

CUPE 4600 Statement on Forced Return to In-Person Teaching and Learning

January 31, 2022

Carleton University's plan [to force Contract Instructors and Teaching Assistants back to in-person teaching on February 7th](#) is reckless, damages the ability of our members to deliver the quality education students deserve, and puts the health and safety of all of us at risk.

To be clear, the members of CUPE 4600 know how important in-person teaching and learning is, and we are all looking forward to safely returning to the classroom at some point in the future.

However, a sudden and mandatory return under the current pandemic conditions is not 'safe and gradual', as Carleton President Benoit-Antoine Bacon likes to call it. Carleton's plan cuts against the advice provided by Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, which remains concerned that [the lessening of restrictions at this time could mean case counts once again begin to rapidly increase](#).

As well, CUPE 4600 members know how sudden changes to course delivery in the middle of the term harm the working and learning conditions of everyone at Carleton. A rise in COVID-related hospitalization and ICU rates prompted a sudden change to course delivery methods at the beginning of the pandemic, and we experienced how damaging that was to our ability to do our jobs and deliver the quality education students deserve.

Unfortunately, for the duration of the pandemic, Carleton management has not bothered to engage in any actual consultation with staff or students on what a truly safe and gradual return to campus might look like.

President Bacon's message on January 18th that some in-person classes would resume on February 7th gave our members less than 3 weeks to prepare. That's less than three weeks to adjust our teaching plans, get booster shots, find daycare for our kids, access the accommodations process, and deal with the multitude of other challenges that a sudden change like this entails.

Worse, the announcement about a return to in-person teaching comes when Carleton's pandemic response continues to have some gaping holes.

Carleton still hasn't publicly released their audits of building air quality, two years into the pandemic. CUPE 4600 members are provided just two 'face coverings' for 4 months of in-person work. Carleton has made no move to increase the accessibility of rapid tests for staff or students. Carleton has not offered any access to PCR testing, undercutting an effective means of confirming a suspected diagnosis or conducting contact tracing. Management isn't

even clear if individuals with symptoms should isolate for the 10 days described in CUScreen, or the 5 days recommended by the province. And the list goes on.

Any return to campus that sincerely prioritized the safety of staff and students and the teaching experience of our members would include Carleton taking the following steps:

- Ensure options to teach, learn, and work online remain available to all staff and students, including for all members of CUPE 4600 who are not comfortable returning to in-person work this term;
- Release the building air quality audits publicly, and complete any necessary repairs;
- Provide free and easy access to an appropriate amount of N95 masks and rapid antigen tests for anyone working in-person;
- Provide comprehensive and effective contact tracing for all staff and students engaged in in-person activities;
- Provide a fair and transparent accommodation process that includes not only religious and medical exemptions, but other legitimate concerns like the health and safety of family members and those we live with;
- Engage in actual meaningful consultation with staff and students about what a safe return to campus looks like.

CUPE 4600 urges all union members to get vaccinated at their earliest opportunity, including a booster shot. [Isolate if you have any COVID-19 symptoms](#), and contact your union if you have any questions about your rights to sick leave.

You can stay up to date on Carleton's COVID-19 related policies and announcements [at this link](#).

If you have any concerns or questions regarding how Carleton's COVID-19 policies may impact your working conditions, contact your union at info@cupe4600.ca.

In solidarity,
CUPE 4600 Executive Board