

## Pandemic Disruption: Winter 2022 Term

### Communication from the Executive Committee of Senate

The continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic that has disrupted academic activities at the University since March 2020 means that the *Senate Policy on the Academic Implications of Disruptions or Cessations of University Business Due to Labour Disputes or Other Causes* remains in force. This policy provides the framework for the Executive Committee of Senate to manage the impact on academic activities guided by the three governing principles articulated in the policy: **academic integrity, fairness to students, and timely information.**

### Winter Term 2022

The University has commenced a phased return to in-person academic activities on the University campuses between 31 January and 14 February 2022 consistent with the [Principles to Guide 2021-2022 Course Planning](#). Through the Provost and Vice-President Academic information has been [communicated](#) about the various forms of support available to instructors to assist with the challenging transition to in-person delivery of programming. Senate Executive is supplementing the information to help address questions that have been raised about instructors' options and responsibilities in sustaining course delivery and providing accommodation to students with extenuating circumstances tied to the pandemic.

Senate Executive affirms that the governing principles of the *Senate Disruptions Policy* continue to guide actions this term. As challenges with student absences might surface, it is critical to remind instructors that students who do not participate in academic activities because they are unable to do so owing to the disruption are entitled to:

- immunity from penalty
- reasonable alternative access to materials covered in their absence to be made available by the instructor, and
- reasonable extensions of deadlines

Meriting attention in this context is that while the Disruptions Policy provides for the remedy of accommodating absences through alternate access to materials, it does not guarantee students the same learning experience that they would have received in the absence of a disruption.

The Disruptions Policy advises that – in short disruptions - individual instructors are in the best situation to determine the extent to which their courses, seminars, graduate supervision, labs and the like have been affected and to determine what remedial action may be required. In the context of this prolonged pandemic disruption, where instructional time is not lost but complex circumstances exist with the delivery of academic activities, Senate Executive

affirms that instructors may exercise appropriate flexibility to determine the form of accommodation for students that best responds to the unique circumstances presenting with the transition from online to in-person delivery of programming mid-way into a term. Specifically, the Executive Committee asserts that:

- instructors have discretion to exercise flexibility in providing reasonable accommodation to students with extenuating circumstances, within the bounds of preserving the academic integrity of courses and the achievement of learning outcomes by students;
- the forms of accommodation available are those that would normally apply outside of a disruption. As confirmed by the Provost, those include the option of providing a make-up class if the instructor is unable to deliver a scheduled meet, or delivering an individual class remotely on that occasion (*not shifting an in-person course to an online mode of delivery for the remainder of the term*), and converting the form of in-person exams or other assessments to online versions while preserving the graded weight of the assessment;
- where circumstances have affected the ability to adhere to the course syllabus, instructors have the discretion to make reasonable adjustments that ensure coverage of the material and that do not disadvantage students; and
- both individual student absences from course activities and the scenario of large numbers of students absent in a class should be dealt with as absences in normal circumstances would, with the instructor determining the best course of action in accordance with the circumstances.

Senate Executive recognizes that the transition back to more in-person activities is challenging and requires drawing on the already taxed capacity of faculty and students, and thus expresses its appreciation for all efforts. Senate Executive has confidence that the flexibility available to instructors to manage the exceptional circumstances of their teaching / supervision this term provides the necessary framework to ensure the successful completion of the FW 2021-2022 year. No centralized remedial actions are deemed necessary at this time. Senate Executive remains vigilant in its monitoring of circumstances during the return to in-person activities and will move swiftly to fulfil its mandate under this policy as required.

Mario Roy  
Chair of Senate  
11 February 2022