

March 12, 2020

## CAUT Update on COVID-19

(March 12, 2020) While the risk to Canadians arising from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic remains low according to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the situation is developing rapidly. CAUT is aware that at least one university has been closed as a preventative measure, and that other institutions are likely to follow suit in the days ahead.

Universities and colleges have a legal obligation to protect the health and safety of staff and students. Employees also have a right to refuse to work in conditions they reasonably believe are unsafe. In certain situations, CAUT understands that it may be necessary for academic staff who have been potentially exposed to COVID-19 to self-isolate. In such cases, there should be no loss of pay or seniority during the period of self-isolation.

In other cases, it may be necessary to close campuses and to temporarily move to on-line instruction in order to limit the spread of infection. In such instances, it is important that academic staff associations be involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of these plans. While associations should be flexible given the seriousness of the pandemic, administrations should negotiate protocols with associations as collective agreement rights may be affected. Some agreements, for instance, require the consent of members in order to transition to on-line instruction. Language on intellectual property, health and safety, workload, and performance evaluations are other examples of what might be affected.

[Administrations must provide academic staff with appropriate time and training to transition to on-line instruction](#), and no one should suffer a loss or reduction of pay, be laid-off, or declared redundant because of these temporary measures. Particular attention should be paid to protecting contract academic staff whose jobs, by their nature, are vulnerable. [In cases where it is not feasible or pedagogically sound to provide a course on-line, the course should be postponed without loss of pay or seniority.](#)

The academic staff association should also be involved in the active monitoring of how these arrangements are affecting members and students. On-line education may create additional workload pressures in which case administrations must provide additional support for staff, such as assigning teaching assistants. [The intellectual property rights of members must be respected.](#) Academic bodies (Senate, Faculties Council, or Education Council) should be involved in monitoring the pedagogical effectiveness of temporary on-line instruction and to decide on adjustments or discontinuance. [Administrations must also consider the special needs of particular staff and students, including those who may have limited access to the internet or face other barriers to delivering or completing their courses on-line.](#)

If campuses are closed, protocols may also be necessary to manage laboratories where time sensitive research or research involving plants and animals is being undertaken. In such cases, and with the appropriate training and protective equipment, academic staff should be allowed access to campus in order to monitor their research and care for plants and animals.

Academic staff associations should ensure, preferably through a written agreement with the administration, that all measures taken in response to the pandemic are temporary and solely in response to an extraordinary situation. The association, through its representatives on the Joint Health and Safety Committee, should be involved in assessing the health and safety of the workplace, and determining when classes should resume as normal.

**Associations are strongly encouraged to share developments with CAUT and to contact us for specific advice as needed.**