

Newsletter

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McMaster University Faculty Association - March 2020



COVID-19: The fast-moving crisis and response at McMaster

Alison Sills, MUFA President

I started planning this article in the morning of Thursday March 12th. At that point, the word at McMaster was the university was working in a ‘business as usual’ mode, but please wash your hands a lot. By lunch time, I was providing comments on a plan to cancel classes and exams a few weeks hence, and before dinner, the Ontario government closed all elementary and secondary schools until April 5th and our prime minister was in self-isolation. And this morning, we learned that all face-to-face classes and exams are cancelled for this term.

No matter where we are in this crisis, there are a few overarching principles that should guide our response, both individually and as an institution. Here is my personal summary:

- 1. Panic isn’t helpful. Vigilance and preparedness are. Extra toilet paper won’t help, unless you run out of Kleenex. Soap and water are really good ideas.
- 2. The health of our community is the top priority. We’ll need to be flexible in a whole bunch of ways to keep that community healthy. It isn’t ideal to cancel exams and re-weight marks in a course at the last minute. But it can be done carefully and thoughtfully. We can find a way to provide students with a reasonably accurate assessment of their performance in our courses, without being unduly proscriptive or hard on the students. Fortunately this flexibility is already built into our course outlines with the Extreme Circumstances clause. You should do whatever makes the most sense for your course and your students.
- 3. Communication is key. This is always true, but even more so during a crisis. Communicate with your students and colleagues often, and make sure that your information is accurate and up to date. Reach out to people you trust and ask questions (mufa@mcmaster.ca.... Just saying).

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SAVE THE DATE!

MUFA Annual General Meeting
May 5, 2020
3:00 p.m.
Great Hall,
University Club

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4. All changes will likely increase our workload in the short term, and may pose additional problems for anyone with a need for accommodations. In addition, many of us are now juggling child care needs at a time when groups are not recommended. Or we have aging parents who may be hit harder by this virus, and who may not live near Hamilton. A crisis is a stressful time. Remember point #2: the health of our community includes YOUR health. Give yourself the permission to also be flexible in your own life. Do what you need to get through this, and make use of the many resources that McMaster can provide.
5. After this crisis is over, we will need to continue to be flexible. Our research may suffer as we turn our attention to other things right now – our chairs know they may need to provide a little more support when they're writing up our tenure report. Our students may not have quite the background you expect when they appear in your course next year – spend a little more time bringing them up to speed.

On the positive side, maybe we're learning some useful things during this crisis. Maybe we'll find some cute online resources that will help our teaching. Maybe we'll finally work up those notes in PowerPoint. Maybe we'll discover that WebEx meetings are great and we can reduce our carbon footprint. I know we'll find that the McMaster community is tight-knit and supportive, and that we'll get through this together.

Now go wash your hands.

Website for McMaster COVID-19 information

A new website for McMaster students, faculty and staff was launched on March 11. It provides additional information and links to key resources. There are specific FAQ sections for students and faculty and staff and these are designed to answer a variety of questions that have been received.

Information on the site will continue to be updated as university decisions are made and new information is available. The site also includes new videos featuring McMaster experts with helpful information to help you stay healthy. You can link to the new website through the Daily News or directly at <https://covid19.mcmaster.ca/>



Get Involved with MUFA!

A voluntary organization such as MUFA can succeed in serving the interests of its membership only to the extent that the members participate in formulating and executing policy. At any given time, approximately two dozen individuals carry the burden for all of the members and after a few years most of them are exhausted by the tasks which they have voluntarily borne. Their valuable experience and wisdom is then lost to us. The best way to lessen this attrition of talent is for more of the membership to give some time and effort to the Association.

If you are interested in putting your name forward to participate on future Executive Committees, ad hoc committees, MUFA committees, or as a MUFA representative on University committees, please let us know by completing this [form on our website](#).

Long-Term Disability

Long-term disability (LTD) for MUFA members is provided through a mandatory, fully employee-paid plan administered by SunLife. It is funded on a cost-recovery basis: our premiums are intended to cover the costs of the plan, and if the plan has a deficit in any given year, we are responsible for paying it and any associated interest costs. We are also the beneficiary of any surplus. It is an insurance plan in that our contributions cover the costs for the first five years of a member being paid LTD. After that time, SunLife covers the payments.

For many years, the university had one plan for all the employee groups on campus who have LTD, and we all paid the same premiums. However, it became clear that the different groups had different levels of usage, and so starting in 2016 the premiums were calculated based on the actual usage for three groups: MUFA + MUALA, TMG, and Unifor. The plan is still considered to be one account at SunLife, but McMaster now tracks each group separately. Premiums are set annually.

This change in 2016 resulted in a closer look at the LTD plan and its finances. Historically, the plan had accumulated a large surplus, which had been moved to a McMaster trust fund. That fund was divided among the three groups. Also in 2016, SunLife discovered an error in past payments to claimants. That error was corrected, and the cost was allocated to the three groups according to where it was paid out. And finally, in 2016/17 and 2017/18, SunLife proposed "guaranteed" premiums (although any surplus or deficit would be allocated to each group in the usual way). As it turns out, the usage of LTD by MUFA members also jumped dramatically around the same time and so those premiums were too low to cover the costs of the plan.

The result of all this is on June 30, 2019 (the latest date for which we have final numbers), MUFA's portion of the Trust Fund is about \$226 000, but our deficit is \$440 000. We are being charged interest on that deficit at the current prime rate.

The MUFA executive has been concerned about the management of the LTD plan for a number of years. We are frustrated that it is difficult to get information about the financial health of our plan in between the annual meetings; we are concerned about the methodology used by SunLife to set premiums; and we are unhappy about paying interest. After a long discussion, we have decided to take the following actions:

1. We will use all of our Trust Fund surplus to reduce our deficit.
2. We will use MUFA reserves to pay off the rest of our deficit. MUFA is in a healthy financial position. We have been investing any annual surpluses in conservative investments for many years and have accumulated sufficient funds that we can afford this payment while still maintaining a reserve pool that should buffer us from any unforeseen circumstances.
3. We will scrutinize all future premium rates from SunLife carefully, and possibly build in a small buffer so that we do not end up in a position of such extreme deficit in the future.

The university is suggesting that all three employee groups move our plan to one in which SunLife is responsible for each in-year deficit, but would also benefit from any in-year surplus. MUFA has rejected this request in the past. We have the financial stability and flexibility to ride out small in-year fluctuations, and we are sure that SunLife would raise our premiums to offset any risk they may be undertaking. However, the other two groups, particular Unifor, are in a more precarious position and may decide that they need to modify their LTD plan. If that is the case, the MUFA exec will need to assess our position carefully and weigh the pros and cons of any action we take on behalf of our members.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us. We will also be discussing this at the Annual General Meeting in May, so we hope to see you there.

Welcome New Members

Babak Nahid-Mobarakeh

Electrical and Computer Engineering

Sean O’Brady

Human Resources and Management

Passages

Maureen Halsall

English and Cultural Studies

November 17, 2019

Reginald Ripton

Sociology

January 27, 2020

Michael Stein

Political Science

January 19, 2020

Observers Needed

Required: members of the Faculty Association—yes, RETIREES also qualify—to serve as observers for appeal and grievance hearings. The role of the Observer is to report on the adequacy of the procedures, with a view to making recommendations to improve relevant policies, not to comment on the conduct or the judgement of the tribunal. Hearings usually take place over one or two days. For more information, send us an email at (mufa@mcmaster.ca), call us (905) 525-9140 ext. 24682/20297, or visit us in (HH 103A).

New External Tuition Bursary Process

The new external tuition bursary process is now live. Please see the [these documents from HR](#) for details. The summary is that there is a two-stage process: you must submit an application by ***MARCH 30, 2020*** and then final receipts by September 30, 2020. If you miss the March deadline, you will not be eligible for the benefit for the 2019/20 academic year.

The submission happens through Mosaic (Employee Self Serve → External Tuition Bursary Form → a specific Microsoft Form with additional login) and at this stage, requires proof of registration of your dependent/spouse in a university or college program. Proof of payment and payment information will be requested later.

If you have any questions, please contact hr.mcmaster@mcmaster.ca.



2019 T4 Slips Now Available Online

Human Resources 2019 T4 remuneration slips are now available to McMaster employees through Mosaic self-service.

Employee T4 slips are available electronically only. You can view and download T4 slips by logging into [Mosaic](#), visiting the employee self-service section, and selecting the T4 tile. Browser pop-ups must be allowed.

Please refer to the [Quick Guide](#) for information regarding accessing T4 slips online.

Employees who require assistance may contact the HR Service Desk at extension 222HR (22247) or by email at hr.mcmaster@mcmaster.ca.

Additional tax slips for students, special employee arrangements and independent contractors (T4A/T4ANR and T2202):

- Graduate students receiving scholarships, clinical faculty receiving stipends and others receiving T4A slips for employment or bursary income should consent to receive T4A slips online in Mosaic to access them electronically. All 2019 tax slips will also be sent to the CRA for individuals to access through their personal CRA account.
- Independent contractors will receive finance-issued T4A or T4ANR (non-resident) slips by mail as applicable. Student T4A, Donor Receipts, and [T2202 Tuition and Enrolment Certificates](#) will be available via the Mosaic student centre by February 28, 2020.

2020 Proposed Changes to the Federal Basic Personal Exemption

For the 2020 tax year, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) is introducing a variable basic personal exemption amount based on an individual's net income. The university is making a plan to deal with these changes.

As a result of the timing and complexity of the proposed changes, the Canadian Payroll Association (CPA) has challenged the CRA to have the administrative changes reviewed by the Minister of National Revenue. Further, the CPA has recommended "no further implementation or payroll system development related to these administrative changes take place until the CRA conducts a thorough review."

For more information on the proposed changes or the Canadian Payroll Association's response to the Minister of National Revenue, please visit the following:

- <https://www.payroll.ca/>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/td1-personal-tax-credits-returns/td1-forms-pay-received-on-january-1-later/td1.html>

Employees are encouraged to review their personal tax situation and consider updating their Federal and Provincial TD1 Forms for the current tax year if their situation has changed. For questions regarding the Federal Basic Personal Amount or for the submission of updated TD1 forms, please contact your HR Advisor: <https://hr.mcmaster.ca/about-us/our-services/human-resources-service-desk/>



48th Annual OCUFA Teaching and Academic Librarianship Award 2019/2020 Call for Submissions

Each year, OCUFA recognizes outstanding teachers and academic librarians in Ontario universities through its Teaching and Academic Librarianship Awards. Since 1973 OCUFA has presented 442 awards. The recipients are selected by the OCUFA Teaching and Academic Librarianship Awards Committee.

Categories

- Teaching, in the context of the OCUFA awards, embraces virtually all levels of instruction – graduate and undergraduate teaching, continuing education and faculty development. Similarly, proficiency in teaching may extend well beyond the classroom, the laboratory or the faculty member’s office. Activities such as course design, curriculum development, organization of teaching programs and other significant forms of leadership are often important contributions to the instructional process. Those who excel in any of these are eligible for the OCUFA Teaching Awards.
 - Academic librarianship, in the context of the OCUFA Awards, embraces all aspects of librarianship that contribute to the scholarly achievement of all members of the university community. Activities such as development and delivery of services, provision of educational materials, collection development and management and other contributions to academic librarianship are important to the intellectual functioning of the university. Those who excel in any of these are eligible for an OCUFA Academic Librarianship Award.
2. Candidate was not previously nominated or Candidate was nominated in a previous year, but did not win or Candidate was nominated twice consecutively, but did not win. At least two years have passed since the last nomination.

Posthumous nominations can be made for those who passed away in the award year. For example, if the award year is 2015-2016, nominations can only be made for those who passed away between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016.

Nominations

- Nominations are invited from individuals, information groups or faculty or students, or both, and such organizations as local faculty associations, faculty or college councils, university committees concerned with teaching and learning, librarians, local student councils, departments, alumni, etc.
- Guidelines to assist in organizing a nomination should be consulted by prospective nominators and are available on request from your Faculty Association Office, the Provincial Office of OCUFA, or the [OCUFA website](#).

Procedure

- If you would like assistance with your submission, you can contact Jennifer Blaney (Educational Developer, MacPherson Institute) at blaney@mcmaster.ca or ext. 26785
- All submissions should be done as one single PDF file via OCUFA’s [online system](#)

The deadline for nominations is May 22, 2020.

Eligibility

The OCUFA Teaching and Academic Librarianship Awards recognize individuals with exceptional contributions to the higher education community. Group nominations are *not* accepted.

A candidate must meet both of the following prerequisites to be considered:

1. Candidate is a member of an OCUFA affiliated faculty association

Human Resources Updates

Using Your Mental Health Benefits for Psychological Testing

Sun Life has confirmed that psychological testing typically falls under the psychologist and their services; whereas psychoeducational testing may fall under the psychotherapist. The testing, like the other services provided by mental health practitioners are 100% covered up to the \$3,000 benefit year maximum. As noted in the 'What is not covered' section of the benefit booklets, "We will not pay for the costs of: services or supplies to the extent that their costs exceed the reasonable and usual rates in the locality where the services or supplies are provided." The reasonable and usual rates that Sun Life applies are based on per hour amounts.

If an individual had 2 hours of testing in a day, it would need to be clearly identified on the receipt that is submitted that the visit was for a 2 hour time period; otherwise, if no timeframe is provided, Sun Life will assume it was for 1 hour and calculate the reimbursement accordingly.

Sun Life has shared that its standard in the industry for the testing to be done in 2-hour blocks of testing followed by a 3rd visit to review the results and the billing is provided for the entire process; not for each separate session. In this case, when submitting the claim, the hours of service provided should be clearly identified, in order to receive the maximum reimbursement up to the reasonable and usual rate per hour, subject to the \$3,000 benefit year maximum.

Sun Life also recommends that a predetermination be submitted for large expenses.

SunLife Claims Submissions

As McMaster's benefit provider, Sun Life offers a number of methods to manage your Sun Life claims.

1. Online via www.mysunlife.ca or the MySunLife app.
 - To use this method you will need to [register online](#).
 - If you're confused about how to use the app or online portal, HR provides a [document](#) that outlines the start page, showing and explaining all the various features.
2. Mailing in paper claims forms for [Extended Health Care](#) Claims or [Dental](#) Claims
 - Sun Life requires original receipts for all claims. Please keep photocopies of all receipts and claim forms, especially when coordinating benefits.
 - Submit all eligible expenses no later than 90 days following the end of the benefit year. The benefit year runs July 1 to June 30th of the following year. Late claim submissions will not be reimbursed.

Other important forms you may need:

- [Application For Extension Of Sun Life Financial Out-Of-Country Emergency Medical Coverage](#). As a reminder, effective July 1, 2019 the PDA policy was enhanced so that non-emergency health and dental premiums paid for international travel while on university business will be eligible



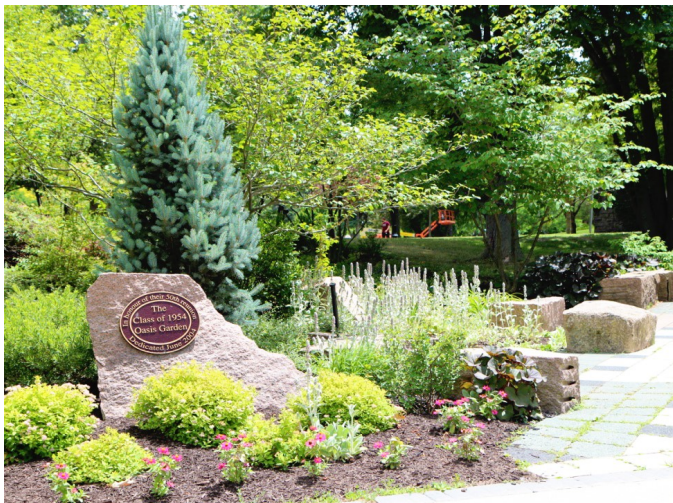
Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, May 5th, 2020

3:00pm

*Great Hall
University Club*

Please join us for our Annual General Meeting and reception to follow.



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