

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, July 19, 2021

Professors and Students Concerned About Quality of Education at the University of Ottawa

Ottawa – Students, academic staff, teaching and research assistants, and support personnel are actively voicing concerns about the University of Ottawa’s plans for the 2021-2022 academic year which include a sizable increase in the number of large courses to be delivered in a bimodal format.

As the pedagogical merits of the teaching plans are being questioned by experts at the university, the Inter-Union Coalition of the university is asking the Central Administration to create smaller courses and to offer more support to those who will be teaching in the bimodal format, in order to ensure adequate working conditions and to ensure the quality of courses.

What is bimodal teaching?

The University of Ottawa’s bimodal instruction and learning plans consist of professors teaching groups of up to 500 students, with a portion joining classes in-person and others joining remotely. Those teaching these courses are meant to simultaneously engage with both groups of students in real-time. It’s not surprising, then, that just as in-person and online or remote instruction require different pedagogical strategies, so too does bimodal instruction require its own unique approach. The bimodal format is widely considered a form of experimental learning, and is more commonly used in smaller class settings and with a number of in-class teaching assistants so as to ensure that students attending remotely receive the same quality of education as those attending in person.

Why it’s problematic

“Professors are committed to delivering the best possible education,” said Luc Angers, Vice-President, Membership Engagement of the Association of Part-Time Professors of the University of Ottawa. “Part-time professors, who are at times hired only a few days before the start of a term, must have the tools and the time to develop pedagogical approaches adapted to the learning format of their assigned courses. It seems like the Central Administration is using the pandemic as an opportunity to implement a new learning model based on financial motivations without ensuring the necessary resources are in place to guarantee a high-quality learning experience for all.”

Teaching Assistants are also sounding the alarm, raising concerns about the lack of adequate training provided to those who will support professors in preparing and delivering courses bimodally. “With less than two months left until September, we are



Inter-Union Coalition Of the University of Ottawa

still uncertain if our members will receive sufficient paid training to adapt to this new teaching model,” said Patricia Magazoni Gonçalves, President of Local 2626 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). “New work expectations need to be made clear to teaching assistants to ensure a positive learning experience for students.”

Students are likewise raising equity concerns about the Central Administration’s plans. “The majority of students have indicated that they want a safe and effective return to campus,” said Armaan Singh Kheppar, Advocacy Commissioner of the University of Ottawa Student Union. “In order to ensure that this happens, the University should prioritize smaller class sizes and more in-person class sections. Yet, all students are going to be paying the same high tuition fees for what will likely be an impoverished learning experience with a concentration on bimodal instruction.”

At this time, the Interunion Coalition is aware of at least 444 courses scheduled to be taught bimodally in the Fall 2021 term, and of 535 during the Winter 2022 semester. The Interunion Coalition and its members are looking forward to a full return to campus once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, and are concerned that the increase in bimodal courses offered in the Winter 2022 term means that this poor learning format is here to stay. The Central Administration has refused to meet the Coalition.

-30-

The Interunion Coalition regroups the University of Ottawa Students’ Union (UOSU), the Graduate Student Association (GSAÉD), Local 2626 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Association of Professors of the University of Ottawa (APUO), the Association of Part-Time Professors of the University of Ottawa (APTPUO), the Support Staff of the University of Ottawa (SSUO), and the University of Ottawa IT Professionals.

Media contacts:

Natasha Roy (819 962-6771) et Chloé Melançon-Beauséjour (514 632-0760)
info@uodissatisfaction.ca

