

Ottawa, Wednesday, July 29 2020

M. Jacques Frémont, President and Vice-Chancellor

The Interunion Coalition of the University of Ottawa (ICUO), is writing to express its concerns regarding current plans for the Fall 2020 semester. In particular, we are very concerned with the ongoing practice of increasing class sizes and the merging of class sections as a result of courses being delivered online or remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising to the challenges brought on by this pandemic requires meaningful investments to ensure that we maintain the high quality education our students deserve. Along with downloading a significant additional workload burden onto all faculty, teaching assistants, and employees, increasing class sizes will hinder our collective capacity to meet students' expectations and needs in the fall, and might seriously affect student retention.

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed a turn to emergency remote teaching in March 2019. Since then, ICUO members have reported significant increases in the number of enrollments for classes offered in the Fall 2020 semester. This is contrary to research stating that high quality distance learning is best conducted with smaller groups of students.

The ICUO is committed to delivering the best possible learning experience for students in the Fall semester. Distance teaching and learning present inequities and barriers to both accessibility and accommodations for students and educators alike. In light of the research on quality distance learning and the problems posed by larger class sizes, the ICUO urges the Central Administration to reverse its decision to increase class sizes for the Fall semester.

Optimizing the student learning experience and student retention amid the COVID-19 pandemic is both in the short and long-term interests of our institution. Our capacity to retain students is dependent on our ability to meet the various needs of all students. As we do our part to retain students and deliver the best possible education, the Central Administration should do its part by avoiding cost-cutting measures, such as the merging of class sections and increasing class sizes. Instead, we urge you to invest the necessary resources to ensure we can deliver the quality education our students expect and need. The University of Ottawa is in a very strong financial position, and in this time of crisis, it is only reasonable to expect investments that would protect the quality of education at our institution, as well as the health and safety of those who work to fulfill its educational mandate.

We hope to find in the Central Administration a partner in providing high quality learning experience for students.

**United in solidarity,
ICUO**

The Interunion Coalition of the University of Ottawa (ICUO) regroups student and labour unions at the University of Ottawa.

The ICUO advocates for accessible high quality education and fair and equitable working and learning conditions through advocacy campaigns and collective bargaining.

