



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
STUDENTS' UNION



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## DEFY EXPECTATIONS: A Fair and Safe U of T in 2022

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December 22, 2021

Meric Gertler, President

Trevor Young, Acting Vice-President and Provost

Salvatore Spadafora, Special Advisor to the President and Provost on COVID-19

Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture

Edward Sargent, Vice-President, Research and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives

Alexandra Gillespie, Vice-President and Principal, UTM

Wisdom Tettey, Vice-President and Principal, UTSC

Joshua Barker, Vice-Provost, Graduate Research & Education

Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students

Dear Meric, Trevor, Salvatore, Kelly, Edward, Alexandra, Wisdom, Joshua, and Sandy,

We are almost two years into the COVID-19 public health crisis and the University of Toronto still has not developed a response that facilitates uninterrupted work and study while also protecting the health and safety of its community. Instead of listening and responding meaningfully to the needs of its students and workers, U of T has outsourced responsibility to third-party companies, relied too heavily on vaccination to keep us safe, and relaxed other important health and safety measures too soon. The latest variant of concern, Omicron, has made U of T's negligence all the more obvious: we are again facing rising case counts, breakthrough infections, and renewed uncertainty.

In order to keep workers, students, and community members safe in the new year, we call on U of T to take the following steps:

- 1. Guarantee income security and flexibility to work remotely.** U of T's policies must take a fair, reasonable, and equitable approach to ensure that workers can continue to make a living wage, despite the pandemic. When workers can continue their work remotely, they should. Workers should not be suspended on unpaid leaves for months when there are other options. Workers deserve dignity, flexibility, and safe working conditions.
- 2. Commit to stable learning conditions.** Students need stable and consistent course delivery modes to succeed in their studies. When courses switch from remote delivery to in-person delivery and back again, students do not receive the quality of education they deserve. Given the heightened uncertainty introduced by the Omicron variant, and the likelihood that travel bans will limit the mobility of international students, U of T must commit to remote delivery where possible.
- 3. Reduce density on campus and indoors.** Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, crowding was a serious issue at U of T. With the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant, U of T must keep the community safe by moving work and study online where possible and imposing occupancy limits and physical distancing measures for activities that must occur in person. This will protect the community within and beyond the University.
- 4. Expand the [rapid testing program](#).** In addition to the vaccine mandate, we need testing for workers and students who come to campus on a regular basis. Workers and students who are expected to attend in-person activities must have free and easy access to test kits, so they can test themselves every day they need to be present. In advance of January 2022, U of T should create and actively promote a program to mail free rapid testing kits to all students and workers who must be in person.
- 5. Provide effective masks.** Masks are an easy, low-cost, and effective way U of T can limit transmission. The masks [distributed in September 2020](#) are not safe enough (U of T has [admitted to this](#)) and the University's current mask guidelines fail to acknowledge the shortcomings of cloth masks. High-quality, disposable medical masks must be made available to all workers, students, and community members who must come to campus. These masks must be the procedural or surgical medical masks recommended by the [Public Health Agency of the Government of Canada](#).
- 6. Consult with students and workers.** Instead of making a unilateral decision to resume in-person activities on January 31st, U of T needs to sit down at a joint table with student unions, labour unions, the faculty association, and health and safety committees. Together, we will develop and deploy a reopening plan based on clear, transparent, and evidence-based metrics for community safety.

The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, and we cannot be certain what 2022 will hold. **U of T must act now to ensure a safe, just, and equitable semester.**

As Canada's largest university, U of T has the power to effect real change by lobbying the provincial and federal governments to put in place public health and occupational health measures and to [reinstate emergency income supports](#) that will keep the general public safe. In particular, U of T has an ethical responsibility to members of our community who have faced exacerbated barriers to participation and worsened precarity as a result of the pandemic, such as low-income, migrant, disabled, immunocompromised, elderly, chronically-ill, or racialized folks, who already suffer invisibly from our deeply inequitable society.

U of T, we call on you to lead by example. **Defy expectations.**

Sincerely,

SCSU, Scarborough Campus Students' Union

UTMSU, University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union

UTSU, University of Toronto Students' Union

CUPE 1230, Library Workers at U of T

CUPE 2484, Childcare Workers

CUPE 3261, Service Workers at U of T

CUPE 3902, Contract Academic Workers at U of T

CUPE 3907, Graduate Assistants at OISE

UFCW, United Food and Commercial Workers Union

USW 1998, Administrative and Technical Workers at U of T