

March 2, 2021

Dear Dr. Wilson;

In a memo of February 19, 2021 to Deans, you outlined a series of assumptions, requirements, and expectations for the Fall Semester of 2021 at UNB. These were subsequently presented to the university community in the State of the University Town Hall on February 25, 2021. At issue are the formats for Fall teaching.

The memo states that in-person/blended delivery should be prioritized and that “ADM options **must** remain available to students in all courses” (emphasis added). Further, the memo indicates that “...some students (including international students) may not be able to attend in-person classes and will need to be accommodated through ADM”. AUNBT is concerned about these statements because they represent a substantial further increase in workload and while we support the legal obligation to accommodate students, it would appear that the framework for fulfilling this legal obligation is being hurriedly extended beyond its scope to include the preference of students to participate in online options for reasons of travel or convenience.

Members of AUNBT have a profound understanding of the complexities of teaching in the context of a pandemic. Over the course of this academic year, faculty have demonstrated their commitment to excellence in teaching at UNB. It has been through their extraordinary efforts that the university has been able to be responsive to this ongoing crisis. As AUNBT has repeatedly stated, these efforts have resulted in a dramatic and demonstrable increase in the workload of academic staff at UNB. This increase has added to workloads that were already being experienced pre-pandemic as challenging and unsustainable. It is critically important that administration develop an understanding of the nature of this workload increase, how the practical realities of “alternative delivery” have contributed to it, and the implications of it for the long-term health of academic staff and by extension, the academic mission of UNB.

We urge you to reconsider your prescriptive language around formats and pedagogy. We understand the need to work within instructions from Public Health and the requirement to meet the legal obligations of the duty to accommodate, but beyond these important legal contexts, academic staff retain the right to determine the best format and delivery for their courses.

We also once again urge you to seriously engage with the issue of workload relief pertaining to increased workload this year and consider in plans for the future, the implications for workload, health, and sustainability for AUNBT members.

Sincerely,

Sue Blair,  
President, AUNBT