

Memo



COVID Memo #7: Summer School Updates

Consultation

As we have reported in previous Memos, at every meeting with the administration in the past few weeks, the Union has asked the College about its plans for Summer School and, as always, advocated for teachers to be involved in the decision-making process. Last week, it appeared that the College intended to implement their existing plan for Summer School without consulting departments. Shortly after our meeting, the College initiated a rapid consultation in certain sectors.

Many of you will have participated in department meetings to discuss the pedagogical viability of offering courses online and determine the limits of what is feasible to teach and evaluate through online delivery. We understand that this is a rapidly-changing situation and that there is often a need for decisions to be made quickly. However, we are disappointed that the College sought consultations with departments at the last-minute, providing limited time for departments to respond and in some cases appearing to take decisions before receiving the requested feedback. We believe in the importance of a meaningful consultation which takes into consideration teachers' legitimate concerns about pedagogy.

Department Positions

Most departments indicated that while the situation was not ideal, they would be able to offer certain courses online; however, a few departments took the position that certain courses, notably those with lab components, could not be offered as it would not be possible to assess the competencies online. These decisions were not taken lightly; faculty had to have difficult and lengthy discussions balancing educational principles with a recognition that precarious teachers rely on summer teaching for both salary and seniority. In many departments, Continuing Education teachers supported positions that certain courses could not be offered online, despite the very real financial impact this will have for them. The College has decided to proceed with these courses despite this feedback; this appears to contradict the opinion of Richard Filion, our Director General, published in [Le Devoir](#) yesterday in which he states that for certain Science disciplines attainment of the competencies requires in-person activities.

College's Response

When we asked why it had taken this decision against the recommendations of teachers, the College responded that other Colleges in the network are doing the courses online, so we should be able to. This somewhat misrepresents the situation: of the 48 Cegeps in the network, we are one of the only Cegeps to be offering certain courses online, e.g. Organic Chemistry. Even Cégep à Distance, whose entire mission is predicated on online learning, does not offer these courses.

The College has stated that it is optimistic that it will be possible to have limited access to the College during the summer for some of the absolutely necessary activities (e.g. certain labs and potentially exams) to take place. The College is in discussions with the Ministry of Education and will have to apply to Public Health Montreal for permission, providing an explanation of how it plans to implement these activities in such a way that will respect Public Health guidelines.

We want to be clear: the College has taken the decision to press ahead with certain Summer School offerings in contradiction to departments' very real pedagogical concerns about online teaching. We believe that offering courses that cannot fully address the competencies is a disservice to students and calls into question the College's mission of providing high quality education.

Remuneration for Continuing Education Teachers

Given that the College is going ahead with Summer School and that courses will begin in little over a month, it is important that we now address issues of remuneration, equity, and protections for teachers. Since the beginning of the transition to "Emergency Remote Teaching," the Union has repeatedly advocated for additional remuneration for Continuing Education teachers. While we recognise that the transition to online teaching has involved a tremendous amount of work for all teachers, Continuing Education teachers have taken on additional preparation, student support, and department tasks — duties for which they are not remunerated.

While the College has assured us that this issue is being discussed at the Ministry, they are unwilling to pay Continuing Education teachers out of the surplus (much of which is generated through Continuing Education). At several Cegeps within the network, the administrations have come to agreements with the local Unions to provide additional remuneration for Continuing Education teachers. It seems unclear why our College is unwilling to consider a similar, local solution.

Since the College is now asking Continuing Education teachers to redesign their entire courses for an online delivery format within the next five weeks, the need for additional support is even clearer. While we recognise that additional remuneration is not sufficient to resolve many of the issues surrounding transitioning to online courses, it would be a small step in supporting teachers. The College is failing to recognize the enormity of the task being placed on summer school teachers.

Several departments put forward suggestions to support students and Continuing Education teachers, such as:

- Decreasing class sizes,
- Paying teachers to create or modify existing course material (in particular when laboratory components must be completely altered) - the fact that the College regularly gives Day teachers release to redevelop or redesign their courses seems to indicate an awareness of the amount of work involved, so it is perplexing that the College is not willing to provide the same level of support for redesigning summer classes

- Providing additional hours of remuneration to teachers to recognize the additional tasks associated with remote teaching
- Eliminating highly condensed courses (intensive, rattrapage)

In response, the College has answered that “Cont ed teachers have a higher hourly rate that takes into consideration the preparation time”. For additional support they have offered the services of the OAD. Clearly, this support is insufficient.

Protections for Teachers

Another key concern is that there are some teachers who may be unable to teach due to the current public health situation — whether for health reasons, family responsibilities, or technological limitations. In multiple meetings, the Union has requested that the College institute a process to protect the seniority of those who are unable to teach due to the current situation. While the College has agreed to respect the salary and seniority for contracts that were attributed before it was forced to close, it has only recently accepted the necessity to protect the seniority of those who must turn down work due to the current public health crisis. The Union has proposed implementing some form of “pandemic leave” to ensure that teachers do not suffer long-term disadvantages (by being passed on the seniority list, for example) as a result of an inability to accept work due to the current situation.

As yet, no concrete plan for how to implement this has been developed and it is unclear if it would apply to summer work. **For now, if you are unable to accept a summer workload because of family responsibilities, we advise you to contact HR and ask if your seniority will be protected. If not, you should ask for a Leave for Family Reasons (Clause 5-9.06); while this is an unpaid leave, it will protect your seniority.**

It is important that Continuing Education teachers understand the implications of turning down Summer School work. Although the College has agreed to honour the contracts of those who have been unable to teach during the current semester, it seems unlikely that it will proceed in this manner for Summer School. The College seems to be working on the premise that since the conditions are known in advance, teachers are in a position to know whether they will be able to carry out the work. Obviously this overlooks the very real impact that the current conditions are having on people’s ability to work. Teachers who turn down summer work will not be eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) or Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Teachers will only have access to the CERB if they are unable to work for reasons related to COVID-19.

Prospects for Fall

We have just heard that several Cegeps are expected to announce soon that their Fall semesters will take place primarily online. As yet, Dawson has not made any decisions regarding the Fall semester; however, we think it is important that departments begin discussions about how to proceed. We understand that it is difficult to make decisions with limited information; we encourage you to plan for the possibility of a semester entirely online or a hybrid format — where part of the semester or course is online and part is in person.

Depending on the situation with public health at that time, there may be a possibility for a limited return to physical courses at Dawson. If this is the case, we expect that the College will prioritize those courses with competencies that require physical presence. Obviously if social distancing guidelines remain in place, this will pose significant challenges for a College of our size - class sizes would have to be substantially reduced and policies and procedures put in place for common areas.

There is also the question of what will happen for teachers who are in more vulnerable circumstances, either as a result of their age or health: will they be expected to return to the physical campus if there are still concerns about infection? Will they have the choice to teach online instead? Will they be entitled to the same protections as currently i.e. salary and seniority preserved if they are unable to teach due to the public health crisis? The Union will continue to advocate that the College put measures in place to support and protect teachers during this time. In particular, we will be emphasizing the need to hold Health and Safety meetings to give Union representatives the opportunity to be involved in important decisions and communicate guidelines clearly to our members.