



UNITED STATEMENT BY RRUSA AND RRUFA ON RETURNING TO CAMPUS AND COVID-19

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on students and faculty alike. Many members of our Royal Roads community have been personally affected by COVID-19, including the loss of friends and family. While restrictions have eased, the pandemic continues to challenge on-campus classes as students and faculty navigate the balance of learning and collaborating in person while still reducing the transmission of COVID-19.

A necessary component of any community is an expectation of mutual respect: one should expect to be respected, and one should feel the expectation to respect others, especially in relation to our personal safety as individuals and as a community.

In the face of mask mandates being lifted by the BC government and our university, the RRU Student Association (RRUSA) and the RRU Faculty Association (RRUFA) are inviting people who work together to discuss and collectively work out how we wish to engage in our specific learning environments.

The RRU administration has stated that “At RRU we will continue to encourage mask use in spaces where we are in close proximity and will support those who continue wearing masks on campus.”

However, leadership of RRUSA and RRUFA have both heard concerns from their members regarding the dropping of the mask mandate for indoor spaces at Royal Roads. Concern about being exposed to COVID-19 has been expressed by those, for example, living with compromised immune systems, or living with or being responsible for those with fragile health, or being members of racialized or Indigenous groups. At the same time, Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, has advised all Canadians to continue masking, given the presence of new COVID variants.

We are also aware that there are many members of both organizations who are happy to be free from having to wear masks in classrooms and other indoor settings.

In the absence of a mandate for wearing high-quality masks at RRU, the executives of both RRUSA and RRUFA endorse the following statements, which are, at their core, a request for mutual respect around wearing masks in indoor spaces on campus, including in classrooms and in the library:

- In any classroom setting, students and professors will work together to ensure that all can feel comfortable and safe in the context of potential COVID-19 transmission. We encourage all students and professors on the first day of a face-to-face course to discuss how to create such a space in accordance with the RRU administration's encouragement of mask use.
- In the case of a student having concerns about COVID-19 transmission, we encourage the professor and fellow students, out of respect for the particular student, to look to find ways to remove the student's concern. Examples of actions could include ensuring that all students are masked when in the classroom, ensuring N95 masks are available to the concerned student, finding appropriate seating near windows for the concerned student, or other acceptable solutions.
- In the case of a professor expressing concerns about COVID-19 transmission, we encourage students, out of respect for the professors, to wear masks as requested.
- All students and professors should commit to staying home when sick. We encourage professors to endeavour making options available within reason, within academic regulations, and within a professor's time constraints and technical ability, for students who cannot attend in person due to being ill or otherwise would be put at-risk by attendance in a classroom.

The executives of both RRUSA and RRUFA call on RRU's administration to provide quality masks, including N-95 or equivalent, at convenient locations on campus for those students, faculty and staff who feel they want or need to utilize this added layer of personal protection for both themselves and/or for others.

We do this in the spirit of our university's core values of care, creativity and courage, recognizing first and foremost that students and faculty must be able to learn and teach in an environment founded on mutual respect, and on personal and communal safety.

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