



FUTURE OF WORK TASK FORCE

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING

REPORT
MAY 21, 2021

BRIGHTER WORLD

ENGINEERING



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A. CONTEXT

COVID-19 and our collective response to it have resulted in a complete change to how we carry out our work. We have successfully adapted as required using new protocols, tools and methods. We realize that at some point the pandemic will resolve and we will be able to return to working together. However, it is becoming clear that what we have learned and the tools that have been developed will allow us to work in different, better, ways, and we want to ensure we take advantage of these opportunities. Further, we recognize there will be a transition period, during which most, but not all, students will be back on campus. This period will require that staff and faculty also transition to a safe return to campus. This Future of Work Task Force was established to develop recommendations to address both a shorter-term transition period, and a full return to a new normal for the Engineering community, that will ensure physical and psychological wellbeing as well as effective delivery of services.

The Committee recognizes that these recommendations are made in the face of many unknowns, including future public health recommendations, University requirements and pandemic evolution. While these unknowns may change timelines and some recommendations, our focus will always be to ensure the Faculty of Engineering is recognized as *a leader in research and education, supporting the development of engineering practices for a sustainable world.*

B. SCOPE

The Committee has consulted widely to gather ideas, suggestions, and feedback around work related to teaching, research, and administration. Consideration was given to what is the best experience for students and what is the safest and most preferred way of supporting our education and research objectives. This report only addresses work done by members of the Faculty of Engineering.

C. CONSIDERATIONS

In our discussions the committee was made aware that there are varied views of what being safe really means. Some individuals are anticipating a return to campus with enthusiasm, while others are extremely cautious. We need to be flexible and understanding as we transition back to a new post-pandemic normal. We also recognize that employees who have been working on campus are often fearful that a larger return to campus will result in increased risk to them. The committee also learned that more students are taking advantage of online services, such as advising and SAS, compared to the number of in-person visits prior to the pandemic. This higher level of student engagement with these offices should be maintained by continuing to offer remote service options. We also realize that leaving all decisions up to individual departments and units will result in inconsistencies causing some employees to feel that they are being treated unfairly. Our recommendations need to address this. Other organizations are also making decisions around the future of work. Many have already moved towards much more remote work for their employees. To successfully compete for highly qualified staff, the University will need to move in this direction also.

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D. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our approach is guided by the values of the Faculty of Engineering. All recommendations are made with the safety and wellbeing of the students, staff and faculty in mind. The recommendations have been divided into two groups: (a) short-term recommendations that will apply during the period in which public health orders are in place to reduce social gatherings and (b) long term recommendations that would apply to the post-pandemic period. The exact duration of the transition period, for which the short-term recommendations apply, will depend on the evolution of the pandemic and decisions made by public health and the University.

The committee's short-term discussion was guided by three principles:

1. Protection of the health and wellbeing of our community, including students, staff and faculty.
2. Providing all students with a meaningful in-person learning experience during the transition period.
3. Maintaining access to research labs and facilities for graduate students and researchers.

The long-term discussion was guided by the following principles:

1. Promoting the Faculty of Engineering as a great place to work and learn.
2. Exploring opportunities to improve the work environment and delivery of services through a hybrid approach.
3. Exploring opportunities for growth and for improving efficiencies within the Faculty.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Future of Work Task Force is recommending that the Faculty of Engineering adopt the following recommendations which have been grouped into short-term and long-term. The task force has also provided some suggested best practices in each category.

a. Short Term and Transition Period:

The following recommendations have been formulated to support to experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students as recommended by the Task Force on Virtual Teaching and Learning. Building occupancy is assumed to be limited to approximately 33%.

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SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The task force recommends that technical staff work on-site to support in-person student experiences. When not needed on campus, technical staff could work remotely.
2. It is recommended that graduate student spaces be set up for 30% occupancy. It is recognized that grad students need a place to work when not in labs. Further capacity adjustments may need to be made to ensure safety.
3. The task force recommends that faculty be on campus when needed to support in-person student experiences.
4. It is recommended that, when possible, administrative staff should continue to do most of their work remotely.
5. Student facing activities (e.g., advising, career services) would continue to be done remotely initially. It is recommended that by mid-Fall, managers consider bringing in some staff on a rotating basis, particularly if students frequent the offices looking for support. In these cases, workstations may need to be assessed and redesigned for safety.
6. Research labs would continue to operate at reduced capacity to limit numbers of people in buildings that will also be hosting undergraduate learning activities.
7. The committee recommends that most meetings continue to take place remotely during the transition period. When the group size is small and when in-person collaboration is essential, meetings may take place on campus as long as the number of attendees is consistent with public health guidelines.
8. It is recommended that managers are made aware of any relevant collective agreements which cover expectations for remote work.

SHORT TERM BEST PRACTICES:

1. Where possible, TA positions will be advertised as either online, in-person, or a combination. HR has developed a variety of offer letters to cover these scenarios.
2. Where possible, visits to campus by faculty, students and staff would be best limited to no more than 4 hours to alleviate pressure on facilities and services.
3. Supervisors are encouraged to make every effort to accommodate staff who are concerned about return to campus in the short term.
4. Managers are encouraged to visit campus and meet with their front-line staff to show support.

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5. We encourage managers to arrange for staff who are working remotely to visit campus after mid-fall. For example, staff could spend half a day on campus every two weeks. These visits will facilitate the return to work after the pandemic. The visits would also allow employees to identify any space changes or equipment needs that they may have after the pandemic.
6. Supervisors are encouraged to acknowledge the extra work and stress of their faculty and staff and allow for less important matters to be deferred. Supervisors are encouraged to officially recognize the extra effort put by their staff and to celebrate their success. Build trust and camaraderie wherever possible.
7. Supervisors are encouraged to show flexibility/understanding towards staff who must care for children, immune compromised family members or the elderly during this time.
8. Support and training will need to be provided to our supervisors and managers. This could be facilitated through our Fireball Academy. This will also increase the consistency in how departments and units approach the return to campus. Training will also provide supervisors with the tools and resources to address new challenges as we do not expect Human Resources to have the capacity to address all inquires.
9. Masks are recommended whenever physical distancing is not possible.
10. Allow staff to make use of empty spaces as temporary office space so they do not always need to wear masks.
11. Supervisors are encouraged to make their staff aware of how to contact HR or employee health if they have concerns about coming back to campus.
12. Supervisors are encouraged to plan a gradual return to campus. The gradual approach will build confidence and increase comfort.
13. The Faculty is encouraged to develop a return-to-work manual. This should highlight all the steps that have been taken to protect our community. It would also provide clear instructions and protocols for sanitizing within offices and identify the responsibility of each group with respect to cleaning.
14. Maintain regular contact with the Return to Research team and share best practices.
15. Create designated meeting rooms which could be booked by various groups, including the advising team. This would make it easier to clean these specific rooms frequently, instead of having to clean office suites.
16. If necessary, modify office spaces to ensure safety of staff.
17. If safety and health considerations permit, provide indoor and outdoor spaces for breaks and lunch.

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18. The Faculty is encouraged to develop training for staff, faculty and TAs on accessibility and accommodation issues related to masking and other health measures. Faculty could make clear masks available for student facing services.

b. Longer Term: Post COVID and Beyond

These recommendations are focussed on ensuring excellence in teaching, research and the student experience while building a sense of community and keeping our community safe. The committee has assumed that there will be no limits on occupancy in most areas.

LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The task force recommends that student support services should be set up for a hybrid model for delivery of services.
2. It is recommended that most non-student facing administration should transition to a hybrid model of on-campus and remote work.
3. It is recommended that guidelines be developed to determine how frequently staff members need to be present on campus. This is seen as essential for creating an equitable approach to decisions related to on-campus and remote work. Managers wishing to make arrangements outside the guidelines to meet operational needs would do so in consultation with the Director of Finance and Administration.
4. Future investments in space renovations and new buildings should consider what activities would optimally take place on campus and those activities that could be effectively completed off campus. This would allow the Faculty to improve delivery of services and expand teaching and research capacity with minimal expansion of its physical footprint.

LONG TERM BEST PRACTICES:

1. It is suggested that the Faculty document and share best practices for onboarding and training employees who work remotely.
2. When possible, meetings would continue to have an option to join electronically. Enhanced IT infrastructure may be needed to facilitate good experiences for both in-person and remote participants.
3. Groups are encouraged to create regular opportunities for teams to meet in person including team building opportunities. The Faculty is encouraged to provide appropriate spaces for these activities.
4. The Faculty is encouraged to work with facility services to sustain cleaning and sanitizing practices that can reduce the spread of infections including common cold and seasonal flu.

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5. All units are encouraged to capitalize on new opportunities for recruitment and retention by promoting a flexible, hybrid work model.
6. Explore the possibility of adding new calendar/schedule features that indicate whether the person is available for an on-campus meeting at a given time.
7. Consider creating workgroups to explore how hybrid work would look like in different environments/teams.
8. When possible, managers should consider employee preferences in terms of the division between remote and on-site work. This is particularly important, when the standard arrangement does not allow the employee work effectively (e.g. some employees may wish to work from the office all the time, because of distractions at home).
9. When making decisions, each unit should benchmark against other units in the Faculty to ensure consistency and equity.

F. AREAS FOR FOLLOW-UP

a. Communication

It is important to have a robust communication strategy around both the return to work and future of work in the Faculty. We recommend that a small group be put in place to oversee communication on these topics. Some suggested areas of emphasis are included below:

1. To reassure returning employees, it is recommended that communications highlight the measures in place to keep people safe.
2. The task force recommends that communications clearly articulate that the safety of students and employees is of the highest priority to the University and the Faculty.
3. It is recommended that communication convey that we are flexible; and that all plans could change if the situation changes and demand a different response.
4. The Faculty should continue to ask for feedback in communications, so people are comfortable that they have an opportunity to express concerns and be heard.
5. It is recommended that communication include scientific/public health information where it makes sense to do so.
6. The committee suggests that it would be helpful to establish a dedicated mechanism/channel or website for communicating around COVID safety and return to work.

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G. FUTURE OF THIS TASK FORCE:

It is recommended that this committee continue as a task force, meeting as needed to monitor the situation and address newly arising matters.

H. FUTURE OF WORK TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

- **Nancy Balfourt** (Co-Chair)
- **Hatem Zurob** (Co-Chair)
- **Monique Beech**
- **Alexa Behar-Bannelier**
- **Amber Bukata**
- **Dan Centea**
- **Michael Curwin**
- **Arlene Dosen**
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- **Kathryn Leistner**
- **Beth McNally**
- **Kristina Trollip**
- **Maria White**