

**From:** [FAFA](#) on behalf of [FA President](#)  
**To:** [Faculty Association](#)  
**Subject:** [Fafa] Further update re mask mandates  
**Date:** March 29, 2022 11:51:35 AM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
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Dear Members,

I hope that all is well with you. I am writing to provide a further update regarding the saga of mask mandates at UVic. As some of you may be aware, a special meeting of Senate was called for last Thursday. Senate rules permit a special meeting to be called in response to the request of eight senators, and nine of us on Senate (including the sessional lecturer representative, a student leader and seven faculty members) asked the Senate to call this meeting to discuss a motion to reinstate the mask mandate until the end of April exams. Victoria Wyatt, faculty senator at large, spoke very eloquently in favour, noting that UVic needed to live up to its own values on inclusion, and that lifting the mask mandate overnight in the middle of the academic term left vulnerable members of the UVic community with no time to seek accommodations or make other arrangements. Some faculty and student senators present also spoke of the problems with the lack of consultation on this issue with faculty, staff and student groups. As this meeting Senate voted 23-19 in favour of the following motion “That Senate recommend to the President and the Board of Governors that the mask mandate at UVic that was dropped on March 11, 2022 be reinstated immediately and kept in place through the April exam period.”

Yesterday the Board of Governors discussed this recommendation from Senate at their meeting. As the University noted in their recent update on Twitter and the UVic website, “The UVic Board of Governors voted today not to accept the recommendation presented by Senate calling for masks to be made mandatory indoors at the university until the end of term.” As a result masks are not mandatory on campus, although they are “strongly encouraged.”

The FA is disappointed with this decision. As you are aware, the FA advocated for the retaining of the mask mandate until the end of exams, as did the staff unions CUPE 4163 and PEA, the GSS and the Society for Students with a Disability, given the negative impact of this sudden change on the vulnerable members of our community. As you may be aware, the Board of Governors is the ultimate decision-making body on campus, although Senate has

significant authority over academic decision-making. The Board membership is composed of the Chancellor, the President of UVic, two elected faculty members, one elected staff member, two elected students and eight government appointees, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The membership of Senate is composed of 17 administrators, 32 elected faculty members, 16 elected students, 4 elected Convocation senators, one elected sessional representative and one elected librarian representative. (Thanks to Emily Fagan who made a similar point on Twitter last night – we academics must always acknowledge our sources ).

I would also like to point out that yesterday, the same day that the Board of Governors voted to reject the recommendation of Senate to retain the mask mandate until the end of April exams, a letter that the BC Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender wrote to the Public Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry, urging her to reinstate mask mandates, [was released publicly](#).

In this letter the Human Rights Commissioner noted that:

The sudden removal of the mask mandate will have profound effects on vulnerable people in the province. “While many of us have the good fortune to simply move on with life, thousands of British Columbians will be left behind because of their age, disability, or other protected characteristic under B.C.’s Human Rights Code,” the letter says. “Some of us are more vulnerable than others to the virus, and public health policy must consider these disproportionate impacts.” “Lifting the mask mandate will do disproportionate harm to those who are already marginalized, forcing many to withdraw from activities of daily life in an effort to protect their health, and reducing the capacity to enjoy their human rights to their full extent,” Govender says in the letter.

“I also agree that we can never eliminate all risk and that we will need to learn to live with an endemic virus,” the letter says. “But the mask mandate is not about eliminating risk; it is about sharing the risk burden across society rather than transferring it to a marginalized or medically vulnerable minority.” Govender notes that a balance must be reached in the conflict of human rights.

“Given the benefits of the mask mandate for thousands of marginalized people and the minimal impact on those being asked to wear one, the balance at this time favours continuing the mask mandate,” the letter says. “As an effective and minimally invasive intervention, the mask mandate is justified long after other more intrusive public health measures have been lifted.”

“That people dislike wearing masks is not a compelling argument when weighed against the rights of others to life, security of person, and equal participation in social and economic life.” The FA strongly endorses these sentiments, as part of our adherence to the equity principle of full inclusion for all members of the University community. The fact that most other post-secondary institutions also dropped the mask mandate overnight doesn’t show it is the right decision; it simply reaffirms that ableism remains widespread, at UVic and within much of mainstream society.

I would note, however, that given the decision of the Board of Governors, the policy of not having a mask mandate at UVic is unlikely to change, unless COVID cases and hospitalizations go up significantly and the Public Health officer decides to re-impose a mask mandate. If you have concerns about the Board’s decision, you might wish to contact the President’s office at [pres@uvic.ca](mailto:pres@uvic.ca), or the Board of Governors by writing to the University Secretary, Carrie Andersen, at [univsecretary@uvic.ca](mailto:univsecretary@uvic.ca).

If you wish to seek a medical or family status accommodation at this time, I would encourage you to contact one of the FA's membership services officers:

Reuben Kellen [msofa@uvic.ca](mailto:msofa@uvic.ca)

Ben Johnson [advisorfa@uvic.ca](mailto:advisorfa@uvic.ca)

Nathan Todd [uvicfa@uvic.ca](mailto:uvicfa@uvic.ca)

As you are aware, the end of term is approaching!

Wishing you strength, energy, health and all the very best,

Lynne

Lynne Marks  
President and Chief Negotiator, University of Victoria Faculty  
Association <http://www.uvicfa.ca/>  
Professor, Department of History  
<https://www.uvic.ca/humanities/history/people/faculty/markslynne.php>  
University of Victoria  
Victoria, B.C.

We recognize with respect the WSÁNEĆ (Saanich), Wyomilth (Esquimalt), and Lkwungen (Songhees) peoples on whose territories the University of Victoria stands, and whose relationships with this land remain profound today.

We acknowledge the devastation that government-created residential schools and Indian hospitals has inflicted on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples and the ongoing effects of concentric trauma that continue to this day.