



OFFICE of
THE PRESIDENT

September 24, 2021

Dr. Byram W. Bridle, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Pathobiology
Ontario Veterinary College
University of Guelph

Dear Dr. Bridle,

I received your letter dated Friday, September 17, 2021, and am writing to you in response per your request.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and concerns about the University of Guelph's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and, more specifically, the vaccine mandate announced at the beginning of this term.

As I have stated publicly, I believe we have a responsibility as an institution and a campus community to protect the collective well-being of our faculty, staff and students and the greater Guelph community. The decisions the University has made to enforce various public health measures for those attending our campus, including the decision to implement a vaccine mandate, have been made with that goal in mind.

The University's leadership has made these decisions with great consideration, thorough exploration of all available options and with the benefit of consultations with local and provincial public health units. As a reminder to you, vaccine mandates are required by the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) for all Universities and Colleges, as well as many other workplaces.

U of G's vaccine mandate went into effect Sept. 7, and more than 24,000 people from the Guelph and Ridgetown campuses have since provided information, including almost 20,000 students. Thus far, of those who have submitted information, 99 per cent are partially or fully vaccinated and 1 per cent have requested or been granted an exemption.

The University strives to provide reasonable accommodation for those members of our community who have received approved exemptions, including twice-weekly rapid testing for those coming to campus. Our response to the challenges posed to us by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve as we receive updated guidance from public health officials and legislative authorities.

Dr. Bridle, I recognize and appreciate the contributions you have made in your field of viral immunology. However, the issues at hand are matters of public health and government policy and have social-ecological implications both within our community and around the world. For that reason, the University has sought guidance from those trained and experienced in the area of public health policy; advice from internationally acclaimed experts in various relevant fields helped inform our approach. The individuals advising and setting policy have read and interpreted the same publications you have read, though in some cases, they have interpreted the data differently and/or weighed the information and risks more comprehensively because they have been trained to do so.

Like you, I believe strongly in the benefit of rigorous academic debate in the appropriate forums. As you know, the University has demonstrated its commitment to academic freedom of expression and will continue to welcome respectful discussion and debate on difficult topics such as those addressed in your letter. The science ecosystem provides a wealth of opportunity for this type of debate; as a university, we must let these time-honoured processes play out in the arena designed for this purpose, with appropriate access to data and peer review.

This is a difficult time for everyone in our community, Dr. Bridle, and I am sympathetic to the frustrations you have shared with me in your letter. Under different circumstances, and perhaps in more normal times, academic and scientific differences among colleagues would not have such immediate and potentially critical consequences. During an ongoing global pandemic, however, they do.

The University of Guelph will continue to endeavour to make thoughtful, evidence-based decisions that support the overall health and well-being of our campus community using the full breadth of information available to us.

Respectfully, and with gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlotte Yates". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dr. Charlotte A. B. Yates
President and Vice-Chancellor