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For immediate release

EDMONTON, ALBERTA—Students are shocked and concerned to see messaging from the Minister of Advanced Education pushing for a return to in-person classes under unsafe conditions, something the majority of MacEwan students oppose. Without a mask or vaccine/rapid testing mandate, MacEwan students and the students of Alberta's post-secondary institutions are being left without critical protections during a time of public health crisis, without adequate support and guidance. Further, SAMU is concerned about the impact this kind of intervention has on the institutional autonomy of post-secondary institutions, and by extension the ability of students to partake in and impact decision-making on our campus.

SAMU conducted a survey of MacEwan students in January 2022, which received nearly 2,500 responses. The current direction set by the Minister of Advanced Education and the provincial government directly contradicts what students have to say; 65% of MacEwan students are concerned about a return to in-person classes in February, and they have been clear on what they need in order to feel safe attending classes on campus. The top three safety requirements indicated were as follows:

- Campus mask mandate (68% of respondents)
- Campus vaccine mandate (67% of respondents)
- Access to free or affordable rapid tests (62% of respondents)

"The number one concern with in-person classes for students is household safety. Only 8% of our students live alone, which means managing household risk is an ongoing challenge for the overwhelming majority of MacEwan students," said SAMU President Myles Dykes. "This is in addition to the challenges that face students with a mid-semester change from online learning to in-person classes, further limiting student success."

SAMU is calling on the Minister of Advanced Education and the administration at MacEwan University to collaborate with students to determine and implement the supports and solutions we need to be safe. Based on SAMU's consultation with students, the university and the provincial government will need to ensure the following supports are in place for student safety and success:

1. The continuation of a mask and vaccine/rapid testing mandate on the MacEwan campus
2. Flexible and affordable lease options in MacEwan Residence for students who will need to relocate part-way through the semester to accommodate a shift to in-person learning

3. A COVID Mental Health Student Support Strategy from the university, created in collaboration with SAMU and students, with a plan for tangible supports and outcomes for student mental health during the pandemic
4. An institution-wide standard of minimum accommodations that instructors must be willing to provide to students whose attendance or participation is affected by COVID, including guaranteeing students timely access to course materials in the case of classes missed due to COVID
5. A consistent communication and application of campus COVID restrictions, especially when concerning the ability of immunocompromised students to assess the health risks of attending class in person.

Students are eager to regain the benefits of in-person learning, but this can only happen when the adequate safety measures are in place. As the people who spend their days in the classes and hallways of MacEwan, we know students are some of the best positioned individuals to speak to safety needs on campus, and SAMU will continue to advocate for these needs to be met by the university and the provincial government.

About SAMU: The Students' Association of MacEwan University (SAMU) is a student-centred organization governed by students, for students. SAMU provides many programs and services that serve the student body, including but not limited to: The Pantry, Peer Support, Breakfast Club, awards, bursaries, events and more. Acting within MacEwan, while maintaining independence from the University, it is an organization serving students, inspired by students.

For more information, visit <https://samu.ca>.

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