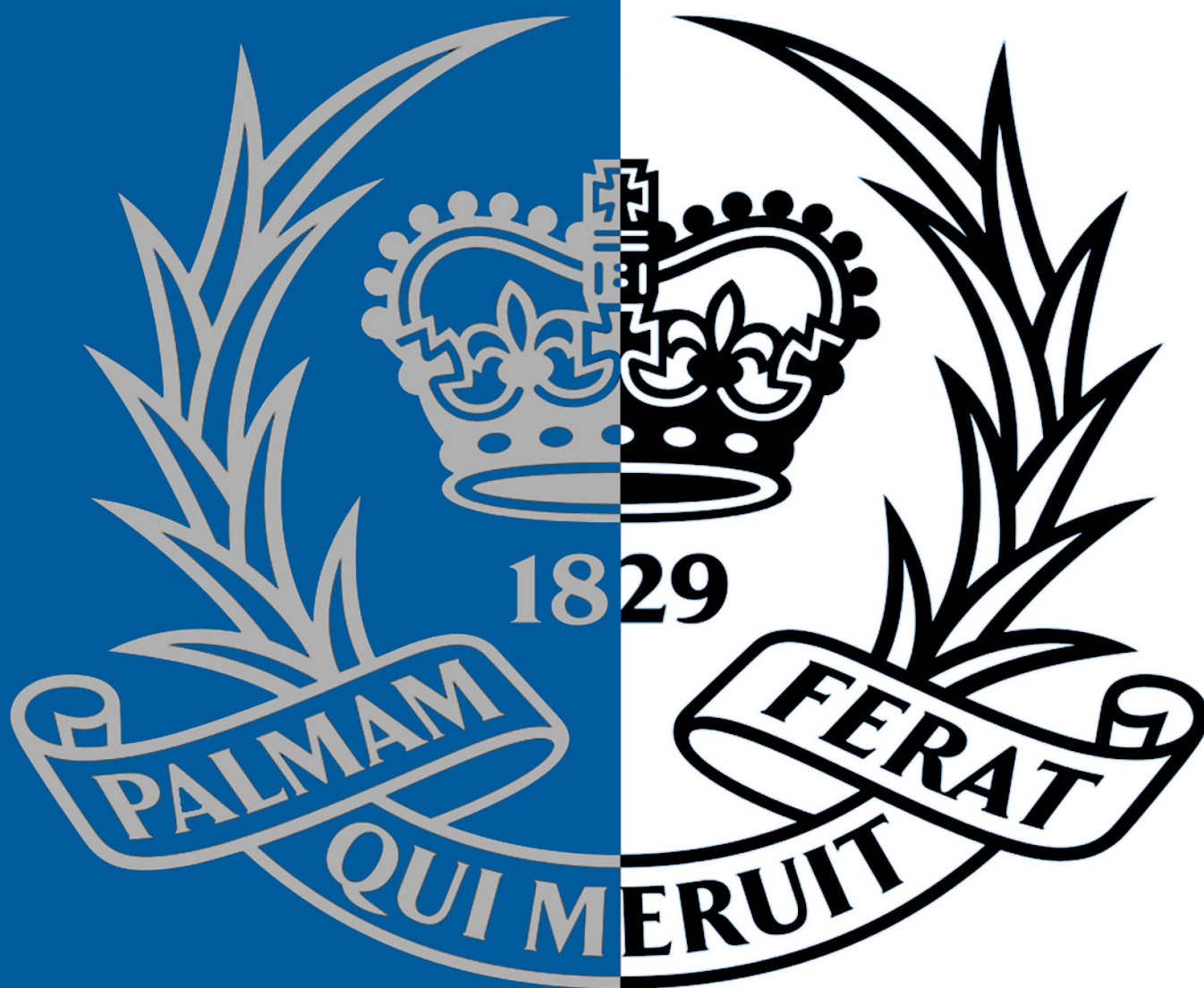


# CONVERGENCE

Despite  
**Divergence**



**Special Issue**

July 2020

# INTERVIEW WITH MR. BARDAI - RETURN-TO-SCHOOL PLAN

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The Continuous Learning Plan (CLP) for the next school year was recently announced by the school. In such a complex and difficult situation, it is very fortunate for the UCC students that the school has made such a tremendous effort to resume on-site schooling to the best degree possible. To clear up any questions students and faculty members might have regarding this plan, *Convergence* reached out to the whole school to collect questions. On behalf of *Convergence*, I brought them to Mr. Naheed Bardai, the Head of Upper School, through an in-depth interview.

**Convergence:** Mr. Bardai, thank you so much for taking this interview. I know the UCC community appreciates the school's great efforts to best advance our learning experience during this difficult time. We received many questions regarding the recently announced Continuous Learning Plan for the next school year, and I have grouped them into three categories: academic, co-curricular, and school routines. But before we dive into these specific questions, please allow me to ask a couple of questions regarding an aspect of the plan that has been brought up by my fellow classmates the most.

That is regarding the division of the student body into two groups according to houses. Many students have expressed concerns about not being able to see and collaborate with many of their friends on campus for the whole year, if these friends are not in their group. According to a recent survey, 75% of students in the Class of 2022 expressed preference for splitting the student body by grade instead of by house. Could you explain the rationale of dividing the student body by house rather than by year?

**Mr. Bardai:** I know that this is one of the toughest aspects of the situation that we are in. So much of the UCC experience is based on the deep and meaning-

ful friendships that develop over time, and the idea of not seeing some of your classmates is difficult.

The Ministry of Education has stipulated three pieces of guidance to schools as we consider reopening:

- To maintain physical distancing of two meters whenever possible;
- To create cohorts of students that as much as possible do not mix; and
- To have maximum class sizes of 15 students.

Each of these guidelines are in place to help minimize the risk of the spread of the virus, especially in the event of an outbreak. From a cohorting perspective, we are planning for cohorts to be based on Year groups in the building at one time.

As a result, we have to split the school in some fashion that allows us to achieve class sizes of a maximum of 15 when the majority of our class sizes are above 15. If we split the school by Year group, we would still have class sizes of 20 or 22 in most cases meaning that we would have to split the classes anyways. We then don't have enough teachers to teach these classes. In addition, from a cohorting point of view, this would lead to cohorts of 135-165 students depending on Year group. While there is no specific number for the size of a cohort, 165 is a lot higher than 82 or 83 which is what we can make it if we split by House.

So splitting by House then allows us to get class sizes of under 15 and cohort sizes down to half a Year group.

**Convergence:** In that case, will community events be organized to compensate for such a distinct division between the two groups, so that friends and classmates in different groups can at least reunion occasionally? Also, will the school allow students from one group to visit the school on their off-day in order to study at the library, use lab facilities,

participate in sports and clubs, or etc.?

**Mr. Bardai:** The challenge with organizing other events where students from across groups or across Year groups come together is that it breaks the notion of the cohort, and this increases the risk of the spread of the virus. For example, if it is found that a student in Year 10 from Group 1 is confirmed to have COVID-19, we need to be able to contact trace all the people that student has come into contact with (with the help of Toronto Public Health). The larger the number of students, the greater risk posed on our entire community.

I want nothing more than for our community to be back together in Laidlaw Hall, in the classroom and on the field. I also want our community to be healthy and safe. The moment that we are able to have cohorted groups mix safely, we will do so.

So to be explicit under our hybrid model, students from one group will not be allowed to physically mix with the other group.



**Convergence:** Let's move on to questions related to academics. Some students have expressed concerns on having assessments grouped together at the end of every 20-day period ("mini hell-weeks" every 20 days). Will this be the case, or will there be measures similar to the assessment calendar to prevent this?

**Mr. Bardai:** This is a real issue that we can predict will happen - and for good

reason because often the best time to assess is towards the end of a unit - and 20 days is about the length of an average unit. The way we are looking to address this is by leaving days 19 and 20 of the term as days when students can work on getting caught up on anything that they miss, reinforcing skills and concepts, and completing assessments in each course. No new material will be covered on these two days. Day 19 and 20 will take place at home for all students. We will still likely have an exam calendar.

**Convergence:** Will all assessments be assignments/projects, or will tests and exams take place? Will assessments take place on campus or at home? Will there be a Winter/June exam?

**Mr. Bardai:** All types of assessments will take place, with a preference for inquiry-based and project-based assessments. Tests and exams will also take place. Tests and exams are likely to take place on campus and inquiry and project-based tasks are likely to take place at home. We will have December exams for Year 12 only, and they will be split into two sessions to reflect Term A and Term B (i.e. the courses being studied by a student in Term A will be examined in Term A, and the courses being studied by a student in Term B will be examined in Term B). All other Year groups will be assessed in June in a similar manner over Term A and Term B.

**Convergence:** What will the off-campus days be used for? Will online instruction take place, or will we be assigned asynchronous work?

**Mr. Bardai:** The 'at-home' learning day will be used to further the curriculum and may be comprised of a variety of tasks - some individual, some collaborative. We are still developing our thinking on what this day may look like, and want to provide as much support to students as possible.

**Convergence:** Will there be any differences in how grades are determined (similar to those during last year's online learning), to accommodate a different learning environment?

**Mr. Bardai:** Grades will be on the basis of demonstrated evidence of learning and will be much like during any other period of time. Under the CLP last aca-

demical year, we were able to take the approach that we did because we were already at over 60% of the academic year complete and had a strong baseline of what student achievement looked like. We have no such reference point at the start of an academic year. It is also important to try and keep in mind that the main purpose of assessment is to provide feedback about learning and in the interest of furthering learning.

**Convergence:** What will happen to classes with very few students, such as Spanish Ab Initio or Mandarin? Splitting these students between Group 1 and 2 could result in very small class sizes of around 3-4 students.

**Mr. Bardai:** At this moment, they will be split in half like every other class. Students will benefit from smaller class sizes in all subject areas and especially in these already small classes.

**Convergence:** Given that Y12 is such an impactful year, will there be any special accommodations for Y12 students? What's the plan for IAs (especially science IAs)?

**Mr. Bardai:** This is an important question and our Year 12s are the year group with the most on their minds. We will do all that we can to ensure that our graduating class has the opportunity to perform at their best. We are currently in the process of thinking through the implications for them, but know that when we created our hybrid model, we built it based on the needs of our Year 12 students first and applied it to the rest of the Upper School (e.g. length of classes, rotations of terms, allocations of teachers). IAs will continue as planned with adaptations being made by subjects as needed, including the Sciences.

**Convergence:** Will extra help be available for subjects even during the term that doesn't explicitly focus on these subjects?

**Mr. Bardai:** While extra help is not necessarily being planned on this basis, individual teachers depending on their availability may support students in other subjects beyond what is being covered in that specific term. However, priority needs to be given to the courses being taught that specific term.

## CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAM



**Convergence:** Many students have expressed concerns about how athletics and other co-curriculars will work in this situation. How will the resuming of sports work? Will only outdoor sports resume? Will the gyms, the swimming pool, and the hockey rinks open?

**Mr. Bardai:** I'll let Mr. Cowie address these questions.

**Mr. Cowie:** Our intention is to run as full and varied a co-curricular program as possible. In following guidance from the Ministry of Education, health authorities, and sports governing bodies, we will implement a progressional approach to our athletic programming with an "intra-school" approach first and moving to a "inter-school" approach when approval is given by CISAA, our governing athletic association. We will start with practices focused on individual training and skills development, moving to scrimmages within practices when permitted to do so, and to cross-cohort competition when we can. At this time, the recommendation is for all athletic programming to take place outside to maintain physical distancing measures and minimize the spread of the virus. All "inter-school" competition will commence when CISAA approves such activity and the use of indoor facilities like the gyms, swimming pool and hockey rinks will be dependent on direction from provincial and health authorities.

**Convergence:** Will practices be divided into Group 1 and Group 2 practices as well? Otherwise, if a student is a Group 1 student and a sports practice for him occurs on a Group 2 school day, will he have to go to school to attend practice?

**Mr. Cowie:** Yes, at this point we do envision running two separate, but parallel, athletic programs for each cohort (groups) on alternating days. So, coaches



will run the same number of practices per week, but would be working with different teams every other day.

**Convergence:** What is the plan for the music programs like bands and choirs (as virtual rehearsals are difficult to coordinate and in-person rehearsals are difficult due to social distancing rules)?

**Mr. Cowie:** Currently we're envisioning running both virtual and "in-person" programming which complies with physical distancing and cohorting restrictions. We will, of course, develop our program to adhere to the most recent guidance from relevant governing authorities prior to school opening.

**Convergence:** How will clubs function? Some clubs, such as robotics, require members to physically work together on projects. Will alternative club activities have to be planned?

**Mr. Cowie:** Currently in order to meet physical distancing and cohorting restrictions, clubs will have to continue in an on-line format. We will move to "in-person" clubs programming as soon as we are approved to do so.

## ROUTINES



**Convergence:** Thanks so much, Mr. Cowie. We just have a few other general questions to ask. How long is this format likely to continue, based on the school's best estimate? The date of June 18, 2021 is listed as the termination of this Plan on the school website. Will the school continuously re-evaluate this structure if the situation changes?

**Mr. Bardai:** We have planning for three possible models of learning this year: 'normal', 'hybrid' and 'remote'. Our hope is that we can move to 'normal' as soon as it is safe to do, guided by the Ministry of Education. We will be constantly re-evaluating where we are from a health and safety standpoint and will make de-

cisions on that basis. Our hybrid model is flexible enough that we switch between all models quickly.

**Convergence:** Has the school considered the format of alternating weeks rather than alternating days for in-school learning? What is the rationale of choosing alternating days?

**Mr. Bardai:** We have considered the pattern of alternating between days and weeks. When deciding, we looked at the survey put out by the Board of Stewards where 46% of students preferred alternating days (as opposed to 27% preferring alternating weeks). We also looked at a survey done by the TDSB where 70,000 families participated. In their report, they state that both students and families prefer alternating days. In addition, from a learning standpoint, we feel that alternating days provides greater support to students and allows them to have more regular contact with their teachers.

**Convergence:** What sort of health and safety measures will be in place in the classrooms, hallways, and other community spaces? Will PPE, in particular masks, be required? Will social distancing measures such as staying two meters apart be in place?

**Mr. Cowie:** Specific communication on health and safety measures will be provided closer to school opening to reflect the most recent guidance from public health, but current considerations include: daily screening protocols, physical distancing, hand hygiene, proper respiratory etiquette practices, and routine cleaning and sanitization. Regarding face coverings, the Ministry of Education's position is that they should be worn when appropriate physical distancing cannot be maintained. Students and employees can certainly wear masks if they choose to do so at all times. The college's position on the wearing of face coverings will be communicated prior to school opening and will reflect the most recent direction from the Ministry of Education and public health authorities.

**Convergence:** Will food be provided? If so, how?

**Mr. Bardai:** At this moment, we are looking at ways that we can provide lunch service to students in a safe manner be-

yond our boarding community. Our lead thinking is that we can provide boxed lunches to students based on pre-order.

**Convergence:** How will attendance be taken? If a student is strong in a particular subject, or knows that the next class will most likely be a work period, can he choose not to attend that class to reduce risk of transmission?

**Mr. Bardai:** Attendance will be taken for all synchronous learning when students are expected to be present. Any student missing a class will require permission from their family. Any family at any time can request that their child attend school remotely due to health and safety concerns.

**Convergence:** Will body temperatures be taken daily? Can students with a mild cold go to school? What is the policy if a student exhibits symptoms or falls ill on campus or in the boarding houses?

**Mr. Cowie:** Daily screening will be a part of the return to school process and specific aspects of that process will be communicated prior to the start of school. There are specific protocols currently in development for students (day and boarding) who may exhibit symptoms while on campus and these will be communicated prior to school opening to ensure they reflect the latest guidance from public health authorities.

**Convergence:** Thank you so much for your time and detailed explanations, Mr. Bardai and Mr. Cowie.

## Note from Ms. Marshall - Uniform

During the hybrid learning period, the school is suspending the requirement for the full UCC uniform! Only the following will be required for daily school attendance:

### - Clean clothing

- **PPE:** as designated by authorities/school (requirements may change).

- **UCC on top:** A UCC, UCC team, House or UCC club shirt, sweatshirt, hoodie, or quarter-zip.

- **Pants on bottom:** Long, unripped pants on bottom (shorts for activities are to be worn underneath pants).

- **Close-toed shoes**

# YOUR STORIES, OPINIONS, AND ACTIONS

## DURING COVID-19

As the oldest student-led publication in Canada, *Convergence* has always been a part of the UCC tradition. Every single issue of *Convergence* is carefully archived by the school's Archive Department and becomes a part of the school's history.

And we are living in a historically unprecedented period of time.

In the Heads Up Article entitled "What to do during COVID-19?", the University Counselling Office suggested:

"Document your experience and the experiences of others. Keep a journal to record your thoughts, feelings, and actions during this historic period ... Interview friends and neighbours online and write an article about how they are coping. Reach out to local business and non-profit organizations to discover how they are adapting to the 'new normal.' ... **Convergence might be interested in your findings.**"

Yes we are! Our next issue will be devoted as a **Special COVID-19 Edition**, in which we will document your stories, your opinions, and your actions.

**Your Stories:** Were you stuck somewhere in Canada or abroad due to travel restrictions? In your family, are there front-line workers who shared their struggles and sacrifice with you? Did you miss your friends and the school during the virtual learning period? Write up any stories that matter to you and send them to us for publishing!

**Your Opinions:** Do you think Canada is doing a better job than the US? Do you actually believe in "herd immunity"? How do you rate Ontario's response? What lessons do you think we can learn from this pandemic if humanity has to face another one in the future? Write up any strong opinions and send them to us!

**Your Actions:** Did you raise funds for the front-line workers? Have you volunteered to help the vulnerable people during this period? Did you take action to connect the UCC community during the virtual learning period or over the summer? Summarize your actions and send them in.

Your articles can be long or short, with or without a picture, written by yourself or co-authored with others, but they must be exclusive for *Convergence*. **All students and faculty members** in the Upper School are welcome to submit.

We will try to apply minimum editing to your articles so that they reflect your authentic voice and style. Please send them to [kevin.liu@ucc.on.ca](mailto:kevin.liu@ucc.on.ca) and [princeton.zhou@ucc.on.ca](mailto:princeton.zhou@ucc.on.ca) by **August 31** and we aim to publish this special Edition of *Convergence* as soon as school starts in September.

We look forward to hearing your stories and opinions.

**Princeton Zhou and Kevin Liu**, Co-Editors in Chief