

Matters arising from the General Faculty and Special Sessions of Auburn University faculty held the fall of 2020.

This document serves as a summary of concerns, questions, and calls for action expressed by faculty at the Special Meeting of the Auburn University faculty held on November 10, 2020, as well as in previous faculty and senate meetings held in the fall of 2020. While the information contained herein is not meant to be exhaustive, it represents those items that were expressed most repeatedly and vociferously. Thus, the Auburn University Senate encourages the administration to continue to make decisions through a transparent communication process and in close consultation with elected faculty leadership or the University Faculty as a whole.

Concerns faculty have about operations now and in Spring, 2021

- The number one concern of faculty as expressed at various venues is safety. Faculty (and staff) are at greater risk than students for complications, long-term effects of the illness, and even death simply because they are older. Faculty (and staff and students) with comorbidities face even greater risks. If the administration does not implement sufficient strategies to minimize individual risk of virus transmission, then it needs to provide sufficient flexibility and allowances that faculty can do what is necessary to protect themselves (most notably, social distancing). All individuals affiliated with the university should not have to endure trade-offs between their physical well-being, the physical well-being of family members, and their livelihood.
- One of the key concerns among faculty about operations in Spring 2021 is about the safety of teaching environments. In particular, faculty are concerned about the university rule that classrooms can be filled up to 50% capacity, with face coverings required, and that a safe teaching environment can be achieved by “leaving one empty seat between each student” (fall Academic Re-Entry Plan, 7-9-2020). This concern is especially notable under the following specific situations:
 - In fixed-seat, large lecture classrooms, where this rule will **still** leave less than 3 feet between students sitting in the same room for up to 1 ¼ hours.
 - classes where instruction involves close contact between instructor and student, for example in music (a discipline where complications arising from covid-19 may have serious repercussions for a faculty member’s ongoing professional career).
 - laboratories where even the 50% rule seems to be not currently enforced due to the need to provide sufficient hours to students.
- Faculty are concerned that the number of students identifying themselves as having tested positive in their classes seems to far outstrip the numbers of positive cases the university reports weekly. Providing information on how the number of positive cases is determined and establishing strategies to improve the reliability of reporting data might help to allay these concerns.
- Faculty are concerned about inadequate technology for generating online lectures that facilitate interaction with students attending remotely and in-person at the same time.

Questions faculty have for the administration about operations now and in Spring, 2021

- Faculty would like more information on how the sentinel testing will be improved for Spring semester. Concerns were expressed that the currently sentinel testing may not provide an accurate assessment of the prevalence of the virus due to low sample sizes and poor representation of the population in individuals on the Auburn campus.
- The faculty would like to know how the administration plans to improve estimates of number of positive cases, given disparities between reported cases and number of students missing class due to illness, as well as reports that students are choosing not to self-report for various reasons. The faculty would like to know how the administrations' plans to address the apparent failure of students to use quarantine and isolation dormitories and why this spread-management strategy was underused.
- The faculty would like the administration to state clearly what circumstances would trigger an abandonment of face-to-face teaching across campus. We understand that the answer to this is not a single data-point, but it should nevertheless be possible to list these factors and what combination of factors would constitute a tipping point. Faculty would also like to know what triggers individual instructors could use to choose to move to remote teaching on their own.

Specific, requested actions faculty would like the administration to take in preparation for Spring, 2021

- Of the attendees at the Special Meeting, 189 out of 215 voted overwhelmingly that the university administration should take up and follow the recommendations in the AAUP report. The later recommendations will not be replicated here, except to note agreement with the principles of transparency, consistency, and shared governance outlined in that document, and in particular noting that 304 out of 354 attendees voted in favor of adopting those recommendations which request that future decisions regarding university teaching policies be made with more active faculty consultation before decisions are issued, for example through the Senate or in a General Faculty meeting. Note: this was an open Zoom meeting and attendees were free to come and go as they pleased.
- We ask that the Executive Vice President and Provost work together to instruct the Deans of the schools and colleges to acknowledge that the 50% occupancy limit is not universally applicable to all classrooms and to immediately limit classroom occupancy levels in large-lecture classrooms such that students are > 6 feet apart or current CDC guidelines.
- In disciplines such as music, where research has shown an increased risk for virus transmission through aerosols, exceptions should be given to the Provost's face-to-face teaching policy.
- Extra laboratory hours should be scheduled, including by paying for course overloads from a central pool of money made available to Department chairs directly by the Provost's office to ensure that sufficient labs are offered to meet students' needs while limiting labs to < 50% capacity.

- Faculty would like the administration to support and provide for an increase in outdoor teaching spaces. The sooner faculty can get information on these spaces, the better, so that faculty can plan for spring.
- Similarly, faculty would like the administration to provide rooms where classes split 50:50 can take exams in person at one time, and according to safe, social-distancing guidelines.
- Some faculty have reported not having received timely responses to their requests for blended or on-line modalities. We request that a strict deadline be imposed on Deans to respond to such requests, and no later than the end of the fall teaching semester.
- While the provost has assured the faculty that his plan included teaching into the evening in order to help thin out student traffic in corridors and hallways, it is clear that this policy has not been implemented in some colleges. We request that the administration provide resources and facilitate departments moving courses to evenings if faculty request and where possible.
- Faculty would like the administration to issue guidance on how to manage members of the public coming on campus.
- Faculty would like the administration to issue guidance on how students should enter and exit large rooms, travel through hallways, and other situations/locations where the mass of students is likely to be large while exhibiting social distancing.
- Faculty ask administration to reverse the requirement for Dean approval to teach non-face-to-face modalities. IF this cannot be changed, faculty ask for approval to teach using one of the predominantly online modalities under the following circumstances: for personal health concerns, for health concerns of a household member, or for care of children being schooled or cared for at home. Faculty would like the weekly reports of cases to be disaggregated by faculty, undergraduate students, graduate students, and staff.
- Faculty would like the administration to generate and publicize specific penalties for individuals that are caught without an appropriately worn mask on campus. Faculty would also like the administration to institute an enforcement mechanism.
- Faculty would like the administration to develop a more accurate mode of contact tracing beyond 'The Guidesafe App' due to low participation in use of the app and anecdotal evidence of limitations in the apps ability to detect exposures and allow the Covid Resource Center to share dashboard data to faculty.
- Faculty request that they be notified if a student in their class tests positive and approximately how many students in class are required to quarantine. Note that identifying individuals is not needed. Faculty just want to be aware of positives in the classroom. Note that such information could help with issues of disparities between reported positives and observations of students missing class.

Miscellaneous policy items:

- Faculty brought up the issue of tuition waivers for graduate students on assistantships who apply for in-person courses, but not on-line classes. Why does the disparity exist and can tuition waiver be extended to those qualified students enrolled in course designated as online ?
- Faculty questioned the ability of students to withdraw from classes up until the last day of the semester without penalty. Faculty are concerned that such policies allow students to avoid putting their full effort into class throughout the semester.