



April 30, 2020

Dear President Alger,

Thank you for taking the time to reply to our April 21, 2020 letter. This is a very busy time for everyone and we appreciate that you and Provost Colman answered us so promptly, directly, and thoroughly. Thank you for your reassurance that your focus is “maintaining the educational mission of the university.”

Thank you also for calling our attention to Governor Northam’s memo instructing executive branch agency heads to “identify low or underperforming activities” to “determine if they can be eliminated rather than simply reduced.” (p.9)

As you indicate, the eight newly formed JMU Contingency Task Forces and working groups have only an advisory role. We note with interest that, of the 122 positions on those committees, it appears that about 7% are filled by full-time instructional faculty (who teach a full course load). <https://www.jmu.edu/academic-affairs/committees-and-taskforces/AATFC.shtml>

You write that these task forces are “not intended to be ... closed in any way”; we note that the Provost has indicated that their meetings’ minutes are “confidential for now.”

We appreciate your confirmation that the full-time instructional faculty members on those task forces were appointed on the basis of “recommendations of deans and AUHs.”

We note that you are aiming to implement “mechanisms for saving,” such as “taking full advantage of available teaching power.” At present, you indicate, “deans, other academic affairs leaders, and faculty on 12-month contracts are increasing their teaching loads.”

In this uncertain time, many of our fellow instructional faculty are, understandably, anxious about the future of the university and their role in it. Your letter has clarified present policies as regards the nature and extent of faculty participation in decision-making. Thank you for the clarification.

The AAUP, as you know, has been an independent voice for faculty members since 1915. In that tradition, the JMU chapter, along with other Virginia AAUP chapters, advocates for academic freedom and shared governance; works to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education; promotes the economic security of faculty; helps the higher education community organize to make our goals a reality; and works to ensure higher education’s contribution to the common good.

We look forward to working with you and the Senate toward upholding these values. We will post this letter to the Faculty Senate discussion board, along with our April 21 letter to you.

Sincerely,

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CC: Heather Coltman, Provost
Mark Piper, Faculty Senate Speaker