



June 15, 2020

Dear President Alger and Provost Coltman,

We appreciate your hard work on the many challenging issues that face faculty and administrators in these unprecedented times. As an independent faculty organization, and by way of continuing the discussion that began with our earlier letters, we write to express our concerns as to ongoing shared governance issues.

As the AAUP-JMU chapter pointed out in our exchange with you on April 22nd and April 30th 2020, (a) the COVID-19 task forces and committees included almost no faculty who teach a full time course load; (b) the few such faculty on those important bodies were appointed by deans and AUHs, not elected by faculty; and (c) the minutes of those bodies' meetings were (and still are) confidential.

This violates a principle unequivocally stated in the JMU Faculty Handbook : “the Senate shall elect or nominate individuals to represent the interests of the entire instructional faculty to University committees or other such bodies as shall require representation.” (VI. Constitution of the Faculty Senate, Article I: Purpose and Functions. Section 2) <https://www.jmu.edu/facultyhandbook/vi-constitution/article1.shtml>

Thus, from the point of view of the faculty, the decision-making process has been, and continues to be, non-transparent and insufficiently representative.

Indeed, many of the decisions made, and being made as we write, directly concern teaching in the fall semester, faculty and student health, faculty's academic freedom (with the announcement of the use of cameras in the classroom, for example). All full-time teaching faculty should be allowed to make their own prudent judgments about whether to teach in person in the fall, and to attend other in-person gatherings (e.g. faculty meetings). Instead, faculty members have to petition their AUH and college Dean, thus potentially obliging them to disclose personal medical, financial, or familial information—which they have a right to keep confidential—in order to gain approval. AUHs also may not be in a position to make such decisions objectively and equitably, while requiring the Dean's approval only compounds the already considerable decisional power vested in individual administrators.

¹ See our letter to you from April 30th 2020. We used the public JMU salaries database, which include employee classifications, and counted 122 individuals across all task forces, of which only 9 were considered Instructional, 10-month faculty (which represent 7% of the task force, and less than 1% representation of the over 1000 non-administrative Instructional faculty at JMU).

In sum, the COVID-19-related decision-making process to date has, by its composition, method of formation, and the opacity of the relevant bodies, ignored, undermined and failed to respect the faculty's right to discharge its basic responsibilities of shared academic governance.

We call on the administration and the Senate to work resolutely and energetically towards a system of genuine shared governance in accordance with the guidelines of the Faculty Handbook. Specifically, the Senate should elect faculty representatives to all COVID-related task forces and committees, and those representatives should both initially consult with, and regularly report back to the Senate about the work they have been conducting. This should include all COVID-related task forces and committees.

This practice should extend to all existing University-wide and School committees constituted by administrative appointment – especially where these address issues such as curriculum, instruction and academic programming, budgetary matters, and long-range planning.

As you know, faculty have expressed many concerns on the Faculty Senate canvas page. In compliance with principles of transparency, we urge full faculty access to the unfiltered results of the survey concerning fall teaching conducted by the Office of the Provost on May 27th.

Sincerely, on behalf of AAUP-JMU chapter members,

Doe Polanz, President

Thomas Adajian, Vice-President

CC: Val Larsen, Faculty Senate speaker