

Virginia Faculty Petition Regarding Plans for the Fall and the Response to COVID-19

**** NOTE:** Faculty who would like to add their names to this petition should complete the form at the bottom. Graduate employees/students and staff who are affected in pertinent ways are also welcome to sign. The list will be updated frequently; names do not appear immediately. ******

As faculty across Virginia prepare for the fall semester, we continue to grapple with the fallout from a global pandemic that has upended millions of lives around the globe, killing more than 120,000 people in the U.S. to date. The pandemic's financial consequences for Virginia have yet to be fully determined. But across the country, colleges and universities already have seen furloughs and program cuts. Similarly, Virginia faculty face uncertainty surrounding employment as well as plans for instruction. The limited input faculty have had so far on decisions related to safety, job security, allocation of resources, and academic freedom -- including the freedom to teach in the manner faculty deem most effective -- is unacceptable.

Transparency and robust faculty involvement in institutional decision-making processes and priority-setting are imperative at all times. They are even more crucial during times of uncertainty and crisis. Now is the time for our universities and colleges to put people first, and to engage in an open and transparent discussion about university priorities. Faculty must play a central role in the process and need to be involved in that process immediately.

Virginia institutions of higher education are committed to diversity and inclusivity. Our practices must match our language. The Disability Rights Movement's slogan, "Nothing About Us Without Us," reminds us that decisions must be made by the people most directly affected by them.

We, the undersigned faculty members at Virginia institutions of higher education, call upon all Virginia colleges and universities to ensure the following without further delay:

1. All faculty members must be allowed to make their own professional and prudential judgments about whether to teach in-person classes in the fall, without having to petition administrators. Faculty will not face negative repercussions from administrators for deciding to teach remotely. Faculty workloads will not be increased without full faculty consultation and adequate compensation. Institutions will maintain full employment, pay, and benefits for all instructional faculty.
2. Faculty must approve all instructional plans for returning to campus. All decision-making processes must be fully transparent, in accordance with normative principles of shared governance. Appropriate input and review by faculty, including existing faculty bodies, must precede policy changes, which must be publicly posted.
3. Adequate safety measures for all members of the institutional community -- students, staff, contract workers, and faculty -- must be in place. This includes, at minimum, free testing on request and daily community reporting from administration regarding new cases on campus. If a mandated on-campus presence results in a COVID-19 infection of an employee, the institution must make specific provisions for covering health costs, above and beyond what the individual's current insurance provides, and including mental health support. These medical provisions will apply to all employees, even those without university/college health insurance, regardless of their contract type.

*This is a public document that will be shared with more than just the petition signers.

Many statements from this petition have been adapted (with permission) from the open letters, statements and petitions written by colleagues from Penn State University, Virginia Commonwealth University, George Mason University and UNC - Chapel Hill

Sign by the Fourth of July, 2020. Please sign your full name, department or program, and institution.