

Old Dominion University Faculty Petition Regarding Plans for Fall 2020 and the Response to COVID-19

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 130,000 people in the U.S. to date. The pandemic's financial consequences for Old Dominion University (ODU) have yet to be fully determined. But across the country, colleges and universities already have seen furloughs and program cuts. Similarly, ODU 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—has been disappointing.

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 (see AAUP's [Principles of Academic Governance during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)). 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.

ODU is committed to diversity and inclusivity. Our practices must match our language. Decisions must be made by the people most directly affected by them.

We, the faculty members at ODU, call upon the respective administrative bodies on campus 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. Request: Accommodate preferences for all instructors between distance and on-campus learning.
2. Faculty workloads will not be increased without full faculty consultation This is in accordance with the *Faculty Handbook* (p. 112), which states:

1. The standard teaching load at Old Dominion University is 24 load hours for the academic year. Each chair will, in consultation with the faculty member, determine how the equivalent of that load is comprised for that faculty member in the department/school, after considering the goals and objectives developed by the faculty member and agreed to by the chair as a part of the annual evaluation process. Such load should be apportioned among teaching, research, administration, and other significant responsibilities approved by the chair. Responsibilities which the chair should take into account include curriculum development, academic advising, supervision of theses and dissertations, supervision of student internships, service in professional organizations, and special community or university services. Copies of the workload apportionment will be provided to each faculty

member and forwarded to the dean for approval each semester and to the provost and vice president for academic affairs for information.

[...]

4. In the case of nontraditional or unusual teaching experiences such as student teaching, applied music, clinical experiences in an allied health program, or internships, the relationship between teaching time and load hours will be determined on a course-by-course basis by the faculty of the department with the approval of the dean and the provost and vice president for academic affairs.

[...]

*6. A faculty member's responsibility toward the university includes research and service in addition to teaching. **Faculty members may not be assigned a teaching load beyond the standardized load hours per academic year described above without their consent.** If the department and the faculty member request a teaching load beyond this limit, approval of such a request must be forwarded to the provost and vice president for academic affairs on the recommendation of the chair and dean.*

Request: Workload reports for the 20/21AY are given for all faculty members after individual consultation that: clarify the unique circumstances of any changes in workload; clarify changes in subsequent research or service expectations stemming from losses in course releases or increases in teaching loads; and signed and agreed upon to only apply for the upcoming academic year.

3. 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. Request: The respective Dean of each of the colleges on campus holds a town hall meeting seeking faculty input for return to campus plans.
4. 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. Request: Follow above health and reporting guidelines.
5. Faculty must receive relevant information regarding the decision-making process. It is necessary that faculty promptly receive and the University publicly disseminate reports, meeting announcements, agendas, and minutes of relevant University and College bodies that produce strategic documents outlining decisions appertaining budgetary and workload adjustments and the implementation of Commonwealth policy. As of July 9, 2020, the faculty is still not in receipt of ODU's plan to comply with the Commonwealth of Virginia's COVID-19 policy governing the

reopening of institutions of higher learning. Request: Follow above guidelines ensuring faculty have timely access to University and College deliberations so that faculty input benefits from access to accurate information.