



National University Advocacy Chapter

June 13, 2020

Dear President Andrews,

The membership of the National University Chapter of the AAUP (NU-AAUP) has directed me to send you this letter on behalf of the chapter as well as the many non-member faculty who have contacted the NU-AAUP regarding recent administration decisions. The high level of concern among the faculty can be gauged by the attendance of over 100 faculty at several recent Faculty Senate meetings called to respond to administration actions (usual attendance of non-Senators at these meetings is zero and almost never more than five). Administration actions over the last few months have represented a direct repudiation of shared governance, the unilateral violation of the faculty's contractual relationship to the University for the last 25 years, and now the cruel and unjustified firing of dozens of faculty in clear violation of the terms of that contract. These actions have sown fear and resentment among the body of the faculty and staff that will affect the University's ability to serve its students, let alone initiate the kinds of ambitious projects that have been used to justify them.

The National University Faculty and the Board of Trustees have a signed negotiated agreement in the National University *Faculty Policies*. The *Faculty Policies* represent a long-term code of conduct, an agreement of behavior, on the part of all signatories. In those *Policies*, the Faculty and the Board of Trustees have agreed that

National University is committed to shared governance and believes it to be a fundamental ingredient of a healthy academic institution and an essential right and responsibility of a scholarly community. National University agrees generally with the philosophy in the 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities which indicates that shared governance allows National University to benefit from the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of its Faculty and provides a structure that includes the elected Faculty governance bodies (the Faculty Senate, Graduate and Undergraduate Councils), through which Faculty and administrators work together to promote National University's mission.

National University, therefore, is committed to support:

- the Faculty's fundamental role in making academic decisions,
- the protection of legitimate Faculty aspirations,

- the existence of clear and varied channels of communication that are understood by all constituents,
- the implementation and preservation of academic standards, and
- the promotion of the welfare of the students. (5)

The faculty are disappointed that the NU administration has not stood up for the values articulated in the National University *Faculty Policies* and supported the National University faculty. You are well aware that “[t]he President and Board of Trustees must approve all amendments to the Faculty Policies and Faculty Bylaws *after those amendments have been approved by a majority vote of the Faculty Senate and the Faculty*” (1.1.2, emphasis added).

As a consequence of this and other recent actions, the credibility of the Board and of the National University administration has been damaged. At the Town Hall in early April, in response to a question about possible faculty terminations, you acknowledged that the rate of recent faculty attrition had already exceeded the declines in enrollments over the same period, and stated that you expected that future faculty job losses would be due only to small program terminations and voluntary retirements. This has turned out not to be true: a large portion of faculty recently laid off fell into neither of these categories. Faculty that could easily be reassigned in accordance with Article 10.2 were instead let go in a rush to cut full-time faculty. The fact that some of the faculty fired were either just reappointed or recently promoted in rank reveals a certain amount of duplicity or chaos in the administration (maybe both) as well as a lack of regard for due process, including procedures for appeal of personnel decisions that are standard throughout academe and have been part of National University’s review process for decades. Combined with the unilateral revocation of the contracts, of which you were certainly aware at the time of the Town Hall but said nothing, it is hard to imagine faculty taking any assurances about future directions or policies seriously.

This creates a toxic atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust that will discourage faculty from committing their full enthusiastic efforts to future projects. Certainly, fear will motivate some to try to do whatever they can to avoid being fired as their colleagues have been, but the University is not likely to be a place where faculty feel motivated or safe to propose innovative ideas or suggest alternative ways of accomplishing their assigned tasks. It appears that the University plans to redefine the faculty role to something more like an assembly line employee, whose job is prescribed and whose creativity is discouraged. This is exactly the opposite of what a university needs to do in order to respond to the rapidly changing landscape of higher education. It seems more like the product of the “vision” of a Board and System unfamiliar with the central role of faculty in any form of higher education (a flaw in the Board pointed out in the WSCUC Team Report).

Over the last two or three years, the faculty have on multiple occasions communicated to you and to the Board their objections to decisions taken without the benefit of the shared governance processes that have prevailed at the University for more than two decades. Those processes have been central to the University’s success and expanded vision over that period. It is a profound mistake to blame them now for the University’s recent enrollment declines or for

a perceived inability to respond “nimble” enough to changes in the higher education landscape. In fact, those declines have not paralleled any notable gains in faculty authority but rather significant changes to the administration and the University’s relationship to the System, not to mention the acquiring and maintaining of a for-profit entity. Any inability to respond effectively to external changes has been, in our view, exacerbated by the administration’s frequent refusal to engage faculty in initiative planning. Where faculty have been involved in and taken leadership in such projects—often at their belated insistence, as in the Asynchronous Initiative—those initiatives have often thrived. Other joint administration-faculty task forces, such as those revising the Five Year Review process and the Small Programs Task Force, have also solved difficult problems successfully. Where the administration has tried to impose its own vision or tackled problems with insufficient faculty input, the results have been less successful.

Faculty are not averse to taking on new challenges and even new roles. But those changes need to be designed collaboratively with faculty—that is, with the experts who produce the programs and courses that our students choose to pay for. To impose these changes on faculty, and particularly to do so in a way that seems designed to force compliance not only through fear but through humiliation, is not just bad for morale but a recipe for bad decision making. The WSCUC Team Report pointed to this problem directly, including as one of its “requirements” that the University work on more collaborative change management strategies and better communication among all involved parts of the University, including the Board of Trustees. The administration’s and the Board’s actions since the issuance of the WSCUC letter have been accelerating in exactly the opposite direction.

The recent and wholly unjustified terminations of dozens of faculty represent an appalling culmination of this sequence of events. These terminations make no sense financially: the University continues to take in more revenue than it spends (unlike our affiliates), and if it indeed plans to double student enrollments in the next several years, it will need more not fewer full-time faculty. In our view, the administration’s and Board’s actions appear desperate and unnecessary, imposing serious material harm to those laid off and a deep discouragement on those left behind. Our purpose in writing to you is to inform you of the enormous damage these actions have inflicted on the faculty’s relationship to the administration, and of the damage they will inflict in the future on the University and its students. As President, it is still within your power to reconsider this course and proceed in a more collaborative and productive relationship with the faculty on whom the success of any future initiatives depends.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Zukas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alex Zukas
President, National University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors
(NU-AAUP)