



Statement of Concern Related to University and College Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis in New York State (8/12/2020)

The New York State Conference of the American Association of University Professors (NYSC AAUP) recognizes that the current global pandemic has posed unforeseen and severe challenges to colleges and universities in our state, both public and private. We are adamant that to survive and emerge stronger from this crisis, institutions of higher learning must be intentional in respecting the AAUP principles of academic freedom and tenure and shared governance. The pandemic has shed a glaring light on the long-standing systemic and structural inequities that people of color, women and low-income communities have born for decades, if not centuries. Therefore, the NYSC AAUP urges administrations, governing boards, and faculty to propose and enact bold, transformative programs to address these inequities while crafting changes that adhere to AAUP principles.

Due to the failed national response to the public health crisis, colleges and universities will be confronted with financial pressures and challenges to educating students in a safe and equitable manner. In turn, the NYSC AAUP calls on academic administrations, governing boards, and faculty organizations to adhere to the following principles when addressing the crises on their campuses. All responses to the Covid-19 crisis must:

- 1) Consider the potential consequences for vulnerable populations, including racial and ethnic minorities and women in the student body, faculty, and staff. All emergency measures must *decrease* existing inequities, not increase them.
- 2) Follow [AAUP guidelines that protect tenure and academic freedom](#), providing faculty due process while allowing administrations to terminate tenured faculty when they can demonstrate programmatic need or true financial exigency. Adherence to these guidelines not only protects faculty from arbitrary and unilateral administrative decisions, but also protects administrations from lawsuits and negative publicity that undermines crisis management. Academic freedom requires that [faculty have the primary voice in deciding how they will deliver their courses](#) (e.g. online, hybrid, face-to-face), as well as the kind of protective measures that enable them to return safely to the classroom.
- 3) Follow [AAUP guidelines for shared governance](#) and the inclusion of representative faculty. As the [National AAUP's 2007 report on college and university responses to the Hurricane Katrina crisis](#) observed: "The imperative that affected faculties be consulted and assume a meaningful role in making critical judgments [in times of crisis] reflects more than the values of collegiality; given the centrality of university faculties in the mission of their institutions, their meaningful involvement in reviewing and approving measures that vitally affect the welfare of the institution (as well as their own) becomes truly essential."

Additionally, we urge public and private institutions to cooperatively pressure state and federal governments to increase funding to higher education so that we emerge from the pandemic more viable than ever. Taxpayer money has gone to bailing out the airline and other for-profit industries, so too should institutions of higher education receive financial support to weather the crisis, while protecting the most vulnerable.



To date, AAUP values have been undermined. We have been hearing from our members and chapters across the state about violations of AAUP principles of tenure and academic freedom that are often exacerbated by college and university administrations and governing boards unilateral decision-making. We offer a few examples of violations of AAUP principles and failure to address racial and social justice issues that have been compounded by the current pandemic and administrative responses to it: [mass firing of several thousand adjunct professors at the City University of New York](#), disproportionately impacting faculty of color and women, [the suspension of the faculty handbook \(contract\) and faculty firings at Medaille College](#) and Keuka College and the [mass firings of faculty and support staff at Canisius College](#) in violation of their contracts, thus gutting liberal arts programs, and laying off lower paid support staff at many colleges and universities whose work is crucial to ensuring the safe return of students, staff, and faculty to campus.

The New York State Conference is determined to defend academic freedom and tenure and shared governance from the current ill-conceived attacks by administrators. If you know of a violation of AAUP's long established principles, contact us through our Executive Director, Sally Dear-Healey sdearhealeyaaup@gmail.com or our President, Mary Rose Kubal mkubalaaup@gmail.com.