

Washington Adventist University Faculty Senate

Statement Concerning the WAU Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

April 17, 2020

The COVID-19 public health crisis is unprecedented, and it will be impossible to predict the economic consequences and their effect on fall 2020 enrollment until after the crisis subsides. A collaborative response to the crisis requires the full engagement of all WAU Faculty and Staff to recruit, advise and register returning students, and to work over the summer with prospective new students for fall registration. Also, the academic elements of the WAU governance committees are essential to the University's mission and objectives at all times, especially in times of organizational and financial crisis.

Furthermore, the Administration has informed faculty that they would not fulfill their obligation to issue faculty contracts by March 15 as outlined in the Employee Handbook. On March 10th, while other institutions were taking action to move to distance learning in response to the crisis, WAU faculty were informed by email that contracts would be delayed due to "the positive extenuating circumstance of ensuring accuracy of the contracts within the context of the new faculty wage scale." There was no further communication until an April 2nd email explaining that the delay of all contracts was due to the "unprecedented impact of COVID-19.

During the General Assembly meeting on Tuesday, April 14, 2020, faculty became aware that as a cost saving measure, cuts to academic programs and/or the faculty positions will be considered during the May 6, 2020, Board of Trustees meeting. We are concerned that such cuts may initiate a review process by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and/or the Maryland Higher Education Commission as well as other program accreditation organizations.

Additionally, the Employee Handbook requires the involvement of Academic Council and Faculty in the review of and decisions made to change the status of academic programs. To date, any such considerations have been outside of the governance structure processes and without collaborative engagement with the faculty.

Because of these conditions, as the representative body of the functioning core of the Institution (the faculty), we the Faculty Senate make the following requests and recommendations:

- We request the WAU community join together at noon each Wednesday for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis to pray for the future of WAU, for returning and new students, and for the global COVID-19 response.
- We strongly advise that the Administration discontinue considerations of financial exigency, cuts in academic programs, or cuts in faculty positions. We are concerned that cuts to the Faculty body or academic programs will adversely affect current and

incoming students, and we are already experiencing difficulty in properly advising students for the Fall Semester.

- We urge the continued activation of all academic and other essential committees provided for in the governance structure to include Academic Council, Faculty Meetings, General Assembly, and Curriculum Committee as per their regular schedule and frequency so Faculty are meaningfully engaged in responding to the COVID-19 crisis.
- We request the Administration continue to include Faculty in discussing cost-saving measures to avoid any cuts to academic programs or to the faculty positions. Clear and timely information about collaborative decisions is necessary for Faculty to meet our professional obligations to our students.
- We recommend that the Administration forgo merit pay and bonuses during this crisis, to be matched by the Board of Trustees, and that the Administration encourage Faculty and Staff to also consider donations to the WAU scholarship fund as the most direct way to aid students and the institution in honor of the many sacrifices being made by WAU students and their families.

We urge the WAU Administration and Board of Trustees to prayerfully consider these requests and recommendations.