



Memorandum

Date: May 28, 2020

To: Pamela Whitten, Kennesaw State University President

From: The Kennesaw State University Chapter of the United Campus Workers of Georgia

Re: UCWGA-KSU calls for consultation and greater equity in KSU's FY21 Budget Proposal and Fall Reopening Plan

CC: Members of President's Cabinet, KSU

FWD: Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Part-time Faculty Council Executive Committee, Staff Senate Executive Committee, Student Government Association Executive Board, Chairs and Directors Assembly Chair and Chair Elect, Deans Council, AAUP@KSU Executive Committee

The Kennesaw State University Chapter of United Campus Workers of Georgia (UCWGA) recognizes that you are faced with many difficult decisions regarding the coming year at KSU due to COVID-19. We know that amidst great uncertainty the University System of Georgia (USG) requested proposals for FY21 budget cuts and Fall reopening plans within a short time frame. Nonetheless, we are dismayed by an apparent lack of imagination in the university's proposal to meet budget targets by laying off workers at the bottom of the pay scale, leading to reduced staff support for those who remain, while simultaneously calling for staff to return to campus within weeks, even as the number of COVID-19 infections is rising in Georgia. In this memo, we outline our concerns about the budget proposal and plans for Summer and Fall reopening while offering an alternative approach.

CONCERNS

- 1) The [FY21 Budget Proposal](#) fails to protect jobs and wages of some of KSU's lowest-compensated employees, has been communicated opaquely, and was developed without consultation of affected stakeholders.
- 2) The [Summer and Fall Reopening Planning](#) does not appear to truly prioritize the health and safety of staff, faculty, and students and it has not included consultation with those most directly affected.

FY21 Budget Proposal

Your email to all KSU faculty and staff on Friday, May 22nd at 8:30 a.m., announcing your administration's [proposed budget cuts](#) in response to the demand for a 14% reduction in

state-funding raises several concerns that we urge you to address immediately.

“Putting Students First” does not mean putting faculty and staff last. Using rhetoric about student success as a justification for cutting jobs and pay, while increasing work for those who serve students, undervalues the critical roles of staff and faculty. KSU's status as a “[leader in innovative teaching and learning](#)” does not occur in a vacuum; it is largely attributable to the efforts of faculty and staff who serve students directly every day. The fate of students and employees need not be mutually exclusive priorities, and we urge you to protect KSU's lowest compensated workers in your budgetary decision-making.

The decision-making process and communication of the budget proposal was disrespectful. The communication alerting affected units came at the eleventh hour, after decisions had been made. For example, Provost Schwaig announced via email at 7 p.m. on May 21 an emergency meeting for the staff and faculty of University College (UC) at 8 a.m. the next morning. Faculty and staff of UC received news their college was being eliminated just as the campus-wide message with the budget proposal went out. That proposal itself is simultaneously too vague and too specific. It is too vague in its use of euphemisms like “operational efficiencies” for what the [AJC's May 26 article](#) revealed to be 202 positions that will be eliminated or held vacant. It is too specific in creating anxieties about imminent layoffs before communicating directly with individuals who face job loss.

It is disrespectful for staff and faculty to learn the details by reading press reports before getting clear information directly from their employer. The administration's commitment to “work with shared governance over the summer months” does not inspire confidence given the absence of transparency and shared governance in the decision-making thus far.

Summer and Fall Reopening Planning

Your [Written by Whitten message from Tuesday, May 19th](#) outlining an intention to return staff to campus in the coming weeks and to welcome students back to campus in the Fall seems entirely out of sync with your expressed intention to “keep the health and safety of the entire KSU community as our number one priority.” Adequate measures to ensure the health and safety of staff have not been taken, even as they are being told to return to campus. And, as pointed out in numerous media reports¹ and a recent [resolution passed by the Chairs and Directors Assembly \(CDA\)](#), the health and safety measures required to invite students back to campus are daunting at best and impractical at worst. The current “pause” on allowing faculty to shift Fall classes from face-to-face to online is another signal that faculty and student safety has not been prioritized in policy decisions about reopening.

The May 19 message also claims that the [Presidential Task Force](#) teams are “seeking consultation from internal stakeholders,” but no clear process for such consultation has been

¹ See for examples [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

explained and, aside from a campus wide survey initiated by the IT team, no such invitation has come from the Task Force so far. The Task Force's website does not even list its full membership. This is not what seeking consultation from internal stakeholders looks like.

With the above concerns in mind, we urge you to do the following:

ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Prioritize protecting students' and employees' health and safety. Put health and safety first, relying on all available evidence-based studies regarding COVID-19 in our region, before insisting that staff and faculty return to campus.

Refuse to achieve cost savings through layoffs. Job cuts are not inevitable and it *is* possible for you to choose another way. Rather than cutting lower-paid workers entirely, the administration could strive to meet the budget targets by making deeper salary cuts to higher-earning employees, including your own salary of close to \$500,000.00.

Invite input from staff and faculty on alternatives to the current budget proposal. Avail yourself of existing shared governance structures to assure full transparency and shared decision-making. Hold a series of town halls to allow students, staff, and faculty to share concerns and ask questions directly to administrators, as [we have asked you to do since March 29, 2020](#). Bring KSU's employees to the table and together we can create a cohesive, unified approach to the current crisis.

Establish transparent, inclusive, and accountable planning processes for Fall semester. Make the complete list of [Presidential Task Force for Fall 2020](#) members public and establish channels for all teams on the Task Force to take broad input from students, staff, and faculty as well as established shared governance bodies (SGA, Staff Senate, and Faculty Senate).

Compensate faculty and staff for our time and work. Recognize that furloughs and layoffs mean employees have less time to complete necessary job responsibilities. Do not ask us to "do more for less" at a time when we are all already faced with enormous stress and uncertainty.

The KSU chapter of UCWGA again calls on you to recognize that solidarity is imperative, not just in a pandemic, but always. We look forward to your implementation of our sensible recommendations.

In solidarity,

Rebecca Hill and Laurie McDowell

Coordinating Committee Representatives

on behalf of the KSU chapter of United Campus Workers of Georgia