

# **Resolution on Faculty Discretion to Teach On-line If Students Are infected or Where Classroom Conditions Make Social Distancing Impossible**

## **Background**

This resolution concerns the autonomy of faculty and instructors as they attempt to conduct their classes during the pandemic. With the rising number of positive cases among the students in those classes, this has become a major issue throughout the University. The resolution has been endorsed by more than 64 faculty member cosponsors, including 9 Faculty Senators, and by the Cornell Chapter of the AAUP (American Association of University Professors).

Irene Mulvey, national AAUP President, has issued a statement that reflects the spirit behind our resolution:

"Let's be clear: the fight for a safe working environment as we begin the new academic year is our fight since it is inextricably linked to genuine shared governance and collaborative decision making, and to academic freedom in the classroom and on campus. Faculty are the ones taking all the risks in our classrooms. It is outrageous for a faculty member to find herself in a position where she needs to consider the probability of bringing the virus home where it might be responsible for the death of a vulnerable family member. When the administration isn't making the best decisions for the institution, it's the faculty's responsibility to stand up, speak out and do all they can to ensure that the core academic mission is carried out in the most effective way for the circumstances. As AAUP president, I thank you for your work in this regard. I am privileged to represent members of the AAUP as we work together during these very trying times."

## **Resolution on Faculty Discretion to Teach On-line If Students Are Infected or Where Classroom Conditions Make Social Distancing Impossible**

**“Whereas**, faculty and instructors are responsible for quality of the instruction that they provide in the courses that they offer and the health and safety of students in their classrooms;

**“Whereas**, the University has said that “[our] data show that the best ways to reduce the risk of transmission are to **wear masks, to socially distance, to gather outside as much as possible, and to gather only in small groups**” (Ryan Lombardi, September 3, 2021 (emphasis in original), <https://covid.cornell.edu/updates/20210903-work-together.cfm>)

**“Whereas**, many classrooms require that students, faculty, and instructors must sit in close proximity to one another in conditions where adequate ventilation is either impossible to maintain or difficult to ascertain;

**“Whereas**, faculty and instructors have not been given detailed information on the frequency of student-to-student and student-to-faculty/instructor transmission in the classroom;

**“Whereas**, many students have been infected with coronavirus, have had to isolate themselves, and thus missed classes as a consequence;

**Whereas**, faculty and instructors have not always been told in a timely way about those students who have tested positive;

**Whereas**, pedagogical methods, classroom routines, and styles of instruction vary widely in the University and should always, for that reason, be the responsibility of individual faculty and instructors;

**Whereas**, all faculty and instructors are eager to be teaching in-person, so long as doing so will be conducive to a safe and healthy learning environment for faculty, instructors, staff, and students;

**Whereas**, given all these factors, faculty and instructors must and should rely on their own judgment as they adapt to the uncertainties imposed by the pandemic;

**Whereas**, the pedagogical decision to teach on-line on a temporary basis should be left to the sole discretion of individual faculty and instructors when they determine that the conditions for a safe and effective instruction environment requires doing so;

**Be it resolved**, that the Faculty Senate demands that Cornell University adopt and announce a policy that individual faculty and instructors have the sole discretion to decide to teach on-line on a temporary basis when they determine that the conditions for a safe and effective instruction environment requires doing so.”