

RESOLUTION ON PRESERVING SHARED GOVERNANCE AND FACULTY PURVIEW OVER CURRICULUM AT MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE

August 24, 2020

WHEREAS, The Faculty of Medgar Evers College (“MEC”) of The City University of New York (“University” or “CUNY”) and its representative body, the MEC Faculty Senate (“FS”) are committed to preserving the core mission of our institution; including preserving access for citizens of New York and equity for its students, especially those who live and work in central Brooklyn; and

WHEREAS, MEC Faculty worked faithfully to maintain course offerings of the College during the Spring semester of 2020, a period in which New York was, and remains, an epicenter of COVID-19 outbreaks, and which resulted in New York State and New York City¹ declaring a state of emergency²; and

WHEREAS, The Faculty of the College are concerned about the viability of MEC at the beginning of what is likely a sustained period of difficulty due to the coronavirus pandemic, accompanied by a likely economic recession, and looming budget cuts; and

WHEREAS, MEC Faculty, both full-time and part-time, worked in accordance with the Chancellor’s directive to offer mostly online courses that utilize online modalities, synchronous and asynchronous, for the Fall 2020 semester³; and

WHEREAS, The CUNY Manual of General Policy 2.08.3, states “To ensure the integrity of college-level decision-making, new processes for communication and decision-making, which permit each group of participants to feel that it can influence that institution as a matter of right and responsibility, must be established” and further defines, “[T]he Faculty: the primary means of the development, preservation and transmission of knowledge”; and

WHEREAS, Shared governance refers to the rights of the Faculty, via our role, to provide meaningful input to shape CUNY policy which includes making key decisions about how to best educate our students; and

WHEREAS, Shared governance also refers to the role of Chairpersons in Bylaw Section 9.3, to “Assign courses to and arrange programs of instructional staff members of the department; [I]nitiate policy and action concerning the recruitment of faculty and other departmental affairs subject to the powers delegated by these bylaws to the staff of the department in regard to educational policy....and

[B]e responsible for the work of the department’s committee on appointments or the department’s committee on personnel and budget which he/she chairs.....”; and

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/07/nyregion/coronavirus-new-york-queens.html>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/03/12/us/12reuters-health-coronavirus-usa-nyc.html>

³ <https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/university-updates/getting-ready-for-the-fall/>

WHEREAS, Shared governance refers to the fact that that Departments have control of their educational policies (Bylaws 9.1), and that Departments have authority over their academic affairs and personnel (MEC Governance 8.1), and that these educational policies and academic affairs include the academic freedom of Faculty to secure the appropriate means for course delivery accompanied within the realm of their disciplinary and technical expertise; and

WHEREAS, Shared governance also refers to the academic freedom of Faculty to secure the appropriate means for course delivery accompanied within the realm of their disciplinary and technical expertise, in particular, to the fact that that Departments have control of their educational policies (Bylaws 9.1), and that Departments have authority over their academic affairs and personnel (MEC Governance 8.1); and

WHEREAS, During the Summer of 2020, the MEC Provost and/or his designees, without adequately consulting the Faculty of the College, converted many courses, including synchronous online courses that were scheduled with days and times, to asynchronous online offerings and further warned Faculty, “no faculty should, at this time, after students have registered, change the format of their classes...”⁴ thus stifling the momentum of Faculty in converting lecture classes that were previously scheduled as synchronous courses; and

WHEREAS, During the Summer of 2020, without consulting Faculty, the Office of Academic Affairs at MEC instituted the non-appointment of adjunct Faculty with 3-year contracts in direct contradiction of the Central Office’s memo from Senior Vice Chancellor for Labor Relations which warned College Presidents, Deans of Professional Schools, and Chief Academic Officers that, “A recent arbitration decision has made clear that a generalized concern about budget and enrollment will not suffice – the colleges will need to undertake a department- or discipline-specific analysis to support a decision not to reappoint an adjunct who is eligible for consideration for a three-year appointment based upon programmatic or fiscal concerns”; and

WHEREAS, During the Summer of 2020, without consulting Faculty, the Office of Academic Affairs at MEC, as a direct result of non-reappointments of part-time Faculty, instituted class sizes (e.g., 42, 50, and higher at various points) that are beyond well-established norms for fully online classes^{5 6}, thus creating instructional challenges that endanger pedagogy, heighten the potential for course withdrawal, and which could also lower Spring 2021 enrollment; and

WHEREAS, The actions by the Office of Academic Affairs to enlarge class size and convert many classes solely to an asynchronous format without the consultation of many Faculty demonstrates a failure to appreciate the turmoil that this demand created for the Fall 2020 semester and the arbitrary nature by

⁴ A. Okereke, 8/18/2020 Memo to the Faculty: Instructional Modalities - Synchronous and Asynchronous

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereknewton/2020/06/28/online-college-classes-should-have-no-more-than-12-students/#961e0e631799>

⁶ <https://www.qualitymatters.org/index.php/qa-resources/resource-center/articles-resources/research-on-class-size>

which many Faculty now labor under a strictly limited asynchronous modality for delivery of their instruction; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED:

The recent conversion of many courses, without adequate Faculty consultation, to asynchronous offerings has failed to demonstrate a respect for the important principle of shared governance; and

The recent conversion of some courses to asynchronous offerings has undermined the role of instructors and has usurped the role of chairpersons in determining the best format for course offerings; and

The non-reappointment of adjunct Faculty on 3-year lines undermines the personnel and budget processes at the College, the PSC contract, and the instructional integrity of departments; and

To avoid the instructional chaos that the above directives created, the President, Provost and Office of Academic Affairs should demonstrate consistent alignment with the CUNY Bylaws and Manual of General Policy regarding shared governance which states that Departments have control of their educational policies and that Departments have authority over their academic affairs and personnel.