



UIC United Faculty’s Official Statement on UI Policies Issued March 11, 2020

We recognize that the administration is dealing with the potentially serious health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our students, staff, and faculty. We also appreciate the challenge of making the decision to move to an on-line model to finish the Spring semester.

Our collective responsibility - above all else - is to the health and well-being of our community, and the urgency in reducing risk of exposure to the virus to save lives across the city and state. Implementing social distancing, well understood to be one of the most important ways to slow the spread of the virus, will require more of UIC than transitioning to online courses. How this will be done is obviously a huge challenge, and must involve faculty, staff, students, and the administration.

While we recognize that social disruption and financial costs will be great, the cost of not implementing such measures will be many times greater. At the same time, we should not encourage instructors who cannot convert their courses to online delivery, to put their students' health at risk to try to keep business as usual going, even with increased cleaning and janitorial services to those areas of campus. This too will have costs and consequences that need to be considered now rather than later.

Moving forward, we remind the administration that “the faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, . . . and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process.”¹ Further, as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has reminded us: “Faculty and academic staff—through their shared governance bodies or, when applicable, their unions—should be consulted on how best to implement this decision.”²

We understand that the UIC administration is consulting with the Senate Executive Committee this Friday, March 13. This document presents UIC United Faculty expectations, concerns, and questions about 1) health and safety for all members of the UIC community, 2) support for students and faculty as UIC moves to teaching on-line and other alternative learning methods, and 3) the upholding of contractual agreements for our tenure system and non-tenure system faculty.

¹ The AAUP’s 1966 [Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities](#).

² Email from Rudy Fichtenbaum, AAUP President, sent to all members March 10, 2020.

Health and safety for all members of the UIC community

We understand the need to work together and support each other during this crisis. However, as written, the new policies are inadequate when addressing the health and safety of faculty, students, and staff. Specifically, we expect the university to:

- Make accommodations for all UIC employees expected to work on campus per the new policy including to work from home if they determine their health may be threatened or compromised by being in public spaces, including transit needed to get to and from work, as well as on the UIC campus.
- Provide sufficient disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizers and other appropriate cleaning and self-care supplies for all spaces that are open on campus.
- Provide building service workers proper training to disinfect classrooms, public spaces, and offices as well as provide them sufficient and necessary protective wear.
- Educate students, staff and faculty on and implement Centers for Disease Control's and Chicago Department of Public Health's recommended practices for social distancing, including prescribed duration and distance, and prevention.³

Support for faculty, staff, and students

Recognizing that this emergency is an exceptional situation, we maintain our commitment to the value of in-person education and expect the university to:

- Allow faculty to have full autonomy to decide, within the bounds of university policy, how to carry forth their courses, as well as how to conduct their research.
- Provide necessary online support to both students and faculty, including equivalent support for faculty whose classes cannot be easily converted to online delivery, and for students whose economic situations do not allow them necessary access to electronic resources. The university must also provide the necessary support for faculty conducting research that cannot be easily completed off-site if they are unable to work on-site.
- Provide for free access to alternative online tools beyond Blackboard that are available to UIUC but not the UIC campus (e.g. Zoom) to accommodate different teaching needs.
- Provide a plan for alternative online tools should Blackboard fail or have capacity limitations due to extensive worldwide use.
- Clearly communicate to students that the university cannot expect full, robust online versions or alternative learning methods for transitioning Spring 2020 courses.
- Maintain the commitment to the faculty's primary responsibility for curriculum by empowering them to make decisions about when, how, or whether to begin online instruction as academically appropriate. As these preparations are above and beyond the in-person instructional expectations in the job descriptions for many faculty, any non-negligible additional preparation should be compensated, especially if we are expected to finish the semester without delay and as close to UIC's typical level of quality as possible.
- Consider the needs and limitations of students who may lack access to the internet or face other obstacles to completing their coursework remotely, and to provide accommodations

³Current recommended social distancing is 6 feet and no more than 10 minutes when in a group. See [Chicago Department of Public Health](#) and [Centers for Disease Control](#).

for those who are not currently able and/or equipped to participate effectively in an online scholastic environment. These accommodations should be provided before, during, and after going online, and should include but not be limited to making sure all students have adequate access to Wi-Fi, devices and software. This must include access to UIC computer labs and libraries, but should also involve creative and proactive solutions such as making available mobile hotspots and laptops so students can work remotely.

- Offer grants to students with financial limitations (e.g. PELL grant eligible) to attain equipment and internet needed to participate in online courses.

Also, the university must emphasize that the transition of any course to online status this semester, and in the future, related to COVID-19 is a one-time occurrence and does not mean that the course will be taught in an online environment in the future.

Contractual Concerns

Through this crisis, UICUF's responsibility to our members is to make sure the university upholds our contract. Our defense of the contract includes protecting the health and safety of faculty, their pay benefits, and their academic freedom with regard to teaching and research. Below are specific requirements that we would expect the university to honor and will request to negotiate per Article XXII (see statement on impact bargaining).

- While the university is open and an employee is required to self-isolate/quarantine themselves, they should not be required to use personal sick leave.
- If the university shuts down, everyone impacted should be held harmless economically and not forced to use accumulated and/or compensated leave (compensatory time, vacation time, etc.) should their work be temporarily scaled back or stopped.⁴
- The administration must guarantee protections against the use of negative teaching evaluations resulting from the disruption and quick transition to an online or alternative format in annual review as well as in decisions on reappointment, promotion, and tenure.
- The administration must prevent any harm to faculty who were expected to present a paper, a performance, or other academic work at a conference that was cancelled due to COVID-19, and/or who are expected to produce research results and reports that are held-up due to lack of access to data because of COVID-19. This includes both the use of these activities in evaluation and in refunding allowable expenses that have been pre-paid prior to March 11.

Also, as a reminder, our contract states in Article VII.G.: In accordance with the University of Illinois Statutes and General Rules Concerning University Organization and Procedures, faculty members shall retain ownership rights to traditional academic copyrightable work. That includes any and all materials developed for use on-line or through alternative teaching methods.

Ultimately, this crisis, for all of the fears and challenges that it has generated, offers us an opportunity for something so missing in our nation, and our world: genuine solidarity. Solidarity is what unions are all about, and UICUF is here for you; please never hesitate to reach out to us at uicunitedfaculty@gmail.com with questions, concerns, or suggestions.

⁴ This includes all faculty covered by our collective bargaining agreement, but should more broadly include adjuncts, civil servants, custodial staff, academic personnel, and hourly part-time employees.