

University Faculty Senate Resolution on Safety, Academic Freedom, and Shared Governance

WHEREAS: Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi has an obligation to protect the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff, as well as a civic duty to show consideration for the health and safety needs of the broader community, especially the resources of the severely stressed local hospital system;

WHEREAS: the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi community is not separable from the City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County and should support the efforts of local government to limit the spread of COVID-19 (as supported by current CDC Guidelines)¹;

WHEREAS: The University is a leader in the South Texas community (to which it adds several thousand out-of-town students as part-year residents) and should act in solidarity with local leaders and take steps to ensure that our day-to-day functioning does not worsen the current public health crisis, which, at the time of our drafting this resolution (July 29, 2020), has 11 new cases per day per 100K (the highest number in our public health region in the state of Texas), the third highest number of COVID-19 hospitalizations per capita, and the third highest number of fatalities per capita in the state according to the Corpus Christi and TAMU-CC joint COVID-19 modelling task force;

WHEREAS: Corpus Christi Independent School District, as well as local parochial and charter schools, have announced they will begin the school year with fully online classes as a recognition that symptomless carriers can transmit the disease and to protect the health of teachers and staff;

WHEREAS: Many members of the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi community are parents or caregivers of children who will not be in school or at daycare, making trips to campus especially difficult and risky;

WHEREAS: The City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County have high rates of poverty, diabetes, and obesity among their residents—risk factors for severe impacts of COVID-19 that make our community more vulnerable to the most serious outcomes from contracting the virus;

WHEREAS: Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi serves a majority Hispanic population and the Hispanic population is disproportionately impacted by COVID-19;

WHEREAS: Many members of the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi community live in multigenerational households, which presents a heightened risk of transmission to vulnerable, often older, household members;

¹ "As such, Institutions of Higher Ed (IHE) officials can determine, in collaboration with state and local health officials, whether and how to implement these considerations while adjusting to meet the unique needs and circumstances of the IHE and local community. Implementation should be guided by what is feasible, practical, acceptable, and tailored to the needs of each community."
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html>

WHEREAS: The faculty, staff and graduate students responded to move fully online course delivery in March by delivering courses in a remote, synchronous learning environment, taking on additional workload to ensure that teaching and learning (including academic advising, library services, and other faculty, staff, and student services) continued with a minimum of interruptions;

WHEREAS: The faculty are scholarly experts in their fields and disciplines, who design curricula, and who are granted academic freedom to deliver courses in the ways that are best matched for their courses, students, and expertise; and

WHEREAS; The faculty deserve the right to articulate what they consider are the best circumstances for learning in their particular course or courses;

THEREFORE, WE RESOLVE:

THAT faculty be allowed to deliver Fall courses in the format they choose on the basis of safety, pedagogical concerns, and any other factors they consider relevant for their safety and the safety of their students and support staff;

THAT staff be allowed to work remotely;

THAT maintaining faculty and staff positions is a high priority in fiscal decision-making;

THAT the university communicate with faculty, staff, and students in ways that are timely, consistent, and transparent, inclusive of clear COVID protocols (e.g. reporting of cases, cleaning and maintenance procedures), COVID-related policies and procedures, and budget considerations as they affect faculty, staff, and students;

THAT faculty, staff, and graduate students will have input on any decision that impacts teaching, learning, and safety.

Faculty Senate, furthermore, calls on the President to use the condition of COVID-19 community spread (currently defined as “substantial”) in the City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County to inform the decision of whether, when, and how to resume in-person classes². This can include indicators such as

- number of new cases per 100,000 population per week

² As per the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/.../community/guidance-ihe-response.html>) when community spread is “substantial” universities should: "Consider extended in-person class suspension. In collaboration with local public health officials, implement extended class suspension and event/activity cancellations (e.g., suspension/cancellations for longer than two weeks). This longer-term, and likely broader-reaching, strategy is intended to slow transmission rates of COVID-19 in the community. During extended class suspensions, also cancel extracurricular group activities and large events. Remember to implement strategies to ensure the continuity of education, research, and housing as well as meal programs and other essential services for students."

- diagnostic test positivity rate
- case doubling rate
- whether there are 14 days of declining cases, or both 14 days of declining influenza-like illness reports and 14 days of declining COVID-like syndromic reports of symptoms
- hospital and intensive care unit capacity
- rate of community spread
- availability of testing
- the development of a safe and effective widely accessible vaccine

Any new public health orders issued by the City of Corpus Christi or Nueces County should be adopted by Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi in solidarity with the community in which we reside.