



Executive Vice Chancellor
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Dear Council of Faculty Governance Leaders,

Thank you for your letter dated March 1, 2024, regarding the memorandum sent on January 25, 2024, entitled “Strategies for the Optimal Use of Academic Resources”.

Above all, we want to emphasize our mutual belief in the importance of shared governance, which is a cornerstone of the City University of New York. Faculty are critical collaborators in discussions of policies and strategies that affect our institution -- including those issues referenced in the memo in question. It is precisely for that reason that a copy of the memo was provided to the University Faculty Senate at the same time it was delivered to campus provosts and deans. Let us state clearly that we want to collaborate with you on concrete, common-sense measures to address our budgetary challenges. It is imperative that we reduce the \$128M+ structural deficit that CUNY is facing.

CUNY’s commitment to faculty governance has been discussed extensively over the last months both with faculty and administrative groups across the campuses in the context of the memo. I personally discussed the importance of and need for faculty governance with the Chancellor’s cabinet, the Council of Presidents, Academic Council (made up of Chief Academic Officers across the system), Administrative Council (made up of key operations administrators across the system), and the cabinet of the central Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). I likewise addressed the UFS plenary, and my team addressed both the Faculty Affairs Advisory Board and you, the Council of Faculty Governance Leaders, just a few weeks ago. At each session, OAA affirmed CUNY’s commitment to faculty governance and our position that the memo reflects the beginning of the discussion on these items, not their conclusion.

We recognize that department chairs are instrumental in ensuring the success of any approach adopted and are key partners in our efforts. In early January, OAA convened a conversation with all chairs to discuss directly what is possible and what is desirable in using data to create optimal course schedules. That conversation, jointly led by faculty and administrators, was well received. We are planning additional sessions both to provide more information and to learn from faculty experts.

The specific phrase “faculty governance” does not appear in the memo because it was assumed. The text states the memo is intended to “spark innovation and conversations with faculty” and help determine “which approaches fit best with your campus culture.” To ensure clarity, we will use “faculty governance” explicitly in future communications. The ideas identified in the memo are labeled as recommendations, not directives, and it is the expectation that campuses will follow up on ideas of interest by engaging the appropriate faculty bodies in accordance with the relevant Bylaws and governance plans.

As for the Bylaws, they must be read in conjunction with each other rather than in isolation. The key language of concern seems to be in Article 9.3.a.2, which states that chairs shall “Assign courses to and arrange programs of instructional staff members of the department.” Although we understand that some campuses have interpreted this provision to mean that chairs have exclusive control over the scheduling of courses (rather than the assignment of courses to faculty), this language is ambiguous at best. While chairs are critical partners in scheduling, the President (or their designee) is responsible for the overall resources of the college pursuant to the Bylaws. A chair cannot expend funds through the course schedule that are not available in the budget.

Notably, the Bylaws were written when CUNY was founded and have not evolved to reflect the actual structure of administration and governance across the campuses. For example, the Bylaws do not reference or contemplate either the role of provost or dean, both of which have been in place in our system for decades and are well-accepted throughout higher education. As such, we soon will ask UFS to review and comment on proposed changes to the Bylaws that we hope will add clarity and structure regarding the role of university officers and chairs. Through this consultative process, we will shape a shared understanding of specified roles in governance.

You inquired about the role of the Council on Academic Policy. This is an advisory group to my office that is comprised of representatives from several campuses. I was pleased to extend an invitation to UFS to add representation to this group. This group has no independent authority and serves as a thought partner to OAA in evaluating various policy and procedural changes. We look forward to faculty engagement in this group.

In closing, we welcome the opportunity to work with you in good faith in these difficult budgetary times as we move forward together on behalf of CUNY. Should you deem it helpful, my team and I are available to speak further with you or any faculty group.

Sincerely,



Wendy F. Hensel
Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost

CC: CUNY Board of Trustees; Chancellor; Presidents; Deans; Provosts; UFS