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## Statement from the Faculty Assembly On CUA's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic May 29, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the nation and the world in unprecedented ways. For The Catholic University of America - and indeed, for the entire higher education sector - the response to this crisis will have long-lasting financial effects. As the University plans for the uncertainty of the upcoming year, the administration must involve all faculty and staff in discussions about online teaching, reopening campus, and financial responses to this crisis. To that end, the **Faculty Assembly conducted a survey** during the final week of the spring semester, in order to gauge the faculty's opinions **about the University's responses to COVID-19**. The survey received 123 responses.

Evaluating the University's response to **online teaching**, many respondents felt that the university had done the best it could under extremely challenging circumstances. Nevertheless, some consistent problems stood out: in particular, **faculty shouldered much of the cost** of online teaching, since many faculty members had to purchase instructional technology, supplies, and other items in order to be able to teach from home. **Faculty are concerned** about whether they will receive **reimbursement** for these expenses as well as **adequate supplies, training and instructional support** for future online teaching.

Responding to the question of **whether to reopen campus** to residential learning for the fall term, the faculty expressed concerns about the prospect of in-person instruction. While acknowledging the university's financial needs, a majority of faculty believe that our **first priority must be the health and safety of the students, staff, and faculty**. The faculty are concerned that CUA has not yet shared a reopening plan with the CUA community. Repeated and often pointed comments noted the **lack of inclusion of and consultation with faculty** during deliberations and planning for the fall term.

Finally, faculty are strongly opposed to aspects of the University's proposed **austerity measures**. Over the past few weeks, academic deans have shared with their faculty a three-phase rollout of prospective budget cuts in response to the financial impact of COVID-19. In the survey, the faculty **strongly disapproved of the proposed salary reductions in Phase C**. Since 2010, the faculty and staff have received **essentially no raises or cost-of-living adjustments**, which amounts to a **full year of lost wages** when compounded over the past 10 years. In contrast, IRS 990 tax records show that the compensation of Catholic University's **top administrators increased nearly 85 percent** between 2010-2016. The proposal to **eliminate 403b contributions for faculty and staff are likewise unacceptable** to the faculty members surveyed.

It is the faculty and staff who are the public face of the University to our students; who will face significant personal risk should we reopen; and who have borne the burdens of economic austerity most acutely in recent years. As the University administration continues to shape its response to the COVID-19 crisis, it must do so with equitability, utmost transparency, and full consultation with all stakeholders. Therefore, **the Faculty Assembly makes the following recommendations:**

1. **Prioritize the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff when considering whether or not to reopen campus:** Although reopening campus may be in the best financial interest of the University, we must not reopen unless we can ensure that all on campus are protected with ample and repeated testing and contact tracing, access to affordable health care for all students, faculty, and staff, and any other precautionary measures deemed essential by medical authorities.
2. **Improve shared governance:** In times of crisis, it is incumbent that the University work with all stakeholders. Tenure-line, clinical, and adjunct faculty, as well as staff, must participate in planning and decision-making bodies (i.e. committees, task forces, etc.) as co-equal partners with the campus administration, drawing upon the collective expertise of the campus and following the procedures laid out in the Faculty Handbook.
3. **Increase financial transparency:** The processes through which decisions are made – and the data on which they are based – must be entirely transparent. Most pressingly, this means making complete, itemized university budgets public. Only with full information and transparent procedures can faculty and staff meaningfully participate in determining budgetary priorities.
4. **Ensure equitable budgeting:** The Faculty Assembly recommends using existing resources (in particular the ~\$130-150M unrestricted university designated funds) instead of implementing the proposed cuts to faculty and staff compensation. Indeed, considering recent financial market returns, the investment earnings of the discretionary fund over the past year alone may provide much of the necessary resources to meet the immediate financial challenges AND fund the faculty equity adjustments that have repeatedly been promised by the President and Provost. It is a matter of concern that the austerity plan shared with the faculty does not include any mention of drawing on these reserves or their earnings.
5. **Protect the most vulnerable:** We should take particular care to ensure the security of those who have the weakest job protections, the lowest salaries, and the most tenuous access to health benefits. Cuts should come first from those segments of the university community that are most able to withstand the financial burden.
6. **Maintain teaching capacity:** The University's employees are its most important resource. Protecting jobs minimizes the human suffering to employees. Moreover, protecting jobs and also filling open positions preserves the University's capacities to teach and provide services for students, along with the institution's role in the preservation and creation of knowledge.

As the University shapes its response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Faculty Assembly will continue to serve as an essential forum for faculty concerns. We will also continue to collaborate with faculty organizations at other universities to discuss regional responses and considerations. We look forward to ongoing dialogue with the Catholic University faculty, staff, and University administration as we work together to address the COVID-19 crisis in the weeks and months to come.