

On August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Tufts University Provost and Senior Vice President Nadine Aubry and Executive Vice President Mike Howard announced to Tufts University faculty and staff a combination of layoffs, furloughs, reduction in hours or salaries, retirements, and other departures from the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine (TUSDM). Appended to that announcement was Dean Nadeem Karimbux's message to the School of Dental Medicine community on those actions.

Acting pursuant to its authority under article 3, paragraphs 3, 8, and 11 of its Bylaws, the Tufts University Faculty Senate expresses its outrage and deep concern regarding both the actions announced in the communication of August 25<sup>th</sup> and the process by which those actions were executed.

All Faculty Senate members are aware of the challenges posed to the University and its constituent Schools by the current pandemic. However, the actions described in the communication of August 25<sup>th</sup> occurred without notice, transparency, consultation, or clarity regarding either the justification for the actions or the procedures by which decisions were made. This lack of transparency permeated communications at both the University and School levels. Moreover, it follows a pattern of drastic administrative action taken without meaningful notice or consultation set by the actions taken by the administration of the Tufts University School of Medicine (TUSM) in 2019.

The School of Dental Medicine held several school wide town meetings over the summer. These meetings included updates about the financial situation of the School, including the severe loss of income due to COVID-19. Prior to the actions to reduce faculty and staff described above, however, there was no consultation with the TUSDM Faculty Advisory Council regarding the actions under consideration, the conditions that required these actions, or the process by which decisions would be made. Decisions, some of which ended careers, were communicated individually to those affected directly in very brief conversations, which had been scheduled the previous day

Further, the University Faculty Senate was not alerted to the severity of the TUSDM's situation or of the drastic remedies being considered, or given any opportunity to weigh in on how the faculty could or should be consulted or involved. On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, Executive Vice President Mike Howard and Vice President for Finance & Treasurer Jim Hurley gave the University Faculty Senate a largely sanguine report on the budget and longer-term finances of the University. Notwithstanding the possibility of school-specific cuts, no member of the Senate left that meeting with any indication that major layoffs, furloughs and reductions in hours were even potentially on the horizon. On the contrary, the minutes of that July meeting state that "the next tier of budget cuts, *if necessary*, would likely include reductions in retirement contributions and health insurance, as well as furloughs and layoffs," [emphasis added], and specify that "the Senate *will have an opportunity to provide input* should the next tier of budget cuts become necessary."

In addition to the immediate and acute effects on the faculty and staff directly impacted by these decisions, the procedural deficiencies in this process, coming on the heels of the actions at the

TUSM, have seriously damaged the trust necessary for a working relationship between faculty/staff and administration at both the School and University levels.

The University Senate's purposes include "develop[ing] a shared sense of community among its members" by "communicating the views, needs, and concerns of the University Faculty with respect to University governance" and by "bringing to the attention of the University governing authorities all matters that the Senate judges appropriate."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, pursuant to article 3, paragraphs 3, 8, and 11 of its Bylaws, the Senate has the power and responsibility "to review and evaluate University-wide faculty issues and advise the administration on such issues," to "receive timely information on annual budget priorities and to provide advice thereon," and "to make recommendations to the President or Provost on any matter of faculty concern." In discharging these responsibilities and exercising these powers, the Senate must "respect[] the autonomy of the individual Schools." For the following four reasons, the actions taken by the TUSDM and the communications between the administration and the Senate are of University-wide concern and cannot be shielded from scrutiny by the invocation of School autonomy:

- Actions such as layoffs, furloughs, and salary reductions of University faculty and staff members, and the processes by which those decisions are made and communicated, are intrinsically matters of fundamental concern to the entire University faculty, regardless of the School in which they occur.
- The actions that are being implemented at the School of Dental Medicine cannot be viewed in isolation. They form part of a pattern of action within the University, following the earlier actions of the TUSM. This sequence demands a response at the University level.
- The level and form of support offered by the administration of the University to a School suffering a specific budgetary crisis caused by an unforeseeable exogenous shock is of fundamental interest to faculty members in all Schools, any one of which could find itself in such a situation in the future.
- The inherently University-wide concern of the events communicated on August 25<sup>th</sup> is conceded in the very fact that the Provost and Executive Vice President of the University issued a communication to the Tufts University faculty and staff on the matter.

In light of the profound concern raised by the actions taken by TUSDM, the prior action taken by the administration of TUSM, the clear interest of faculty across the University in those actions, and the imperative to rebuild trust and improve University practice going forward, the University Senate proposes the following four steps:

- First, we request that the administrations of TUSDM and the University, including Executive Vice President Mike Howard and Vice President for Finance & Treasurer Jim Hurley, provide a clear and transparent account of (a) the factors that informed the decisions communicated on August 25<sup>th</sup>, (b) the procedures, specifically including steps to ensure that the Faculty were informed and consulted, by which those decisions were made at both the School and University levels, and (c) the distribution of impact within

---

<sup>1</sup> Tufts University Faculty Senate Bylaws, article 2, paragraphs 3 and 5.

the School's faculty, along lines of age, race, national origin, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

- Second, we call upon the University administration to work with the Faculty Senate to design and implement a process for future decisions of this nature that includes meaningful, open, timely, and transparent consultation with the Faculty Senate.
- Third, we call upon the University administration to coordinate with the administration of each School in the University to ensure that each School designs and implements processes for future decisions of this nature that include meaningful, open, timely and transparent consultation with the representative body of the faculty of that School.
- Fourth, we call upon the University administration to liaise with the TUSDM to reexamine the decisions communicated on August 25<sup>th</sup> with a view to determining whether they were taken in a procedurally fair and inclusive manner and to reconsider those decisions in the event that that evaluation returns a negative result.

The Faculty Senate reiterates the importance of taking these steps in order to restore the trust squandered as a result of the events described above.