

Remarks to the Special Meeting of the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, October 15, 2020

Let me remind you why we have called this meeting: across Rutgers, since March, hundreds of staff have been laid off; several hundred part-time lecturers lost their teaching; your raises, due this past July 1, have been withheld. Two weeks ago, Old Queens made an unprecedented attempt to eliminate *all* PTL courses from the English department's writing program, a move to, in effect, terminate seventy instructors. And plans are still underway to lay off 15–20 staff members in SAS, with at least nine already having received notice.

Let me remind you that our collective response has already had an effect: since this meeting was called, *some* part-time lecturer courses have been restored. I would like to acknowledge that, in helping to restore veteran PTLs to teaching this spring, Dean March has demonstrated that he understands the importance of more secure working conditions for part-time faculty

However: staff layoffs are still happening; many part-time lecturers still face complete uncertainty under the hiring freeze; our contractually guaranteed raises are being held back on the basis of a baseless “fiscal emergency.”

You have heard from David Hughes that neither the overall financial situation of the university nor the budgetary situation of SAS justifies these austerity measures; you have heard from Amy Higer about the hardships created, now more than ever, by eliminating PTL courses and leaving instructors in uncertainty.

So the question is not: How much should we all sacrifice?

The question is: Why are faculty and staff being asked to sacrifice in order to fill deficits in auxiliary enterprises like athletics?

The question is: if austerity budgets were planned on the assumption of \$350 million in state funding, what will be done with the \$437 million—\$87 million more—that the state is actually appropriating for Rutgers?

The question is: will decisions about priorities at Rutgers be made by managers through budgeting mechanisms, or will they be made by faculty governance?

When we petitioned for this meeting, Old Queens was not simply micromanaging English courses on the basis of enrollments: Old Queens was attempting to direct the Writing Program about which courses could be offered and who could teach them. And the Writing Program is still being forced to limit its more advanced offerings.

Right now, you may say, this issue is local to the Writing Program and the English department. But its implications are global. If we concede that a vice provost or a vice president can meddle in a particular department's course offerings, we no longer have faculty autonomy in the matter of instruction. Undergraduate and graduate program directors will have no more freedom in assembling and staffing a curriculum.

Dean March's Sept 30 letter to chairs speaks of "using the teaching capacity of full-time instructors more efficiently." But I submit that questions of what courses to offer, and which instructors should teach what, are best decided, as they have customarily been, within departments. It is department officers and committees who know colleagues and students best: who has the expertise? who has the experience? where are enrollments likely to go? where are low-enrolling courses nonetheless essential to programs of study?

"Efficiency" cannot justify interfering in the academic affairs of departments to rewrite curriculum. "Efficiency" cannot cloak layoffs that undermine research and instruction. And "efficiency" cannot excuse decisions that, by harming the quality of our classes, ultimately harm our students.

So I think we need to pause and re-evaluate priorities across Rutgers and within SAS in particular. If additional state funds are now available, we can re-examine budgeting decisions. We can say: No to layoffs. No to PTL cuts. And we can say: Faculty expertise, and not "efficiency" as interpreted by administrators, decides about curriculum.

So I have a [resolution](#) to introduce. It begins with a series of motivating statements that amplify what I have just said, and then it proposes a way to re-evaluate priorities within SAS.