

Blaming the Faculty? Letters from Faculty

The selected letters below are in response to the Sept. 13, 2021 UT-AAUP Newsletter. As faculty we need to express our concern over the Administration's mishandling of this situation. The decision by officials in the Postel Administration to use students as pawns in this process is unconscionable and unacceptable. UT-AAUP Executive Board

Letter #1:

Thank you for sending this email. I had several students approach me during class about their fear of losing their financial aid. I waited until yesterday morning at 9am (still before the UT stated deadline) to confirm attendance because I had multiple students add/drop as well as some that were in quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure/infection. Tracking attendance has been difficult since students do not always communicate their enrollment intentions to faculty. I wanted my records to be accurate and felt they would not be if I reported early (before the end of the add/drop period). The University has placed the burden on faculty to be flexible with students' attendance due to COVID, with very little solid guidance on how to do that appropriately and ethically. Meanwhile, the administration throws us under the bus for our diligence. This speaks to ongoing issues about the treatment of faculty by the Postel administration and the lack of strong, ethical leadership in the Provost's Office. I appreciate you calling attention to these issues.

Letter #2:

Dr. Postel:

Many faculty are concerned about the student participation tracker. Students are currently in a panic, as demonstrated in my student's message

The message sent to students from the Financial Aid office is both offensive to all faculty and inaccurate regarding extended time for faculty reporting. The tracker is now closed! I just tested it and I can't get back into the system, even though the message to students indicates that faculty have received extended time for filing these reports. (And if faculty received extended time, why are students being threatened with losing financial aid?)

I hope that your office and the provost office will 1) reassure students about their financial aid and 2) apologize for the implication that faculty are the reason that students lose financial aid.

Letter #3:

Thank you for this message, I wholeheartedly agree. The same message was sent to students during the summer term as well. It was sent before the actual deadline for reporting has passed. I also found it very hostile then but didn't think to let AAUP know - I should have. Does the union contract compel us to fill out the attendance tracker? Seems like it should be up to faculty whether or not to take attendance and if the university wants to track it for its own purposes, perhaps it can use its other units to achieve this goal.

Letter #4:

Thanks for this newsletter. I received calls from students and thought I had screwed up the attendance tracking request – only to find out later it was an administrative failure. It seems adding responsibilities to faculty but not adequately informing faculty of relevant issues is apparently par enim cursus.

The tone of your language in this newsletter was quite appropriate – my students were scared that they somehow screwed up and their enrollment was in jeopardy. Scaring students *before* verifying records and details? This is a disgrace.

Letter #5:

Great article! This should certainly be sent to the President's office.

Letter #6:

I'm sure you are getting a lot of blowback about what a colossal bungle that was for any number of reasons (sent to students before the deadline passed, the obvious power differential between student and faculty, the optics of insisting students do what administration is clearly unwilling to do and take on faculty directly, the knowledge that those emails have probably been disseminated throughout most of the region by now, the realization that parents are already upset with UToledo and now this gives them even more ammunition, the recognition that our students from marginalized backgrounds are going to be disproportionately impacted by this, etc).

.....if I wanted to write a script for how to create the conditions that would cause enrollment to plummet and a university to be shuttered or taken over, the beginning of this semester would follow that script to the letter. To wit:

- Eliminate custodial and maintenance staff so that the grounds are ill kept and the classrooms/ public spaces are dirty (that memo that went out today about daily cleaning is a total fabrication if you look at the actual "job sheets" of custodial staff who are told to clean classrooms once per week tops);
- Eliminate clerical and support staff across campus so that students experience long wait times if there is any resolution to their issues (and cause more issues because of multiple errors committed by overworked and undertrained remaining staff, let alone the abysmally low morale of those few remaining overtaxes employees);
- Eliminate two parking garages, charge students more for less parking, and reduce the time of "after hours" parking (which means, considering it is almost a mile walk from Rocket Hall parking lot to Savage/McMaster/Gillham, in the winter due to low maintenance students will be slogging through slush, snow, and ice for a mile at a time);
- Reduce dining options (let alone not have options for the huge variety of diets that our on-campus students wish, such as dairy-free and/or gluten-free), particularly in the Union; and then, just to top it off...
- Send an email out to 2700 students blaming faculty for the loss of their financial aid.

A university is a service industry. Anyone who has worked in a service industry understands that there are two types of employees: those who serve the clients (students) and those who support those who

do. I would say that we have lost sight of this at UToledo and it is in large part causing our death spiral of enrollment decline. If we do not turn this around by treating our students well and creating a physical environment in which they would want to continue enrollment, the point will be moot as we will either be shuttered or more likely absorbed by another institution as has happened in many other states.

Letter #7:

I'm doing everything I can to help these students through challenging times. Please stop turning them on me and my fellow faculty.

Institutional Courage is an institution's commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost; a pledge to protect and care for those who depend on the institution. - Center for Institutional Courage

"Wouldn't it be nice?" - The Beach Boys