

To: Chancellor Gilliam, Provost Coleman, and Deans

From: The Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program

Date: July 8, 2020

We are writing with an urgent request to university leadership. The crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inextricable links between employees' abilities to thrive on the job and their responsibilities for caretaking in their households and communities. Since caretaking tends to fall disproportionately on women and since those with the fewest resources will find it most difficult to simultaneously fulfill their responsibilities in the home and at their jobs, the pandemic is deepening existing inequalities of gender, race, and class.

Preliminary research indicates that the historical disparities in care work—with women, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, and working-class people taking on more care work while being provided with less social support for that work—are becoming even more pronounced under the pandemic. For example, women are more likely to pick up the additional household labor created by COVID-19. And since COVID-19 in the US has disproportionately affected Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, these faculty and staff are more likely to face family and community health crises.

When UNCG went online in spring 2020 due to COVID-19, the demands on university employees increased as they scrambled to adjust to the additional demands of remote work. At the same time, many caregivers had to manage the additional labor that came with having children or dependents at home. The option to request a pause in faculty tenure clocks was welcomed. However, the rest of faculty and staff's labor continued despite the vast increase in caretaking responsibilities.

In August, we do not expect that children will return to a normal school schedule. Many parents will not be able to send their children to school at all due to health conditions or because others in the family are at risk. Further, it seems likely that day care centers and schools will require parents of children who exhibit coughs, sore throats, or any signs of flu to produce a negative COVID-19 test or keep them home for 10-14 days. This means that the sniffles and stomach-aches that are a regular part of most children's lives will now result in significant time spent at home. They will need caretakers.

How can a housekeeper be expected to work full-time on campus if they have young children at home unattended? How can a faculty member be expected to teach face to face and perform all of their other regular duties if they are responsible for caring for a sick loved-one? The options available for university employees to take leave due to caregiving responsibilities offer only 2/3 pay, something most cannot afford, especially in light of years of stagnant salaries and the potential for significantly greater medical expenses due to the pandemic.

Fortunately, there is still time to plan for the fall semester. We appreciate all the university has done to solicit input from faculty and staff about the administrative response to the crisis. In this spirit, we suggest the following steps:

1. Form a committee that includes staff members to create a comprehensive plan for staff. The university cannot run without its staff and yet they are the ones who will a) be most likely to perform work that cannot be done remotely, b) have jobs such as cleaning the dorms, serving food, and interacting with many different students that entail high risk of exposure to COVID-19, and c) have the fewest resources to help them with caretaking.
2. Create a fund to help university employees pay for the additional dependent care they will need if schools do not reopen on a regular schedule.
3. Allow faculty to repurpose research funds for dependent care if schools do not reopen.
4. Offer optional tenure-clock extensions to those affected by COVID-19.
5. Suspend normal expectations for employee productivity (including standards for tenure, promotion, reappointments, and merit pay) until a vaccine is available. All people are affected by COVID-19 in some sense: living in the midst of a pandemic is extraordinarily stressful and under current conditions certain forms of work are taking longer or are impossible to complete. Our expectations for faculty and staff should be revised to take these challenges into account.
6. Waive all non-essential faculty service until there is a COVID-19 vaccine (such as curriculum reform, peer teaching reviews, attendance at non-essential faculty meetings, reviewing core curriculum).
7. Allow all faculty to teach online and opt-out of F2F service due to caretaking responsibilities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration, and we look forward to your response.