

Correcting the Record Re: U of M Concerns on Safe Working Environment as Fall Term Begins

The chapter of the American Association of University Professors at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities recently held a faculty forum to discuss the administration's current reopening policies as it regards COVID-19 precautions, including the recently announced temporary mask mandate and lack of vaccine requirements for staff, faculty, or students. Members and non-members of our chapter from among the tenure-track and term faculty were invited to this meeting. The primary purpose of this forum was to hear the concerns faculty had about reopening and what possible actions might be taken to ensure a safe return to campus. After the meeting, a summary of its proceedings was distributed amongst the attendees and the members of the chapter.

This discussion was wide-ranging and included questions from faculty about possible actions including petitions, working with the faculty senate, and other direct actions. Some faculty had questions about potential work stoppages that were discussed as part of the general conversation. We want to be clear: the AAUP chapter of Minnesota Twin Cities neither decided nor committed to a faculty work stoppage if the administration did not create a safe working environment for the coming term. This faculty forum was entirely discussion focused, it was not a decision-making body of our chapter or the broader faculty. Reports today stating that there is an imminent work stoppage supported by our AAUP chapter are the result of sloppy and inaccurate reporting based possibly on an out-of-context reading of the meeting summary. We were not asked to comment on or clarify the meaning of this summary prior to the publication of these reports.

The content of this summary does reflect, however, the broad frustration and deep anger among faculty at Twin Cities that has been building over the summer about the unsafe reopening policies put forward by the administration. The general sentiment among faculty at the meeting is that there must be a multidimensional approach to the issue of health and safety for faculty, students and staff, especially in the context of the rising Delta variant of the virus. This approach should include vaccine and mask mandates with provisions for dealing with necessary exceptions. Faculty also believe that there must be greater flexibility in teaching modality, to accommodate needs for social distancing in courses with many students and also persons with conditions or family situations that make any exposure to the virus a cause for serious concern. The UMN Twin Cities chapter of the AAUP is prepared to advocate and fight for changes together with other groups on campus to our reopening policy to ensure a safe return for all faculty, students, and staff.

Signed,

The Executive Board of the American Association of University Professors Chapter, University of Minnesota Twin Cities