



# Pledge of Solidarity for SUNY Campus Workers

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous human suffering. First and foremost, it is a health crisis like no other in recent memory. Hundreds of thousands have already died of the disease, a figure that rises each day. We mourn with those around the world who have lost loved ones.

Moreover, COVID-19 has prevented workers from working. More than 30 million people in the U.S. have lost their jobs in a span of six weeks—a figure also likely to rise—producing levels of economic disruption also unlike anything in recent memory.

The crisis we face at SUNY has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 health emergency, but not caused by it. Over the last decade our campus has struggled with austerity budgets and reduced staffing. To raise revenue, the University has engaged in desperate efforts to attract and retain students to help offset a massive, decades-long public disinvestment from public higher education in New York State and across the country. The long-term solution to our current financial crisis can only be found in significant public reinvestment.

In the short-term, budget cuts are likely. Though always painful, cuts can be managed in ways that are equitable, transparent and humane. Facing budget shortfalls, other universities and colleges across the country have begun to impose salary reductions or, worse, to furlough or lay off workers.

We at SUNY are fortunate to have a strong union—United University Professions (UUP)—the benefits of which become crystal clear in moments of crisis and scarcity. We have a contract that provides considerable job security for many (though not all) of our members, and we have a statutory role in the process of shared governance. Our contract protects us from unilateral state reductions in salary or furloughs; such moves would have to be negotiated with the union.

These contractual provisions, however, as strong as they are, cannot shield us entirely from the economic turmoil we are likely to face. The contract will not answer the complex questions of campus priorities that will shape our budgeting decisions; it merely provides a framework within which the deliberations occur. At the campus level, it will take engaged participation from UUP members to meet the economic challenges ahead.

In the face of likely cuts, UUP members will be tasked over the coming months, in ways both large and small, to participate in the difficult process of balancing campus budgets. When engaging in this process—whether at the university-wide level, or in our smaller units—we ask members to be guided by the principles of labor solidarity, which accord fully, we believe, with the core mission of the University.

*Read on for the 13-point pledge*



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*By signing this statement, the undersigned UUP members pledge that any decisions and actions we undertake to manage anticipated cuts will, to the best of our ability, be made in accordance with the following principles:*

- 1 No job losses:** The University's employees are its most important resource. Protecting jobs minimizes the human suffering to employees. Moreover, it maintains the foundation of the University: its capacities to teach and provide services for students, along with the institution's role in the preservation and creation of knowledge. Preserving jobs for part-time and full-time employees must be a priority.
- 2 No loss of healthcare:** Health care in the US remains tied to employment. In the face of a global pandemic, we must do everything possible to prevent the loss of employee health benefits. This means not only keeping people employed, but particularly for contingent faculty and professionals, keeping them employed at levels that maintain their health coverage.
- 3 Equitable budgeting:** Cuts should be distributed broadly across the campus. This is not a time to "build to strength," or foster cut-throat competition among units for scarce resources. Our University's strength is in the diversity of its programs; small units must be maintained alongside larger ones. Whether as the result of swift retrenchment or slow attrition, the loss of programs and units must be avoided at all costs.
- 4 Protect the most vulnerable:** Equitable does not mean identical. Cuts should come first from those segments of the university community that are most able to withstand the losses. We should take special care to ensure the security of those who have the weakest job protections, the lowest salaries, and the most tenuous access to health benefits.
- 5 Revenue sources to save jobs:** Campus management and unions should work together to identify ways to secure resources to save jobs for current employees. Avenues for voluntary adjustments that could assist the most vulnerable employees and benefit the university by maintaining its strong and diverse base of faculty and staff include use of the Voluntary Reduction in Work Schedule Program and Phased Retirement. UUP is ready to work with management to develop information and conduct an appeal for voluntary use of these options to help protect colleagues.
- 6 Transparent processes:** The processes through which decisions are made, and the data on which they are based must be entirely transparent. Most pressingly, this means making complete, itemized university budgets public. Any data on enrollments, revenues, growth or other relevant criteria must likewise be public. Only with full information and transparent procedures can academic and professional faculty meaningfully participate in determining budgetary priorities.
- 7 Shared governance:** UUP and the University Senate act as the two primary bodies of shared governance on our campus. In times of crisis, it is incumbent that the University work with and through these bodies. Full consultation, not the expectation of a rubber-stamp, is the only genuinely participatory process. Academic and professional faculty must participate in planning and decision-making bodies (i.e., committees, task forces, etc.) and processes as co-equal partners with the campus administration, drawing upon the collective expertise of the campus. When the University says, "we're all in this together," it must live up to its word.



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- 8 Collaborative advocacy for SUNY funding:** The entire campus community is needed to fully engage in efforts to advocate for federal resources to assist New York State. UUP is working with other unions and community groups to educate the public and press legislators to provide the financial support SUNY needs to provide medical care and accessible public education for the residents of our state. A campus community united around this continuous advocacy effort is a critical component for success.
- 9 Safety and well-being of the community:** Regardless of the model used for re-opening of the campus for the fall semester, the health and safety of all members of the college/university community must be protected. This requires that there be collaboration between all members of the community to provide the necessary testing, Personal Protective Equipment, safety and cleaning protocols, and quarantine arrangements in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 cases anywhere in the campus community. There must also be arrangements established to protect members of the community who are vulnerable to the virus, and their families.
- 10 Maintenance of academic quality:** Decisions about the use of remote and online learning should be determined by the faculty, in consultation with professional staff and relevant administration. Recognizing that not all campuses are the same, decisions should be tailored to the needs and conditions of local campuses and the needs of the students they serve. The current crisis should not be used to accelerate the transition to online programs, recognizing that online education is not optimal in many situations and, when inappropriately used, can disadvantage students and erode the quality of education and the academic reputation of SUNY.
- 11 Protection of Academic Freedom and intellectual property:** Protecting Academic Freedom and faculty intellectual property must remain central to the policies, programs, and life of the university.
- 12 Protect against privatization of public education:** As a necessary public good, we will press to ensure that local agreements and state policies reject any and all institutional closures or privatization schemes including, for example, the outsourcing of student services, the creation and expansion of privatized units on campus (such as the Research Foundation), or the increasingly many contracts with private entities to provide educational services to campus. All partnerships with the private sector must be fully transparent, including contract terms, costs, conditions for service, etc.
- 13 Collaboration and shared responsibility:** In order for the campus to function in a healthy, productive and safe manner, all elements of the community must be a part of the work of building a safe and productive learning and living environment for all. All members of the community bear responsibility for the safety of everyone in the community and, thus, must be party to discussions and deliberations on steps taken to insure that the campus emerges from this crisis healthy, financially strong, and a place where an affordable, high-quality education is available for all who seek it.