Petition for Remote Instruction at SUNY Stony Brook in Fall 2020
June 19, 2020

It is a moral imperative that the health and safety of our campus community be prioritized in planning the fall semester. **We call on incoming President Maurie McInnis and the Interim President Micheal Bernstein to immediately withdraw the recently announced proposed hybrid instructional plan and replace it with explicit policies for safe, equitable, and inclusive online-centric teaching as other major public universities have done.** All classes, both undergraduate and graduate, should be taught remotely. The only exceptions are courses which cannot be adequately taught this way such as labs and experiential learning classes. Even for these courses, however, we call for full autonomy for faculty and students to opt for remote instruction if they so choose. This call aligns with UUP's telecommuting agreement with New York State, which calls for telecommuting requests of employees to be granted to the greatest extent possible. Below are reasons why we have reached this conviction.

The Hybrid Model Disregards the Nature of the Virus and the Pandemic: There are compelling science based arguments why face-to-face learning should be curtailed this fall.

- The data make clear the risks of face-to-face teaching during this pandemic. SARS-CoV-2 is highly contagious, is spread by asymptomatic carriers, and is dispersed mainly through liquid droplets and contaminated surfaces. Sustained contact in poorly ventilated areas such as classrooms is a near perfect environment for person-to-person spread. It's unclear the amount of protection offered by cloth face masks.
- This virus can kill, permanently harm, or cause lengthy and serious illness to many who become infected, regardless of age or comorbidity. Many require hospitalization, including intensive care, and those who recover have significant risk of debilitating lung damage.
- NYC and Long island are the pandemic epicenter in this country. Although the levels of community spread have been greatly reduced, we have not achieved meaningful levels of herd immunity to prevent a rapid resurgence.
- We must also recognize the staggering rate of mortality and serious medical complications among high risk groups including those over 65 years of age, communities of color, and those with underlying health conditions.
- The enrollment thresholds that have been proposed to determine which classes are taught online and which in person appear arbitrary, have never been explained, and anecdotal evidence and mathematical modeling suggest even small classes can lead to a resurgence of infections.
- Epidemiological models predict a significant second wave may occur during or even before the fall. A second wave could necessitate a chaotic switch to remote learning mid-semester and put student's families and communities at risk as they return home for Thanksgiving.

The Hybrid Model is Inequitable: The hybrid model directly impacts civil rights and worker rights. It has implications for disability, racial, age, and gender equity. Many of the concerns below are detailed in a letter from the SBU UUP West Diversity Equity and Inclusion committee.

- The requirement that faculty justify decisions to teach remotely by submitting medical records is invasive, places a burden on doctor's offices, many of which still are closed, and may violate both [HIPAA](#) and [SUNY BOT privacy policies](#).
- The approval process falsely frames risk as an individual, rather than a community issue. These decisions impact health and safety of faculty, staff, students, as well as the communities they are from.
- This process neglects the ethical commitment to upholding the lives of Black community members pledged in the recent [President and President Elect's](#) and [Diversity officer's](#) statements. Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian and Asian-American faculty members, staff, and students are at greater risk of complications from COVID-19, and this is not being considered under the current framework.
- This procedure contradicts the guidance included in the [Fall Semester Planning Input Report](#), which states that "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and accessibility concerns must play a key role in planning and have increased visibility."
- According to a recent SBU UUP west campus survey about reopening, safety and equity for faculty and staff of color was a central concern.
- Finally, contingent faculty and graduate student employees are unfairly impacted by the current requirements. Workers in precarious positions may be reluctant to reveal health information, express safety or morality concerns, and request exemptions from face-to-face instruction. As such, this procedure may coerce contingent faculty and graduate student instructors into agreeing to unsafe work conditions out of fear of losing their jobs or facing retribution from supervisors. Moreover, the current call for recitations to be in-person even if the class is online unfairly burdens graduate students with the bulk of on-campus instruction.

The Hybrid Model is unworkable in practice: When put into practice, the hybrid model has many worrisome consequences.
- The hybrid model will necessitate use of large numbers of buildings and classrooms, which need more frequent cleaning and sanitization. This appears to exceed the resources of the custodial staff, which may be why the administration has [encouraged faculty](#) to clean classrooms with supplies provided by their departments. This is also an equity issue.
- When even a single person tests, or is presumed, positive, then [by CDC guidelines](#), all students and faculty in that person's in-person classes would be quarantined for about two weeks, meaning those courses would go online anyway for this period of time.
- Offering some courses in-person and some online requires students to be physically on campus even though only a fraction of their courses are in-person. As the number of people on campus increases, the logistical burden of providing services to the campus community while maintaining social distancing likewise increases. Food and transportation services must be provided, pedestrian traffic must be managed, and study areas must be provided, all while maintaining social distancing guidelines. Moreover, these difficulties will be borne unequally by commuters who are much less likely to return home in between classes. Congregate settings, like college residence halls, are known sites of COVID-19 superspreading, and could put our students, faculty, staff and the community at higher risk than necessary.
- In contrast, online-centric learning during the pandemic allows administrative and logistical efforts to focus on the health and safety of the smaller number of members of the campus community who attend only those courses that must be taught in-person.