

Joint Faculty Assembly and Staff Association Resolution on COVID-19 Emergency Funds

In the spring of 2021, the UW Tacoma Faculty Assembly and the UW Tacoma Staff Association collaborated on a proposal to establish a COVID-19 relief fund for campus employees. Both the Faculty Assembly and the Staff Association created and distributed surveys to their respective communities in an attempt to understand how the pandemic had impacted both their professional and personal lives.

The survey responses indicated that many faculty and staff were struggling. Specifically, faculty and staff identified trying to juggle the demands of work while also providing care and/or instruction to their children. Many respondents indicated they were using their own resources (equipment, power, internet) to do their work remotely. Faculty and staff were not provided with university equipment and were expected to pay for the ancillary costs (e.g., upgrading internet plan to accommodate increased usage) themselves. The ever-changing nature of the pandemic led many faculty and staff to work longer hours and to work on evenings and weekends in order to accommodate the needs of students, colleagues, as well as their personal lives as the pandemic eroded the boundaries between work and home.

Respondents also indicated the pandemic interfered with their ability to grow professionally. Both faculty and staff mentioned not being able to conduct research, attend conferences or participate in trainings that would further their professional development.

Based on this data, the Faculty Assembly and Staff Association worked together on a proposal to establish a COVID-19 relief fund. In this proposal we outlined the need for such a fund, how we would spend the money as well as a process for granting approval to individual faculty and staff. In the proposal we detailed how we planned to utilize these funds to help faculty and staff who were struggling because of the pandemic. Mentioned in the proposal is a desire to assist those who were having difficulty paying for things like childcare or utilities or who needed equipment that would make it easier for them to do their work. We submitted our proposal to then Chancellor Mark A. Pagano. Chancellor Pagano sent out an email earlier in the spring of 2021 asking for proposals that could be funded through the Chancellor's budget. We submitted our proposal and were notified a few weeks later that it had been approved. In the proposal we asked for up to \$100,000 a year for five years. We were approved for a total of \$100,000 per year for two years (FY 22 and FY 23), money that would be split evenly between faculty and staff.

Research into how this fund could work continued over the summer. This included looking at similar funds at other universities, devising a timeline for when the program would launch as well as what an approval process might look like. Work on the program began in earnest during the fall of 2021. We ran into problems almost immediately. We received word from the Office of Finance & Administration that the funds could not be utilized in the way we outlined in our proposal. During the proceeding weeks and months, representatives from both the Faculty Assembly and Staff Association participated in conversations with leadership to better understand the situation. We have been instructed that the money can only be used for professional development due to the limitations placed on the type of funds that were awarded to us. Representatives from the Faculty Assembly and Staff Association have repeatedly asked for clarity on this matter but have not been provided with a sufficient response.

Therefore, we call on UW Tacoma leadership to do the following:

- Allow the Faculty Assembly and Staff Association to distribute the funds as originally intended.
- If these funds cannot be used in this way because of restrictions on use of state funds then the campus needs to fund another source of funds to fulfill the promises it made to faculty and staff and to do so by the end of the academic year.
- Investigate how our initial proposal received approval, make public the investigation's findings including steps that will be taken to ensure this doesn't happen again.

The Faculty Assembly and Staff Assembly believe this issue is paramount to improving employee morale at UW Tacoma. Recent surveys by the Faculty Assembly and Staff Assembly indicate that employees are burned out and in need of support. The university, in approving our initial proposal, made a promise to support faculty and staff during these challenging times. We ask that the university follow through on its promise and allow the funds allocated to us be used as intended.

Adopted by Staff Association Board on January 24, 2022 with 7 Yes, 0 No, and 0 Abstention.

Adopted by Faculty Assembly Executive Council on February 14, 2022 with 18 Yes, 0 No, and 0 Abstention.