

Resolution to Freeze the Academic Transformation Process West Virginia University, University Assembly

WHEREAS the University Assembly affirms the need for fiscally responsible institutional decision-making that is responsible to WVU students as well as to the residents, taxpayers, and youth of the state of West Virginia;

WHEREAS despite claims to the contrary, Academic Transformation has been an opaque process, where senior leadership has failed to clearly and honestly communicate the future vision of the university, the efficient allocations of resources therein, the precise budgetary and personnel goals for each unit to “increase efficiencies,” and why programs that are eliminated are of especially limited value;

WHEREAS despite claims to the contrary, senior leadership has failed to honestly and effectively communicate how decisions being made in the name of Academic Transformation are data driven, informed by stable and reasonable criteria, and in reference to the full scope of disciplines and practices associated with other flagship R1 universities;

WHEREAS the process of Academic Transformation has been carried out in such a way that severely deviates from academic professional norms and principles that are designed to preserve the integrity of the institution and discourage corruption, where the expertise of the faculty, chairs, and directors are respected, employee time and effort spent on mandated tasks are respected, and faculty are meaningfully included in the process for determining whether a condition of financial exigency exists in the first place, the factors that led to it, and potential solutions;^{1 2}

WHEREAS Academic Transformation has been built on a foundation of dishonesty, duplicity, and misleading communication in the following ways:

- Failure of senior leadership to fully and honestly disclose the source of the budget shortfall of \$45 million in one year and \$75 million by FY2028, purporting that it was largely a result of student population decline—which the administration could have predicted based on birth rate data—but leaving out that significant contributors included poor planning, faulty decision making, and financial mismanagement on the administration’s own part in addition to reduced State funding³;
- Failure of senior leadership to explain how recommended cuts correspond with the larger goals of Academic Transformation, as they supported cuts to competitive, revenue-generating programs and units that bring millions of dollars to the university effectively subsidizing other units with no changes to units that operate at a deficit, and as the stated goals of Academic Transformation to align academic programs “with student demand, career opportunities and market trends that also serve our land-grant and research missions”—yet those leading Academic Transformation have refused to accept student testimonials and feedback as part of their formal decision-making process, provided recommendations that seem disconnected from “market trends,” and recommended cuts to programs that are instrumental to our land-grant mission;

¹ [“Responding to Financial Crisis: Policies and Best Practices.”](#) American Association of University Professors.

² [“Financial Crisis FAQs.”](#) American Association of University Professors.

³ [“Erosion of State Funding for Higher Education Explains Most of WVU’s Budget Crisis.”](#) (2023, Jun 7). West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy.

WHEREAS the Academic Transformation process has relied on ill-informed consulting and faulty data collected by for-profit corporations like rpk GROUP⁴ and Huron Consulting Group,⁵ both of which have reputations of charging universities and colleges millions of dollars before weakening tenure protections and implementing austerity measures, e.g., slashing budgets, cutting programs, mass layoffs, and even campus closures while generally keeping senior administrative positions and their salaries in tact;^{6 7 8}

WHEREAS during Academic Transformation, the university administration required all employees to sign new appointment letters stipulating that we “avoid conduct that reflects adversely on the image of the University” in order to retain our employment at WVU, thus “threatening our academic freedom and First Amendment right to speak on matters of public concern”⁹, coercing our silence as they rushed through significant processes that will impact numerous people’s lives in addition to the reputation of WVU, the university’s commitment to provide a high quality education for students, WVU’s commitment to the state and community as a flagship land grant university, and the university campus climate;

WHEREAS the consequences of cuts related to Academic Transformation and its implications for students, faculty, and the state of West Virginia have not been honestly and clearly communicated, with the senior leadership claiming that:

- The measures are efforts to put students first and that they will impact only 2% of students, when many more will be affected by reduced course availability, lack of access to a full and meaningful liberal arts education, negative perceptions about value of a degree from this university, limited access to support as a result of the overworked faculty and staff who remain, larger class sizes and a higher student-to-faculty ratio, lack of access to study abroad opportunities, lack of access to printed materials, dejected campus climate, limited access to preparation for post-graduate opportunities, and more;
- The proposed RIFs will impact only 7% of faculty, when the percentage of full-time teaching faculty who are being laid off during this phase is closer to 16%, with many more to be affected by having to take up the workload of both faculty and staff who have been cut, low morale, and the knowledge that we are disempowered as we continue to work at the whims of senior leadership;
- The proposed cuts will benefit West Virginians and will keep young people here, when they are far more likely to lead to increased state departures as they limit young people’s access to a comprehensive education,¹⁰ quality language education, global perspectives, and the option to further their education in much-needed areas in-state;¹¹

⁴ [“Frequently Asked Questions.”](#) WVU Transformation, West Virginia University.

⁵ [“Budget Model Recap and Upcoming Campus Conversation.”](#) (2022, Mar 25). Office of the Provost, West Virginia University.

⁶ [“Meet Huron Consulting, the Corporate Firm Behind The New School Restructuring.”](#) (202, Oct 2) The New School AAUP.

⁷ Kalish, K., Hassel, H., Phillips, C., Heinert, J., & Giordano, J. B. (2019). [Inequitable Austerity: Pedagogies of Resilience and Resistance in Composition.](#) *Pedagogy*, 19(2), 261–281.

⁸ Corrigan, L.M. (2023, Aug 16). [“The Evisceration of a Public University.”](#) *The Nation*.

⁹ [FIRE Letter to President Gee.](#) (27 July 2023). Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

¹⁰ Bass, A. (19 Jun 2023). [“West Virginia state funding cuts are hurting its youth’s educational prospects.”](#)

¹¹ Ferrell Knisely, A. (20 Jul 2023). [“WVU faculty, students organizing amid looping cuts to programs and jobs.”](#) *West Virginia Watch*.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the University Assembly of West Virginia University calls for an immediate freeze to the Academic Transformation process.