

August 12, 2020

Thank you, President Morehead. Thank you, Professor Rodrigues. And thanks to Fiona Liken and Adam Lawrence in the Registrar's Office who made possible this virtual special meeting of the University Council.

We'd like to provide some context and rationale for the petition before you this afternoon. A July 15 email discussion among University Council members prompted one member to ask if others would be willing to form a working group to consider calling a special meeting of Council. A total of 8 members volunteered to do that work, and the group first met on July 21 to review the University Statutes and the University Council Bylaws about special meetings. Of course, any member of Council or group of members could also have met and written a different petition to call a special meeting. The 8 members of the working group are as follows:

Laura Bierema, Professor, Mary Frances Early College of Education
Elizabeth St.Pierre, Professor, Mary Frances Early College of Education
Joseph Bartges, Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine
Esra Santesso, Associate Professor, Franklin College of Arts & Sciences
Janette Hill, Professor, Mary Frances Early College of Education
Stuart Ivy, Senior Staff, Auxiliary Services
Barbara Biesecker, Professor, Franklin College of Arts & Sciences
Benjamin Britton, Associate Professor, Lamar Dodd School of Art

The University Statutes and the University Council Bylaws each contain information about Council meetings. The University Council Bylaws state that Council "will schedule at least three meetings each semester of the regular academic year," for a total of 6 regular meetings a year.

There are no provisions in either the University Statutes or the University Council Bylaws for summer meetings of Council, though both provide for "special meetings," which can be called anytime.

In regard to special meetings, Article 5, Section 11 of the University Statutes states that "The presiding officer or the Executive Committee of the Council shall have authority to call a special meeting, or a special meeting shall be held upon written petition, addressed to the Executive Committee and signed by twenty members of the Council."

Part 5, Section 4(C) of the University Council's Bylaws state that "Special meetings shall be called in any of the following ways: 1. By the presiding officer 2. By majority vote of the

Executive Committee 3. By written petition, signed by twenty or more Council members, addressed to the presiding officer.”

The working group identified 2 reasons to justify a special meeting:

First, Article 5 of the University Statutes grants University Council “legislative power on matters of general educational policy” and “on matters dealing with the general welfare of the entire University.” As stated at the beginning of the petition, our working group believes Council’s legislative power has been bypassed for various reasons in policies and procedures made thus far during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, we were concerned there was a 7-month gap between the Council’s last regular meeting on February 19, 2020 and the next scheduled regular meeting on September 30, 2020. As a side note, 3 of Council’s 6 regular meetings were cancelled last year because there were no agenda items, which typically come from the Council’s standing committees, though agenda items are not limited to proposals from standing committees.

Given those 2 reasons, we decided a special meeting of Council was justified so that Council could *immediately* assume its legislative power and responsibilities in regard to general educational policy and the general welfare of the University community in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, we propose in the petition’s *first* resolution that the Executive Committee of Council *immediately* form an *ad hoc* COVID-19 Crisis Response Committee of 12 elected, not *ex-officio*, members who reflect the current composition of faculty, staff, and students on Council. Council’s Bylaws state that one of the duties of the Executive Committee is to form *ad hoc* committees. Another duty is to “act, in matters of particular urgency, on behalf of the full Council, as authorized under Article V, Section 2(f) of the Statutes of the University of Georgia. Actions taken in this manner shall be reported to the Council at its next meeting and confirmed or revoked by a majority vote.”

Since COVID is an urgent matter, the first resolution proposes that Executive Committee act immediately, *as it is authorized to do* in the University Statutes and the University Council Bylaws, to form this *ad hoc* committee.

In the first resolution, we also propose membership on the committee be limited to *elected* Council members, since quite a few of our *ex officio* members have already been involved in COVID decision-making at UGA. We considered asking chairs of Council’s 17 standing committees to serve on the *ad hoc* committee, but we know they are already very busy as chairs. Further, some of those 17 committees have more of a judicial than a legislative function, such as the Faculty/Staff Parking Appeals Committee and the Faculty Post-Tenure Review Appeals Committee.

In the first resolution, we propose a 12-member *ad hoc* committee because its quorum would be 7, thus avoiding tie votes. Other issues related to the *ad hoc* committee can be determined by the Executive Committee.

The first resolution proposes 2 tasks for the *ad hoc* committee related to basic issues of *representation* and *reporting*. These are listed as items 1 and 2 under the first resolution of the petition. We propose that reports from those representing Council on university-level committees report directly to Council members every 30 days as well as to the Executive Committee so that members have immediate access to all reports.

Though our primary focus has been to activate Council's legislative power and responsibilities, our group has many concerns other than Council's inactivity for possibly 7 months during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our group first met on July 21, but both the Mary Frances Early College of Education Faculty Senate and the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate—representing 2 of the largest colleges at UGA—had already been meeting. The Early College Senate first met on July 2, the Franklin College Senate first met on July 15, and, together, they produced a joint resolution on July 28, which is referred to in the petition's second resolution. Only 2 of UGA's 17 schools and colleges have faculty senates, and both have long histories of respect for and commitment to shared governance and to academic freedom as described in Article X, Section 5 of the University Statutes, which states that "University Faculty members have the right to criticize and seek alteration of both academic and non-academic university policies."

Given that the joint-senate resolution addressed concerns of our working group, we proposed Council endorse it in the petition's second resolution.

The petition and the joint Senate resolution were emailed to University Council members on July 28, and by midnight on August 1, 54 Council members had signed it—we needed 20 signatures. We then sent the petition to President Jere Morehead, presiding officer of University Council, and Professor David Shipley, Chair of Council's Executive Committee, as required. On August 3, the Registrar's Office notified University Council members that a petition requesting a special meeting of Council had been received and that President Morehead called a special meeting of Council on August 12 at 3:30pm. On August 4, the Registrar's Office notified all members of the university community about the petition and the special meeting.

We hope this information provides background and rationale for the petition before you today. Members of our working group will be happy to try to answer your questions about the petition.

Thank you