

Proposal for Sense of the Faculty Resolution: Sept. 3

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While the Lehigh community works together to make in-person instruction possible, it is important that we not let our rush to return to normalcy disrupt professional and academic life for those still dealing with the fallout from the pandemic.

Faculty, staff, and students are still dealing with the threat of COVID infection for themselves and for vulnerable family members, particularly if they have immunocompromised family members under their care or young children who cannot yet be vaccinated. They are taking precautions just as everyone else is, but they also are trying to avoid unnecessary extra exposure when possible. Too, many with young kids are going to be facing constant life disruption in K-12 schooling due to the surge in the Delta variant among the younger population. That is going to necessitate periods of isolation.

This is an issue of both equity and inclusion. When departments, colleges or the university hold large gatherings such as mixers, critical administrative meetings or training in person and without an equitable remote option on Zoom, it deprives faculty and staff the chance to receive critical information and build the social capital that helps with professional growth and advancement. Even more important, at-will staff employees, contract faculty and tenure track faculty possibly won't feel they can take the risk of being the person disrupting every gathering announcement with a request for remote options. Finally, we note that it's common in the U.S. for the burden of caring for kids and loved ones to be skewed toward women, which creates another layer of inclusion problems.

Hybrid meetings that are in-person and have a Zoom option are better, but it's important to realize there still are inequities even in that circumstance. People attending on video simply don't have the same chance to participate fully that those in person have. To be clear, some meetings do need to be held in person, and normal university life with in-person gatherings remains our hope and goal. We are asking for inclusion and equity for those still bearing the burden of the pandemic to be a factor in deciding meeting formats.

Therefore, the Lehigh Faculty Senate asks the following:

1. We urge the administration to consider stronger guidance on large gatherings that are not mission-critical to Lehigh's educational charge. Even if there are few health and safety concerns, there are equity and inclusion reasons to go remote until the pandemic subsides.
2. We ask for a policy on in-person gatherings to make sure the room is large enough to allow spacing for those who must attend but have health or life concerns.
3. We ask that deans, chairs and departments think carefully about whether critical or required meetings can be done on Zoom until the pandemic subsides.
4. We ask that all faculty, particularly those with the protection of tenure, use their voice to advocate for more inclusive meeting formats.
5. Finally, while the above requests are considered inclusive of the entire Lehigh community in spirit, we want to note that we request these considerations be applied university-wide, not just for faculty. Staff and students should be receiving similar considerations when it comes to inclusion and equity. We are all connected and affected by policy choices even if they aren't in our specific unit.