

April 14, 2020

Dear Members of the HSU Campus Community,

We invite all HSU employees to read and engage with our call for visionary action in troubled times. Collectively, HSU staff, faculty and administrators are navigating the profound human reality of grieving loss, fearing for those most vulnerable in our families and communities, working double shifts caring for loved ones while facing an increased university workload, and supporting our students who are grieving and afraid. Colleagues with the least economic security are also facing the fear of losing employment in the context of unprecedented levels of joblessness in our lifetimes. Losing employment also means the loss of health insurance during a pandemic with no definitive end in sight. We believe it would be unconscionable to move forward with business as usual budget reduction strategies that will result in colleagues losing employment and access to healthcare in this time of unprecedented crisis.

Call for visionary responses

We acknowledge that leadership at HSU is already considering a range of actions that can protect employment and economic security, and we support efforts being discussed, such as incentives for early retirements and recouping lost revenue through tracking Covid-19 related expenses and filing for emergency relief. We are encouraged by early news of emergency funding that will help students navigate the economic crisis and help campuses address unanticipated costs.

Yet at the same time we are seeing proposals for drastic budget cuts at HSU, alongside the cancellation of numerous classes due to projected enrollment decline. In prior economic crises at HSU (as well as universities across the nation), strategies to cut costs tend to eliminate lecturer faculty positions and eliminate or consolidate staff positions. These approaches to solving very real budget crises treat lecturer faculty and staff colleagues as dispensable labor. These solutions heap yet more work on tenure-line faculty, and remaining lecturers and staff. Year after year, faculty workloads increase with repeated new class preparations and additional committee work and advising, and staff across the university face increased workloads to address the gaps from hiring freezes and layoffs. In recent memory, for example, we have witnessed custodial staff taking over building assignments normally serviced by two or more people and ASCs and ASAs who had served one department hired to serve three or more.

In these unprecedented economic times, business as usual approaches to economic crises are unacceptable and break faith with the HSU community, as well as with the community at large, as we are only beginning to grasp the financial devastation that widespread unemployment due to the COVID-19 crisis will bring to our area. We also know that historically, the thought-to-be

expendable nature of our lecturer and staff workforce is fleeting, and we will need to call upon their/our work in the near future, when enrollments rise. In the meantime, what hardship will HSU have inflicted on members of our community? How many people will have to relocate from our region, which already suffers from a dearth of academic talent in many fields, harming HSU's ability to meet our educational mission? How many small businesses will close when one of the primary employers of the region makes decisions that require otherwise economically contributing individuals and families to leave?

In this moment of unprecedented crisis we urge all of us to think of HSU as an ecosystem that lives in concert with its environment. We propose HSU envision mutual aid as a model to develop a compassionate approach to meeting the needs of our students, our staff and faculty colleagues, local communities, and Tribal Nations during the current crisis. In other words, how can we be of mutual aid to our communities within and outside, instead of laying people off in the worst economic crisis of our generation?

What does mutual aid look like? Local communities and Indigenous organizations have formed mutual aid initiatives in response to the Coronavirus, including [Cooperation Humboldt](#) planting mini gardens to feed people and [Humboldt-COVID-19 Mutual Aid Network](#) delivering food and supplies. The [Seventh Generation Fund has launched the Flicker Fund](#) to support Indigenous communities impacted by COVID-19 worldwide. The [NDN Collective COVID-19 Response Project](#) provides grants to Tribal Nations and Indigenous-led organizations and other forms of support, including combating the spread of misinformation due to COVID-19. We see HSU's creation of the [Student Adversity Fund](#), which raises and distributes small grants to help students in need continue their education, as a part of this mutual aid model.

Imagining Alternatives

Inspired by the ethics of mutual aid, we call on HSU leadership and all HSU community members to imagine ways to expand this approach that centers mutualism, creative forms of reciprocity, and care over cuts. When it is not possible to maintain an existing lecturer or staff position, we can invent innovative programs to fund and create alternative employment opportunities for lecturer and staff colleagues in ways that meet our students' needs, the needs of our campus community, and broader CSU and state needs.

First, we encourage campus leaders to think outside the box about revenue generation and redistribution. Some examples include:

- Use federal, state and/or CSU emergency funding as much as possible to preserve employment in ways that serve our students and our broader communities.

- Seek authorization from the state to revise existing allocations in HSU's operating reserves to address current campus needs and reflect values expressed in the statement of URPC principles.
- Ask University administrators to follow the lead of colleagues at institutions across the country and take pay cuts as a response to this unprecedented crisis
<https://thehill.com/homenews/news/492788-harvard-leadership-among-universities-taking-salary-cuts-to-offset-coronavirus>.
- Create an emergency fund that HSU employees may donate to that is explicitly tied to employment creation for colleagues who would otherwise lose work, be laid off or have recently been laid off.
- Identify areas where HSU is at the cutting edge of policies and practices, and seek funding from the State or the CSU system to share these models with other campuses or communities.
- Wherever possible, use donations, endowments and other gifts to the University to support strategic initiatives.
- Value people over assets: recognize that our wealth is in our people, and when necessary we urge HSU to consider selling assets.

Second, we have brainstormed a number of specific proposals for employing colleagues in ways that further the mission and vision of the University. We have organized these proposals according to the URPC principles that guide our budgetary processes.

Students First: *We will always prioritize the needs of students and their education first. We will support students' academic success and provide courses and services that facilitate their education and graduation.*

- Hire faculty colleagues as discipline-specific consultants to increase equity, support institutional learning outcomes, and promote curricular and pedagogical innovation.
 - Examples include increased support for initiatives such as: writing across the curriculum; curriculum transformation efforts to realize our goal of becoming a truly Hispanic/Latinx thriving institution; development of GE minors and pathways that build on core strengths of HSU; incorporation of best practices in pedagogy to increase equity in classes with our largest equity gaps.
 - While some funding may be allocated to convert some classes to online instruction, we believe it is imperative for HSU to engage in a thoughtful, measured response to increasing online education. We urge HSU leadership to maintain a strong commitment to face-to-face instruction for the many students who do not thrive online, for those classes and

disciplines which do not translate to online learning, and to our strength as an institution that thrives on creation of community through in-person instruction and hands-on learning. Our interactions with students leads us to believe that this face-to-face creation of community is why many are drawn to HSU in the first place.

- Solicit and fund proposals for service learning classes that engage students in just and equitable community solutions to addressing the economic and health crisis.
 - Examples include engaging students to become part of mutual aid solutions to meet basic needs for those who are most affected by the pandemic and associated economic crises; action classes to support students in local projects to build a green economy; partnerships with Tribal Nations and local communities to help further their initiatives to address the pandemic and economic crises.
- Offer additional or increased scholarships for local students (Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino) or Northern California students.

Preserve and Value Personnel: *The education of students is intimately linked to the morale and security of staff and faculty. As such, every effort will be made to avoid concerted personnel dismissals. We will instead focus on preserving jobs for existing employees and engaging in thoughtful, evidence-driven approaches to filling positions as vacancies arise, and leveraging reassignment of personnel in line with student needs and growth.*

Motivated by the principles of mutual aid, we encourage HSU to extend the reach of this principle to envision “preserving and valuing personnel” beyond existing programs. In addition to the ideas articulated in the prior “student first” section, we urge leaders to imagine ways that HSU can help sustain our broader community in times of unprecedented crisis.

- Employ colleagues to assist with legal aid work for the community, supporting community members in filling out the forms for emergency aid (small businesses, tenants, unemployment, welfare programs).
- Employ colleagues to support existing community organizations and Tribal Nations during this time (based upon collaboration with and outreach to organizations that have served diverse communities in Humboldt County and inquire how HSU employees could use their skills to support their needs).
- Collaborate with local municipalities to envision and implement a local version of a Works Progress Administration for environmental justice and sustainability, with roles for artists, musicians, as well as policy makers, planners and builders.

Fiscal Stability and Revenue Enhancement: *The budget must be balanced on an annual basis, and be sustainable into future years, through co-equal consideration of contemporary needs and ongoing institutional health.*

- Halt the use of consulting firms and replace with local expertise whenever possible; when believed not to be possible, engage in shared governance deliberations before initiating new contracts with consulting firms.
- Provide additional mini grants and reassigned time to support grant writing to fund projects related to the mission and vision of HSU.

Mission, Vision, and Context: *We will continue to work toward realizing the articulated vision of the University.*

- Identify areas where HSU is at the cutting edge of policies and practices and seek funding from the state or the CSU system to share these models with other campuses or communities.
 - Examples include HSU's work on sustainability, CHECK IT, place-based learning communities, *El Leñador*, *CouRaGeouS Cuentos*, El Ballet de Folklórico de Humboldt, Native American/Indigenous Studies, energy solutions from Schatz, CCAT, Oh Snap Student Food Programs, (we invite members of the campus community to add other HSU innovations here).
- Fund faculty to create several signature in-person or online courses that reflect HSU's strengths, mission and vision. Offer these as free courses (with online courses being free for anyone in the world who wants to take them). These courses would meet needs of those who are unemployed while also serving as PR for the university.

Transparency, Communication, and Shared Governance: *We need input in order to make informed decisions about resource allocations such that they reflect the values, needs, and avowed intentions of the University community. In order to provide meaningful input, the Campus community must be informed about the issues being considered. Reciprocal participation by all stakeholders is thus advised and requested.*

- We ask HSU administrators to foreground transparency and commit to engaging in shared governance when decisions are made regarding the use of emergency funds, and in decisions about budget reductions.
- We ask HSU administrators to be transparent not only with regard to our budget numbers, but also with how the above suggestions have been considered as we chart a forward course. Reports only of budget information followed by assumed required job

losses are not sufficiently transparent. We ask for information regarding options considered and why, among those options, any decision was supported.

Conclusion:

Crisis can generate exciting innovation, but it can also be used to circumvent deliberative processes of shared governance, pause equity efforts because they are “inefficient,” and consolidate resources in ways that leave vulnerable people all the more vulnerable. We urge University leadership to refrain from the use of this crisis as an opportunity to implement austerity measures based on limited views of what the University values. Such an approach would reinforce existing power structures and weaken the University’s capacity to serve its own mission.

Instead we call upon all of us at HSU to envision a new future, one that promotes innovation and which is rooted in principles of mutual aid and social and environmental justice. We encourage thinking outside of the box, rejecting business as usual approaches, and thinking about each of our department’s/unit’s strengths, contributions and potential roles in responding to this crisis in new ways. We applaud CFA President Toombs's April 14 email message that, “As a union, CFA will continue to fight for appropriate responses to this crisis, including thoughtful solutions for a recovery which includes adequate investment in the CSU that provides real opportunities for students and faculty to prosper.” We fearlessly believe in and envision a future where we build strength, together.

Signed (Department/Office names listed for identification only).

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