

FAS Senate
AN ELECTED BODY OF THE
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
YALE UNIVERSITY

REPORT

Faculty of Arts and Sciences Senate Statement

**Preserving the Future of Yale's Research and Teaching Mission
during Financial Crises**

FASS 2019-2020 Executive Council

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Faculty of Arts and Sciences Senate Statement Preserving the Future of Yale's Research and Teaching Mission during Financial Crises

We find ourselves facing an extraordinary moment. COVID-19 presents formidable social, financial, and health challenges to the Yale community. Their full extent is as yet unknown. We are fortunate that Yale has systems, procedures, and resources in place to confront profound financial disruptions – just as it has done in the past on multiple occasions.

In times of change, challenge, and uncertainty, decision-making at a historic institution such as Yale, with rich legacies from a long past and high expectations for a long future, should be guided by fundamental principles, which we affirm here.

The principles are (1) to **protect the mission of the university**, (2) to **maintain excellence at Yale for the future**, (3) to **preserve institutional stability**, and (4) to **protect the vulnerable**, all through (5) **shared governance**.

(1) Education and Research

Excellence in education and research is at the heart of Yale's mission, and the Yale faculty is the core strength of the University in this pursuit. For the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the mission is to preserve, advance, and transmit knowledge through inspiring research, scholarship, and teaching. All other principles serve this one.

(2) Intergenerational Equity: Maintaining Excellence for the Future

The mission of the University must be protected not only for this generation but also for future generations. We are stewards of Yale and its future, of the institution's community of students and mentors, and of its fiscal health.

Maintaining the purchasing power of the endowment, stewarding it for all future generations, provides for only one aspect of future excellence. More fundamentally, Yale's guiding rule of intergenerational equity requires our stewardship of the university's prestige, its human and intellectual resources, and its ongoing research and teaching mission. For the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the high standing and distinctive qualities of Yale College must be preserved, as must the historic eminence of Yale's Graduate School.

These crucial aims require attending very carefully to faculty strength throughout any crisis, through both hiring and retention practices, including diversity goals. Even where financial circumstances are unusually difficult, we should be clear: maintaining a strength is easier to achieve than rebuilding one.

(3) Institutional Stability

Institutional stability is a requisite to maintaining excellence in education and research. Except for in emergencies, adjustments must be taken very gradually because abrupt changes can cause unnecessary damage. Yale formally recognizes with smoothing in its endowment spending rule¹ the principle that in crises, as well as in less extraordinary times, Yale's leadership should act gradually. Moving gradually gives time for rational and informed deliberation, including consultation with a range of experts and with those affected. Supported by its large endowment and reserves, Yale FAS does not face dire cash shortfalls that require immediate cuts, as might be the case at many state universities and less well-endowed private ones.

¹ See our discussion of [The Yale Endowment Spending Rule and the COVID-19 Crisis](#).

Rapid cuts are nearly always implemented as across-the-board cuts. They do not distinguish between expenditure cuts that can easily be reversed and those that are hard to reverse in a recovery. They do disproportionate damage to departments and programs with particularly urgent needs for faculty hiring to maintain their strength or even survival, and to departments with special opportunities. Additionally, they disproportionately harm units with minimal discretionary funds, which cannot be reduced further without threatening their research and teaching mission. Abrupt changes also squander long-standing plans and preparations, and disrupt ongoing projects.

Faced with uncertainty, the first order of business should not be to save through austerity, but to avoid actions that would be costly to reverse. Suspending new building construction is easily reversible. The effects of a hiring freeze are not.

(4) Protecting Members of the Community

As a matter of social justice and in the interests of preserving a cohesive and healthy community, Yale must protect the most vulnerable members of its community during times of crisis. Those among us who have the least influence over our budgetary and administrative choices are often at greatest risk of having their lives upended in an emergency like that created by COVID-19. We applaud various initiatives that the administration has already taken to protect our community's members. We call on the University to continue to pay close attention to the impact of its decisions on precariously situated groups, such as instructional faculty, untenured faculty, graduate students, and staff. As has become increasingly apparent, the crisis has racial and gendered dimensions that may particularly burden many in our community. We call for efforts to address these dimensions as they emerge across all sectors of the University.

(5) Shared Governance

Shared governance is the best means to ensure adherence to all of these principles. Yale has been well served by a long history of faculty participation in governance. Especially in times of crisis, when there is most likely to be the need for change, or the opportunity for change, it is critical to involve the faculty, who are the core of the university and central to its mission.

The formation of committees and task forces for the many aspects of the COVID planning was an important step. But the faculty should have been included in consequential budgetary and strategic choices from the beginning. Faculty in FAS are well-placed to monitor and assess at ground level the likely consequences of proposed budgetary policies. Leaving the faculty out of decisions that affect the mission of FAS squanders expertise and risks losing faculty support, especially if the decisions turn out to be flawed.

Shared governance also requires transparency—as a process as well as a final reporting of outcomes. Transparency both compels clearer decision making and enables more effective inclusion and participation.

In crises it is tempting for any administration to make “emergency” decisions without taking the time to consult, and without much explanation or transparency. Past crises have demonstrated that a lack of shared governance can result in damaging mistakes.² Yale’s world-class faculty leads in many forms of expertise, critical analysis, humanist and scientific insight, and models of deliberation and decision-making. As part of such a community, we call for broad and substantive faculty inclusion and participation in the fundamental decision-making that lies ahead.

² See our discussion of [Three Lessons from Past Financial Crises at Yale](#).