

Speech at SAS Deans meeting 10/15/20

My name is Christine O'Connell and I am the president of the Union of Rutgers Administrators-American Federation of Teachers (URA-AFT) Local 1766. I am also the proud parent of two SAS graduates and have a daughter currently in the SAS Honors Program now. I know what a great school SAS is and am proud every day for our staff and their work to keep it great.

As we react to a global pandemic as a SAS community, it's disheartening to see that staff are considered disposable and not valuable to the continuing mission of Rutgers and its service to our students.

In your own remarks, Dean March, you list as one of your significant accomplishments creating a Convocation ceremony to celebrate the achievements of the SAS student population. I know that many URA staff give their time to make Convocation a signature event for SAS and though it is listed as your accomplishment, it could not be done well without the significant contribution of staff hours and effort. This type of dedicated service to our students and their families is just one example of the devotion that SAS staff have to their work at that event and the countless number of events that we run smoothly throughout the year. We are a vital part of the "beloved community" that President Holloway refers to in his remarks.

Our diversity is our strength in SAS as well. As Rutgers increases their focus on the importance of diversity in the workplace, your choice to lay off the only person in the Graduate English Language Learners program, who happens to be a Latinx woman who is a first generation graduate of Rutgers, is troublesome. What does that say about your commitment to being culturally diverse and serving those who are underrepresented at Rutgers? How does SAS intend on supporting our first generation and international students and help them navigate an overwhelming large American university system and towards academic success?

I say that every staff person's work and contribution help to make SAS a success. I recognize that their contributions are acknowledged by the greater public. Your choice to lay off someone in Genetics while we celebrate that we are ranked as #3 in College Factual is contrary to the supposition working hard to be nationally ranked provides job security to anyone. Your choice to layoff someone who has 20 years of service in Economics is devastating to that person and their family. Your choice to eliminate a position in a prominent research center greatly reduces their productivity and ability to function. I hope that you understand that SAS's success and ultimately your success is inextricably tied to staff and our hard work.

Rutgers should not be the reason that people are devastated during a pandemic, whether financially, or through loss of health insurance, or through loss of tuition benefits. We are integral to all the operations in SAS. We provide the services that are often overlooked and undervalued but missed desperately when eliminated. It is truly unnecessary to lay off any employees when we, as union members, advocated to our local legislators to provide restoration to state appropriations and funding. We acknowledge that this is an unprecedented time, but we need to find ways to come out beyond the pandemic as an intact SAS community that does the least harm to all and find ways to strive together to be stronger than ever.

