



LSU A&M Faculty Senate Resolution 20-01

Class Cancellations for Athletic Events

Sponsored by Kevin Cope and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee

Whereas members of the LSU Board of Supervisors (Board) are appointed by the Governor of Louisiana so that all citizens of Louisiana, whether students, faculty members, workers, farmers, professionals, investors, or political leaders, are considered in the decisions regarding higher education at the University;

Whereas that mandate to the Board members expresses the hope and expectation that these leaders will exercise sound judgment in the guidance and management of Louisiana's highest-ranked university;

Whereas the Board took a sudden, disruptive action by canceling classes on the two opening days of the Spring 2020 semester in order to facilitate attendance at a spectator sport event, the national football championship, and to allow for football-related festivities;

Whereas the Board did not find it appropriate to follow its own Bylaws by referring this matter to the Academic and Research Committee for their recommendations and did not prepare a written resolution to facilitate such recommendations although this was achievable given that it was known two weeks before the meeting that LSU would play the night of January 13 and given that January 13 was the first class day of the spring semester as published in the Academic Calendar more than a year before;

Whereas the cancellation of classes for sporting events by the A&M campus sends a message to students, faculty, Louisiana citizens and the nation that intercollegiate sports can and should preempt the academic activities defining LSU's core mission, and a confusing message to other LSU campuses, which expect the flagship campus to set standards, as well as to campuses in other Louisiana higher education systems, which have trouble maintaining their own commitment to academic improvement when the premiere campus undermines the statewide educational project;

Whereas LSU's football opponent, Clemson University, which enjoys a #70 academic ranking from *US News and World Report*, did not cancel classes for the days surrounding the championship football game, while LSU, which has a #153 ranking with the same rating service, halted instruction;

Whereas the LSU vision-and-mission statement presents the core duties of LSU as "offering a broad array of undergraduate degree programs and extensive graduate research opportunities

designed to attract and educate highly qualified undergraduate and graduate students” and as “contribut[ing] to a world-class knowledge base that is transferable to educational, professional, cultural, and economic enterprises” that seem unlikely to be advanced by canceling of classes for a sporting event;¹

Whereas football-induced class cancellations also raise questions about LSU’s commitment to the third component of its vision and mission statement, “using its extensive resources to solve economic, environmental, and social challenges,” a worthy goal that is devastatingly inconsistent with the replacing of classes with an athletic event;

Whereas the Board of Regents Master Plan focuses on the productivity of Louisiana institutions by the awarding of degrees and certificates, on creating an educated, employable, and forward-looking population, on “new and novel approaches to the way education is delivered,” on “performance,” and on the role of “research universities and special purpose institutions in advancing knowledge and new ideas,”² which are diminished when teaching opportunities are obstructed;

Whereas neither of the aforementioned campus- or statewide mission, planning, and vision statements contain a single word about intercollegiate athletic programs, but abound with references to and images of academic personnel in instructional settings;

Whereas the cancellation of classes with only a few days, indeed only one business day of notice disrupts teaching schedules and lesson plans and academic calendars that are often developed months or years in advance and can unsettle or even waste time-consuming instructional setup efforts such as are common in laboratories or clinical courses;

Whereas the necessity of make-up classes on Saturdays, when students may have work or personal conflicts, or the probable compression of course material resulting from class cancellations undermines the education and reduces the career-readiness of Louisiana students;

Whereas the claim that cancelling classes was required for the “safety” of students by a Board of Supervisors member suggests that LSU academic leadership has not succeeded the *Vision 2020* strategic plan goal of creation of an educated citizenry committed to constructive activities especially since the President's Office has adequately made past decisions on university closures;

Whereas the first obligation of the leadership of academic institutions is for truth, a duty not accomplished when allocating only 1,100 tickets for a student body of 30,000 while also announcing that class cancellation allows for student participation in an event for which “street” ticket prices for the remaining 70,000 tickets reached thousands of dollars, an event far beyond the economic reach of many of our economically stressed or disadvantaged students;

Whereas the LSU administration has remained distressingly silent in the nationwide debate about intercollegiate athletics and especially “big-time” college football, a debate that, in focusing on lifelong injuries, exploitation of athletes, non-transparent athletic department budgets, non-

academic uses of donor benefactions, and racial and gender inequities, raises questions about the enabling of intercollegiate athletics by suspending classes;

Whereas the values embedded in Title IX that call for gender equity were not evident since no cancellation of classes has ever occurred for LSU women's sport teams that participated in national championships and so the disparities between men and women or between minority and majority populations continue to be evident;

Whereas highly qualified LSU faculty members hold prominent positions as the Faculty Athletic Representative, on the LSU Athletics Council, and in national groups such as COIA (the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics) that are concerned with the role of athletics in higher education and so are highly qualified to offer advice on matters such as class cancellations;

Whereas LSU and its leadership make extraordinary, expensive efforts to recruit inventive and thoughtful faculty yet have ignored the counsel of the LSU Council of Faculty Advisors and LSU Faculty Senate Executive Committee, which prioritized classroom instruction over class cancellations for extracurricular activities on behalf of the faculty they represent;

Whereas the most valuable asset of any higher education institution is the authority of the faculty to develop educational policy, which has been delegated by and ignominiously disregarded by the Board in cancelling classes against the advice of duly elected and representative faculty leadership;

Whereas many major research-driven firms and high-tech businesses that considered relocating to Louisiana have chosen other locations owing to the inadequate support for and cavalier attitudes toward education, attitudes that are now evidenced in class cancellations in support of entertainment;³

Whereas the public is surely confused by repeated requests for higher levels of funding for LSU and for higher education when that petitioning university shuts its doors owing to sporting matches;

Whereas confusion might pertain to the implicit comparison between a sporting event and the other, more usual reasons for university closures such as natural disasters or loss of major leaders or sacrosanct holidays, a disconcerting contrast that leaves faculty and students wondering whether the experience of victims is trivialized by being placed equal to a sport success;

Therefore, be it resolved that the LSU Faculty Senate Faculty adjures the LSU Leadership and Board of Supervisors in collaboration with faculty leadership to develop a reasonable policy for the cancellation of classes for foreseeable and unforeseen circumstances so as to minimize disruption, serve the interests of all students, communicate the correct message concerning the value of education to the public, and preserve the dedication of the University to its principal tasks as outlined in its vision and mission statement among many other governing or guiding documents;

Therefore, be it further resolved that the LSU Leadership and Board take immediate action to reaffirm their commitment to LSU as “a leading research-extensive university, challenging undergraduate and graduate students to achieve the highest levels of intellectual and personal development” per the mission-and-vision statement;

Therefore, be it further resolved that the LSU Faculty Senate asks the LSU Leadership and Board to create a committee whose membership includes several experienced faculty leaders that will be charged with studying and issuing a policy concerning the role, scope, mission, and purpose of intercollegiate athletics at LSU.

And therefore, be it further resolved that the LSU Faculty Senate asks the Board of Supervisors to begin continuing dialogue with the faculty and its leadership on educational issues at LSU, such as occurred during previous presidencies of some of the current members of the Board.

REFERENCES

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1. LSU Mission and Vision Statement: <https://www.lsu.edu/about/mission.php>.
 2. *Louisiana Prospers: Driving our Talent Imperative*, current edition of the Louisiana Board of Regents Master Plan, page 29.
 3. For example, Thyssen-Krupp and Hawker-Beechcraft.