

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Media Coordinator:

Candi Churchill, UFF Executive Director,

candi.churchill@floridaea.org

*Can put reporters in touch with members from Pensacola State College
Faculty Association-UFF (PSCFA-UFF Chapter):*

StayingAlivePSC@gmail.com

Faculty at Pensacola State College: My Life or My Livelihood? Don't Make Us Choose

*PSC leaders endanger the lives and well-being of high-risk educators and
their families by denying continued live online instruction*

PENSACOLA, Fla. — Pensacola State College (PSC) mandated “face-to-face” instruction for the spring 2021 semester, with a requirement of at least two face-to-face classes per instructor “without exception.” Faculty requests for live online instruction have been turned down, even for those with medically documented illnesses that place them at high risk, even risk of death. The United Faculty of Florida (UFF) filed a class action grievance in December on behalf of all faculty, and the push to protect at-risk educators continues this week. Several faculty members also are stepping forward to tell their own stories, below.

Across the state, most colleges and universities are staying primarily remote to reduce the spread of Covid-19 and protect lives. Campuses that are increasing in-person instruction in larger numbers are continuing to accommodate high risk employees as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

That is obviously not the case at PSC. Find attached letters sent this week by Pensacola State College Faculty Association-United Faculty of Florida (PSCFA-UFF) and retained counsel regarding faculty members who have requested remote work or other appropriate accommodations for a variety of reasons, including severe medical conditions that the CDC warns could lead to severe illness or death. View the letters online here: <https://myuff.org/uff-psc-takes-legal-action-covid-19-accommodation-request-denials/>

“At the start of the new year, just this past week, I have heard from distraught faculty who have sold their houses and got their estates in order in preparation for going into

**The Higher Education Affiliate of Florida Education Association, National Education Association,
American Federation of Teachers, and AFL-CIO**

the classrooms and labs in-person,” said Candi Churchill, executive director of UFF. “UFF is exploring all our options — including escalating legal action — and will stand by faculty who are being forced to choose between their lives and their livelihoods for no pedagogical or practical reason. Students are preferring live on-line instruction in these uncertain times, but the PSC president (Dr. Edward Meadows) and vice president (Dr. Erin Spicer) are ignoring medical professionals at the expense of educators, students and the PSC community.”

In their own words

Here are some of the stories shared with UFF by faculty:

Jen Ehrhardt, Business faculty member

I have ongoing serious health issues with my lungs and my doctor has said to me that if I get sick again it will be my premature death. He says I am at high risk with Covid exposure and potential illness.

I feel very threatened by the prospect of going back to face-to-face in the classroom. As a professor, I'm also concerned about the pedagogy, and feel it's a disservice to the students to take them into a face-to-face environment right now when we were thriving on-line, because it's not really face-to-face – it is mask-to-mask. Yes, we'll be in the same physical location, but we won't be able to offer the students the same pedagogy the students think they are getting. ... Education is a very emotional profession. Teaching and learning is a human thing, and we're not going to connect as well with our students while wearing masks and keeping our distance.

Vaidehi Kumar, Computer Science faculty member

I have severe type 2 diabetes. Both my parents had it and my mom died of it. I am 58, my husband is 75, and he already had a heart attack. He's on 10 different cardiac medications. If I get the virus, it's inevitable other house members would have it, so I'm very concerned. My daughter used to work for the CDC and she is begging me not to leave the house. I have quarantined since March, but I don't want to lose my retirement or lose my job. I am being forced back to in-person and I don't understand why my request was denied.

Brigette Robinson, English and Communications faculty member

Our class interactions in the fall via Zoom were more enjoyable than face-to-face classes because the interaction was more community-minded; I was not so distanced from the students. I'm concerned with the decision-making process at PSC. I have someone living in my house in the high-risk category; I've expressed that to the college.

I also have a family member right now in intensive care who is in the hospital because he contracted Covid when he went back to work. He's been in the ICU for seven days now, and he did not have any pre-existing issues, so I'm concerned that the administration is not effectively evaluating the evidence in front of them when they are making decisions, which is disappointing because it's the one thing we teach in higher ed – preparing future leaders to evaluate information and look at what is most current. We have increased cases climbing every day, and we also have a mutated version of the virus now that will add to this whole situation. It is the administration's responsibility to make a decision based on the information in front of them and how it impacts the entire community. The entire community's health is at stake. I find it disappointing that our PSC leaders would not be modeling good behavior, something that they expect from our graduates.