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# The University of Georgia

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Franklin College of Arts and Sciences

For meeting of Franklin College Faculty Senate, Tuesday November 17, 2020

To my fellow Senators in the Franklin College,

I am unable to attend today's Senate meeting; my apologies and I look forward to seeing my fellow Senators in January. Meanwhile, I am submitting this item simply to share ideas I would have expressed in person, were that possible for my schedule.

At our meeting in October, there was discussion of the purpose and disposition of current Senate committees. Following that discussion, I have thought more about how our committees might best serve broader interests and concerns that have increasingly become part of the Senate's work. These concerns include enhancement of faculty governance, defense of academic freedom, and support of scholarly integrity. In light of the recent Zoom-based attack on some Franklin Faculty, and in relation to the discussion items that are before the Senate today, I want to offer some thoughts about item II in particular.

If item II is taken up and supported with a vote at a subsequent Senate meeting, then Senators could incorporate the work of documenting events like the recent attack into committee work—either of a committee that already exists, or of a new committee with new purposes. Such work is certainly the Senate's purview, and it is a way to support our colleagues. Therefore, I encourage Senators to consider that, should these new discussion items come to a vote, the Senate itself might make item II its responsibility.

I also want to offer some preliminary thoughts that might usefully inform this kind of documentation work. This attack on Zoom included death threats and monetary coercion, and it announced UGA faculty names and home addresses. The attack was racist, sexist and homophobic, and thus it is part of specific histories, and current realities, of bigotry and injustice. However, and very importantly, scholarly work by UGA faculty, which they are contracted to do in service of the public, was the particular occasion and the specific target of the attack. The attackers, whoever they are, chose this event specifically and planned their actions with care. Given all these facts, it behooves Senators and all Franklin faculty to announce and to repeat that their colleagues have been victims of a crime that a.) was committed against them in the course of their work as scholars and b.) was aimed precisely at this work, at its public efficacy, and at the scholars themselves as persons who serve the public. In short, this was not only a crime against persons on the basis of their identities, but also a crime against scholars on the basis of their vocations. Making the crime fully and widely known among faculty in this way can contribute to the

development of faculty governance, and to the defense of academic freedom, and to the support of scholarly integrity.

Two additional notes, one brief and one lengthy. First, I believe that Dean Dorsey's readiness to make an announcement condemning the attack, prior to any announcement from the President's office, is commendable. Second, I note that, to date, official University communication about this attack, in particular from the President's office, has been segmented in ways that do not aid strong comprehension of what has happened and what it means. The President issued an emphatically worded but factually vague statement of support that did not make clear the specific realities mentioned above. This was followed by a second statement about legalities and institutional commitments that made no reference to the immediate context prompting the statement.

This approach reminds me of corporate practice in factories where I used to work. After an employee was injured, first a sympathy card for the employee would be circulated. Then, a few days later, there would be new announcements, made with no direct reference to the recent injury, reminding everyone of safety protocols and affordances and then claiming, implicitly or explicitly, that the reminders proved the company's commitment to safety. The parallel with UGA's current practice should be clear. I believe such an approach makes more sense for injuries sustained by employees than it does for crimes committed against them. Whether my belief is valid, and regardless of the intentions of the President or any other UGA employee or office, such a segmented and incomplete response avoids the holistic work of publicly naming, recounting, discussing, and analyzing specific crimes against our colleagues, and the impact and significance of such crimes in the context of a research university.

Of course it would be possible, in theory, for other entities at UGA to assist with this work—for instance through detailed and extended coverage of this event in *Columns*, and/or in *UGA Today*, and/or through the Division of Marketing and Communications. If President Morehead wants to use these venues to assist the purposes I have articulated here, I am sure he will make it known. At present, however, a pattern already established in the University's treatment of earlier Zoom-based attacks aimed at students is continuing in this new attack aimed at faculty. As far as public-facing news venues controlled by the University are concerned, these attacks have not occurred.

It may take some effort for Senators to gather different kinds of data and expertise, along with all relevant voices, into one document that recounts what our colleagues have undergone in helpful context, thus creating a permanent witness that is accessible to the public and oriented to faculty concerns. I believe the Senate is more than capable of this task, and I believe the task is important in relation to the Senate's other emerging goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christy P. B.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Christopher Pizzino, Senator, Franklin College of Arts and Sciences  
Associate Professor, Dept. of English