

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ODU Faculty Senate Executive Committee responds to WAVY 10 report on Forward Focused Digital Transformation Initiative

NORFOLK, VA — The Old Dominion University (ODU) Faculty Senate Executive Committee is issuing this response following the January 20, 2026, WAVY 10 news report regarding faculty concerns over the university's Forward Focused Digital Transformation Initiative (FFDTI). While the faculty remains steadfastly supportive of innovation and necessary digital evolution, we must address critical failures in shared governance and the significant risks posed by the current implementation plan.

The FFDTI, as currently designed, mandates a unilateral transition of all online programs to an 8-week accelerated asynchronous format by Fall 2026. This decision was made solely by the administration and the Board of Visitors (BOV) without meaningful faculty consultation, bypassing the long-standing principles of shared governance essential to academic integrity.

Evidence of Faculty and Student Concerns

Data from recent university-wide poll and survey reveal a disconnect between administrative directives and the professional judgment of the faculty. Faculty believe the implementation of FFDTI's 8-week asynchronous online courses is rushed and threatens educational quality and student learning.

- The faculty pulse poll: In a 4-question poll of 507 faculty members (43% response rate):
 - o 75% disagreed that the transition to an 8-week calendar reflects deliberate planning. Faculty are concerned that the timeline is rushed.
 - o 74% are not persuaded that the 8-week format supports course quality or student success. Faculty are concerned that this one-size-fits-all mandate ignores the unique pedagogical needs of diverse disciplines and curricula.
- The faculty survey: In a comprehensive survey about FFDTI responded to by 558 faculty members (43% response rate):
 - o 78% expect degree quality to worsen as a result of the initiative.
 - o 75% believe that course rigor would need to be reduced to fit an 8-week accelerated format.
 - o 76% anticipate that student learning will worsen under the new model
 - o 84% agree that implementation should be delayed until adequate faculty input is obtained

A Breakdown in Shared Governance

Despite these faculty concerns, the university administration and Board of Visitors has remained resistant. In response to a Faculty Senate letter, Rector Murry Pitts dismissed requests for a more measured approach, stating that “as a Board, we will not agree to slowing down or stopping an initiative that requires adaptability, resilience, and work. I encourage you and your colleagues to roll up your sleeves and be productive partners.” This characterization fails to recognize that faculty are already working under challenging conditions marked by inconsistent communication, shifting requirements, and a lack of responsiveness from the administration. This has led to a collapse in confidence in university leadership.

The results of the survey of faculty show:

- 63% have low confidence in the President.
- 55% have low confidence in the Provost.
- 58% have low confidence in the Vice President for Digital Transformation and Technology.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a case letter to the University President and the Rector of the BOV, formally acknowledging the failure to adhere to shared governance standards.

Call for Collaborative Action and Measured Implementation

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee is not opposed to innovation. We are opposed to a reckless implementation that jeopardizes the quality of an ODU education. We call on the administration to:

1. Respect shared governance and academic freedom: Restore the faculty's role in determining delivery methods best suited for their specific academic disciplines. The one-size-fits-all approach, where 8-week asynchronous courses are required for all programs without faculty input and decision-making, is a key challenge regarding FFDTI implementation.
2. Delay implementation: Move the Fall 2026 deadline to allow for an intentional, consistent, evidence-based rollout.
3. Improve two-way communication: Build upon current communication approach to engage in direct, respectful, and meaningful two-way dialogue with faculty to replace the current approach that is inconsistent, sometimes confusing, and contradictory, leading faculty to feel the administration is “making it up as they go along.”

ODU deserves a future shaped by collaborative expertise, not administrative mandates. We remain ready to “roll up our sleeves” as true partners, provided the administration is willing to listen.

About the ODU Faculty Senate

The ODU Faculty Senate serves as the representative body of the faculty, functioning as the primary organ for shared governance between the teaching and research staff and the university administration. The Senate is responsible for formulating and recommending policies regarding academic matters, faculty welfare, and the university's strategic direction.

Guided by the principles of academic freedom and professional responsibility, the Senate ensures that the collective expertise of the faculty remains central to ODU's mission of excellence in teaching, research, and public service. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee acts on behalf of the broader body to coordinate with university leadership and advocate for the integrity of the institution's academic programs.

<https://www.odu.edu/faculty-senate>

Disclaimer: This press release represents the perspective of the ODU Faculty Senate Executive Committee and does not necessarily represent the opinion of the administration or the Board of Visitors of the University.

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