



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

# NEWSBRIEFS

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November, 2001

## **Part-Time, Short-Time, Sometime Faculty** Charles J. Parrish, President

A worrisome problem in higher education is the spreading dependence on part-time faculty. The American Federation of Teachers, along with other national groups including the American Association of University Professors, took the lead in naming the week of October 29<sup>th</sup> National Campus Equity Week. Activities were carried out in many institutions of higher education across the country to point up the problem of poor pay and limited or no benefits for the growing cadre of part-time instructors working in these institutions. At Wayne State we cosponsored such an event with the GEOC, the graduate assistant's union.

Over the past decade the number of classes taught nationally by part-time instructors has grown from 33% in 1987 to 43% this year. Are these part timers qualified? Certainly, many of them would qualify for full-time positions if university administrators weren't replacing such jobs with part-timers, but it is equally obvious that cheapening the work has often lowered standards as well. It was reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that the University of North Florida was forced by its accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities, to fire 20 percent of all its adjunct faculty members because of questionable credentials. The pressure to fill teaching slots with cheap instructors too often trumps the concern for quality.

Having a quality undergraduate education program is key to turning around our enrollment problems. Not only do we need to insure that we have such quality, but we need to acquire a reputation for it. Historically we have gotten about 2400 to 2500 community college transfer students each fall. We have been getting only about 1700-1800 first-time college students, most directly out of high school. We need to increase both of these groups if possible, but it is among the latter group that we need to do the most work. The Reid administration has recognized this and is making efforts to provide better student services and improved student amenities, including a much-used workout facility and a new dormitory for residential students.

To acquire a reputation for quality undergraduate education we must expand the number of full-time, tenure-track faculty teaching undergraduates. Administrators who defend the present levels of use of adjunct faculty point out that these instructors often bring special knowledge to teaching programs. Whatever validity this has in graduate professional programs (law, business, criminal justice, education, music, social work, etc), it has little when it comes to teaching the humanities, the social sciences or the sciences. Most of the value that qualified professionals bring to graduate professional programs simply does not extend to introductory classes for first-year students. It is one thing to

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have an experienced litigator teach law students how to argue a case, it is quite another to depend on a part-time instructor to teach introductory physics or astronomy. Even in those programs in which adjunct faculty unquestionably make contributions (e.g., business, law) accrediting agencies criticize schools where they see too much reliance on such faculty for teaching.

During the last negotiations the Administration agreed that a committee made up equally of representatives appointed by the Administration and the AAUP-AFT address the problem of part-time instructors. It met regularly and produced a report that was adopted unanimously by its members. Several parts of the report are relevant here.

"The committee believes that the University's dependence on part-time faculty members damages the University in five ways. (1) It diminishes the quality of the classroom experience provided students, especially undergraduate students—at the very least, because the knowledge-base of part-time faculty members is not as current as that of full-time faculty members, in as much as part-time faculty members are neither hired nor rewarded for research or publication. (2) It undermines the academic stability of the disciplines by reducing the number of continuing faculty members necessary to cover their essential courses. (3) It restricts opportunities for development and growth in the academic units. (4) It prohibits long-term planning, curricular design, and curricular renovation that depend on full-time continuing faculty members to execute. (5) It reduces the number of continuing faculty members who conduct research and compete for external funding. The committee believes, therefore, that the University should make a commitment to concrete goals of reducing its reliance on part-time faculty members and, simultaneously, of increasing the number of full-time, tenure-track positions.

"The committee recommends:

That the University set a goal that no more than 25% of all classes, university-wide, be taught by part-time faculty members. (This limit has been suggested by the national organization of the American Association of University Professors.) Moreover, since the use of part-time faculty members varies widely from college to college, and is especially heavy at the undergraduate level, the committee further recommends:

That a limit be set that no more than 30% of undergraduate credit hours—in any single college—be taught by part-time faculty members.

That a concrete timetable for meeting these goals be developed so that they may be met efficiently and in as brief a time as feasible.

That sufficient budgetary resources be allocated—through the redistribution of priorities within the University Budget—to fund the hiring of additional full-time, tenure-track positions.

That the timetable for meeting these goals allow for implementation by stages, to avoid undue dislocation to other budgetary units.

"Finally, the committee also recommends:

That the University develop a plan for the provision of some measure of fringe benefits to part-time faculty members. In keeping with the recommendations of the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate, the committee recommends that benefits be extended to part-time faculty members (1) who teach two classes in any given semester, or (2) who have taught at WSU in three consecutive years. Such benefits would give WSU a competitive advantage in recruiting the best part-time faculty members and would be likely to secure a firmer commitment to the University from its part-time faculty members."

The committee report has pointed the way in which we should be moving to improve our undergraduate teaching programs. Thus far there has been no reaction from the Administration to the report and its recommendations.

\* The complete report can be found on the WSU/AAUP-AFT web page. <<http://home.msen.com/~aaupaft/reports.html>>

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*Members and Fair Share supporters of the AAUP-AFT are invited to submit letters to Newsbriefs for publication as space permits, subject to editing for length. Any such editing will be reviewed with the author.*

### **Open Letter: Recruitment and Retention at WSU**

While college and university enrollments are up most everywhere, here at WSU it's no big secret that enrollment has been on a downward trend for several years. Why?

Let me begin by saying that I love Wayne State. I have been a student, instructor and academic advisor here, earning a bachelor's degree and a Ph.D. in History at this university. Based on this experience, I would like to share some observations about how the union and the administration can work together to revitalize and modernize this institution.

Teaching and learning for undergraduate and graduate students must be the number one priority of the university, and a good place to start might be teacher training. It's nice that Wayne is a Carnegie I research institution, but while the likes of Paderewski and Rachmaninoff were fabulous pianists, they were also lousy teachers.

Treating students with respect and dignity is also key to revitalizing Wayne State. This topic has a number of aspects. Students must be treated as partners and full participants in the education process, not as "customers." Those who advocate the consumer model of education should think about this the next time they with access to an advisor who knows their name and vice/versa. This means hiring more academic staff. Essentially, you must spend money to make money.

Phone trees for advising, financial aid, etc. should be abolished. Nothing could be more discouraging to a potential student than to be unable to talk to a real, living, breathing human being when it comes to admissions, advising, and financial aid. Moving these services to call centers in Texas or Tijuana is not the answer either!

Encourage, rather than discourage innovation. We are not even close to offering an online degree and have precious few online courses. Why? Is it perhaps because innovation is neither recognized nor promoted?

The previous administration managed to encourage the establishment of fiefdoms all over the University that act solely in their own interest rather than the greater good of the institution. A house divided against itself cannot recruit and retain students.

Why, for example, have extension centers if you do not intend to promote them and utilize them to their fullest? The parking lots of Macomb Community College and Oakland Community College are packed full every day. These are potentially our students, yet we don't even offer daytime classes at these centers. The extension centers are underutilized and underpromoted.

We need to create a university-wide sense of unity, mission and purpose. It is up to both management and the union to renew enthusiasm for Wayne State University. A positive step is to generate a genuine love of and interest in students, teaching, learning and advising.

You can't get quality people without paying quality salaries. More importantly, however, University employees at every level need to be valued and treated as essential to the functioning of the institution. This has not always been the case in the past.

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College of Lifelong Learning  
Interdisciplinary Studies Program

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### **AFT and NEA Partnership Sponsors September 11 Fund**

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have joined together to create a mechanism to address the long-term needs of families in both unions— especially the children— in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The NEAFT September 11 Fund is a new fundraising program sponsored by the AFT and NEA's partnership and is separate from the AFT's Recovery Fund.

The AFT Recovery Fund is supporting the immediate needs of AFT members and their families who have been directly affected by the terrorist attacks. Thirty-four members of the AFT's Public Employee Federation who worked in the World Trade Center are missing and presumed dead.

On October 3, President George W. Bush cited "the courage that New York teachers showed" during the disaster as he visited a public school in lower Manhattan. More than 8,000 students were safely evacuated from seven schools near the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, with many teachers and other school staff staying through the night as they waited for parents to pick up their children.

At some point in the future, any unused funds from the AFT Recovery Fund will be delivered to the NEAFT September 11 Fund. The AFT is still seeking donations for the union's Recovery Fund; contributions may be sent to the AFT Recovery Fund, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001. Those who wish to contribute through the NEA should send checks payable to the NEAFT September 11 Fund, c/o NEW, Attn: Dennis Van Roekel, 1201 16th St. NW, Washington, DC, 20036.