



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

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Working With The Administration: Some Progress?

by

Charlie Parrish, President

We can be grateful that some steps towards a more cooperative approach in administration-union relations are being taken. It is a welcome change after the needlessly confrontational approach we experienced for a decade and a half during the previous administration.

The new situation is partly due to the personality of President Irvin Reid, who is friendly and open to diverse points of view. Our (relatively) new Provost, Nancy Barrett, has contributed considerably to a new atmosphere. She has shown herself to be accessible and willing to listen.

Lecturers and Term Renewals

For example, Provost Barrett is to be specifically complemented with respect to the situation for lecturers. In 1999 we negotiated a new provision in the collective bargaining agreement that calls for multiple-year contract renewals for lecturers with three or more years of service (previously, lecturers with more than a decade of service were still getting one-year term contracts). This is not an absolute requirement; there is administrative flexibility where necessary, but the Collective Bargaining Agreement indicates that multiple-year term contracts for lecturers are expected "under normal conditions." Last year, in the face of "non-normal" budget uncertain-

ties, lecturers were renewed for only one year. This has continued into this year. When it was brought to the attention of Provost Barrett, she discussed the matter with the Council of Deans, reminding them that the one-year term reappointment was a one-year policy and that the multiple-year appointment standard is again the norm.

Naturally, there will be ongoing points of disagreement between the interests of union members and senior administrators, differences that will have to be addressed when we enter into the next round of contract negotiations in 2005. But in the meantime we can express our appreciation for Provost Barrett's approachability and willingness to solve problems.

Ignorance Is Not Bliss

We recently held a meeting with the Provost and the Associate Provost for Academic Personnel, Margaret Winters. On our side were Faculty Grievance Coordinator, Mary Cay Sengstock; Academic Staff Grievance Coordinator, Lothar Spang; Academic Staff Contract Implementation Officer, Barbara Jones; and myself. (Our Faculty Contract Implementation Officer, Anca

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Vlasopolos, was on a professional trip.) We had a wide-ranging and fruitful discussion of the issues. One of the major continuing problems that we presented is that of contract adherence by middle- and lower-level administrators. The more generous explanation of the situation is that there is ignorance of the provisions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement that these administrators are required to follow.

This ignorance might have various causes. Some new administrators are recruited from outside the University from non-unionized institutions and have little experience of operating in a unionized environment. It is a comment on non-unionized institutions that the due-process procedures in many such institutions are so sadly lacking in fairness that administrators cannot acquire the experience appropriate to our situation. (An example is afforded by our sister institution in Ann Arbor: if a faculty member there files a formal complaint against a dean, it is the dean who reviews the case to see if he or she acted appropriately.) Another cause is the promotion of inexperienced faculty or academic staff to administrative positions. They may make mistakes through inexperience.

An additional problem is that some administrators just try to push the envelope when it comes to the exercise of what they conceive to be their prerogatives of office. In instances in which human nature gets the best of good judgment in administrators, the union stands ready to intervene to assure that the rights guaranteed to bargaining unit members by the Agreement are not violated.

Such union interventions can result in grievances if we cannot get the situation ameliorated through negotiation. Grievances involve a two-step process. At Step One the parties meet in order to try to resolve the

issues in an informal discussion. If the Administration agrees to a solution that is acceptable to the union, the matter ends there. If not, the process proceeds to arbitration, in which the Administration and the union present their cases before a neutral third party who ultimately decides the matter, issuing a written and legally binding decision.

Nip It in the Bud

Our recent experience has been that the Administration has not been willing to settle any grievances at Step One. This was addressed in our meeting with the Provost and Associate Provost. Rather than spend an excessive amount of time

going over the past, we agreed that one of the things that could be done to avoid grievances is to develop a better system for familiarizing administrators

with relevant details of the Agreement. Moreover, the Provost and Associate Provost understand that it is the responsibility of the Administration to assure that department chairs, directors and other administrators conform to the Agreement and that it is much better to nip potential violations in the bud, before we have to get into the grievance process.

All in all, our meeting was a useful first step. If we can work with the Administration effectively to improve the situation, we will be most gratified and our members' situation improved. It is, however, a sizeable job as we have about 1850 members of our bargaining unit, scattered across more than 100 units. This means that the opportunities for misunderstanding and disagreement are many. Maybe we can take a few steps to avoid some of them.

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Testimony before the Michigan State Senate Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Thomas A. Dietz
President, Michigan Conference of the
American Association of University Professors

March 5, 2004
(Excerpts)

On behalf of the Michigan Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), I want to thank you for allowing me to appear before this subcommittee as you prepare your recommendations for funding higher education in FY 2005. We recognize that economic conditions, particularly as they affect state revenues, make this a time of difficult choices for the executive and legislative leadership of Michigan...

Even so, higher education must not be perceived as a luxury but, rather, must be recognized as a vital part of the state's infrastructure and a key contributor to its economic recovery.

Higher education remains the surest, most accessible means for Michigan's young people to acquire the skills needed to compete in an increasingly global economy. It is no longer blue-collar, industrial jobs that are moving overseas, increasingly, as the presidential campaign has brought to our attention, it is white-collar, technical jobs that are moving offshore. To keep those jobs in Michigan, our young people must have access to higher education institutions that can provide the skills to meet and exceed those of lower-wage competitors elsewhere around the globe....

What is a superior system of higher education?

A superior system of higher education is one in which the physical plant is adequately maintained, renovated, and modernized. And not just the physical plant, but also the electronic infrastructure that is vital in our modern world must be maintained. None of this will be inexpensive but it will be far more expensive, both in dollars and in its impact on Michigan's economic development, if maintenance and modernization are delayed or inadequately funded. Quality education requires quality funding.

A superior system of higher education, one that will keep Michigan competitive, also requires a high quality, adequately compensated faculty. The Michigan Conference-AAUP believes that only full-time, tenure-track faculty can provide such an education. We recognize that many part-time and adjunct faculty are highly-qualified and dedicated

instructors. Nevertheless, the contingent nature of their employment necessarily leads to an economic insecurity that detracts from the time they can devote to their students and their discipline. In addition, we believe that such presumed cost-cutting measures as increasing class size provide no more than a false economy – students in large lecture classes remain essentially anonymous to professors who can neither recognize their individual abilities nor address their individual needs.

A superior system of higher education is one that acknowledges the importance of academic freedom in the pursuit of knowledge, both theoretical and practical. The Michigan Conference-AAUP opposes all efforts to place ideological, political, personal, or budgetary constraints on course content or delivery methods. The Conference believes that the faculty is both capable of determining, and is the most appropriate body to determine, what the proper parameters for academic inquiry should be. Legislative efforts that claim to respect academic freedom while giving the legislature authority to direct or condition state funding for specific courses are disingenuous, at best.

A superior system of higher education is one that recognizes that the most effective means to protect and preserve academic freedom is that of tenure. The Conference opposes all efforts to limit, restrict, or eliminate tenure. Without such protection, individual faculty members are potentially subject to administrative pressure, political expediency, or external expectations in the pursuit of knowledge. All institutions have the ability to dismiss or discharge tenured faculty for cause.

A superior system of higher education is one in which all colleges and universities are prudent and responsible stewards of the public funds with which they are entrusted. Members of the Michigan Conference are ready to work with the administration at their respective institutions to identify and implement necessary economies. However, the AAUP does not subscribe to the view that the so-called "fat" in higher-education is to be found in the actual provision of educational and aca-

demic services. Rather, as our Vice-President, Joel Russell of Oakland University, testified last year, the real expansion of higher education budgets over the last quarter-century has disproportionately occurred in middle and upper level administration. The ratio of full-time faculty to full-time students has declined over the same period.

“The AAUP does not subscribe to the view that the so-called “fat” in higher-education is to be found in the actual provision of educational and academic services. Rather, the real expansion of higher education budgets over the last quarter-century has disproportionately occurred in middle and upper level administration. The ratio of full-time faculty to full-time students has declined over the same period.”

A superior system of higher education is one that is funded by a state revenue system designed to provide the necessary support for all essential services, based on an honest and accurate assessment of the community’s needs, rather than a revenue system driven primarily by ideological considerations. While Michigan Conference members have no greater desire than any of our other fellow citizens to endure unnecessary taxation, most of us agree with Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes that “taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society.” A fair and progressive system of taxes and other revenue generating measures is essential to insure that we remain a civilized, educated, and technically qualified society.

I come before you, as I indicated earlier, aware of the difficult economic circumstances the state of Michigan faces. The Michigan Conference is aware of the challenges that you must address as you finalize the state budget. We realize that it will take longer to recover from the budget reductions of recent years than it took to impose and adapt to them. We take heart at the preliminary indications that the next higher education budget, under certain conditions, may be able to avoid further cuts. Nevertheless, we strongly encourage this subcommittee to restore state support for higher education to the level necessary to insure the maintenance of a superior system of higher education that will position Michigan to compete and excel in the high-tech, global economy of the 21st century....

Thank you.

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