



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

# NEWSBRIEFS

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## Preparing for Bargaining

Charles J. Parrish  
President

With negotiations for renewal of our collective bargaining agreement approaching, its time to start identifying the issues and priorities we will bring to the bargaining table next Spring. The AAUP-AFT Executive Board has taken the first step in this direction with the unanimous selection of Professor Anca Vlasapolos as Chief Negotiator for the union.

Professor Vlasapolos brings a wealth of experience to her new role, including her 31 years in the English department at WSU, where she holds tenure; her 10 years of service on the AAUP-AFT Executive Board; her past service on the bargaining committees of 1999 and 2002; and her current role as Contract Implementation Officer for faculty issues, a role she has filled with exemplary energy and skill since 1998. Over these years, she has immersed herself in the details of the contract's day-to-day protections for faculty and academic staff, from the due-process requirements for term renewal and promotion, to the fundamentals of academic freedom. (On the latter score, see her article on page 3 of this newsletter.)

We will begin to fill out the rest of our bargaining team over the next few weeks as we also begin to canvass our members for their concerns and their proposals for improving our collective bargaining agreement.

### The Context for Bargaining

We face a complicated situation as we approach bargaining. Michigan's ongoing economic problems have reduced the revenues of the state government. These revenues had been

already restricted by the tax-cutting policies that have been followed over a number of recent years. Along with these policies, the state government, both the Legislature and the Governor's Office, have little sympathy for tuition increases. Over several decades Michigan has followed a policy of constraining budgets for higher education, but allowing colleges and universities to raise tuition to meet rising expenses. That era has come to a halt and Lansing has been bringing new pressure on

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the state's institutions of higher education to restrict the rate of increase in tuitions to the level of the increases in the consumer price index. These restraints do not mean that we cannot seek improvements in salaries and benefits, but we will have to set clear priorities and exercise some imagination in how we address negotiations.

Under the leadership of Provost Nancy Barrett, we have seen a genuine responsiveness to most of the issues and concerns that we have brought to her attention. There are important matters on which we will continue to disagree, and this is to be expected given the different constituencies to which we answer. But as we have sought common ground with the Administration, Dr.

Barrett has been helpful, and we are hopeful that the bargaining team that will be assembled by the Administration will reflect this positive approach.

### Preparing for Bargaining

We are taking several steps to prepare the membership and the Bargaining Committee for the start of negotiations:

- \* We will conduct a bargaining survey in late January or early February to identify issues and priorities of concern to faculty and academic staff.
- \* There will be a Saturday offsite meeting open to all interested members on February 12, to discuss issues and prepare proposals.
- \* In the meantime, we will enlist Council Representatives and other active members to help organize departmental meetings where faculty and academic staff can talk directly with members of the Executive Board and the Bargaining Committee.

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\* A committee representing the School of Medicine is being convened with an eye to the special concerns of WSU's largest school—a school that confronts a continuing crisis in its finances and its mission. We will pursue every opportunity to continue to make collective bargaining relevant to the needs of SOM's faculty and academic staff.

There are many issues to anticipate in these upcoming negotiations. Among these are: the protection of tenure; early-retirement benefits; protecting and expanding health coverage; workload and the process for resolving disputes concerning it; salary increases; increasing contractual protections for academics

on soft-money; encouraging a better integration of clinicians into academic activities in the SOM; as well as many others.

We look forward to your participation in discussing bargaining issues in any of the above forums, as well as in direct communications with our office (577-1750, [aaupaft@wayne.edu](mailto:aaupaft@wayne.edu)).

## Education Services for Union Members

**Call your local union office for  
more information**

A Union of Professionals

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# Academic Freedom at Wayne State

## Recent Cases that Fall Under the Collective Bargaining Agreement

Anca Vlasopolos

Contract Implementation Officer

While it is widely acknowledged that academic freedom is the cornerstone of "the free search for truth and its free exposition" (as stated in the *Official Proceedings* of the Board of Governors), protection of this lofty principle can easily be trumped, in practice, by the temptations of self-interest. Motives vary, but administrators who interfere in the research or teaching activities of individual faculty are often driven by political hostility, professional jealousy, or just plain ol' personal animus.

Many of our bargaining-unit members are unaware of the rules under which they can defend their teaching against student complaints and, more importantly, against overzealous and prosecutorial administrators. In Article VII of the AAUP-AFT Agreement (otherwise referred to as the "contract"), faculty and academic staff are assured of the continuance of actions approved by the Board of Governors. One such action is Statute 2.42.01, pertaining to academic freedom.

### Recent Cases

We have recently had cases in which professors were singled out for surveillance of course content and conduct by administrators. Under the pretense of looking out for students' interests, upholding GenEd requirements, or defending the accreditation standards of their profession, these dean-level administrators went after particular faculty in their colleges.

### Student Complaints

Departments and colleges outline procedures for dealing with student complaints (see, for instance, the "grade appeal procedure" section of the College of Fine,

Performing, and Communication Arts). Generally, the rules are that the administrator to whom the complainant comes asks the student to go back to the professor and try to resolve the problem directly in conversation with the professor. If the student does not feel satisfied with the outcome, s/he may then seek remedy from the higher-level administrator, who will then hold a conference with the student and the professor.

**What happens instead with some regularity: deans, associate deans, or chairs, even after one complaint from a single student, have been documented to solicit comments from other students even while a course is in progress, either without mentioning to the professor that they are soliciting evaluations of the professor's perfor-**

**mance, or by intimidating the professor into giving consent to this procedure. In fact, comments on the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SETs) go only to the instructor and are not to be seen or used by administrators.**

This policy concerning SETs was developed by a joint union-administration committee that was called for under the collective bargaining agreement. The reasoning behind it is that, at times, salient statements of student discontent have been used against faculty in cases when these statements were not representative of how most students felt about their learning in a particular class. Numerical scores,

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while an imperfect instrument, offer a better overall assessment of student learning. **Administrators are not allowed to bypass the terms of the contract by soliciting comments outside the established university procedures for course evaluations.**

### General Education Requirements

The GenEd requirements are established by the University and overseen by departments in order to ensure content and conduct of courses designated by a GenEd oversight committee. In a recent case, an administrator who was not remotely acquainted with the discipline of a specific department used GenEd as an excuse to interfere with a professor's syllabus. The administrator sent a certified letter requiring that the professor turn in the course syllabus for review of its content before the professor even met with the class. GenEd "compliance" is obviously an excuse to harass a specific member of the bargaining unit. Even if the administrator honestly thought that surveillance of syllabus content was within his/her scope (**an assumption that is wrong**), s/he would have had to issue a general call for syllabus submission for review from the whole faculty of the college, as opposed to singling out an individual for review. *The contract, in Article XXIV, Section D, makes clear that only the Salary committee is entitled to review a professor's teaching performance for a three-year window, and the rules for that review are delineated fully in Section D.*

### Defending Accreditation for Professional Schools

As with the excuse of looking for compliance with GenEd requirements, the excuse of acting in accord with accreditation requirements has been used to single out and persecute a single person in an entire college. An associate dean asserted that soliciting email comments from a professor's students in a particular course constituted compliance with professional requirements of student assessment of learning. If a professional school is required by its accreditation board to assess student learning, it needs to devise a plan to do so in a uniform manner for all faculty teaching required courses for the college. ***Otherwise, the college is in direct violation of Article VIII of the contract, which defends bargaining-unit members against discrimination.***

Despite our general awareness of the importance of academic freedom, few of us are cognizant of our specific rights under the contract and under college/departmental rules. **If you are subjected to reviews of teaching initiated by administrators, please contact the AAUP-AFT as soon as possible. We operate under deadlines for violations and grievances, and it is a matter of urgency both for the interest of the individual and for the principle of academic freedom that we refuse to allow administrators to intimidate us on our professional turf.**

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