



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

# NEWSBRIEFS

Office: 577-1750 Fax: 313-577-8159

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[aaupaft@wayne.edu](mailto:aaupaft@wayne.edu)

[http://mywebpages.comcast.net/aaup\\_aft/](http://mywebpages.comcast.net/aaup_aft/)

## Productivity Matters

### What Does it Mean in Academia?

Anca Vlasopolos

Faculty Grievance Coordinator and Chief Negotiator

We are all familiar with the “accountability” buzzword. In practice, what does it mean? In the current political environment, it means that Michael Brown, head of FEMA, resigns from that job and opens a consulting firm offering advice on how to respond to disasters. For top executives, in other words, accountability and productivity are highly fungible concepts, applied (or, often enough, ignored) when it suits them. Employees, on the other hand, are being pressed by employers to become “accountable,” even as top CEO’s bankrupt companies and move on, taking their golden parachutes with them.

In academia, “accountability” has been implemented by state legislatures south of the Mason-Dixon line (in Texas and Virginia, for example) through “post-tenure review,” a process that reduces tenure to a five-year contract. Each and every tenured professor is supposed to show sufficient productivity at the end of each five-year cycle so as not to lose tenure and ultimately the job.

#### “Selective Salary” vs. “Merit Pay”

In principle, the notion of productivity—remaining active in the profession, teaching well,

generating grants in fields where grants are to be gotten— makes sense. We all want to work with colleagues who are well informed and conversable and to have students taught by competent, active professionals.

What does it mean in practice? Tenure-track faculty and those with tenure who are working for promotions get grants, publish, work toward getting good student evaluations, go to national and international conferences, and do their share of service for their universities. Ideally, those faculty who arrive at the highest rank and are tenured should be

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able to take time to develop long-term projects, sometimes involving the mastery of another sub-field or acquiring a foreign language. In practice, most faculty do continue to be competent teachers and to produce research and publications relevant to their professions. There are some who are sometimes tired, demoralized, recovering from illnesses or family tragedies, and who might not be as visibly productive all the time. Social scientists tell us that in a population there is no such thing as 100% activity. The bell curve applies to productivity as well as to any other distribution.

con’t on page 2

con't from page 1

**Productivity Matters**

At Wayne State, we have instituted a process for the annual evaluation of faculty productivity. It is the annual Salary Committee report on which every faculty's selective-salary increases are based. We, the union, call them "selective-salary" rather than "merit" increases because we have had long experience with a process that is as imperfect, and as biased, as any other, and also produces considerable inter-collegial bitterness. The point is not the money—the pool is quite small. The point is the status of the faculty member versus the colleagues who judge him/her.

The position of the union is that the section dealing with productivity in Article XXIV of the collective bargaining agreement should help people to improve their teaching (after substantial evidence that they need improvement) and help them restart their research (after substantial evidence that they have fallen behind). In general, faculty will benefit from improvement plans if they are implemented correctly and justly. In addition, we are working with the Administration to make funding available for such programs (there is a \$50,000 Provost's Fund for Faculty Improvement, which was not tapped during the duration of the contract).

However, the union's interest in the issue of productivity is that people not be bullied, intimidated, and punished by cliquish colleagues, chairs, and deans who may exercise a hierarchical approach and ride rough-shod over procedures in order to express their authority, denigrating faculty and demoralizing them. This is not the demanding-but-collegial atmosphere which should characterize a top ranked research university.

**Insuring Due Process**

Presently, we are engaged in interest-based negotiations with the Administration regarding workload issues. Section D of Article XXIV, which deals with workload, is relatively new; it was introduced in the 2002 contract. It opens the door to a process that is supposed to lead to remediation if a tenured faculty member is found wanting in "productivity," i.e. teaching or research, during a three-year window. Only three cases came to the union's atten-

tion during the last three-and-a-half years of the contract. Two had to do with teaching. One was resolved amicably when the faculty member underwent a program of training in the new classroom technologies through the Technology Center of the Library. One is complicated by longstanding animosities within a department. The third was an attempt by the Chair to impose standards other than those of the departmental factors to judge a faculty member who is highly productive but has not brought in the grant money that the Chair deems adequate.

This last case illustrates the importance of departmental factors in defining the appropriate criteria for evaluating faculty performance. As specified in Articles XXII and XXIII of the collective bargaining agreement governing tenure and promotion, each department shall delineate "in a manner reflecting the particular mission and the diverse characteristics of the unit" the factors to be considered in evaluating teaching, scholarship, and professional achievement. These written "factors" provide a consistent and consensual guide to evaluating productivity and help remove the process from ad hoc or biased considerations.

What can faculty do to participate in an honest, fair, and non-punitive way in this process of reviewing productivity, for all tenured faculty, on a three-year basis?

1. Insure that departmental factors have been articulated and brought up to date.
2. Salary Committees: the people elected to these committees need to be thoroughly familiar with departmental factors and use them to assess productivity.
3. Personnel Committees: these are brought in as secondary reviewers if the Salary Committee finds problems with a faculty's teaching or research productivity; the members need to be thoroughly familiar with the factors.

con't on page 3

## U.S. House and Senate Cut Student Loan Support and other Safety Net Programs, While Cutting Taxes for Wealthy

By a vote of 217 to 215, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a \$50 billion budget reconciliation bill in the early morning hours of Nov. 18 that cuts programs for low and middle-income Americans. All of the votes in favor of the bill came from the Republican side of the House. All Democrats—and notably 14 Republicans defying their leadership—voted against the bill. The Senate had already passed a budget bill that cuts these same programs.

Of special concern to students, faculty and academic staff at WSU is the \$14.3 billion cut in support for student loans, more than a third of the current funding of \$37 billion. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), this bill will create \$7.8 billion in new charges on students and parents borrowing to pay for college. These cuts would result in an average increase of \$5,800 in the interest students pay on their loans. The Senate bill cuts \$8.8 billion from the program, or a quarter of the current level of funding.

The AAUP and the AFT joined with dozens of religious and community organizations in the “Student Aid Alliance” to oppose the cuts and lobby for increases in a program already eroded by the failure to keep up

with rising costs. Adjusted for inflation, the maximum Pell grant in 2004 of \$4,050 was already 14% below the value of the comparable grant in 1975.

In addition to the draconian cuts in student loans, the House and Senate bills also cut Medicaid, food stamps, and other safety-net programs, with the goal of reducing the federal deficit by \$50 billion by 2010. However, before the dust even settles on this vote, the House is expected to steam through a \$70 billion tax bill benefiting the wealthiest Americans. The Senate has already approved measures that will reduce the tax bills of those earning more than \$1 million by an average of \$103,000 each.

The House and Senate budget bills will be reconciled in conference meetings that begin this month.

*Sources:* Student Aid Alliance ([www.studentaidalliance.org](http://www.studentaidalliance.org)); *News & Observer* (NC), Editorial (11/19/05); *Times Union* (NY), Editorial (11/27/05)

### con't from page 2 Productivity Matters

4. Individual faculty should provide full and clear records of three-year accomplishments to the Salary Committee of their respective departments.
5. Once a problem has been identified through a fair and honest appraisal of a faculty member's record, each step toward remediation needs to be followed (the new contract will make the steps even clearer).
6. Faculty members need to familiarize themselves with their rights under the contract. There are appeal procedures in place for people who feel they have been unfairly treated by their depart-

mental committees and whose workload is therefore subject to change.

The push toward “post-tenure” review is not going to go away any time soon. In order for us to defend the principle of tenure, we must work cooperatively and collegially within departments and the university. Our expectations, i.e. factors, ought to be up to date and clear. The procedures for review must be scrupulously honest. In contract negotiations, our goal is to make the process as transparent as possible so as to make it easy for committees of departments to do their job and for faculty members to find remedy if they have been unjustly singled out for remediation.



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*Happy  
Holidays*