President’s Message: Dreaming of Civility and Inclusion

Diana Rios, UConn-AAUP President

The past several weeks have moved quickly and in concentrated fashion, almost like a dream. Yet, with full consciousness I am more aware than ever, that the dreams of unsung heroes and civil rights leaders-- who have worked for racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and socio-economic equities--are still alive with us as we push forward and stand up for faculty rights, academic freedom, inclusion, and civility. Our academic/professional labor unions have made notable progress over time but contingent faculty still face inequities. Contingent faculty, called adjuncts, lecturers, and by any other name, are the new expendable faculty labor pool and are the new face of the higher education professoriate across the United States. Our contingent colleagues have evolved to be the economic band-aid to problems in state budgets throughout our country. The fact is they travel and teach from college to college to piece together a salary that will support their families. We must look for ways to include this labor force more fully into our faculty governance processes as it is clear that contingent faculty are actually long-term. In addition, political, global migration realities have made us more aware that some of our treasured students are in need of “sanctuary” protections, while they study, excel, complete their degrees, and plan to give back to society as proud Huskies. Many local and national groups, like national AAUP, continue to put their dreams into action through statements, petitions, or peaceful actions regarding the sanctuary movement. We have a new political reality and a renewed need to practice civility in the broadest sense, nurture our diverse intellectual environment, and practice inclusion across faculty.

Chief Negotiator’s Update

Michael Bailey, UConn-AAUP Executive Director/Chief Negotiator

Your negotiating team of Gene Salorio, Tom Peters, Evelyn Simien, and Suman Majumdar has been at the table with the administration four times this semester. Most sessions have been limited to three hours, but longer durations may be appropriate in order to finalize a contract with the looming legislative session.

There are several important issues remaining, including a compensation package. At our last meeting on November 11th, Vice Provost Sally Reis presented a proposal on revising the Promotion, Tenure and Reappointment Policy. One of the major items of the proposal is to move the 3rd year evaluation to the 4th year.

Your negotiating team has decided to seek advice from groups of faculty throughout the University on this PTR proposal and will be contacting them with a survey. If you receive a survey, please return it as soon possible in order for the team to respond to the administrative proposal.

There are three negotiating sessions scheduled for the month of December.

For the rest of the State agencies and state employee negotiations, three bargaining units have filed for arbitration and will be meeting with an arbitrator soon. None of the units are close to submitting a package to the legislature. UCPEA remains the only unit that has a contract agreement ratified by both sides but still awaits legislative approval.

The State of Connecticut administration requested to meet informally with SEBAC leaders. That meeting occurred November 23, 2016. The parties plan to meet informally again. Those union leaders in attendance will be briefing their leadership bodies and negotiating teams. Any further briefings or information will be available if discussion continues. SEBAC negotiates healthcare and pension benefits for all state employees in the SEBAC coalition of unions.
UConn-AAUP Representation for Promotion, Tenure, and Reappointment (PTR) Issues
David Amdur, UConn-AAUP Associate Director

As we move further into the PTR cycle for this academic year, it is important to remind faculty going up for tenure and promotion that if they are contacted by the Provost’s office for a meeting to discuss their case they have the right to representation from the UConn-AAUP. After the PTR process concludes at the Dean’s level in Schools and Colleges, the next level is the Provost’s office.

For various reasons the Provost’s office may want to meet with faculty members to discuss their PTR case. The Provost may ask if the faculty member wants their case to be referred to the Faculty Review Board (FRB). The FRB is made up of six (6) faculty members elected by the University Senate from a slate of full professors without administrative office. They advise the Provost on PTR decisions and the Provost may refer PTR cases to them for review.

If you are invited to a meeting with the Provost to discuss your PTR case, you have the right to UConn-AAUP representation. Faculty can contact the UConn-AAUP office at 860-487-0450 with questions or concerns.

Legislative Update – Post Election
Michael Bailey, UConn-AAUP Executive Director

Some top bullet points:
• Senate Republicans have gained 3 seats and the balance in the Senate moves to an 18 – 18 tie. Lt Governor Wyman has the authority to break ties.
• House Republicans gain 8 seats leading to the smallest Democratic majority in the House in three decades.
• Former Majority Leader Joe Aresimowicz is elected Speaker of the House and Hartford State representative Matt Ritter is elected Majority Leader of the Democratic Caucus.
• House Minority Leader Thelmis Klarides retains her position.
• All five Congressional Districts return their current Democratic Members to Congress.
• Senator Blumenthal cruises to an easy win.

NOTICE
A SPECIAL POST ELECTION NEWSLETTER WILL BE COMING IN THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. PLEASE BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THAT ISSUE.

Fair Labor Standards Act Rule Change
Michael Bailey, UConn-AAUP Executive Director

Over the past two months, we have spent a lot of time negotiating with the administration on the impact of President Obama’s Executive Order to update the overtime eligible rule for employees. In May 2016, the administration doubled the annual salary cutoff below which workers are eligible for overtime pay, raising it to $47,476. Many schools with tight budgets were faced with tough challenges with this change.

On November 22, 2016, a federal judge in Texas blocked the implementation of the new rule just days before it was to take effect. The injunction came in response to 21 states and many business groups claiming the rule would cause irreparable harm and that the Department of Labor overstepped their authority in making the rule change.

The UConn administration immediately suspended efforts to comply with the rule change. In a statement to UConn-AAUP, the administration wrote, “There will be no action taken to increase employee salaries to the new minimum threshold, and all current FLSA-exempt employees will remain classified as FLSA-exempt.”

UConn-AAUP will monitor this situation and keep you informed of any further developments.
Adjunct Faculty & Academic Freedom
Christopher Henderson, UConn-AAUP Internal Organizer

Teaching at a university, even a Research 1 university such as UConn, has changed radically in recent years. The teaching faculty are increasingly hired on a part-time, temporary basis rather than on the tenure track. In many institutions of higher education in the USA, the pay and working conditions of adjunct faculty have become moral concerns. Nearly 31% of part-time faculty nationwide live near or below the federal poverty line. At UConn, adjuncts earn a little over $4600.00, at the minimum, for a three credit course and have marginal health and retirement benefits. In addition to the challenges of living on minimal pay, the rise of contingent faculty brings to light serious concerns over academic freedom.

The purpose of academic freedom is to facilitate discussion and debate in the classroom and to challenge students to think critically without fear of reprimand from university administrators or legislators. Lack of job security; minimal institutional support; and few due process rights mean that adjunct faculty may be hesitant about presenting controversial material in class and giving out low grades for inadequate student work. In the wider arena of campus life, adjunct faculty may be reluctant to advise a group of student activists demanding administrative public action on undocumented students because adjunct professors do not want to risk forfeiting renewal of their teaching contract. Such hesitation imperils the American university system that has academic freedom at its core.

One of the ways to combat this challenge is for tenured faculty to advocate for adjunct faculty improvements in pay and working conditions. The notion that higher pay for adjuncts would impinge on full-time faculty rights is erroneous. Such incorrect beliefs tend to divide constituencies and quell debate. Tenured faculty can be a part of the conversation about ensuring better job security for adjuncts so that they can have the freedom to teach, to research, and to challenge in the classroom and beyond. In this economic climate, it may be unrealistic to advocate for adjunct faculty positions to be converted to tenure-track ones, but full-time faculty can help ensure that adjunct professors have meaningful multi-year contracts with fewer loopholes for non-renewal. By the same token, full-time faculty should be cognizant about the need for more tenured lines because at UConn, non-tenure track faculty currently make up a little more than half of the UConn-AAUP bargaining unit.

We need to stand together to ensure all faculty have academic freedom and the job security to exercise that freedom.

The AAUP “Redbook” on the Integrity of Work as It Relates to Contingent Appointments
AAUP Committee on Contingent Faculty and the Profession & Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure
(Adopted November 2003)

The following is an excerpt from the “Redbook”, the National AAUP’s policy statements and reports book intended to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education.

Integrity of Faculty Work

Higher education achieves its unique standing in our society because it is characterized by original research, teaching that is grounded in scholarly disciplines, and service to the larger community, all supported and protected by academic freedom. Institutions rely on the professional responsibility of the faculty to maintain a strong commitment to student learning and to the development of scholarship. Indeed, the Association’s founding statement, the 1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure, describes the public purposes of a college or university as teaching, scholarship, and service. The relative emphasis placed on teaching, scholarship, and service by a faculty member varies according to the terms of his or her appointment and academic discipline and the type of institution at which he or she works. But although emphases vary, these functions are not completely divisible. Faculty work cannot be sliced cleanly into component parts without losing the important connections that make up the whole.

In all types of institutions, faculty share a responsibility for academic decision making. Faculty participation in governance structures is an essential feature of higher education, ensuring that programs and courses are of high quality and are academic in nature.
Tenured and tenure-track faculty are expected to engage to some extent in teaching, scholarship, and service, and their salaries and teaching loads reflect that expectation. Faculty holding contingent appointments, on the other hand, are rarely compensated for time spent on shared governance or other service. The professional development and scholarly accomplishments of contingent faculty are often viewed as irrelevant or simply ignored.

To support the essential mission of higher education, faculty appointments, including contingent appointments, should incorporate all aspects of university life: active engagement with an academic discipline, teaching or mentoring of undergraduate or graduate students, participation in academic decision making, and service on campus and to the surrounding community. Faculty who are appointed to less-than-full-time positions should participate at least to some extent in the full range of faculty responsibilities. For all faculty members in contingent positions, this participation should be supported by compensation and institutional resources and recognized in the processes of evaluation and peer review.

Mark Your Calendars

Day of Action for Public Higher Education
When: Thursday, January 26, 2017
Time: 8:30am-4:30pm, Come When You Can
Location: Old Judiciary Room in the CT Capitol Building, 210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford
More Details to Follow.

UConn-AAUP Excellence Awards 2017
Submission Deadline: February 10, 2017
More Details to Follow.

For more content and updates;
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