President's Message

*Diana Rios, UConn-AAUP President*

Your union was at work this summer, including union officers—your faculty colleagues—who lobbied on Capitol Hill on your behalf; presented research; and conducted/attended workshops at the National AAUP conference in Washington D.C. and in Portland, Oregon. As a chapter delegate and member of the National Council, I voted on sensitive issues impacting colleges and universities across the country. I will continue to attend in-person and virtual Council meetings this academic year in my role as a delegate at-large.

We are starting fall with an extension agreement on our expired contract. As I stated at the Spring Annual Chapter meeting, and as we have let you know through our energetic communication channels, contextual economic conditions have not helped us. Multiple forces continue squeezing highly educated labor globally (intellectuals, teachers, researchers, etc.). We continue to push back by reminding the world of our key roles as high producing mentors, trainers, laboratory, and extension professionals. We continue to push back by organizing ourselves and asking questions during departmental meetings and large university forums.

As you know, it took a tremendous amount of coordinated union committee, assembly and leadership elbow grease to advance our position thus far. Let us gain inspiration from our advances and continue to volunteer and strategize. You might be contacted to continue on a committee or to join a new committee. Your expertise is valued and needed in your union.

I wish you well for a strong fall start, and I hope to see you at our membership gatherings and events. As always please contact the UConn-AAUP office if you need assistance or information.

Chief Negotiator’s Update

*Michael Bailey, UConn-AAUP Executive Director/Chief Negotiator*

On June 29, 2016, the Board of Trustees approved an extension to our expiring collective bargaining agreement. This extension of benefits and protections is for one year, or until a successor agreement is reached between the parties. We have scheduled several negotiating sessions beginning in October and hope to have something before the legislature in February or March.

Included in the extension agreement is 2015-16 level funding of Professional Development, Childcare Reimbursement and Tuition Reimbursement. Also included are tuition waivers for dependent children of UConn employees.

UCHC-AAUP, UCPEA, the Connecticut State University-AAUP and the 4-C’s community college group all were able to negotiate extension agreements with their administration. Many state agency bargaining units have not reached extension agreements and are filing for arbitration. We will have to watch these arbitration decisions to see if any are applicable to us.
Research Assistants to Get Pay Increase

On May 18, 2016, President Obama announced the release of the Department of Labor’s final rule updating overtime regulations by extending overtime pay protections to executive, administrative and professional employees. This change sets the standard salary level at the 40th percentile of weekly earnings for full-time salaried workers, which is $921 per week, or $47,892.

How does this affect UConn-AAUP bargaining unit members? Currently, 28 full-time research assistants fall below the $47,892 threshold and need to have their salaries increased in order to be protected by the Fair Labor Standards Act intended overtime protections. Increasing the salary level minimizes the risk that employees legally entitled to overtime will be subject to misclassification based solely on their salaries.

How will this effect research grants that have included the lower salaries of research assistants? It won’t. The administration has committed to funding the increase in salaries due to this change from other University funds. But they will only do this for the 2016-17 academic year. Thereafter, the budgets for the grants must include the appropriate salary for each research assistant.

(This rule update also affects the salaries for Post-docs, but they are not included in our bargaining unit.)

New Organizational Name, Some New Policies, Same Word of Caution

David Amdur, UConn-AAUP Associate Director

As of July 1, 2016, the Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE) assumed a new name, the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE). The focus of OIE’s work remains the same and focuses on ensuring the University’s commitment and responsibility to foster diverse and inclusive working and learning environments. It ensures compliance with the University’s non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, as well as state and federal laws and regulations related to equal opportunity and affirmative action.

As of August 1, 2016, OIE has new procedures for how all reports of alleged violation of University policy under their jurisdiction will be investigated. As before, UConn-AAUP members have the right to be accompanied by one of our professional staff if they are the respondent in an OIE complaint. If one of our members is considering filing an OIE complaint, this office can also represent and accompany you.

A new part of the investigation policy is that OIE will now provide the Complainant and Respondent with the opportunity to review their respective interview summaries and provide any additional information within three (3) business days.

Another new part of OIE’s new investigation policy is that there is a new structure and process to review the findings of OIE final reports. OIE will appoint a standing pool of faculty, staff, and University Administrators who will train to serve a term of 2 years on a Panel of Reviewers. OIE will select the Chair of the Panel. Either the Complainant or Respondent may request a review of OIE’s findings for the case within fourteen (14) calendar days of receipt of the final report. As in the former policy, grounds for review are limited only to violations of the complaint procedures and/or additional evidence that was not available during the investigation which could have a material effect on the outcome of OIE’s findings.

OIE will forward the request for review to the Panel Chair, and they shall choose three members from the Panel of Reviewers to serve as a Review Committee. The Review Committee will evaluate all relevant evidence and then make a written recommendation to the University President within twenty (20) calendar days. The President or designee will then notify the parties in writing of their response to the Review Committee’s recommendation within ten (10) business days.

UConn-AAUP members should realize that an important item has not changed. If you are contacted by OIE that you are a respondent in a complaint, please contact the union office right away to speak with David Amdur. This is also the case if OIE contacts you with a “matter of concern”, a situation where there is not a formal complaint, but OIE still wants to speak with you.
2016 Elections

An ancient Greek statesman once said, “Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn’t mean politics won’t take an interest in you.” As we learned during the last legislative session, UConn, state employees, and academics can be targets of misinformed attacks and used as pawns in a political football game. It is now more important than ever, as stated by National AAUP President, Professor Rudy Fichtenbaum, for the AAUP to enter the arena of politics. President Fichtenbaum states:

“Until we start electing state legislators and governors who believe that higher education needs to serve the public interest, we will be fighting a defensive battle to try to save what is left of a higher education system that was once the envy of the world.”

With the formation of a Member Legislative Liaison Program, UConn-AAUP must build a strong relationship with the legislature representing both political parties. Having members develop a relationship with their respective legislator will help ensure that UConn and its faculty are given the proper resources to propel UConn forward in this “new economic reality.” As such, find out what state races are happening in your legislative district, attend an event, donate to a campaign, phone bank or door knock for a candidate, and find out candidates’ views on UConn, the Academy, and the important role of faculty in achieving the mission of higher education. If you would like more information on how to connect with legislative candidates and their campaigns or participate in the Member Legislative Liaison program, please contact Chris Henderson at chenderson@uconnaaup.org

The UConn-AAUP Political Action Committee is working on the endorsement process for key state races and once they are finalized, we will notify you through a separate newsletter.

Email Communication Troubles

Over the past couple of months, we have sent emails out to @uconn.edu email accounts, which did not elicit a response. When we started investigating, we found other entities outside UCONN were having the same issue. Apparently, our emails were going to SPAM or CLUTTER folders. You may have emails from us still sitting there now.

As such, please check your SPAM, CLUTTER or similar “Junk” email folders for @uconnaaup.org emails as there may be important emails that we have sent in that mailbox. Thank you.

Organizing: The Year Ahead

Christopher Henderson, UConn-AAUP Internal Organizer

Internal Organizing can be defined in many ways, but a simple definition is creating a good communication process for members throughout the bargaining unit and to strengthen the chapter to address workplace issues.

Last year, we saw some major organizing successes: we rallied for academic freedom and about the definition of the “University”, and we made gains at the bargaining table due to faculty activism. Representatives from the Representative Assembly organized department meetings with UConn-AAUP staff and elected officials for updates on negotiations and on the legislature. Representatives also carved out time in each of their department meetings to update their colleges on UConn-AAUP matters. Membership in the National AAUP increased by 6 percent, and members were more engaged and informed than ever.

This year we plan to build on our efforts to continue moving towards a more member-driven union. Much work needs to be done to ensure that all faculty know what is happening with negotiations and with the legislative battles forthcoming; but it takes a village. We need more faculty to step up and participate in UConn-AAUP activities. With more people attending meetings, asking questions, joining a committee or the Representatives Assembly, and relaying information to your colleagues, we can build a stronger UConn-AAUP that pushes against the tide of diminishing resources to UConn and the threats against academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure.

For more information on how you can participate in your UConn-AAUP and help build capacity for the organization, please contact Christopher Henderson, Internal Organizer, at chenderson@uconnaaup.org
MARK YOUR CALENDARS

UConn-AAUP Membership Meeting/Luncheon
When: October 19, 2016
Time: 12:00pm
Location: Storrs Student Union Room 304

UConn-AAUP Childcare Reimbursement
Deadline to Submit for Reimbursement: November 11, 2016