



The Forum



At The Forum we write about the pressing issues our members face on campus. We do so from the perspective of labor, connecting our local concerns to those of the statewide agenda of UUP, the national crisis facing public higher education and the issues of working people in the US and beyond.

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Know your rights: Academic Workload

Workload is a **mandatory** subject of negotiation.

Management has repeatedly asserted that the so-called “O’Leary Memo” stipulates a 3-3 teaching load as the ‘normal’ teaching load for the campus.

However, the O’Leary memo was never negotiated with, or agreed to by, UUP.

There is no “standard teaching load” across the University. Even though we are all academic faculty working at the same university, we recognize that different fields and different departments have different norms and expectations when it comes to the mix of teaching, service and research.

Workload must be evaluated on an **individual basis** and workload norms are situated in a historical context and determined by **past practice**.

Management can adjust the relationship between the parts of a professional obligation, but ideally supervisors and employees should jointly determine how that mix will change.

If someone is attempting to raise your workload, contact a union officer or your department representative immediately.

Welcome to *The Forum*:

UUP Welcomes President Havidán Rodriguez to campus for the start of the 2017-18 academic year.

Given the transition in senior leadership, we at *The Forum* have decided to dedicate this issue to revisiting some of the issues that we have addressed over the last few years. To that end we are reprinting recent articles on:

- 1) Research Productivity at the University
- 2) The Pitfalls of On-line education
- 3) The precarious financial life of graduate students

At the same time, we continue to address the plight of our contingent instructors and the pressures on faculty workload for both academics and professionals, as well as the larger issues facing the labor movement today.

We at *The Forum* have been pleased to see President Rodriguez address such important issues as the research identity of the University, our declining graduate student enrollments and the lack of diversity within our faculty. UUP shares these concerns and hopes that some of the progress we have made on transparency, shared governance and contingent faculty life will continue.

At the same time, however, it is worth noting that the University convened two blue ribbon committees in 2015 to address two of the most pressing issues facing the University at Albany: the quality of life for our contingent faculty and graduate student stipends. While both committees produced reports with a series of strong recommendations, many of those recommendations have yet to be implemented. UUP looks forward to working with senior administration in whatever capacity we can to ensure that these recommendations become reality.

By the Numbers:

26% Average salary premium enjoyed by union workers compared to non-unionized workers (referred to as the “union wage premium”) in 2015

33% Union wage premium for women workers

17% Union wage premium for male workers.

47% Union wage premium for Latino/a workers

30% Union wage premium for African-American workers

25% Increased probability of having health insurance benefits for low-wage workers if they belong to a union

\$1,558 Yearly average loss in wages for all workers, unionized or not, in so-called right-to-work states

1st Rank of New York State in percentage of unionized workers

1942 Year of highest unionization rate in the United States

33% Unionization rate of all US workers in 1942

11% Unionization rate of all US workers in 2008

33% Share of income going to the top 10 percent of US wage earners in 1942

48% Share of income going to the top 10 percent of wage earners in 2008

All data from the Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank created in 1986 to include the needs of low- and middle-income workers in economic policy discussions. <http://www.epi.org>

Time for a Stronger Union

Aaron Major, Chapter President

It's hard to escape the feeling that people are a bit obsessed with how university employees spend their time. Earlier this year, the Republican Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker—who has already made it clear that he would be much happier if tenure did not exist in the UW system—attached a “faculty workload policy” to a bill to increase funding to the state’s public universities. This policy would, among other things, require reporting on faculty teaching loads. In 2015, North Carolina Republican state senator Tom McInnis introduced the “Improve Professor Quality” bill that would have codified a 4-4 teaching load for professors across the UNC system. In 2011, former advisor to the University Texas system, Rick O’Donnell, released an analysis of so-called “faculty productivity,” wherein he claimed that most academic faculty members were either “coasters” or “dodgers,” teaching far too little than he felt they should be. This was the same year that the Republican Governor of Ohio, John Kasich, called for faculty in his state’s public universities to teach an additional course every two years.

While these efforts to get more time in the classroom out of academic faculty all come from states with conservative legislators and governors, teaching in a University system in a blue state like New York is no protection against similar policies emerging for SUNY campuses. Over the past two years on our campus we have seen a persistent effort on the part of management to assert teaching load “norms” that are much higher than the actual teaching loads of academic faculty and, in some cases, we have had to push back against attempts to increase teaching loads in departments.

These politically-motivated attacks on academic faculty are premised on the belief that university employees are lazy and shiftless, shirking work for a life of relaxation and leisure. Yet, as I talk to my colleagues working across the University in a variety of roles, I get a very different picture, one that paints University employees as stretched to their limits, exhausted and overwhelmed. To be sure, that picture does not serve the right’s political agenda, but seems to fit how people who study these things have described the modern labor market: “time polarized.” On the one hand, in lower-skilled occupations, many workers are underemployed, working fewer hours than they would like; on the other hand, many in professional fields are now putting in 50 hours a week, and more, into their work. In addition, work time has not only expanded, it has deepened. Work days are densely packed with tasks and duties leaving few with a moment

to catch their breath. In a factory setting we would call this “speed up;” here we just call it “doing more with less.”

At first glance, this particular threat seems less imminent and less dangerous than the frontal assault on organized labor being launched in the name of “right to work.” Under this banner, political and economic elites have devoted significant time, energy and, perhaps most critically, money to undermine unions by dismantling their financial base. The latest and most imminent of these threats is the *Janus v. AFSCME* case which the Supreme Court has agreed to hear and which, with a court now titled decidedly towards the right, could very well force unions to represent free riders who will not have to pay their fair share of union dues while still enjoying the benefits negotiated for all. Given what lies ahead, why should we devote any of our limited energy to anything except to mobilize against these threats?

Yet our capacity to resist and, should worse come to worst, weather these attacks depends entirely on organized labor’s power, the building of which needs to be at the top of every union’s agenda. Understood in this way, taking on the widening, and deepening, of work time needs to be similarly placed at the top of our agenda. To understand why, it is helpful to remind ourselves that struggle to hold back the advance of work time is as old as organized labor itself.

Fifty years ago this year the great historian E.P. Thompson described the efforts that went into yoking pre-industrial communities to the rhythms of industrial work time. This was the era of the Puritan work ethic, when one’s devotion to a “calling” in the workplace could mean the difference between eternal salvation or eternal damnation. This was the era when time itself become parcelled out as days in the week, hours in the day, to be regularly allocated between time owed to the factory manager and time kept for oneself.

It was organized labor that stepped between workers and industrial capitalism’s voracious appetite for time. Whereas the Puritanical moralizing around work time portrayed work as the key to spiritual growth and self-fulfillment, organized labor recognized that the time spent laboring in factory conditions was resulting in bodily, intellectual, and spiritual degradation. Industrialization’s hunger for labor was devouring family and community spaces and, as a result, weakening the collective power of the working class to resist exploitation and abuse. Time at work was time under the heel of management, but free time was time to socialize, to reflect, to learn and to organize. In addition, because the pressures of work time were felt fairly

uniformly by all workers, focusing on the question of time was a powerful tool for bridging the racial and ethnic divides that undermined class solidarity. Labor's struggle over time, in other words, was both an end in its own right and a means to greater union power.

Building strong workers movements and, with them, better workplaces and communities, takes time. Political action—whether that action is marching in the streets or writing letters—takes time. Keeping a large organization properly serving its members also takes time: meetings need to be scheduled and attended, resolutions need to be written and voted on, member questions small and large need to be addressed.

But even more than the day-to-day work of managing and administering the organization, building a strong union requires that individuals have time to make real, meaningful connections with their co-workers. Strong unions harness the ideals and interests of individuals into collective action, but collective action, especially those kinds of collective action that ask us to be visible and take risks, needs more than shared ideas and shared principles; it needs deeply felt bonds of solidarity and the life blood of those bonds is time—time to have conversations not just about workplace issues, but about life more broadly. Time not just to attend union events, but time to socialize and learn about each other outside of our job duties, time to go from being colleagues to being comrades.

So how can we push back against the widening and deepening of work time? The fact that we are a unionized workplace gives us some formal mechanisms for confronting the most blatant, egregious efforts to increase our workloads. This is an invaluable tool, but ultimately a limited one as it is reactive, defensive, and isolating. It begins with an individual taking a complaint forward to a Chapter officer, and those officers bringing it forward to management. To be sure, this can be an effective way of halting encroachments on our time and the service of intrepid, courageous colleagues to bettering all of our working conditions should not be undervalued, but these little dramas often unfold beneath the awareness of our larger campus community and so their effect in terms of reshaping the larger culture of work and time is marginal.

That being said, while this may be a limited tool, it is also an underutilized one. While the political right likes to paint university employees as shirkers and lazy do-nothings, in reality we are often all too willing to take on additional work without complaint, which makes sense given our prevailing workplace culture. We are a union of dedicated professionals who give willingly of our time and energy in service of the ideals that undergird public higher education. The fact that we have chosen

to dedicate our working time in the service of public, higher education makes it difficult to resist the call to be selfless and carve out time to do a little more work. After all, saying “no” often means saying no to a colleague or a student in need.

In order to have effective enforcement of the formal rules and regulations that we have in place to protect our time we all need to be stewards of decent workplace cultures. As colleagues, supervisors, members of university governance councils and active unionists, we need to be the voice that gives as much value to free time and leisure as we do to pitching in and being a team player. We need to encourage our coworkers to use their vacation time and support them when they find their workloads overwhelming.

We also need to advocate for policies and contract provisions that create new protections for our time. Currently, the clearest example of this is the struggle to get a comprehensive Family Leave policy into our next contract. Time to care for young children or older or sick relatives, should not be something that is bequeathed to us as some kind of a favor or gift from management, it should be given as a matter of course. As important as it is to secure that provision in our next contract, we will still need to do the work of making ours a workplace culture where individuals are encouraged, not scared, to use whatever benefits we may win through collective bargaining.

At the same time, we also need to recognize, as did our early industrial brothers and sisters, that while we experience pressures on our time within our own workplaces, the forces generating those pressures are broad and structural. 19th century labor movements fought for national legislation to restrict working hours because they understood that it was the relentless drive for productivity and profit, built into the nature and logic of industrial capitalism itself, that compelled management to demand ever more toil and sweat from their workers. Ours is certainly not an industrial workplace, and as a public institution it is not (or at least should not be) compelled by the same economic forces as private firms, but it is also true that increased demands on our time are manufactured out of a climate of fiscal austerity.

The Republican legislators and governors that put a target on university professors did so as part of a larger effort to reduce public support for higher education. While we have not seen similar moves in New York State, it is also true that in the last two budget cycles, state political leaders—including the governor—have refused to fully fund SUNY's rising costs. Combine that with the recent passage of the Excelsior scholarship, which is itself part of a larger

effort to boost enrollment in the SUNY system and one does not have to stretch one's imagination to see how reduced funding and more students can quickly lead to a variety of measures—some dramatic, some subtle—to increase the workload of academic and professional faculty.

We also need to recognize that while these funding decisions are driven by our own elected officials' political calculus, it is a calculus that is shaped in no small part by the realities of fiscal austerity at the federal level. This has been made abundantly clear over the past few months as right-wing attempts to dismantle the Affordable Care Act directly threaten our SUNY teaching hospitals and contribute to the underfunding of the entire SUNY system by punching massive holes in the state budget. The effect of this and other manifestations of fiscal austerity will have the same effect: expanding and deepening work time. State and federal political leaders who refuse to fund the university system will demand faculty to spend more time in the classroom and offices to meet the demands of a growing student body. If grant funding is down because national political leaders refuse to fund the research centers that are the lifeblood of creative and innovative research, then researchers will spend more time submitting more applications.

To win victories in the struggle over the encroachment of work time has always been and must continue to be a central focus of today's labor movement. Making a meaningful contribution to our workplaces is important but so too is protecting time and space for our friends, or families, our communities and ourselves. It is an essential layer of our larger vision for a decent society and necessary for building the strong labor movements that we need to make that vision a reality.

Feels like déjà vu

Tom Hoey, VP for Professionals

Four years ago, I found myself writing a newsletter article welcoming a new University President and a new UUP Albany Chapter President. Today I welcome our new University President Havidán Rodriquez and UUP Albany Chapter President Aaron Major. While much has changed in the past four years at our University with new buildings and programs, there are problems that still exist. Many of our members have come to our Grievance Chair Greta Petry and myself with stories of bullying in the workplace. A good example of bullying that was brought

to my attention recently occurred when a member asked their supervisor for a raise due to increased workload, which is allowed under our contract. The supervisor asked the employee when they would be retiring, a response which was both inappropriate and threatening. This is a major problem the union feels needs to be addressed. While there is no current law covering this hostile behavior your union leadership feels that this is both an ethical and moral issue that demands attention. Human Resources and UUP have put on joint workshops on workplace civility which briefly describes bullying behavior and we will ask the new University President to consider addressing this issue.

Unfortunately, there are other issues that we need to address as well such as workload creep and lack of performance programs and evaluations. The continued turnover in our departments as baby boomers retire leads to new supervisors who are not familiar with the protocols of working in a unionized work place, often bringing practices from private industry into a public workforce, which can lead to many problems.

You as a union member need to let your chapter leadership know when things just don't seem right. Working together we can solve these problems as they occur. Remember "We are the Union!"

The More Thing Change

Rebekah Tolley, Asst. VP for Academics

My very first teaching position out of grad school was back in 2003 at UNC-Chapel Hill, a large public University not unlike the University at Albany. That job paid \$5,000 a course for four courses over a year, which went up to \$8,000 a course in the following years. This pay rate was more than double the current (newly improved) UAlbany rate of \$3,800 per course that I am now earning over a decade later. I taught for another seven years full-time at other institutions before moving to Albany and will be honest and say I had very little appreciation for the real plight of adjunct lecturers before becoming one. The studio I teach in was once run by a tenure track professor who was never replaced, and even though we may not like to admit it, this is what has happened to most of our decent jobs while we weren't looking.

In 2015 the University created a "blue ribbon" panel which issued a report specifying clear, meaningful steps that could be taken to improve the working conditions

of contingent faculty. UUP was involved in that process from the very beginning, identifying members to serve on the panel, while also sharing data and analysis and proposals. While some important progress towards meeting these goals was initially made, over the past year that progress has completely stalled with the shift in administration. While the report called for a \$5,000 per course minimum in two years, two years later we are still well short of that goal with no sense of when the next pay increase will happen. And it's worth noting that while the goal of 5K is welcome, the Modern Language Association believes that anything less than \$7500 per course is not a living wage.

In addition there are persistent reminders that this is precarious work. One of the other recommendations of the blue ribbon panel was that departments should try, whenever possible, to assign adjuncts two courses per semester to ensure that they remained eligible for health insurance, retirement, childcare allowances and other crucial benefits. And yet, two years later, I frequently hear from fellow adjuncts who have had their usual course loads cut. In some cases, the class is just no longer offered, in other cases courses are given to new and different people. In one particularly jarring case, a colleague wrote to inform me that, this fall, after over a decade of service to the University, she was dropped to one course without anyone from her department letting her know. How did the member find out? From the bookstore when trying to place textbook orders.

With new campus leadership in place, we hope that we will soon see new progress being made towards reaching the goals laid out by the blue ribbon panel report. That hope should not, however, let us wash our hands of the responsibility that we all have to do what we can, when we can to act with an eye towards the fair, equitable and respectful treatment of our adjunct colleagues. As faculty we have little say over how budgets are allocated, but we do have a lot of say over what kinds of courses we are going to offer and how we will go about staffing those courses. Indeed, it is full time faculty that typically control the hiring and firing of contingent faculty.

Until we have policies in place that give real employment security to contingent faculty, we have a responsibility to be mindful of the fact that for many contingent faculty, one fewer course could mean the difference between being able to make ends meet or, even more critically, having access to quality health insurance, retirement benefits, and professional development funds to support our creative and intellectual endeavors.

As I have thought about this problem, and the people who, like me, have fallen victim to the whims of precarious employment, I have come to realize that in many cases these unfortunate outcomes are not the result of malice, but of busy lives combined with ignorance. While I can't make our lives less busy, I can offer some suggestions for simple ways that tenure-track faculty can do to support their contingent part-time colleagues.

- If you need to fill a course, reach out to your current adjunct instructors before recruiting new ones, as per the fourth recommendation of the blue ribbon panel report on part-time and contingent faculty.
- Distribute courses so that those who are teaching less than two courses per semester get priority. Remember, this is the critical threshold for ensuring access to the quality benefits that we have negotiated for.
- Assign courses by seniority. Even if we don't have contractual protections around job security, acting according to the principle of seniority can be an effective substitute.
- Vote in the upcoming senate bylaws amendment that aims to allow part-time faculty to vote for their own part-time representative in senate.

UUP Members receive Statewide Awards:

Two Albany UUP Members received awards at the Fall Delegate Assembly held in Buffalo NY in October. Jessica Manry, a graduate student in the English Department, Contingent Faculty Member in English and organizer for the Graduate Student Union was the recipient of the William E. Scheuerman Post Baccalaureate Scholarship. This award recognizes students who demonstrate "a dedication to the goals of the trade/labor-union movements; integrity; a tireless quest for excellence in both academic and personal endeavours; and service to the community."

Rebekah Tolley, Assistant Vice-President for Academics and a Contingent Faculty Member in Studio Art was the recipient of the 2017 Fayez Samuel Award for Courageous Service by Part-Time Academic and Professional Faculty. This award recognizes members of UUP who have served their union with courage and distinction at either the chapter or state-wide level.

Please join us in congratulating these two deserving award-winners!

Strengthening Research

Paul Stasi, Academic VP

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee presented its three imperatives at the University Senate Meeting in April of 2017: Foster our Culture of Excellence, Innovate our Programs and Strengthen our Research. A dominant theme of the discussion that followed was the significance of SUNY Albany’s status as a public research university and the need to support faculty in their research endeavors. The point was made many times that we can only improve our standing if we take a cold hard look at where we are. A few points, towards this end, seem worth addressing as the University pursues these imperatives, in particular in relation to the ways we might strengthen our research mission.



1) Research at the University takes many forms. Over the last few years, the University has made its desire for external funding abundantly clear. What this relentless focus on external dollars risks doing, however, is undervaluing forms of research that neither generate nor require these funds. Indeed, academics in a wide range of departments—from English to Computer Science, from Social Welfare to Public Policy—have conducted ground-breaking research without any external funding. A public research university, by definition, must recognize, value, and support research in all of its forms consistent with the disciplinary standards of each department. And, as the graph on this page indicates, faculty have by and large responded to the demand to submit applications for external funding. The precipitous drop in grants awarded stems not from faculty inactivity but from the paucity of funds itself.

2) At the same time, we must recognize that productivity takes many forms. We all agree that faculty should continue to be productive throughout the entirety of their academic careers. But productivity is not so easily quantified as an assessment driven culture seems to suggest. There are times in an academic’s career where teaching might demand more effort. Or perhaps

one enters the stage of academic lifewhere the service burden is increased. At the same time, research does not always proceed linearly. Avenues are pursued that might not yield results and a truly productive faculty is able to pursue leads wherever they might lead, without the fear of someone demanding an article or a grant or a book in a fixed amount of time. Indeed this is one plausible definition of the much-prized notion of academic freedom.

3) Increased teaching loads is the easiest way to destroy the University’s academic excellence. Periodically the idea is floated that faculty deemed “non-productive,” will simply have their teaching loads increased. We have seen signs of this in several departments and schools on campus in recent months. We recognize that the distribution of our professional obligation is traditionally a management prerogative. But in the versions of this idea that we have seen there has been no explicit reduction of the research or service burden when teaching loads increase. Instead, teaching is used, as it was recently in an attempt to raise faculty teaching loads at CEAS, as a punishment for conducting research that does not bring in extramural funding, whatever other intellectual merits it may have. Faculty are effectively being punished for carrying out the research they have always done. The ideology at work here is transparent and shows, all lip-service to the contrary, which part of our professional obligation actually matters, and, more damningly, which types of research are valued and which are utterly dismissed. The premise is both anti-intellectual, in that it acknowledges only money and not the creation of new knowledge as productivity, and anti-academic, in that it treats teaching as punishment. Moreover, its proposed solution to a perceived problem is deeply counter-productive by nature. First, and most

Report of Research Foundation Applications and Awards

	Submitted	Funded
FY '10 - '11	491	405
11 - '12	495	335
12 - '13	469	339
13 - '14	468	305
14 - '15	568	285
15 - '16	573	275
Overall Change	 17%	 -32%

obviously, increasing a faculty member's teaching is no way to help her produce research. Second, every department's tenure and promotion procedures rest on the production of research. More to the point, so do the national norms of our disciplines. To lessen a faculty member's research expectations is, effectively, to deny them the ability to do the only work on which they can be promoted, whether here or at another university. And if we hope to increase our research profile, this type of punitive teaching assignment is precisely the wrong way to go about it, for its only obvious result will be to lessen the amount of research produced at the University.

4) Increasing teaching loads is the best way to destroy faculty morale. If the University truly believes everything it says about valuing faculty and the people who work here, it will stay away from policies that are, by their very nature, divisive and punitive. Faculty should be treated as what they are: experts in their disciplines. Any attempt to increase academic "excellence" should start by asking the very people who are the judges of academic excellence in their own work—in the peer-review process, through the evaluation of tenure files for this and other Universities and for the graduate students they teach—what resources they need for their departments to become nationally competitive programs. Punitive policies treat faculty as children to be disciplined. And they will create a two-tiered structure within departments that will only lead to more divisions and tensions within an already demoralized professoriate.

5) We must, instead, find ways to support productivity rather than punish its perceived lack. In some ways, this is easy. There are many bread-and-butter issues that would create a stronger research environment at the university, including greater funds for conferences and research travel and more frequent opportunities for leaves and sabbaticals. At the same time, the University needs to hire more tenure-line faculty to strengthen departments, improve graduate programs and, in doing so, create a lively and research environment that is campus-wide. Hiring more tenure-line faculty will also relieve the service burden of the Associate Professors, which will, in turn, allow them greater time for research. And graduate programs need to be supported not just by tenure-line faculty but also by increased assistantships for our graduate students so they might be able to produce top quality scholarship as well. Productivity, in other words, is not the failing of a set of individuals—I, personally, have met very few tenured academics who are not driven, in some basic way, to conduct research—but rather something that is structural, supported or disabled by the larger institutional environment in which research is conducted.

UAlbany is at a crucial moment in our history, one where we can choose to strengthen the University's core mission while expanding its offerings. But this requires treating faculty with the respect they deserve and providing them with the resources they need to do their jobs. Anything less is an abandonment of the mission we all profess to support.

Growing Student Debt Signals Dramatic Change in Public Higher Education

Jackie Hayes

I am a doctoral student at the University at Albany and have \$72,000 of student debt, \$6,800 of which is interest, all from attending public Universities in New York State. What does this mean for my day-to-day life? It means that at least once a month I experience anxiety about my ability to lead a relatively debt-free life in the future. Earlier hopes of having a house, a family, or living abroad are quickly checked by the reality that I may never be able to afford any of them. Similarly, when I think about the work I want to devote my life to, this calculus profoundly limits hopes and ambitions. Student loan debt has altered the way I think about myself and my place in the world. Unfortunately, my situation is not unique, many other graduate and undergraduate students at UAlbany share this experience. Total national student debt hit \$1.2 trillion last year, surpassing credit card debt. Today, U.S. undergraduates leave school with an average of \$28,400 of debt and graduate students leave with an average of \$57,600, signaling a dramatic shift in Higher Education.

Statewide and National Trends in Student Debt

When I talk with others about student debt, the conversation tends to revolve around themes like individual fiscal responsibility or, in the case of older SUNY administrators, personal stories about struggling to pay for education before they "made it." They usually punctuate these stories with questions like: "If I was able to work my way through college, why can't you?" The short answer is that education costs, financial aid, and the very nature of public education have changed significantly in the last few decades. Whereas our parents had a welfare state, we have neoliberalism and the gospel of austerity. (By 'welfare state' I don't mean the pejorative term frequently used by conservatives to demonize social programs; I mean a state that invests in the general well-being of its citizenry.)

The roots of this transformation in public higher education extend far back into US history. In New York, it started in the late 1970s when tuition was first instituted at the City University of New York (CUNY). Prior to this, CUNY had been free for most students, and tuition at public colleges was widely viewed as a supplement to strong public support of higher education.

Yet, only six years after CUNY had adopted an open admissions policy, it began charging all students tuition. The initial cost was modest and was partially matched with state financial aid, like the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). But it initiated an ideological shift from public higher education being viewed and managed as a public good, to it being treated increasingly as a private commodity. Students broke down one barrier (access) while another was being erected (tuition).

Since tuition was instituted, it has increased dramatically alongside other education costs like books, fees, and campus housing. In 2011, The New Yorker reported that since the late 1970s college costs have increased at three times the rate of inflation; simultaneously, states have dramatically slashed financial support leading to a decrease in full-time faculty and an increased reliance on adjuncts. The personal finances of students and their families are replacing the financial support formerly supplied by the state. In other words, students are not paying more for a better education; they are paying more for a lower quality education.

More recently, disinvestment in public education has intensified. Following the bank bailout in 2008, which drained public coffers to the tune of \$700 billion, states across the US experienced profound budget shortfalls. At least 34 states cut funds to public colleges and universities, resulting in reductions in faculty and staff, and increases in tuition.

New York did not evade the maelstrom. In 2010, New York cut \$1.4 billion in total aid to public schools across the state. SUNY's budget was cut by \$210 million—this large reduction in funding, coupled with previous cuts, meant that SUNY's total operating budget had been reduced by over 30% in only three years. At Albany, funding cuts resulted in the deactivation of five academic programs: Italian, Russian, French, Theater and the Classics, as well as the elimination of staff positions campus wide. While technocrats may see such cuts through the lens of efficiency, these cuts actually represent a shift in what an education means: whereas at one time speaking another language or knowing cultural history was viewed as the mark of an educated person, today anything that cannot be quantified is carelessly thrown aside.

To fill the giant hole left by massive cuts in state support, SUNY and CUNY administrators have lobbied for tuition increases. In the summer of 2011, their efforts were successful and New York passed a bill entitled NYSUNY 2020, which included provisions to increase tuition by 30% every year for the following five years (the rate is double for international and out-of-state students). Last year, at SUNY's request, the Legislature approved further tuition increases. Rather than seek out creative solutions, SUNY officials and the Legislature have simply pushed the burden down to students and their families, relying on the fact that today a degree is perceived as a requirement for most career paths. We only have to look at the last few decades to accurately predict how financially stressed students and their families will get by. They will take out more student loans. The contradiction couldn't be more glaring. The same exact banks that created the conditions for a crisis in public education funding will reap the benefits of the crisis.

Aside from my own anxiety about my financial future, a more profound fear is how these alarming trends are altering the social function of education in general. When I signed up for a career as an educator it was, in part, because I saw the potential for higher education to transform the trajectory of students' lives in meaningful and positive ways. My deepest fear is that higher education's transformative potential will soon be eclipsed by its function as a debt trap. These alarming trends also make clear that it is more important than ever to have vibrant, robust unions on our campuses that focus on material gains, as well as on the content and meaning of those gains. The current moment requires a creative vision for the future of higher education that, first and foremost, views it as a public good.

Let us know what you think.

Send your comments to:

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Online Education: A Solution Without a Problem

Paul Stasi, VP for Academics

In recent issues we have addressed online education in various contexts. In December of 2013 we addressed the high costs and labor associated with MOOCs (“Making a MOOC”) as well as the repudiation of MOOCs by Udacity founder Sebastian Thrun. At the same time we reported on the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE), which has produced a series of working papers that examine the profit motives behind the push for online education and rigorously refute the claims for accessibility often raised by defenders of online education. As the Executive Summary of CFHE’s October 2013 report on accessibility argues: “Realities of the digital divide (inequities between those who have regular, reliable access to the internet and digital technologies and those who do not) make basic access to online courses much more problematic for some groups. In fact, substantial evidence shows that the digital divide remains a reality for the very students that online promoters claim they want to reach— low-income students, students of color, and academically underprepared students” (for the full report see: <http://futureofhighered.org/workingpapers/>).

Similarly, we noted in our October 2014 issue, the remarks of University of California President Janet Napolitano, who questioned the premise that online education would work for students needing remedial work in general education classes. “I think that’s false,” Napolitano stated, “those students need the teacher in the classroom working with them.” Napolitano, here, echoes the findings of CFHE cited above. Her full remarks can be seen here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZPfSS8wVwg>

These comments are particularly relevant for the University of Albany as it moves forward into the brave new world of OPEN SUNY. To be sure, the University says it is only looking for “willing faculty” to participate in online education. At the same time, since every strategic plan each department is required to submit asks, simply, what are you doing for online education (rather than, say, “as a department of experts in teaching, do you think online education has a place in your discipline?”) it is hard not to feel pressured to produce online courses, regardless of their pedagogical soundness.

As with so many issues confronting us on campus, the issue comes down to shared governance. Curricular

decisions should be driven by those who deliver the curriculum and should be based on sound intellectual and pedagogical principles rather than either the fetish of a new technology or the pressure of contracts with corporations invested in producing online platforms. Indeed a large number of our students are precisely those CFHE and Napolitano describe. They come to us ill-prepared by their previous educational and social backgrounds for the rigors of a college education. For many of these students, college is a place to enter into a different environment, one that allows them to connect not only with faculty and staff but with other students as well. And it often not an easy transition. These connections, then, are among the most crucial ways that our students are able to overcome their disadvantages. Online education, then, has a place, but it is likely to be a very limited one that will largely serve self-motivated, high-performing students. When over-used at a public university such as ours it threatens to become simply another barrier between working class students and the world-class education they deserve.

A 1% Raise, and a Precarious Future Bret Benjamin

Soon, it seems, you’ll be able to give yourself a 1% raise. Not bad, huh? By opting out of your union membership, you will be able to put the 1% of your salary that you now pay as dues or fees to UUP back into your pocket. There’s just one catch. **This is fool’s gold.** In exchange for modest, short-term, individual gain, you will be eroding the ability of your union to effectively bargain on behalf of everyone in the unit. In exchange for a 1% raise you will be helping to usher in a sustained if not permanent period of wage decline, job insecurity, benefit reductions, and unchecked managerial discretion. To opt out of UUP and take your 1% raise is to hurt yourself, your co-workers, and the future employees of SUNY. As the old labor hymn goes, I’ll be sticking with the union. I hope you will too.

Let me back up a bit. In September, the Supreme Court announced that it would hear the case *Janus vs. AFSC-ME*, the latest and most serious legal threat to public sector unions, including UUP. At stake here is the issue of whether public sector unions will be able to continue to automatically deduct fees from non-union-member employees for whom the union must nevertheless act as the collective bargaining agent. If, as is expected, the plaintiff Mark Janus wins, only those members who affirmatively sign a union card—those who “opt in”—will pay dues. The rest will continue to benefit from the contractually negotiated benefits and union representation but will pay nothing to the union in return. They will become what are

known as “free riders.” The case is being argued on freedom of speech grounds. However, as Paul Stasi has decisively explained in his December 2016 *Forum* article on *Friedrichs* (the predecessor to *Janus*), this argument amounts to nothing but a thinly veiled right wing attack on unions and working people. For more than 40 years there has been a system in place that allows members to opt out of the political activities that unions undertake if they disagree with those positions. In this case, libertarian contortions of the principle of free speech are being used to defund and weaken public sector unions.

Why? There are two reasons. First, unions are among the only institutions that have been effective in securing wage gains for workers, their own members as well as non-unionized workers in similar industries and regions. Second, unions have been among the most dependable political agents, fighting not only for political candidates or legislation, but also for the ongoing provision of public sector services and for programs that benefit working class citizens as a whole. The *Janus* case, by contrast, is being bankrolled by the same deep pocketed libertarian groups who were behind *Friedrichs*: The National Right To Work Foundation and the Liberty Justice Center. With the unexpected death of Justice Antonin Scalia last year, the labor movement dodged one bullet. With the election of Donald Trump and the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch, however, we find ourselves again in front of the firing line, with little hope of another last-minute reprieve. Most commentators seem to agree that it is all but certain the conservative majority on the court will rule in favor of *Janus* and against the unions.

So what does this mean for UUP? Once *Janus* goes through, we will immediately begin losing revenue from our current group of fee-payers. These are largely contingent faculty, which gives us even greater incentive to sign those employees up as members. But we also face the loss of current members, those employees who can't resist the lure of a 1% raise, dangled before their eyes. As membership declines, not only will UUP lose financial resources, it will also experience a decline in its bargaining power, which comes from the fact that our union represents nearly 40,000 SUNY employees.

I know that times have been tough, and that we all can use some extra cash. But know that if you take that 1%, it will come with a whole lot of pain for a very long time. Among other things, you can expect that your 1% bump will buy you the following:

- A diminished capacity for the union to bargain salary increases. 1% now, will mean increasingly smaller returns in the future.
- Smaller portions of the unit getting salary increases. Unions have historically fought to ensure more

equitable distribution of resources. This includes union's successful efforts to reduce disparities for women, people of color, and employees such as contingent faculty whose labor is particularly exploited.

- Skyrocketing health costs, with reduced quality of coverage. We all know that health care costs have risen sharply in recent years, but the presence of unions has been among the only forces keeping these costs even somewhat in check. Moreover, ensuring health care of the highest quality has been a major priority for unions, UUP included. Expect the floodgates to open if unions are considerably weakened.
- Increasing job insecurity. Weaker unions will lead to fewer tenure protections, shorter contracts, reduced notification requirements for non-renewals, and less worker control over schedules.
- Weakened unions mean greater managerial discretion. Workplaces are among the least democratic institutions as it is. Workers will find themselves less able to participate in the decisions that most affect their lives, and about which they often have the greatest expertise.
- Constrictions in due process and in the ability of workers to get a fair hearing in disciplinary cases and grievance proceedings.
- Reduced State support for SUNY. UUP has been, bar none, the single strongest advocate for the SUNY System. UUP has fought for affordable, accessible public higher education at its four-year campuses, medical centers, and teaching hospitals. Without UUP's advocacy, State subsidies for SUNY would surely have fallen far more precipitously than they have.
- Greater levels of social income inequality and even more restricted capacity for working people to participate in political life. The labor movement remains among the very few institutions capable of redressing these issues nationally and internationally.

This 1% bump, then, will turn out be the costliest “raise” you'll ever get. If you think that you will somehow be better off going it on your own, I'm afraid the historical evidence points strongly in the opposite direction. And not only does your decision to opt out affect your own financial, health, and job security, it undermines all of our coworkers as well. Even more, it erodes the future of SUNY and its employees, and by extension the very future of public higher education in the State.

Most of the people reading this already understand the logic of this accounting. But the future of our union—and much more—is at stake. It's time that we started talking plainly about the benefits of union membership with co-workers, family, friends, students, and anyone else who will listen. Let everyone know that you'll be sticking with the union too.

Enjoy Your Weekend!

Paul Stasi, VP for Academics

We live in difficult times for the labor movement. Union membership is at an all-time low. According to the United States Department of Labor, overall union membership for 2016 was 10.7%, the lowest level since this type of data has been collected. Public sector workers have a much higher union membership – 34.4%—as compared to private sector employees who are unionized at a mere 6.4%. No doubt this is why the upcoming Supreme Court case—*Janus v. American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees*, essentially a replay of last year’s *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*—has been such a priority for those wishing to destroy the labor movement. Both cases take up the issue of agency fee payers—those members who benefit from the union’s collective bargaining strength but wish to be absolved from paying for these benefits—and perversely it is likely that the same right wing that continually decries the supposed laziness of those who depend on public assistance will decide in favor of fee payer’s ability to opt out of union dues. Much depends, of course, on the specifics of the decision—and the likelihood that the New York State legislature would seek to modify the worst effects of any federal decision—but the case clearly represents a concerted attack on the very premise of public sector unions: namely our collective bargaining rights represented by strength in numbers.

Perhaps we will have to undergo the kind of onerous re-certification process recently set up in Idaho, a process laced with a series of provisions designed to make re-certification difficult. Nevertheless members of thirteen teacher bargaining units recently voted overwhelmingly to maintain their units, demonstrating how attacks on unions often end up strengthening our resolve.

Of course, Idaho is one of twenty-eight right-to-work states which already have in place the kind of provisions businesses seek to establish nation-wide through supporting lawsuits such as *Janus* or *Friedrichs*. Even worse, Idaho, like many states, has passed legislation in support of non-compete agreements, which force employees who wish to leave their employers to prove that they would not harm their former employers by taking the new jobs. These agreements—originally designed to protect confidential information, such as Coke’s “secret formula” that might hurt a company’s competitive advantage in the marketplace—have now spread to many low-wage jobs. According to the New York Times “one in five American workers is bound by a noncompete clause.” The result of trying to move jobs is an often crippling, and lengthy, legal battle. Once again we find the irony of

champions of the free-market promoting restrictions on one of its commodities: labor power.

But in case you think we are safe, here, in New York State consider the situation of the 115 workers at DNAinfo and Gothamist, two of New York City’s leading digital purveyors of local news. A mere week after deciding to unionize, these workers found themselves out of a job, as the billionaire Joe Ricketts, founder of TD Ameritrade and owner of the Chicago Cubs, closed both websites. A DNAinfo spokesperson even explicitly named unionization as part of the decision to close the sites: “The decision by the editorial team to unionize is simply another competitive obstacle making it harder for the business to be financially successful.” Now it is true that DNAinfo was never profitable, but Ricketts was happy to run it at a loss for eight years, and the Gothamist was, by most accounts, generating a profit. And both sites were widely considered among the most important sources for local news in New York City. But Ricketts couldn’t handle what Hamilton Nolan, writing in the *Times* about the situation, described as “every plutocrat’s worst nightmare: a few dozen modestly paid employees who collectively bargain for better working conditions.”

There is however a ray of hope in all the gloom and doom. As part of their “Better Deal” initiative, the Democratic Party has argued for a series of pro-union reforms, including a ban at the federal level on Right to Work laws, a ban on the permanent replacement of striking workers and a limit on employer’s ability to campaign against union drives. This last is particularly timely given the role of aggressive anti-union campaigns in the recent defeat of UAW attempts to unionize auto-workers in the South. All of these reforms are welcome, though the right-wing control of federal government and the Supreme Court ensures that they will remain platforms rather than laws.

In such times we need, more than other, to stand tall as unionists, reminding everyone around us—our friends, neighbors and, yes, even co-workers—of the benefits we owe to collective bargaining. And if you’re unsure how to begin the conversation, you can always start with that old chestnut: Unions, the people who brought you the weekend.

Further reading on noncompete clauses can be found here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/14/business/economy/boise-idaho-noncompete-law.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/13/business/non-compete-clauses.html>

<https://www.alternet.org/labor/indentured-servitude-returns-america>

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