

Akron-AAUP: A Student Q & A

FACULTY CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

UA Students: Contract negotiations between the UA faculty and the Administration are not going as well as we had hoped. The current contract expires on December 15th. If we are unable to come to some agreement on these issues before this date, there is a chance that this negotiation could go badly, with dire consequences for students and faculty. Below are answers to some questions you might have.

Question: How long have faculty been negotiating?

Answer: We started this past July. Given that this is our second contract negotiation, it should have gone smoothly. Usually, in a second contract, both sides are just interested in fine-tuning the first one. Not so this time. The Administration is proposing language that would, in our estimation, roll back many of the professional rights of the faculty, like academic freedom, tenure, and much more.

Question: Isn't arguing over money what has held things up?

Answer: NO. In fact, up until now, the two sides have not focused on salary or benefits. The problems so far have been over NON-ECONOMIC issues. These are issues that relate to faculty control over the academic matters that most affect their work and the quality of your education. These include:

- the process for evaluating colleagues,
- academic freedom
- tenure rights
- faculty involvement in shared decision-making
- checks and balances protecting faculty against arbitrary firing in a future financial crisis
- faculty ownership of course materials

Question: What is so important about academic freedom, tenure, and shared decision-making? Why don't faculty just do their jobs?

Answer: Exercising these three concepts IS our job. Like all important fundamental principles, these are the basic rights and responsibilities faculty have to guarantee the very idea of a university, just as the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights provides the basis for the idea of a free society. Far from separate issues, the three ideas are inextricably tied together - losing one means losing the other two. Ask yourself, which one or two of your constitutional rights are you willing to give up? If you give up one, what happens to the others? By giving up tenure, academic freedom is moot. Constricting academic freedom, erodes tenure. Without shared governance, the tenure process (and it is a process) is diluted and weakened. Faculty believe in ideals and we think students (and administrators) should also.

Question: What do faculty want in this contract?

Answer: Faculty want a contract like the first one, and like every other faculty contract in Ohio.

Faculty want to continue to have academic freedom in their teaching and research, they want appropriate involvement in campus governance, they want their hard-earned tenure to be honored, and they want checks and balances so that the university cannot fire them at will for invalid reasons. These are features in the current contract; we'd like to keep them. This will make UA an attractive place to work for the best available faculty. And this will be good for your education.

Question: Won't a faculty raise make my tuition go up?

Answer: NO. Tuition and faculty salaries are almost mutually exclusive. The Administration has already authorized a tuition increase to the maximum allowed this coming Spring semester, as they have every single semester that such increases have been allowed by the state of Ohio. It has also proposed a 0% salary increase and increases in healthcare costs for all campus employees, faculty and staff alike. Plus, because of enrollment increases, the University has made money each of the last seven years. Where is that money going?

Question: Aren't faculty raises a big chunk of the University's expenses?

Answer: NO. If the 700 full-time UA faculty had received a 3% raise this year (not unlike what other university faculties have received), it would have cost the University about \$1.5 million dollars out of a 400 million dollar budget. By comparison, the University will spend millions of dollars just to operate the new Student Recreation Center, and another several million dollars to pay the debt on the new football stadium, Isn't a good faculty worth 1/3rd of the upkeep on the Recreation Center or debt on the stadium?

Question: What will happen to my classes if faculty go on strike?

Answer: If faculty are forced to go on strike after the contract expires in December 2009, they will let students know how to proceed prior to walking off the job. This will be different from class to class. Some classes will no doubt be staffed by substitutes, but the majority of classes, especially upper level and graduate classes, will be in a holding pattern until the dispute is resolved. It is our hope that students can understand that such an action would be as much for their benefit as it would be for faculty themselves, and to keep in mind that **faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.**

For answers to any question you may have, just talk to your instructors.

Your interests are their interests and they know how to get in touch with the Akron-AAUP on the web at <http://www.akronaaup.org/contact/contact.html>