

WMU-AAUP Bulletin

Western Michigan University
Chapter of American
Association of University Professors

The WMU-AAUP and AFT Michigan Alliance

In our Association Council meeting last March, we began discussing the consequences for us, the WMU-AAUP, of AFTMichigan's organizing activities on the WMU campus.

During Summer 2009, with the support of the Executive Committee, we sent out mailings and an FAQ about a potential new formal alliance with the AFT Michigan. There are two aspects to the reasons for the alliance: The economics of the state of Michigan, and the realities of having three different unionized faculty groups on our campus.

First, the economics: All universities, particularly public state universities, are undergoing major changes. In Michigan, we are rapidly losing state support. Where state funds once provided seventy-five percent (75%) of our operating budget, WMU is now at about twenty-six percent (26%).

Universities and colleges are required to operate as businesses, with major emphasis on cutting corners rather than making the education of our youth their main focus. Because our economic environment has dramatically worsened, we expect to face very serious challenges in areas like numbers of full time faculty, workloads, salaries, health care, and shared governance.

We must find ways to strengthen our position, and to carry the message to Lansing and the state that a greater emphasis on education is the key, for the long term, to solving our state's economic crisis.

Second, three faculty unions: AFT Michigan has recently organized our teaching assistants (TAU) and the part-time WMU faculty (PIO). These groups represent about half the teaching faculty and half the credit hour production at WMU. We need a formal relationship in order to maintain policy coherence over a period of years. And a close working relationship with AFT Michigan would significantly strengthen our hand both before and during negotiations.

The AFT and the AAUP are already working closely on joint organizing in Oregon, Washington, New Mexico and Illinois. A high percentage of AAUP union

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members are jointly affiliated with the AFT (for example at Wayne State and the CUNY system in New York). AFT Michigan has significant political, and economic influence and power, state wide, that could strengthen us both before, during, and after negotiations. Similarly, the WMU-AAUP can provide support and solidarity to their newly organized affiliates, particularly on our own campus, but across the state as well.

The WMU-AAUP leadership believes that close cooperation between our local and state level faculty unions strengthens us all, and deters attempts to use any of our unions against one another. We believe in combining the best traditions of the AAUP with the strengths and vitality of the AFT on a local, state, and even national level. In other words, high levels of cooperation between the WMU-AAUP and AFT Michigan are essential for our continued well-being at WMU.

This is why we have proposed an alliance between AFT Michigan and the WMU-AAUP, which, if ratified, would mean having joint membership, both in the national AAUP and the AFT, two years from now.

In the September Association Council meeting, and in the October Chapter Meeting, during which David Hecker, President of AFT Michigan, visited us, we discussed establishing an alliance with AFT Michigan. This alliance will give us the opportunity to test the advantages of joint membership and close cooperation between us. We plan to affirm this alliance with a vote of the Association Council, likely in January or February. We would like this proposal will be discussed in every department and we are ready to join in departmental discussions should our participation be desired. Please contact our office, 345-0151, to arrange for one of us to join you.

Where we are heading: If this relationship develops positively, as we fully believe it will, we will introduce a proposal for our joint affiliation in the AAUP and AFT. That decision will need both the concurrence of the Association Council and a vote by our WMU-AAUP faculty. We are convinced this move will strengthen our local union and all faculty unions within Michigan.