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Advocate

At Western Michigan University

January 2000

Editorial Board

Ariel L.H. Anderson
Gary Mathews
Elaine L. Phillips
Robert J. Ricci

Welcome to Western in the Year 2000!

Ariel L.H. Anderson, WMU-AAUP President

*Ariel L.H. Anderson
AAUP President*

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Welcome to Western in the 21st century! With the new year come a number of changes. First, our **AAUP email address** has changed to wmuaaup@aol.com. With this change we are hoping to alleviate concerns regarding confidentiality of email communications sent to us at the AAUP office. You may, of course, continue to direct your email communications to individual members of the AAUP leadership, either by flagging your message sent to the central (AOL) email address, or by using our individual email addresses, published in the faculty/staff directory. You should be aware, however, that we do not have control over the monitoring of email messages received at a Western email address site. I do not mean to imply that our messages at the AAUP are being monitored by Western. We are simply doing what we can to provide as much security and confidentiality to our membership as we possibly can. As always, we invite your communications, via email, FAX, phone, or any other medium you choose. Let us know of your concerns, and we will do everything we can to address them in a timely and sensitive manner.

As you are aware, Provost Light will be returning to the faculty. On-site interviews for provost candidates are tentatively scheduled for early to mid-February. I believe you have all been made aware of the dates, and I encourage you to participate by attending the public sessions for each candidate. The AAUP leadership will join with the leadership of the Faculty Senate to meet with each candidate who appears on campus. Feedback forms will be made available at these and all other sessions, and

I encourage you to take an active role in the search process. These are very exciting times for Western, and it is critical that we have a good “match” for Western in terms of the new Provost. Your input is valued, and I hope you will choose to participate.

The AAUP leadership remains committed to **addressing faculty concerns** in as constructive a manner as possible. We do have some grievance activity at this time, but I am pleased to report that we are daily ironing out problems *before* things escalate to the point of filing a formal grievance. I remain convinced that a great many issues that come to us at the AAUP are the result of either poor communication or a lack of awareness regarding the provisions of the new collective bargaining agreement. Please remember to make good use of your contract – read it, and if you need assistance in determining the parameters of the *Agreement*, contact your department representative, a “union-savvy” colleague, or one of us in the AAUP leadership for assistance. We will do everything we possibly can to enhance the quality of your work life at Western.

I am, once again, feeling that fresh excitement that comes with the beginning of each semester – meeting new students, and facing new challenges and opportunities that accompany life in the academy. I wish you all a wonderful semester, and I encourage you to mark your calendars for a **social AAUP reception we have scheduled for Thursday, March 23rd, from 4-6 p.m. at the Oaklands**. Hope to see you there! #

Some Reflections on 31 Years at WMU

*Robert J. Ricci
WMU-AAUP Vice President*

First, and perhaps foremost, the cliché “Where has the time gone?” is relevant when one starts to look back on decades gone by. As a still active faculty member, it seems almost impossible that so much change has occurred right under one’s nose, and then to attempt to reflect on those changes, challenges both memory and perceptions. Hence, with regard to anything I write here I would ask that the reader keep in mind that these are personal reflections, and I’m sure that many colleagues would not agree with either all or parts of them.

When I first came to Western in the fall of 1968 I was fresh out of graduate school with a D.M.A. in music composition and theory. Western at that time, at least in the music department, (it was a department back then, not a “school”) was staffed by many faculty who had acquired master’s degrees, or lacking that, some kind of secondary school certification. There were a few with doctoral degrees, and, of course, this was to change dramatically in the following years, when the doctorate

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became virtually mandatory for all faculty. This is not to imply that faculty without doctorates were not able teachers, for many were exceptionally good at what they did, both in and out of the classroom. But to be at Western, as time went by, meant that the terminal degree requirements had been elevated as the university became more high-powered. And this brings me to one of my central points: as time has passed, Western has embarked on a journey to change its perception from that of a teachers’ college to more of a full-fledged university. This process continues to this very day, and every faculty member can speak, I’m sure, to increased demands on teaching and professional lives. By now, it seems to me that most of us have accepted the journey we are on to Research II status, and that movement is part of the change I’m addressing here. At the same time, I’d like to point out that Western has had a strong and growing reputation as a university heavily committed to undergraduate education. I think what most parents wish for their children as they enter the university is that they are being taught by professors for the most part, and that there is a commitment to undergraduate programs, regardless of the research status. I believe that too often Western has been a follower institution in some regards, adopting standards set forth by other institutions instead of trying to develop its own agendas and strengths as a unique university. When other universities installed astro turf in their football facilities in the 1970’s Western did the same, only, years later, to remove it and put back the grass field that had been in Waldo Stadium, losing millions of dollars in the process. When other universities started utilizing more graduate assistants and part-time faculty as a basic part of the instructional program, Western followed, I think with the result that the undergraduate programs were adversely affected. When student/faculty ratios were elevated because fewer full-time faculty were being hired (a common trend elsewhere in the

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country), Western followed suit. One could make the point that the best way to strengthen and enhance this university would be to *not* follow trends such as these, but rather to develop an identity different from most other higher education institutions.

Over the years, interaction with students has become more problematic and difficult. Many students now work full or part time. How many times have faculty members been confronted with excuses for either absent or poor work due to the claim that the student had to work and hence could not fulfill necessary requirements? Curiously, the burden seems now to fall on the faculty. In the consumer-oriented mode currently operative, it is too often the responsibility of the faculty member to make adjustments for problems caused by exterior commitments. Students now lobby professors for grades and other academic considerations, a situation I don’t recall from the early days of my teaching career. Just this semester I had two students in two different courses approach me with the caveat that they “had to get As” in order to preserve a scholarship or some other perk. Why should faculty be subject to this? Obviously, if you need to get an “A” in a course, you should produce the work that garners an “A.” Connected to this issue as well is the matter of grade inflation. Professors are told that too many high grades are being given, but

there is no doubt in my mind that student evaluations are a primary component in grade inflation. No matter how much this issue is discussed, it remains a problematic one for all involved. I accept the fact that nowadays everybody, in almost every walk of life, has to be evaluated. But, when students are asked to evaluate professionals with questions such as "knowledge of subject," I remain flabbergasted as to how any student can answer such a question accurately or knowledgeably. We bemoan the fact that contemporary students, raised on television and an entertainment culture, don't read much anymore. We're embarrassed by the writing and spelling abilities of these students. Yet we allow these same students to submit evaluations which are taken seriously by administrators as a measure of professional competence. Much has been written about the conundrum of student evaluations, yet we still don't seem to have a good handle on the process, or ideas as to how to make it more effective.

Another facet of our jobs, and one that I find to be very different from the days of my own undergraduate and graduate education, is the fact that students seem singularly grade-driven these days, almost to the exclusion of the content of that particular educational experience. Hence, at the end of every semester I have but a small fraction of

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students coming in to pick up a final project or final exam, much less wanting to discuss the project or exam. Once the course is over, as Yogi said, "it's over."

Having spent many years in an educational environment, I am used to being in the front of a classroom with the blackboard behind me. The students are usually organized in rows in front of the instructor. Yet, more and more it strikes me that for many courses this traditional arrangement no longer works very well. For the future design of classrooms, I think we need to brainstorm other kinds of physical spaces in which to teach. These spaces should be more comfortable for all involved, without sacrificing the educational mission at hand. Often, I find myself in a classroom playing recordings to emphasize certain styles of music. The equipment, due to budgetary considerations, is usually far less sophisticated than the sound systems most students have in their apartments or dorm rooms. All of these factors diminish the educational experience.

Another problem I see looming in the future here at Western is the yearly schedule, with two long semesters followed by two short sessions. This huge facility is somewhat deserted during the spring and summer sessions, yet office staff, library staff, bookstores, heating, lighting, and processes are operative and on board. How long can this or any other university afford to operate under this scenario? Many students now have to attend for five (or more) years to achieve an undergraduate degree, and one wonders if a different yearly semester layout would help to remedy this problem.

I hope this tirade is not taken too negatively. I have always loved being a member of the academy, and I am still very proud to be a faculty member. Over the years I have served as an instructor for many outstanding

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students. But, "the times they are a changing," and I fear that the academic world is slow to respond to the multifarious shifts engulfing all of us at the start of this new century. We need to have increased dialogue about the future of higher education, and we need to be creative here at Western as to what makes this particular university unique and strong. I look forward to participating in this process. #

AAUP Officers' Hours*

Ariel Anderson President

Tues 10:00 – 11:00 am
Wed 10:00 – 12:00 pm

Robert Ricci Vice President

Thurs 10:30 – 12:00 noon

Gary Mathews Contract Administrator

Mon 9:00 – 10:00 am
Wed 10:00 – 12:00 noon

Elaine Phillips Grievance Officer

Mon 1:30 – 3:30 pm
Wed 10:00 – 12:00 pm

*and by appointment

From Your Grievance Officer...

Elaine L. Phillips

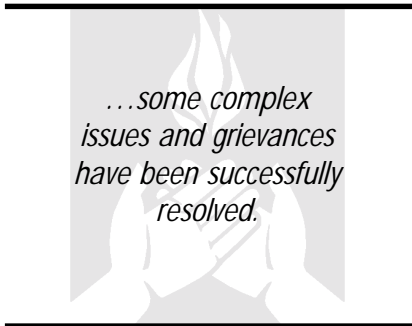
Many years ago, while visiting upstate New York, we happened upon a newly opened gourmet restaurant. It was located in an old building on the main street of a small town. Because the restaurant was new to the community, people did not know what to expect. The owners had, therefore, using their finest calligraphy pens and penmanship, posted a small sign at the entryway that read: "Please be patient, good food takes time."

The image of this lovely restaurant with the sign asking for patience is one I often use to remind myself to be patient as the administration and we at the AAUP work to develop good resolutions to problems and grievances. It is sometimes frustrating for all involved to wait as we discuss and discard various possible resolutions in an attempt to find one that is acceptable. It is also difficult to be patient when we are moving slowly on any *one* issue, as there is pressure in the knowledge that there are many issues to resolve. There is the temptation, when tensions are high, problems numerous, and solutions hard to come by, to resort to unproductive behaviors, call off communications, turn it all over to an arbitrator, and let the lawyers fight it out. At least we can temporarily cross it off our list and move on to some other problem. As satisfying as this might be in the short run, in the long run really good resolutions, like good food, take time.

As the grievance officer, I have been pleased with the many exemplary administrators who take the time to generate and explore possible resolutions in a fair and honest manner. It is

also a pleasure to deal with our AAUP Officers and Executive Committee as they listen carefully, discuss, and propose creative and fair resolutions to problems. Therefore, as difficult as it can sometimes be, both the AAUP leadership and the administration have practiced that virtue called "patience" as we have thoroughly and methodically moved through issues.

The result has been that some complex issues and grievances have been successfully resolved. The following report highlights two of these. So, if you can, relax, have a cup of tea, and enjoy reading about the fruits of patient, persistent work.



...some complex issues and grievances have been successfully resolved.

GRIEVANCES SETTLED

Evaluation of faculty—This grievance alleged two violations of the contract in the area of faculty evaluation. The first concern was that, in some cases, demographic questions on course evaluation forms might permit faculty members to identify respondents. The second concern involved a question on a student satisfaction survey that was written in a way that, on a few occasions, resulted in students evaluating individual faculty members without the faculty members soliciting such an evaluation, or even being aware that such an evaluation had occurred. Further, the evaluative comments were

being read by faculty members' colleagues with no assurance that the comments would not be forwarded to the administration.

Both issues have been satisfactorily resolved. In the first case, the demographic questions were removed from the forms. In the second, the survey question was rewritten, and a procedure put in place, to notify faculty members and to destroy forms when students evaluated individual faculty members as part of the satisfaction survey. My thanks to everyone involved for their perseverance, creativity, and flexibility.

Workload and Recognition of the Chapter—In this grievance the AAUP objected to the University hiring an instructor as "part-time" and assigning a teaching load of 12 hours per semester. In our view, this made the individual a full-time faculty member. We also voiced concern that there might be other employees in this same position (teaching 12 hours per semester, but hired contractually as "part-time"). In a strong show of good faith, the University entered into new contractual agreements with the individual involved and two other employees who were also "part-time" but teaching 12 hours per semester. The employment status of all three employees was changed from part-time to full-time faculty status.

We at the AAUP are pleased with the relationships that have been developed between the Chapter and the administration. We remain committed to working in a civil and problem-solving mode to resolve problems and grievances. We are pleased that the administration is also committed to this style of problem resolution. #

From the Desk of Your Contract Administrator...

Gary Mathews

Article 23 of the current Agreement between Western Michigan University and the WMU Chapter of the American Association of University Professors is about faculty participation in departmental governance. The article opens by stating a principle. To quote: "By virtue of their command of their disciplines, University faculty have as a unique resource, the abilities to assist in the governance of the departments in which they will exercise their respective disciplines. Faculty, therefore, should participate in the governance of their departments in order to create and maintain harmonious relationships among colleagues, and to fashion and maintain the departments in such a way as to make them maximally appropriate for instruction, research, service, and other professional activities of the disciplines. Fundamentally, what is desirable and what is intended by the sections that follow is to ensure meaningful participation by departmental faculties, with the ultimate power of decision-making by Western, but with an assurance of procedural regularity and fair play."

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Faculty governance is being eroded. This is occurring not just at Western, but in many universities around the country. One of the recurring themes of the December 1999 meeting of the Collective Bargaining Congress of the AAUP was the challenge to faculty governance. This is not to say that the behavior of university administrations is solely to blame. There are many additional factors.

Faculty are working so diligently at teaching, research, creative activities, and grant writing/grant management that they do not have as much time for governance activities. There is waning participation on departmental committees. Untenured faculty are focused on doing what is necessary to procure tenure. Tenured faculty are focused on being promoted, obtaining merit increases, and staying competitive for the job market. It is becoming less common for one to stay at a single university for one's entire career. The most likely avenue to avoid the phenomenon of salary compression is to move.

The culture of the University is changing. There is an increasing urgency to make decisions quickly. There is a willingness to cut corners. There is impatience with the deliberative process on the part of both administrators and faculty. Many departments are stretched so thin that it is becoming more important to have someone fill a vacant position than to have the **best** someone fill the vacancy. In many fields, if a timely offer to a faculty candidate is not made, the candidate goes to another university where a timely offer **was** made. Under these competitive conditions, committee input is devalued as cumbersome and unnecessary. Sometimes the newest faculty member is assigned to a faculty governance task, while senior colleagues sigh in relief. Sometimes the absent or tardy committee member is voted to be the Chair at the first meeting, and we gleefully inform the poor sap at the next meeting. I know a

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professor at the University of Pittsburgh who recently said, "Faculty governance – who has time for that anymore?"

As faculty members who are devoting our careers to higher education, we must see ourselves one of two ways. Either we are employees of the institution or we are officers of our institution, charged with constantly seeking the best for our disciplines, even if such values are at odds with those of the administration. You decide which it will be, or someone will decide for you.

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

There have been several inquiries about the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and how it is implemented at Western. A faculty colleague provides these suggestions to smooth the way:

1. A faculty request for medical leave should begin with a formal letter submitted to his/her chair that spells out the request and its justification. At that time the applicant would be advised that a letter from his/her physician would be required before final approval could be given.
2. If the chair approves, the letter and any accompanying documents are forwarded on to the dean.
3. If the dean approves, the letter and any accompanying documents are sent on to the provost.

4. If the provost approves, notification is sent back to the chair, who must notify the faculty member and make arrangements for covering courses and so forth.

5. It will also be the responsibility of the chair to notify whomever is responsible for processing the FMLA forms so that the administratively approved medical leave will benefit from the protections of the Act.

Some believe that this process is open to grievance. However, this is up for debate, because the decision is based on Federal law and not the current Agreement (contract). If you have additional or different information about the FMLA process, send it to me via campus mail and it may be included in the next newsletter. There is additional information available from the Benefits Office, including the admonition to provide medical certification to

the WMU Human Resources Benefits Specialist within 15 calendar days of the request for leave. We also understand that you may request payment during an FMLA leave by using any unpaid annual or sick leave you have accrued at the time of your FMLA leave under Western's leave policies. #

**New
Email
Address:**

wmuaaup@aol.com

Association Council and Chapter Meeting Dates

February 10
Association Council

March 16
Association Council

April 13
Chapter

All meetings begin at
4:00pm in
Rooms 157-158 of the
Bernhard Center



WMU-AAUP Chapter
814 Oakland Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED