

Preparing for Negotiations

The Key Date: The Spring 2008 Chapter Meeting

4 pm, Thursday, April 17, 2008

Please put this date on your calendars now so that you'll have firm plans to join us at the Spring 2008 Chapter Meeting -- the key meeting before formal negotiations begin in earnest. At this meeting we will discuss the details of our positions and goals. Most important, this meeting is the time when we demonstrate solidarity as we proceed into negotiations with strength and unity. So please plan now for 4 pm, Thursday, April 17.

Recruiting the Chief Negotiator and the Negotiation Team

When the votes were counted on October 10, our proposal to amend the Bylaws passed by a very significant margin, 283-11. This vote has authorized us to begin the appointment process for both the Chief Negotiator and the Negotiation Team this semester. Be on the lookout for the call for nominations because it will go out mid-November.

Please give some thought to applying for one of the negotiation positions; there are stipends for serving on the team because we recognize that the time commitment will impinge on your ability to teach in Summer I and II, and we are appreciative of the scope of the work. Please consider saying yes if one of the Officers or members of the Executive Committee asks you to apply! I found that serving on the 2005 team was one of the most interesting and rewarding activities I've ever been involved in. I encourage you to get in touch with the Chapter office (345-0151, or email us, staff@wmuaaup.net) to get more information about serving on the Negotiation Team.

Outreach to Departments

The Chapter Officers are already embarked on an active outreach campaign to come to your department meetings to discuss your issues and concerns, your goals, and your sense of strategy for the 2008 negotiations. These are crucial discussions. In order for us to do the best possible job of representing your interests, we need your full participation. The Chapter staff have already contacted your Association Council representatives to set up the schedule, and we have attended six meetings so far. I'd like to encourage responses from the rest of our Association Council reps as in the near future, but even more so, I'd like to encourage every one of you to speak with your rep about setting a specific date and time. I know that for some of the larger departments, there is a great deal of business re. Tenure and Promotion reviews, so we're happy to come to visit you whenever your department responsibilities will allow.

Priming the Pump on Negotiation Issues: What Kind of Western Do We Want?

During the department meetings, we certainly want to get your views, to whatever extent you can be specific, about the key issues for the 2008 negotiations. The big three are no surprise: healthcare, compensation and workload. Your priorities among these three, and your specific concerns about each of

them, are equally important. In order for us to make our case, we need to have both data and specific examples; we can work on the data side, but we especially need the specific examples from you. The department meetings are invaluable for hearing your examples.

There are a host of other issues related to various aspects of our Agreement and our working conditions on which we also need your input. But I want, for the moment here, to ask you to think about a larger matter of principle re. what we are trying to negotiate. There is a sense in which, partly through negotiations and the Agreement, we are trying to re-create Western as a place where we want to stay. What do we want that place to be like?

A key issue that confronts us quite acutely right now is faculty control of the curriculum. At the October Senate meeting, Peter Krawutschke, Past President of the Senate and a former WMU-AAUP Officer, introduced a motion from the floor, which passed after an animated discussion, to require that the chairs of College Curriculum Committees be tenured faculty members rather than academic officers (i.e., Associate Deans). Peter's point was that the chairs act as gatekeepers, and so should have faculty interests in the forefront of their minds as they do the job. His theme is worth considering in other contexts.

Clearly the Graduate Program Review process involved wresting control of many programs from faculty hands. This was a one-time assault that, as its irrationality became clear, we were able to reject satisfactorily for the most part, but with some program casualties. There are other more persistent practices in place that create instability for programs, increase the workload on the full time faculty, and erode faculty control of the curriculum. These include the following:

- (a) The sweeping of all tenure track lines when faculty leave; this means that the faculty cannot count on a consistent level of support for the core of their program.
- (b) The increasing reliance on term appointed faculty; this means increasing numbers of faculty who will most likely not be with us for long enough to participate in long term curriculum development and service.
- (c) The proliferation of part-timers; this means more people teaching classes who engage in virtually no curriculum planning or service, and who, in some departments that are heavily dependent on them, have little or no contact with the full time faculty.

Consider, in the same light, the proposed Summer teaching revenue plan where departments have to generate \$3 of revenue for every \$1 spent on instruction. Although cutting out the higher paid faculty is one simple way to achieve the revenue goal, to do it in this way does violate our Article 41 provisions on preference, and we will follow up on it. But if such a plan were implemented, where maximizing revenue and minimizing cost were the object, departments and programs would be forced to have the courses they need taught solely by their lowest paid faculty – the part timers.

What has become clear to me is that the outsourcing of faculty work, which so far has happened primarily in relation to teaching, amounts, in fact, to an ongoing erosion of faculty control of the curriculum. I believe that we need to think through this cluster of issues and practices as we prepare for the 2008 negotiations, and consider how to address them as part of our goals.

The Officers and members of the Executive Committee look forward to talking with you during this year, and encourage your active participation not only in Chapter events, but also in reaching out to us with your ideas and concerns. We are eager to hear from you.