

# Faculty Welfare Committee/AAUP

## *Excellence in Education*

### ADMINISTRATION PROPOSES ALARMING CUTS IN BENEFITS AND ABANDONING OUR 18-YEAR AGREEMENT TO MAINTAIN AVERAGE COMPENSATION AT THE AAUP'S 95<sup>th</sup> PERCENTILE

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#### FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Colleagues,

Not two years ago the President of this university stood before the faculty and told us that the administration's commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile was rock solid — “steadfast” was the term he used. In the months preceding this, SVPAA Fitzgerald had repeatedly given the faculty the same assurances. We were being asked to give up substantial protections involving our health coverage, retirement benefits, and more. But there was nothing to be concerned about, the President and SVPAA assured us — the commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile protected us. And, they assured us, they were unwavering in their commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile.

In my opinion for the President to pick a fight of this magnitude with the faculty at this time shows a disturbing lapse of judgment. The 95<sup>th</sup> percentile is sacred to the faculty, and if the President insists on pushing this, the situation at Fairfield may get ugly and public at a time when we are trying to recruit a class we are not sure we can get. And if we fail to make our freshman class again this fall, this university will likely be in serious difficulties of a magnitude we've never faced before.

Members of the Faculty Salary Committee are meeting today with the President, and we hope this situation will be resolved in a satisfactory way. If not, I will ask the FWC Executive Committee to put together a list of escalating actions. In the meantime, the chapter leadership will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Rick DeWitt

President, Fairfield University FWC/AAUP

“In its landmark 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, the American Association of University Professors argued that “a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability” is, along with academic freedom, “indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.” The AAUP’s annual survey has documented the stagnation in full-time faculty compensation over the last decade, simultaneous with a continuing shift away from full-time tenure-track faculty positions to precarious and grossly underpaid part-time appointments. At a time when leaders in government, industry, and academia agree that the need for innovative solutions to pressing economic and social problems has never been greater, this disinvestment in higher education - and specifically its greatest resource, the faculty - cannot fail to have far-reaching consequences for our society.”

John W. Curtis, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Public Policy, AAUP

## **Background:**

The agreement to maintain a commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile was reached in 1994 and has been a contractual commitment since then. It took years to get there, with mutually-agreed upon intermediate benchmarks reached along the way, but the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile was reached and affirmed as an on-going commitment in 1994. The commitment requires the average total compensation (salary plus benefits) in each rank to be at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for class IIA schools. If, in any rank, the average falls below the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile, each individual in the affected rank receives a check (added to base salary) for the amount needed to raise the average to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile. The administration has stood behind this commitment and has compensated faculty without hesitation on the few occasions that a rank has fallen below the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile. It provides important protection to Fairfield faculty not least of all because it measures total compensation (salary plus benefits). A reduction in benefits would probably need to be offset by an increase in salary, while robust benefits would allow for smaller salary increases. In any event, this is a crucial, contractual protection for faculty and a vitally important tool for recruitment and retention of new faculty.

## **Proposals from the administration:**

The administration was not willing to begin discussing the 2012-13 Memo of Understanding/Benefits Plan Overview until about one month ago. As of this writing, the Faculty Salary Committee has not received any contract language from the administration.

The current administration proposal includes:

- **an increase in the portion of health care premiums that faculty pay from 10% to as high as 15%;**
- **an increase in co-pays for office visits and prescription drugs;**
- **a decrease in the University’s contribution to retirement**
- **from 10% to 8%;**
- **a decrease in the amount of Life Insurance coverage;**
- **a salary increase of 1%.**

In addition, the administration proposed — for the very first time on March 20 — abandoning our 18-year agreement to maintain average total compensation in each rank at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for class IIA schools.

The administration’s stated concern is that, as currently implemented, the commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile may result in an expense in April that has not been budgeted for. The administration’s position is that this is “financially irresponsible.” Their solution is to abandon completely the commitment to maintain average compensation or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile.

## **Reaction from the FWC Steering Committee:**

- The administration and the Board of Trustees have neither the authority nor the legal right to unilaterally abandon the commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile. The commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile is a contractual commitment in the 2011-12 Memo of Understanding which “will apply from September 1, 2011 and continue until superseded by a subsequent Memo of Understanding.”
- The Faculty Salary Committee acknowledges the administration’s concern but rejects its solution. The Faculty Salary Committee’s position is that it is possible to maintain a commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile that would eliminate the possibility of an unbudgeted expense in April.
- The Faculty Salary Committee is willing to discuss benefits, but only in the context of our commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- The administration’s proposals will lead to an overall decrease in compensation and an ongoing erosion of benefits.
- This represents, perhaps for the first time, action on the part of the administration to diminish and reduce overall compensation of faculty.

The FWC/AAUP Steering Committee, a standing subcommittee of the FWC/AAUP, consists of the elected members of the FWC Executive Committee and the members of the Faculty Salary Committee: Professors Abbott, Boryczka, Dennin, DeWitt, Greenberg, Miecznikowski, Rakowitz, Preli, Strauss, and Wheeler.

## **A Reaction from Members of the AC Subcommittee on Governance:**

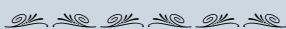
In 2008-2009, we were members of a subcommittee of the Academic Council that met with the administration to try to reach compromises that would stave off threats from the administration and Board of Trustees to make unilateral changes to our *Handbook* and governance structures. Among the proposals that we, with the Faculty Salary Committee, brought to the General Faculty were changes to the way in which some of our benefits were protected. Though none of us were particularly happy to argue for these changes, what made them at all palatable was the administration’s continuing commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile. As we explained to the faculty, even if the benefits did not have the *Handbook* protections that they used to have, any attempt to decimate them would likely push us below the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile and trigger the mechanism of making up the shortfall through increases in salary. The administration assured us that that commitment was solid and they have continued to do so, most recently at a General Faculty meeting in the Fall.

That’s why it is particularly upsetting to us to learn that they are now seeking to remove the commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile from the Memo of Understanding. Without the commitment to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile, we could not have pushed for the agreements that the faculty eventually approved. Of course we understand the difficulty, in the current financial context, of dealing with an unbudgeted expense close to the end of the fiscal year, but the solution is not to simply abandon the commitment. Other ways must be found to maintain the commitment while budgeting for its implementation.

In addition to feeling anger over this threatened rescission, we are deeply disappointed about the consequences for faculty/administrative relations. Over the last several years, working relationships between faculty and administration have, on the whole, dramatically improved from the days when the default position for many of our interactions was adversarial. If the administration continues to insist on this change, all of the work that has gone into improving those relationships will have been for naught. At this time, when it is crucial for faculty and administrators to work together to recruit and retain students, the administration’s willingness to break such a fundamental commitment to the faculty bodes ill for the institution.

— Susan Rakowitz, John Thiel, and Don Greenberg

The Faculty Welfare Committee/AAUP at Fairfield University is an *ad hoc* committee of the General Faculty and an affiliate of the national AAUP. Any member of the General Faculty at Fairfield may join by contacting the membership chair or any officer. Dues are set annually by the membership and can be paid in semi-annual installments or deducted from each paycheck. If you aren't a member, please consider joining. We promote the professional and economic interests, broadly defined, of the Fairfield University Faculty. All our activities are open to all members of the faculty but we are funded entirely by our dues-paying members.



## From the Archives:

*An excerpt from an address to the General Faculty given by  
President von Arx, S.J., on May 12, 2010 (emphasis added)*

The willingness of the faculty to work with the administration in making sacrifices to meet our financial challenges has not gone unnoticed. Last month, the General Faculty passed a Memo of Understanding concerning faculty compensation for the coming year. Your agreement to a zero salary increase in this past academic year, and an average of a 1.5 percent increase in the coming year — plus funding for all rank and tenure promotions — is evidence of your continued commitment to the mission of the University. With the increase in the cost of health care and other benefits, the overall increase in the compensation pool for the coming fiscal year is 3.7 percent. Staff are also receiving raises, except for administrators making over \$150,000, who will receive no pay increase again this year. The sacrifices that you have been asked to make go beyond compensation. The budget cuts we have had to make may have affected your ability at times to travel, to pursue areas of research, and to avail yourself of resources and staff support that would assist you in your work. I want to assure you that our commitment as a University to enhancing our faculty resources remains in place. I support faculty sharing in the University's good fortune when the economy rebounds, our endowment grows, and our enrollments meet or exceed expectations. ***The fact that we have been steadfast in our commitment to keep faculty compensation at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of the Carnegie IIA schools is the strongest illustration of our support for the faculty.***

**Faculty Welfare Committee/AAUP Executive Committee: Rick DeWitt (President), Joe Dennin (Vice President), Bill Abbott (Secretary), Rona Preli (Treasurer), At-large members Jocelyn Boryczka, Susan Rakowitz, Deb Strauss, Kate Wheeler. Membership Director: Vacant. Newsletter Editor: Irene Mulvey.**

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