

Faculty Welfare Committee/AAUP Excellence in Education

e-newsletter

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"If only I had a few more papers to grade" said no teacher ever.



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From the FWC/AAUP President:

Things are happening quickly. As I write, the Faculty Salary Committee is scheduled to meet with the administration. The FWC Executive Committee expects a report from the FSC as soon as is practical. The FWC Action Committee is meeting on Wednesday; details will follow by email. We will update FWC members as soon as we have information to share. Thank you all for your continued engagement.

- Rona Preli, FWC/AAUP President

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ✓ Page 1: From the President
- ✓ Page 2: From the FWC Action Committee
- ✓ Page 3: What a Difference a Year Makes?
- ✓ Page 4: Comments from the FSC/HCC Survey
- ✓ Page 5: New Poster!
- ✓ Page 6: A Message to Our Newest Colleagues



Read coverage of our faculty action in The Fairfield Mirror at:
<http://fairfieldmirror.com.news.faculty-protest-health-care-options/>

**Wear your chapter button every day.
Post the *new* flyer included in this issue.**

From the FWC/AAUP Action Committee:

The Faculty Welfare Committee has responded to the changing and ever-shifting concerns that arose from the FSC's collegial discussions with the administration, particularly around health care coverage changes. We confronted difficult challenges this year - extremely high increases to employee premiums were announced in the Fall and then draconian changes to health care options were proposed in the Spring, both presented in a time frame that left us with little time to assess or to react to the proposed changes. We had hoped things would be better this year after the mutual approval of a joint Health Care Committee created to address on an ongoing basis our shared concern about the growth of the total cost of health care. Some members of the administration share our frustration with the under-utilization, essentially bypassing, of this committee; others assert that consultation with the HCC is "not required" and blame the committee members for not addressing a proposal that was never sent to them.

Proposals for major changes to health coverage reached the FSC in mid-April. After faculty had a chance to discuss the proposal and to weigh in on a survey, the FWC waited, poised for action but taking its cue from the FSC. On the day before the last scheduled General Faculty meeting of the year, which includes the President's annual address, the FWC met with the FSC to assess and discuss the status of the conversations with the administration. During the last week of classes, members of these committees dropped everything-well, if we're honest we shoved everything else that had to be done to later in the night and early the next morning-to meet for hours in the day before the President's Address. With less than 24 hours to work with, we discussed and debated the possible impacts and messages that might address and express faculty concerns. We shared and pooled our colleagues' questions. We reached out to more colleagues we hadn't heard from. We delegated and shared responsibilities. We came to a concise message and sketched out a series of escalating actions, stretching from that day through the summer, and into the fall. Then we activated the Action Committee to announce a meeting one and a half hours before the President's address. Various Action Committee members gathered supplies for our sign-making, others brainstormed slogans, and still others worked on the messages and questions that needed to be addressed. On the day of the meeting, faculty gathered-with many others emailing and stopping us in the halls to express their support as they rushed to finish classwork with their students. A simple message, "Healthcare Choice," expressed concerns that faculty had addressed, along with the underlying values of transparency in negotiations and the priority that we place on long-term planning for the good of Fairfield as a whole. We even finished the sign-making with time to spare; one committee was dispatched to put up the signs while another handed out flyers to faculty coming in to the meeting along with instructions about our action, which was simple and yet which got attention and made our concerns known. We held up signs at pre-determined times during the President's speech to stress our main focus, and this concern was supported with questions from the faculty. By offering time and space for faculty to gather, by giving each other support, and by having the necessary and difficult conversations even when the semester was winding to a close, we provided a space for faculty to become vocal rather than merely to resign themselves to confusion in the face of the administration's proposal.

Was this easy? No. Was it stressful? A little. Yet it showed us that our organizing over the past years in the face of continual changes and shifts in the MOU has paid off; we have structures in place to successfully plan an action in less than a day. Sometimes we look like exhausted professors in khakis, and then all we have to do is to turn around and you'll see us in our red t-shirts, ready for action.



What a Difference a Year Makes? Excerpts of Memos from last year's FSC

DATE: May 7, 2014

RE: Terms of compensation in the 2014-15 MOU - *Excerpts*

In this section of the memo, we articulate the FSC's position on the three-year commitment to health care in the [2013-14] BPO and our position on when and how changes to health insurance can be made in that three-year window. [Details of the actual changes we are recommending the GF accept follow.] The faculty's position, as stated in a memo from the FSC to the Executive Vice President dated 5/3/14 is as follows:

The FSC maintains that we have a three-year contractual commitment to the current health plan with 20% cost-share as agreed last year and as shown in the plain language of the 2013-14 (current) MOU/BPO. The changes we accept in the 2014-15 MOU/BPO modify that plan by mutual approval but do not negate that three-year contractual commitment.

The administration reiterated their position in a memo from the EVP to the FSC dated 5/6/14:

We reject any notion that our commitment to the faculty extends to plan design but do intend to fully honor our commit on an 80/20 cost share.

The FSC is always willing to discuss any matter that falls under FSC purview. So, even with the three-year contractual commitment, we would be willing to discuss and recommend changes when appropriate. The FSC has maintained that any changes must be thoughtful and data-driven. We were told that the new administrator, Aetna, has much better data-mining capabilities but we've only been with Aetna a short time. The FSC's position [reached after thoughtful consideration by FSC's past and present over many years] is that there are 4 categories of changes that are reasonable for us to consider:

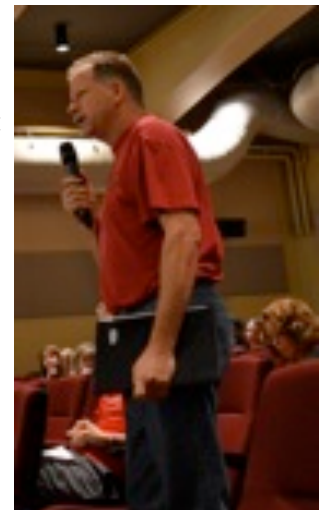
1. Changes to increase economic efficiencies
2. Changes to bring about reasonable behavioral changes
3. Changes to increase wellness
4. Changes to reduce higher than average plan participation

In our meetings this year – full joint meetings and meetings of subcommittees focusing only on health insurance – we emphasized that we will only consider “smart” changes that address the growth rate in healthcare costs; we won't accept changes that simply shift costs to employees.

DATE: May 22, 2014

RE: Health Care Review Committee and Trigger Committee - *Excerpt*

The growth in the total cost of health care is a concern for both the faculty and administration. The FSC has maintained that any changes must be thoughtful and data-driven - “smart” changes that address the growth rate in health care costs, as opposed to simply reducing benefits or shifting costs to the employee. The [proposed and, eventually, mutually approved] Health Care Committee, if put into place, would provide a collaborative structure in which health care matters could be addressed on an ongoing basis.



Comments from the FSC/HCC Survey:

Thank you to all the members of the General Faculty covered by the Memo of Understanding who answered the April 2015 survey put out by the Faculty Salary Committee and the Health Care Committee. The response rate of nearly 60% during an extremely busy time of year confirms for us how important these issues are to the faculty.

The survey included the opportunity to include a comment for the FWC newsletter and we appreciate the FSC and HCC passing along the comments to the newsletter staff and we can provide a selection here:

- Why did the administration wait so long before springing this proposal on the FSC only 24 hours before our General Faculty meeting? Why did they totally bypass the Health Care Committee? Looking over the past decade, I cannot remember a year when the administration did not pull some last-minute trick like this. Do they not realize that such behavior only undermines the trust that is essential to a good working and learning environment?
- It is such an outrageous betrayal of faith that the university continues to escalate the cost of our health care. The faculty agreed to absorb more of the cost of health care with the understanding that this would generate larger salary increases. This is the first betrayal/lie. The faculty agreed to pay a higher percentage of the cost of health care with the understanding that this would stabilize costs for the university. The national data does not support their claim that a hike is justified. This is the second betrayal/lie. Furthermore, to insist on a measly merit increase for some, while at the same time shifting more of the burden of health care costs on all the faculty, in effect demonstrates the zero empathy that the Administration has vis-a-vis the faculty. signed, ex-FSC member.
- Please remind the administrative team that there are three big efforts underway at the University that will go best with cooperation and good will between faculty and the administration: the Fairfield 2020 plan; the public launch of the Capital Campaign; & NEASC preparations, report, and site visit. Rushing a radical change to our health care is likely to engender ill-will, sap faculty and administrative time, and impede all three of these critical initiatives.
- Since the faculty, in a good faith but mistaken vote moved health care coverage out of the *Faculty Handbook*, the administration has been on a slow, steady, determined march to unload more and more costs onto the faculty.
- Might it be time for a line in the sand, a vote of no confidence, of working to rule? During the last few years, the administration has pared away our benefits. We have been more than reasonably accommodating.
- I simply don't understand the administration's proposal. what is the justification for the health care change and the refusal to increase retirement? Most troubling is the process. Why was the health care committee never convened? Why does this process happen so late every year?
- I feel it is alarming how much professors have lost in the past 5 years and I only imagine this getting worse. I cannot imagine that there is much we can do, but nothing we decide should be a "vote of trust" to the administration. I think it is clear we cannot expect reciprocity or goodwill on their part.
- The faculty should form a union with powerful lawyers to put an end to the administration's bullying.
- We have a committed, engaged, and hard-working faculty. I don't understand why every year the administration takes some stance in the negotiations that drives a knife into faculty morale. Isn't it obvious that the long term effects of these constant blows, even when the administration eventually backs off, will not be in the best interest of the institution?

REDUCING EMPLOYEE BENEFITS IS NOT OK!

I support the FSC.

The Faculty Welfare Committee/AAUP at Fairfield University is an *ad hoc* committee of the General Faculty and an affiliate of the national AAUP. About 70% of the full-time faculty at Fairfield are members of the FWC. If you aren't a member, please consider joining. The FWC promotes 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. To join, contact any member of the Executive Committee.

A Message to Our Newest Colleagues from the FWC Executive Committee:

Congratulations to all of you on a successful year! All of us—new and old faculty members—should be proud of the ways in which we have contributed to our students and to the University this year. As new faculty members on the path to tenure, you have worked especially hard, adjusting to a new institution, courses, and colleagues. We hope that you can enjoy your accomplishments as you look ahead to a summer of research and course development—and not let the current tensions around the MOU rob you of your joy.

Those tensions have made this a hard time to be young faculty member. You may feel confused as acronyms fly around: MOU, BPO, HCC. More importantly, you may feel nervous about the prospect of ending the year without a new Memo of Understanding in place and uncertain about how you, as a not-yet-tenured faculty member, should proceed. It is a small consolation, I expect, to know that we have been through this before—ending the year without a new MOU in place, only to reach agreement by the fall.

Be assured that no one in the FWC expects you to take actions that make you feel conspicuous or uncomfortable. We all remember the feelings of vulnerability that go along with being on the way to tenure. There will be plenty of time for you to be leaders in faculty governance and faculty action in the future. In the meantime, we wish you a productive and happy summer.

FWC/AAUP Executive Committee: Rona Preli, President; Jocelyn Boryczka, Vice-President; Bill Abbott, Secretary; Irene Mulvey, Treasurer; At-large members Betsy Bowen, Sonya Huber, Anna Lawrence, Deb Strauss. Membership Director: Stephanie Storms.

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