

Faculty Welfare Committee/AAUP

Excellence in Education

MAY DAY ISSUE

Feast of Saint Joseph, the Worker



· A · GARLAND · FOR · MAY · DAY · 1895 ·
· DEDICATED TO THE WORKERS BY WALTER CRANE ·

In this issue:

- ✓ **Page 1:** From the President
- ✓ **Page 2:** From the faculty members on the HCC
- ✓ **Page 4:** Thoughts from an untenured faculty member
- ✓ **Page 5:** Email to the GF from FSC Chair.

FROM THE FWC/AAUP President.

Dear Colleagues,

I am so grateful to the Newsletter editors for trying to keep up with all the faculty news at this very busy time of year. I know we all are eternally grateful to the faculty members on the Faculty Salary Committee as they continue their extremely difficult work with the administration.. Many of us have served on the FSC and know firsthand how difficult, how frustrating and how extremely important this work can be.

Like many of you, I am disheartened and demoralized by the fact that it's May 1 and we have no contract. The mood this year is worse than I have ever seen it. Faculty are angry - very angry - but also beaten down. Possibly checking out. I really don't know if we'll recover from this - *another year* with no contract in May, *and* compensation proposals from the administration with *more* deep cuts to our health insurance benefit that simply shift more of the cost to employees. We agreed to cost-share six years ago based on administrative rhetoric that having health insurance out of the *Faculty Handbook* would allow us to look at compensation in a holistic way. In fact, what's happened is health insurance has been cut, cut, cut and then cut again.

The morale problem is serious. In all schools, at all ranks, at all levels of political involvement, people are alternately very, very angry and extremely demoralized. With each passing day, more people are becoming disaffected and disengaged. On the plus side, people are joining the FWC - four new members in the last couple of weeks - and we will continue to support faculty welfare at Fairfield University.

We have more articles planned, and we continue to keep in close contact with the FSC. The Action Committee continues to stand by. My best wishes to you and your students as you finish up another semester and another successful academic year.

Rona Preli, FWC President

From the Faculty Members on the Health Care Committee.

Many faculty members have reacted quite strongly to the administration's demands that we accept cuts to our health insurance benefit in the 2016-17 Memo of Understanding. In order to help explain this reaction to newer faculty members and others, the FWC leadership asked the faculty members on the Health Care Committee to provide some context (in two pages or less). For an article with more detailed information, see the February 17, 2016 FWC newsletter at www.faculty.fairfield.edu/fwc.

Reductions to Employee Health Care Benefit over the years.

- Prior to 2010: Fairfield's health insurance benefit covered the employee, spouse and dependent children at no cost to the employee.
- 2010: General Faculty (GF) accepted cost-sharing of benefits. For three years beginning 1/1/10, employees paid 10% of the "premium" and, in 2010, received an offset into base salary.
- 2013: Employee cost-share of premiums stayed at 10%, but, for reasons never fully explained to us, the premium increase was nearly twice what it had been over the prior three years.
- 2014: GF accepted an increase of employee cost-share from 10% to 20%. For three years beginning 1/1/14, employees paid 20% of the premium and, in 2014, received an offset into base salary.
- 2014: GF accepted a major change of plan provider from Anthem BC/BS to Aetna.
- 2015: GF accepted changes to specialty pharmacy that removed flexibility, increased co-pays for ER and hospitalization, added a penalty for smokers, and added a wellness-requirement for HSA participants. (Here, our emphasis was on accepting only "smart" changes, changes that would address the growth rate in health care costs, as opposed to changes that would simply shift costs to employees.)

Fall 2014: Establishing the Health Care Committee.

All along, and especially during the process of discussing the 2015 changes, the FSC and the administration's team recognized the need for a standing committee to address health insurance matters on an ongoing basis. The 5/27/14 GF minutes on the FSC report to the GF include:

...the administration began this year by proposing three years worth of draconian changes to healthcare (including co-insurance by the third year). There was no particular logic to the changes except to save money. As far as the FSC could tell, they were devised solely by the administration's consultant. The FSC agreed to set up a healthcare committee to address the growth in healthcare costs (not healthcare costs themselves).

The Health Care Committee (HCC) is a joint (2 members of FSC, 2 faculty members appointed by the FSC, up to 3 administrators appointed by the President), jointly approved (in the Journal of Record) committee. The purpose and the relevant parts of the committee's charge (from the JoR) are:

The purpose of this committee is to address on an ongoing basis the growth in the total cost of health care, which is of concern to both faculty and the administration. Using all relevant and reasonably available data, including data on projected as well as actual health care costs in the aggregate, changing demographics, employee usage patterns and changes in stop-loss insurance cost, and with the help of the University's consultant and other consultants as mutually agreed to and needed, the committee is charged to:

- 1. Consider and make recommendations to the FSC and the administration on ways to make plan participants more economically efficient users of health care;**
- 2. Consider and make recommendations to the FSC and the administration on ways to reduce the increases to the cost of health care, and...**

Those of us on the FSC that year were pleased at this accomplishment and we think the administrators on the administrative team that year also saw the HCC as a way to move forward together in a productive, cooperative and collegial way.

This year.

This year, on the heels of the University over-budgeting health care in 2015 by \$2.75 million (arguably, the changes we have accepted have reduced costs) and on schedule for another large surplus in 2016, the administration's team is demanding more changes to health insurance including - at a Jesuit University - an increase in cost-share for dependents to 30% of premium. Enough already!

The administration's proposals for changes to health insurance went to the FSC in April. No rationale has been provided for any of these changes (except, perhaps, for the "glide path" to [an unspecified destination] mentioned at various times in the past by EVP Lawlor).

No proposed changes were ever sent to the HCC. Keep in mind that the joint HCC (chaired by SVPAA Lynn Babington, former Dean of the School of Nursing and very knowledgeable about health care matters) met all year long in a most collegial fashion. The joint HCC looked at masses of data about Fairfield's health insurance cost and budget, and how Fairfield compares to several different comparison groups. When the HCC determined that our work for the year was complete, the HCC did not recommend any changes to health insurance for 2017.

In closing.

Health care costs are a shared concern. Changes must be presented with a sensible rationale. At one time, the rationale was that we must "bend the curve" (i.e., slow the rate of growth). Data show that the curve has been bent! The GF are not opposed to changes to health insurance. We have made changes in the past and we are open to changes in the future. Changes must be thoughtful and purposeful, and changes must be presented with time enough for the necessary, careful consideration by the HCC.

REPRINTED HERE, WITH PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR, IS AN EMAIL THAT WAS SENT TO THE FSC CHAIR:

Dear FSC,

I write to express my concern as an untenured, new faculty member at Fairfield University. I chose to come to Fairfield University because of its proximity to New York City, the diverse demographics of southern Connecticut, but more importantly, because the Jesuit Philosophy expressed during my interview, visit to campus, and from publications on the website spoke directly to my sense of ethics and morality. I chose to work at an institution that valued local communities, upheld grace for its employees, and desired to do what is right, especially in difficult times at the local, national, and international levels.

In the few years I've been at the campus, I've begun to worry about my choice to teach and conduct research at Fairfield University, and whether or not this is an institution where I want to be tenured and to continue to serve. I have thoroughly enjoyed my colleagues, the classes I teach, the interaction with the Center of Academic Excellence, The Office of Service Learning, partnership with other Jesuit Universities, and committee work with a wide representation from a variety of departments on campus. With this noted, veteran faculty who were once optimistic and happy about working here - the greatest advocates for what an institution of higher education should stand for and stellar mentors offering guidance about how to survive in higher education - have turned the corner. The happiness they once had for being at Fairfield University has subsided. In personal correspondences many have indicated to me that they are applying to leave - they are worried that administrative choices over the last decade continue to deteriorate a support for faculty and staff and it is likely to continue. I, too, have felt a similar disintegration. I've watched a dozen of my colleagues leave and/or retire without being replaced. This, in return, has weighed heavily on junior faculty who are doing our best to uphold excellence through keeping departmental programs alive, but it's coming at a cost. We recognize the hard work it takes - most often beyond the call of duty - to do what needs to be done for our students. The extra burden of carrying such weight, however, is beginning to reach its breaking point.

When I first arrived to Fairfield University, I loved seeing colleagues on a regular basis and having the opportunity to talk about our students and to share research with one another. In a very short time, however, I've begun to see fewer and fewer of my mentors on campus with the joy they once had. An environment that should be thriving with hope, intellect, curiosity, engagement, and dialogue has been weakened to a culture of doubt, frustration, worry, and pessimism. This alarms me and makes me wonder what happens next.

The ongoing negotiations between FSC and Administration has always been contentious (which I recognize is par for the course at most Universities). Yet, in the last three years it appears as if administration has beaten down its staff and employees to a point where they don't want to advocate for the campus's mission any more. A very short time ago I enjoyed hearing individuals discuss why they loved working at Fairfield University, but it has deteriorated. Morale is extremely low and I worry more individuals will also choose to leave as administration places more of the institution's burdens onto faculty and staff. It has to change. I stand in full support of the FSC and their desire to represent the interests of faculty members during collegial discussions, especially newer ones like me who have just begun their careers. The collegiality, however, doesn't seem to be reciprocated at the administrative level (with changes in healthcare, failure to follow university protocols, and a President's choice not to address the faculty). This year, between the morale and continued debate over healthcare, I have seriously begun to reconsider the economics of teaching at the University. I am willing to do my part, but when I see that my colleagues are brow-beaten, when staff members are stressed by what is going to be done to them next, and when leadership seems to blame faculty for the expenses of higher education I am worried. We know Connecticut is outrageously expensive - it is definitely a difficult place to raise a family if you aren't at a particular income level.

I want to believe that administration respects the hard work of faculty and staff. My belief, however, is wavering. I write FSC to say thank you for all the hard work and to express what I'm experiencing on campus. I thank you for reading what I have to say, and wish you continued luck with your negotiations.

[The author is an untenured faculty member who wishes to remain anonymous.]

Reprinted here, in case you missed it, "Update from FSC" sent to members of the GF on Wednesday, April 27, 2016:

To: Members of the General Faculty
From: Faculty Salary Committee
Date: Wednesday, April 27, 2016
Re: Update from the FSC

Yesterday, Tuesday, April 26, the FSC met with the administration team again. The FSC presented a number of questions about the administration's proposal. The most serious concerned the effect of elimination of co-pays and introduction of co-insurance in the PPO. According to what we have read, this could mean that employees would have to pay the entire amount of a doctor's visit, not just the current \$30 co-pay. Insurance would not kick in until the entire deductible (\$2000 for a family) was paid. We pointed out that this scenario would lead some employees into debt, and some employees would probably avoid necessary health care to avoid fees. We asked about the functioning and amounts of the co-insurance, and the administrative team said they would have to get back to us on the details.

The administration then told us that they were having a meeting with a subset of the trustees today, April 27. They needed to know whether we on behalf of the faculty were accepting or rejecting their proposal. We replied that we couldn't give a sensible answer until we could understand what the administration is actually proposing, and that we had not yet had an opportunity to take the full proposal to the faculty given the number of details still to be worked out, also including details about the Reserve Fund.

The FSC then presented the administrative team with a proposal crafted over the previous week. Highlights of this plan included a five-year term for the agreement and select compromises toward the administration's position on healthcare. Under the FSC plan, there would be changes to health care only in year three. This would give employees time to prepare for the changes, and would guarantee five years of stability free of the tension of these discussions.

This afternoon (Wed., April 27), after the meeting with the trustees Tom Pellegrino sent this email:

Dear Chris,
I had a chance to review the counter offer provided by the faculty at the April 26, 2016 meeting of the Faculty Salary Committee. After careful review, the administration is unable to accept this counter offer. We urge the FSC to submit the administration's last best and final offer to the general faculty for a vote without delay. We remain open to collegial discussions.
Thank you.
Tom

In other words, the administration has taken this position: 1) It has chosen not to engage in a substantive way with any of the details of our proposal, despite our attempts at compromise and our attempts to move toward goals of a multi-year agreement; and 2) it has chosen not to respond to any of our questions or requests for clarification and instead is hurrying the faculty to make a decision not in our interest but because it suits the administrative timeline.

We have been meeting all year long. The FSC does not understand why the administration made their proposal at the last minute, why the proposal was never sent to the HCC, why they are pressuring for a vote without proper vetting, and why they are unable to answer basic questions about what their proposal even means. This is a definite departure from standards of collegial discussions over the MOU at Fairfield.

Given the uniquely challenging nature of this situation, we are currently meeting with faculty and outside advisors to determine the best course of action and will keep faculty updated. If you would like to send comments on the current situation to the Faculty Salary Committee, please email facultysalarycommittee@gmail.com