

Faculty Welfare Committee



Excellence in Education

From the President

Fairfield University
FWC / AAUP Newsletter

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Fumbling Towards Fall... again

Dear Colleagues,

Are we there yet? As someone who has crossed North America three times --with small children in a small car-- our current moment is approximately Nebraska. We have been speeding uncomfortably for what feels like forever; we have made some objective progress, but there is no apparent end to the road ahead, and everything smells of old French fries, spilled juice boxes, and small feet. As faculty slog toward the most taxing part of another tough semester, tired from more than a year of pedagogical gymnastics and forced Zoom-levity, what I hear most is that folks are exhausted. What I hear second most is that we all want to know when it will be over. I wish I knew. I wish someone knew. What to do about not knowing is the main concern of the FWC right now.

In one sense, “it” will never be over if we are referring to the need to change, to adapt, to evolve. Joseph Schumpeter famously argued that “creative destruction” is the essence of our current global system, the force that drives innovation and wealth creation via “everlasting uncertainty and agitation.” In this sense, the pandemic has cruelly amplified the central dynamic of our time. We will never go back to the way things were. We may get hair-cuts again, and learn to wear pants and leave the house, but we will never get back the lives claimed by Covid, the time it took from us, the life events missed, and neither will we return to the ignorant bliss we had before the pandemic. Perhaps we will never again breathe one another’s air unselfconsciously. The question is how to proceed. How do we comport ourselves under conditions of permanent uncertainty?

Faculty in their classrooms, labs, and studios have been forced to make far too many last minute fixes, conjure too many jerry-rigged solutions. Too often, faculty

Free Swag! Contact me for your private supply of these fetching AAUP “Got Academic Freedom?” masks. Perfect for sharing your socially distanced opinions! Two sizes, two layers, with a disposable filter in the middle.



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have compensated for institutional shortsightedness by simply working harder. For many of our colleagues, there is little more to give. Our reserves are gone. We no longer have the energy to react spontaneously; we are no longer nimble. It is unlikely that fall semester will be a “new normal,” and it will certainly not be the old normal. What will it be? What should it be? How do we make it the best it can be? And, most importantly, how can our planning extend beyond one semester, to the whole of next year, and the next five?

However frustrating this moment seems, I retain faith in the capacity of our faculty to engage it, and the FWC will continue to do what we can to contribute. Recently, Bill Abbott from History hosted a vibrant Brown Bag lunch discussion of the pass-fail policy. Anita Fernandez from Biology enlisted PHAT (Public Health Advisory Team) representative Shelley Phelan to field questions about the vaccine rollout, and what it might mean for faculty. Soon Peter Bayers from English will host a virtual cocktail hour series for junior faculty, an informal venue to share stories and seek advice (or maybe just meet people!) outside of the formal advising structures of the university. And Jen Adair from History will convene a Brown Bag discussion focused specifically on next fall.

What will next semester require from us? What policies will be in place? When will we know about them so that we can plan? What role do faculty have in deciding how we teach our students? We know changing laws and government policies will impact us, that everything from virus variants to student accommodations and local school decisions will skew our decisions and demand that we adapt. We will get advice from the CDC and the WHO, from our own doctors and scientists, but curriculum cannot be an afterthought, a mere reaction to last minute exigencies. What can we control, and how ought we do so?

These are the questions before us. As a faculty, we cannot fear the unknown, and we cannot wait for our administration to dictate our path, to control our classrooms. We have to engage our moment creatively, think it through using all the disciplinary techniques and intellectual energy we still have, and collectively carry our mission forward. This is what we have always done, and what needs doing now more than ever. I am grateful to work on this with you. On behalf of the FWC, I thank you for your support, your contributions, for making this long, strange trip not only bearable, but even, on good days, joyful.

In solidarity,

Dave Crawford

President, Fairfield FWC / AAUP

Announcements....

Air your concerns, vent your frustration, offer your insights, or just lurk with your video feed off and feel less alone with the molten ball of anxiety that has eaten your reason for living...

Brown Bag lunch discussion:

Fall 2021 Reopening

Facilitated by Jen Adair, History

Wednesday, March 17, noon

Zoom link: <https://Fairfield.zoom.us/j/96219572915>



BYOB Junior Faculty Virtual Cocktail Hour:

“Junior Faculty in the Age of Covid”

Facilitated by Peter Bayers and an FWC mentor or two, the goal of this cocktail hour (and hopefully many more!) is to offer junior faculty an informal, supportive setting to share their stories, learn from one another, and help the FWC better serve junior faculty.



Date: Thursday, March 18, 5 p.m.

Zoom link:

<https://Fairfield.zoom.us/j/92110811858?pwd=Zlp5QlhFZjNEeTNwSzhieUdjNkVGUT09>

Meeting ID: 921 1081 1858

Passcode: 104285

Forthcoming... and just in time for spring salary “collegial discussions”... a Brown Bag focused on **our contract**. Date and time TBA

Brown Bag Highlights (in case you missed them)

On pass / fail...

Eleven faculty members attended the February 11th FWC Brown Bag on pass/fail. Issues include:

At what point before or during the semester should students be allowed to choose the pass/fail option?

Should Magis core courses be eligible for pass/fail?

Should there be a grade cutoff (C? C-?) for a student's score to qualify for a pass?

Should the professor be informed as to whether a student has opted for pass/fail?

How many courses per semester should be allowable for pass/fail?

How many courses per undergraduate career be allowable for pass/fail?

Bill Abbott shared information from eleven other Jesuit Universities:

Ten out of eleven of these Jesuit universities do not permit pass/fail courses to count for core.

Eight out of nine place the deadline for opting in to pass/fail prior to the last day of classes. Seven out of nine put it in February.

Six out of the eleven stipulate a C grade or better, to earn a Pass. One stipulates a C- to earn a Pass.

Questions:

Many courses count for BOTH major and core. If a student is taking a core course that she might or might not later want to count towards her major, but has not yet declared the major, can she opt for pass/fail? Assuming that she takes the pass/fail option and later declares the major, will that course not count towards her major?

How do we advise students in choosing the pass/fail option? Are they properly informed about what effect a pass grade will have on their scholarly record? On applications to graduate school?

Comments:

By placing the pass/fail declaration deadline on the very last day of classes, we funnel students toward an ever-greater obsession with grades. They worry about grades anyway, but this policy increases these fears, to a point at which thinking about end-of-semester projects and exams, which should be a rich intellectual experience, is replaced by obsessive calculations over GPA management.

Pass/fail is not simply a matter of specific policies. Like labor-based contract grading and like un-grading, pass/fail is part of a system that, for the first time, gives the student a role in determining the evaluation metric. Institutions making long-term decisions about pass/fail should recognize that it is a paradigmatically different system of grading, not simply another letter, and also that we should have discussions about how the regulatory bureaucracies of grading are institutional literacy practices that enforce the kinds of hierarchies anti-racist institutional and pedagogical practices seek to dismantle.

Conclusion: All of these issues need a robust discussion by the entire faculty. When the Academic Council finishes its deliberations on pass/fail and makes a proposal to the General Faculty for its consideration and vote, it is expected that all of these issues will be thoroughly aired.

Bill Abbott, History

(EVEN MORE) Brown Bag Highlights...

On vaccines and classroom teaching...

On February 18, the FWC-EC hosted a Brown Bag Discussion about vaccine rollout and its potential impact on our activities at the University. Dr. Shelley Phelan of the Public Health Advisory Team (PHAT) was there to field questions.

- The University does not currently plan for an on-campus COVID-19 vaccine distribution. However, HR has initiated registering University employees into the Connecticut Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS) as we become eligible (based on age). Email prompts will be sent to employees to complete VAMS registration. For more information see the email sent by HR on 2/24.

-Because of HIPAA, the University cannot require faculty to disclose vaccination status. However, administration would find this information useful, and many employees would also be interested in knowing the extent of immunity on our campus. The University might develop a survey for employees to voluntarily disclose their vaccination status.

-The Public Health Advisory Team is discussing the idea that residential students should be strongly encouraged to have the COVID-19 vaccine before returning to campus Fall 2021. There has not yet been a discussion of requiring faculty and staff to have the vaccine. Currently all COVID-19 vaccines are under Emergency Use Authorization (and thus not yet FDA approved) so it is not clear if the University can require anyone to take it.

-Faculty discussed concerns that the University might require on-campus instruction this semester for instructors who have already had the vaccine. (The University has NOT suggested they would change this policy mid-semester.) The faculty members of PHAT recommend that those with accommodations for this academic year should be able to keep those accommodations through this semester regardless of vaccination status.

-Faculty discussed whether the University expects us to continue to accommodate off-campus students if vaccine availability is widespread in the fall. This topic has not yet been considered by PHAT.

Anita Fernandez



AAUP News & Updates

FWC/AAUP Mission

We promote faculty welfare, broadly defined, through chapter programs and activities designed to advance academic freedom, advance the economic and professional status of the faculty, encourage faculty participation in governance, and inform the community about AAUP standards and policy statements to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good.

FWC/AAUP Executive Committee:

- Dave Crawford, **President**
- Maggie Labinski, **Vice-President**
- Bill Abbott, **Secretary**
- Paul Baginski, **Treasurer**
- Jen Adair, **At-large member**
- Peter Bayers, **At-large member**
- Anita Fernandez, **At-large member**
- Shannon Kelley, **At-large member**
- Irene Mulvey, **Immediate Past-President**



[On Covid and faculty burnout:...](#)

[On the potential positive impacts of Covid on differently abled students, and what happens next...](#)

[Another look at the AAUP's statement on racial justice \(because Black Lives still matter...\)](#)

On what you hope our administrators are reading:

<https://www.chronicle.com/page/faculty-career-paths-a-conversation-for-presidents>

Book review editor sought at AAUP's *Academe*

<https://www.aaup.org/news/academe-book-review-editor-sought#.YEUnBGhKiyY>