

# Faculty Welfare Committee



*Excellence in Education*

## From the President

Fairfield University

FWC / AAUP Newsletter

Dear Colleagues,

The air is warming, my pears and cherries are wonderfully abloom, and a family of robins have chosen to nest in the pine outside my Donnarumma window. All this means... We might survive? My mom can hug her grandkids? I can walk the dog without surgical gear?

After an extraordinary year of faculty sacrifice, the scent of “cautious optimism” is in the air. Faculty are finally able to lift our collective gaze and contemplate the future. What will next fall look like? What will our next multi-year contract look like? What have we learned from the experience of teaching “hybrid,” and of managing students under unprecedented strain and uncertainty? What can we learn about our faculty governance structures from their stress test under Covid? Can we forever banish the phrase “an abundance of caution?”

In this month’s brief newsletter, we report on three main things: First, Paul Baginski, former chair of the Faculty Salary Committee (FSC), helpfully reviews the Memo of Understanding (MOU) we signed last fall. He points out important differences between our “contract,” which is set for next year because we voted to extend it, and “restoration,” the process of refunding the money we allowed the administration to set aside for a potential financial disaster. The good news is that the dreaded disaster has not come to pass. The current FSC is working with the administration to determine exactly how much of our money we get back, and the FWC Executive Committee has approved funds to pay our lawyer should the FSC need it. Thanks are due, as always, to our dues-paying members.

\*\*\*[Click here](#) if you are not a member,  
or for more information\*\*\*

### In this issue...

- The ABCs of our MOU
- Fall opening ???s
- Junior faculty concerns
- **Free** AAUP swag!
- Important links!

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Also, Jennifer Adair and Peter Bayers share feedback from the Faculty Welfare Committee's (virtual) Brown Bag lunch on the fall 2021 "reopening," and the (virtual) Cocktail Hour for junior faculty. Here the news is less sunny. As of this writing, important questions remain unanswered. Faculty expressed a range of concerns, sometimes in "salty language," in the words of one witness, sometimes with genuine sadness. Of special concern to all of us on the FWC is the welfare of junior faculty and the long-term impact of the pandemic on their careers.

Thanks to our devoted colleagues serving on all of our important committees, and good luck to everyone winding down the semester.

In solidarity,

Dave Crawford

President, Fairfield FWC / AAUP

**Free Swag!** Contact me for your personal supply of our fetching AAUP "Got Academic Freedom?" masks. Very useful if we need to teach masked in the fall, and perfect for sharing your socially distanced opinions! Cotton-lined, two sizes, two layers + a disposable filter insert for the deeply fearful or immunocompromised. What more can you ask from a mask? They are seriously comfortable.

## The Pandemic MOU

by Paul Baginski

It's certainly been a difficult and stressful year, dealing with the effects of Covid-19 on our teaching loads and our personal lives. Now that the academic year is coming to a close, many of us are starting to think about the coming academic year and those thoughts naturally include questions about contracts and compensation. Do we have a Memo of Understanding (MOU) for the coming year? Will we have a restoration? Is the University in good financial shape? August 2020, when the Faculty voted on a revised MOU, seems like ages ago and by now many of us have fuzzy memories of the details. So, as the former Chair of the Faculty Salary Committee, I wanted to give a quick recap of that MOU, to remind us of what happened and where we stand now.

As a disclaimer, this is not an official communication from the FSC. I am not on the FSC this year and not privy to their discussions.

**History:** Before the pandemic, the Faculty and Administration had agreed to a 3-year MOU for Fiscal Years 2018-20, which was extended by joint agreement in April 2019 for an additional fourth year. That fourth year of the MOU was supposed to cover the current 2020-21 academic year (i.e., FY21). However, when the pandemic hit in Spring 2020, that caused financial strain for the University. Seeking additional budgetary flexibility, the Administration approached the FSC in Summer 2020 with the idea of revising the existing MOU, in light of the extraordinary and exceptional circumstances. After three months of intense collegial discussions, the FSC and Administration devised a proposal for a revised 2-year MOU, which the Faculty voted on and approved in August 2020.

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**Terms this year:** The revised MOU involved financial sacrifices by the Faculty in the current year, Fiscal Year 2021. Retirement contributions were reduced from 9% to 3.5%. There were no merit raises or supplemental salary budget this year. There were no other changes to compensation.

**Terms for next year:** The revised 2-year MOU approved in August 2020 covers this coming year, FY 22. The terms for compensation are already set and do not depend on the University's financial performance in the present year. Compensation returns to pre-pandemic levels and, in some cases, exceeds those levels. Retirement contributions will return to 9% on July 1, 2021. Merit raises will again be the greater of a) 2.25% or b) 1 percentage point less than the percentage of tuition increase. The supplemental salary budget will be 1.75%, an increase from the pre-pandemic level of 0.75%. Lastly, each faculty member will receive a \$150 increase to their base salary, prior to the application of merit raises and the supplemental fund. There are no other changes to compensation and no changes to the health plan.

**Restoration of sacrifices:** The revised MOU has a mechanism for restoring some or all of the financial sacrifice from the current academic year. This is the only part of the MOU that depends on the University's financial performance in the current fiscal year. The June 2020 budget approved by the Board of Trustees anticipated losses in undergraduate tuition and room & board of \$11.1 million. If the university's losses on undergraduate revenue are less than \$11.1 million, then the difference will be returned to faculty. As FSC Chair Walter Hlawitschka announced at the General Faculty Meeting this month, current finances indicate that the losses were indeed less than anticipated and so some of our sacrifice will be

restored. The exact numbers will not be known until after the fiscal year closes on June 30, 2021 and the funds will be restored as soon as practically possible. The MOU prioritizes the restoration of merit raises, then supplemental fund, then retirement.

In sum, through shared governance, the Faculty and Administration found a joint solution to the financial hardship of this past year. The collegial discussions last summer ensured that, while there would be some sacrifice this year, that sacrifice would not be excessive. The MOU is now steering the Faculty to solid ground with compensation that recognizes the extraordinary efforts the Faculty have put in to keep the University running during such a tumultuous time.

For anyone interested in consulting the full MOU, the document can be found on the General Faculty Secretary's website:

<http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/gfs/>

## ***Reflections on Junior Faculty Socials***

Peter Bayers, English

Even under normal circumstances being a junior faculty member can be bewildering, if not overwhelming, as they try to navigate the complex straits of academia. At Fairfield, having informal opportunities to form connections with fellow junior faculty or informal mentors at the department, school, and university in 'normal' times has been crucial to this navigation so they can ask questions such as: "I mean, what is this 'Committee on Committees' anyway?"; "Do you ever get blank stares when you ask your students questions?" (Yes!); "Are your kids at home driving your nuts" (YES!); "Where's a good place to run my dog?" (the beach, but...); "Should I run for Chair of a Handbook committee?" (NO!); "Am I crazy think that...?" (NOPE!); "I'm going up for tenure in 5 years and I'm already stressing out, are you?" (YES!).

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Given that these crucial informal, low-stakes opportunities have largely, if not completely, evaporated, the FWC thought it might be helpful to give junior faculty an opportunity to mix and mingle to meet or reconnect with fellow junior faculty 'at' virtual BYOB social hours, and to have a chance to ask questions of a mentor or two from the FWC .

I had the privilege of hosting these social hours, a privilege that was humbling and inspiring: our junior colleagues are ferociously hard working, talented, conscientious, deeply committed, dignified professionals in their teaching, scholarship, and service. Indeed, if they are supported and nurtured by Fairfield, the University's future is bright. The questions during the social hour mirrored the type of questions listed above, and we had some light-hearted laughs. At the same time, it was clear that the while there's no question that the Covid crisis has been isolating and disorienting for all Fairfield faculty, its impact on junior faculty has been profound, particularly for those faculty who have joined Fairfield's ranks in the past 2 -3 years.

At the same time, I must confess that I left these social hours deeply concerned for many of my junior colleagues— and not only because the Covid crisis has taxed them. Specifically, I heard troubling stories from junior colleagues that cannot be directly correlated to the fallout from the Covid crisis. In order to protect the anonymity of my colleagues, I cannot detail some of what I learned from them.

But I left these socials dismayed about the inordinate demands of service and teaching made upon junior faculty, demands that obviously threaten their scholarly productivity. Moreover, it's clear to me that the University is not providing nearly enough of the necessary resources for all junior faculty to maximize their scholarly productivity.

In the case of tenure-line junior faculty the stakes are, of course, enormous, and for those junior faculty on short-term contracts the stakes are also enor-

mously consequential for their professional trajectory.

I am reminded that my senior colleagues and I have a responsibility to advocate more forcefully on behalf of our junior colleagues to ensure that they have the full support they need for their re- search and that they are protected from service obligations inappropriate to their rank.

At the same time, it's clear to me that these junior faculty and their research needs and labor are simply not being fully respected by the University. Don't get me wrong, I have to believe that administrators in the academic division know what is happening and admire and appreciate these faculty; and I think many of them are also well-aware of what is being asked of many junior faculty. But admiration and appreciation, of course, are hardly enough, not if Fairfield wants to cultivate a respectful, nourishing academic culture where *all* faculty can flourish, the outcome of which will ensure the long-term health and integrity of the University.

At the most fundamental level, however, the reason these problems have to be addressed by the University immediately is straightforward: supporting junior faculty so they can flourish as dignified professionals is simply the respectful, just, and yes, fundamentally Jesuit thing to do.

Peter Bayers, English

## Highlights and Concerns

On March 17, the FWC-EC hosted a Brown Bag discussion about the Fall 2021 reopening. As we look toward the resumption of in-person instruction, faculty raised several issues for consideration. These included:

### University communications:

Faculty voiced concerns about communications from the administration regarding teaching and working during the pandemic. Some attendees described University messaging as “incomplete” and “compartmentalized.” Other faculty felt frustrated that messaging across schools and departments often don’t align, adding that there has been little uniformity among University offices. Attendees discussed the need for clearer policies about expectations and directives in general, and for in-person versus online teaching in particular.

### How much of hybrid-hyflex is here to stay?

As plans for Fall 2021 continue to evolve, what aspects of hybrid-hyflex instruction will remain? Will the option for studying remote be available to students going forward? Faculty expressed alarm about what seems to be an emerging “model” in which students have begun to move from in-person to remote instruction at their will. Without clear guidelines or policies about class formats, this has added additional labor and stress on faculty already burdened by the demands that the pandemic has placed on their professional and personal lives. Faculty described having been put in the position of “policing and monitoring” their students. Attendees discussed the need to create standardized language and policies that faculty can use to communicate with students regarding expectations about in-person and remote instruction.

### Faculty governance during the pandemic:

Faculty expressed concerns about disruptions to faculty governance over the course of the pandemic. Attendees lamented the lack of General Faculty meetings in particular. While many faculty have appreciated Town Halls and coffee hours, these gatherings are no substitute for the robust forum that General Faculty meetings provide to vote on resolutions, enact policy, and raise concerns as a collective. In the case of faculty meetings across schools, attendees described

several instances when issues related to work/teaching/research during the pandemic have been rushed at the end of meetings, in effect burying the most pressing business and leaving little to no time for engagement and discussion.

### Junior faculty on the tenure track:

The pandemic has heightened the challenges and anxieties of junior faculty on the tenure track, including lost research time, and pressure to keep up with service and teaching responsibilities, among others. Faculty discussed examples of concrete steps that could help ameliorate the added pressures on tenure track faculty, including:

- De-emphasis on evaluation and/or cancellation of annual review
- An overhaul of performance evaluations that take into account the pandemic
- Extension of tenure clock, and/or a revision of expectations and guidelines for what is required for rank and tenure
- More course releases for junior faculty

### What do faculty want going forward?

Towards the end of the discussion, faculty members reflected on the need for concrete forms of compensation and redress that could help alleviate the added pressures that faculty have faced as a result of the pandemic. Concrete forms of compensation – in terms of time and money – might include:

- A centralized place for information, clearer communications from the University, and more standardized/uniform directives from administrative offices
- Honoring our contracts, and restoring retirement funds
- Putting an end to merit
- Mechanisms for course releases across all ranks that account for the ways that the pandemic has derailed research agendas
- Limits on advising and service requirements, which have increased during the pandemic
- Support for parents
- Expanding new hires

Jennifer Adair, History

## 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.



[Information about Fairfield's FWC / AAUP](#)

[AAUP support for free college](#)

### 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**

*And coming soon...*

*congratulations to our:*

- George E. Lang, Jr. Award winner
- Colleague of the Year Award winner
- Lifetime Service Award winner