

21 May 2013, AAUP testimony to Regents
Robert Wood

Thank you for holding this hearing today on the UW budget, as we enter yet another year of disinvestment from higher education by the Washington State legislature.

I am Rob Wood, the president of the UW chapter of the American Association of University Professors. Our mission is to uphold faculty academic freedom and advocate for placing faculty at the forefront of all academic decisions of the University through meaningful shared governance. Further, we strive to improve working conditions for all classes of faculty on all of our campuses. We guard against the erosion of faculty status, promote faculty diversity, oppose the privatization of the academy, and advocate to keep higher education affordable and excellent in Washington State.

We have several concerns about this budget, but chief among them is the problem that faculty salaries have stalled for four years, and we now lag peer institutions by a wide gap. Loyal UW faculty of all ranks have suffered real and permanent setbacks during the salary freeze, and our wages have provided the budgetary cushion for our institution for far too long.

As required under the Faculty Code, merit reviews have continued each year during the salary freeze, yet promised rewards for meritorious performance have been denied.

Note that during the salary freeze, the Seattle area Consumer Price Index has increased by more than 6%. That means that anything less than a 6% increase still amounts to a reduction in real salary from 4 years ago.

Now is the time to reverse the devaluation of the faculty, and not by off-loading the entire burden to students through tuition increases. We applaud the Provost's Advisory Committee for Students urging faculty increases, even at the cost of increased tuition, but it is unfair to ask them to meet this state obligation by themselves.

Washington State is eating its seed corn. The Regents should work with campus bodies, including the AAUP, to convey to the legislature the serious consequences of failing to fund higher education. If the state abdicates its responsibility, then we must bring in funds from other sources. The discussion in a state that has some of the biggest knowledge-based industries in the world should not be focused upon cuts, but instead be about how to make higher education free for all. Several innovative suggestions have been put forward for how this might be done and we urge the Regents to give them full consideration.

Within the UW, we urge you to look, for example, at the contribution the athletic program could make to the general UW budget, rather than having the UW subsidize the athletic program. Two glaring examples are the tuition waiver and the stadium construction guarantee. When proceeds from the stadium loan of \$200 million payoff start to come in, those funds should be aimed at important campus priorities.

The faculty have done our part in seeing the institution through a challenging time by foregoing promised raises for 4 long years, and the time is right for a significant adjustment to get compensation back on track. Whatever salary policy is in place, its success depends on a commitment to sustained funding for the academic program and for the faculty that conceive and develop it.

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Amy Hagopian

I'm Amy Hagopian, the secretary of the UW chapter of the American Association of University Professors. I'm on the faculty in the Department of Global Health, and my area of expertise is in the global health workforce. In that capacity, I have had occasion to visit many higher education training institutions around the world.

Higher education is what America historically has done better than any other country in the world. We offer the broadest range of educational offerings, the deepest faculty expertise, with the most accessibility to people from all walks of life. It's a national tragedy that in our rush to bail out the banks and hedge fund operators over the last several years, we have abdicated our nation's investment in higher education. Meanwhile, we have enslaved our graduates to a trillion dollars in student loan debt.

The UW is a great institution, recognized as such internationally, and strategically located to attract students from a wide geographical area, including Asia.

To remain the flagship economic engine for Washington State, the UW must attract and retain a world-class faculty. What we are witnessing, and what you are overseeing, is a systematic erosion of the value of UW faculty. Some of my colleagues in health sciences have been lured away with the promise of tenure track positions at institutions in states much harder hit by the Great Recession than was Washington, but where tenure track positions are still available.

While we focus on salaries, however, we may be missing the really important issue of faculty status erosion. Tenure is the job protection that has secured academic freedom in this country for a hundred years. It is arguably the bedrock principle that sustains higher education as we know it. Today, however, the majority of UW faculty and, for that matter, faculty nationwide, are working in labor arrangements that no longer protect academic freedom.

To be clear, academic freedom is not about the personal predilections of faculty to spout off about whatever they like whenever they like. Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either individual teachers or the institution by which they are employed. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom carries with it duties correlative with rights.

The majority of UW faculty are now serving in lecturer roles or in professorships without tenure. AAUP nationally reported this spring that "76 percent of college and university instructional appointments across the nation are now contingent: full-time faculty members off the tenure track, part-time faculty members, and graduate student employees."

This is largely because we faculty are now serving as interchangeable units of flexibility rather than as a community of scholars on which the institution is built.

The commitment to higher education in America starts at each of the state's universities. It starts with each Board of Regents and each state legislature. Let's make our state a model of excellence, with a robust commitment to funding and academic freedom.