

Report from the AAUP Lecturer Forum May 10, 2013

The UW AAUP chapter sponsored a three-campus forum on the status of lecturers on Friday, May 10, on the UW Seattle campus. We were pleased to have over 80 participants, mostly faculty, at various stages of the forum. The AAUP made this issue its top priority for the current academic year, and assigned its executive board vice president (me) to focus on it. This forum was held to further that priority.

Joe Berry, a nationally recognized expert in labor issues in higher education, introduced the forum by connecting lecturers at UW with the broader struggles among lecturers and other contingent academic faculty across the nation. The struggle is for dignity and decent working conditions in the face of a presumption by many that contingent faculty in various guises – now by some counts $\frac{3}{4}$ of higher education's instructional workforce—are the new faculty majority. In other words, these are the academic faculty who are teaching the majority of students in higher education today. Across the country contingent faculty are organizing and making sure their institutions do not use them simply as “units of flexibility” (as they have been described). Numerous successful union campaigns have been waged to secure job rights that protect academic freedom, including most recently at the University of Oregon. In the Q&A following Joe Berry's presentation, American Federation of Teachers representatives described their successful campaign to gain recognition for UW Extension Lecturers.

An essential part of the forum was to learn about the working conditions lecturers' experience on UW campuses. To that end, our panel of 6 lecturers described the realities and concerns they face. Most said they love their role as teachers, but the conditions they face make it hard for them to persevere and provide the support that they believe students deserve. Fear of non-reappointment, ineligibility for benefits, the absence of offices in which to meet with students, last-minute reappointments and class cancellations, failure to support lecturer's scholarly engagement, heavy teaching loads, and low priority in teaching assignments are just a sample of the concerns discussed. One panelist identified her advancement to principal lecturer as a positive vision demonstrating how respect and support for lecturers can look at UW. Though several part-time faculty had been contacted, only one was willing to speak out in this public setting. Given the tenuous nature of their appointments, Joe Berry noted how courageous and unusual our speakers are in coming out to publicly voice their concerns.

The forum concluded with reports from committee leaders at each of the three campuses regarding their recommendations to the Provost. Libi Sundermann provided Tacoma's recommendations, which is the only set thus far to be fully ratified by the faculty the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs at their campus. The committee did not feel as though it had time this spring to make recommendations regarding part-time lecturers but plans to take up those more complicated issues next. Tacoma's primary recommendation is that when lecturers get favorable

reviews of their excellence in teaching, long-serving, but originally non-competitively hired lecturers be given a waiver of the requirement to enter the AHR job classification code 0179 (“competitive”). This would allow UW to offer them multi-year contracts and the possibility of promotion to senior lecturer. Corollary to that recommendation was the idea that the positions of future “emergency hires” be evaluated within three years to see whether a continuing need existed, and if so to allow them to compete for that position through competitive search.

Lisa Coutu described UW Seattle’s committee draft recommendations, which focus almost entirely upon new hires. The recommendations are similar to those from the Tacoma campus, but do not address waivers or multi-year contracts for long-serving faculty. Coutu noted that Seattle plans to address concerns of existing lecturers, particularly the “non-competitive” ranks, in phase 2 of the committee’s plans.

Pamela Joseph outlined UW Bothell’s recommendations (also still in draft form). Bothell’s recommendations which, among the three committee reports, are the broadest in scope, covering new hires, transparency, promotions, mentoring, workload, job-security and—quite important to the UW Bothell lecturers—recognition of and support for lecturers’ scholarly engagement. Bothell, like Tacoma stressed the need for multi-year contracts for long-serving lecturers regardless of their status as “competitive” or “non-competitive” hire.

Both Tacoma and Bothell recommended allowing long-serving year-to-year “non-competitive” lecturers the opportunity to convert their positions with successful completion of a serious review of their performance. These faculty could be awarded a “search waiver” akin to a spousal or opportunity hire so they do not have to compete for the jobs they have long-filled. Some have held their positions for five to 20 years, have been recognized with awards of excellence by their campus or the UW system.

An Academic Human Resources administrator at the forum clarified that a “competitive hire” is defined by a job search that is considered national in scope, which can be as simple as being announced in the Chronicle of Higher Education and on the website. AHR believes there are federal requirements for a national search to allow permanent appointments, although no one can point to the precise law or ruling and this is not required by the Faculty Code. It was considered a “risk management” issue. AHR labels some of its announced positions as “non-promotable,” but who decides that? And why are multi-year contracts not offered in the first place? Spousal hires are obviously not open searches, referred to simply as “targets of opportunity.” What is part time and what is full time? And why is there a big policy difference between the two?

AAUP is strongly committed to promoting better conditions for lecturers at the UW. The forum convinces us of the need and the interest, and suggests we need better channels of communication and advocacy. Unfortunately, many lecturers do not

even know of the AAUP Faculty Issues and Concerns listserv, and most are not members of AAUP.

AAUP seeks avenues for lecturers to find their own voice and organization, and offers the vehicle of AAUP to promote or serve this effort. Only a small proportion of the faculty serving on UW campuses are now in traditional tenure track roles with the job security afforded by multi-year contracts that constitute a critical first step towards sustaining the academic freedom across the spectrum of academic employment that is central to the mission of AAUP.

Discrepancies between the faculty code (which now recognizes multi-year contracts) and the Academic Human Resource (AHR) job descriptions (which seemingly operate outside Code to limit the length of contracts for non-competitively hired lecturers). The effect of AHR regulations and UW practice has been to perennially reappoint a very sizable labor force with second class rights and conditions. While the non-competitive search provision may have been enacted with good intentions to promote competition, its effect has been to create and discriminate against a near permanent underclass of place-bound faculty that find it almost impossible to escape their situation.

Joe Berry reminded us academic laborers are not different from other workers in this economy, and we should view other working people as our allies. His book, "Reclaiming the Ivory Tower," and his blog on contingent academic labor provide more information on this issue.

<http://thenewfacultymajority.blogspot.com/2012/06/joe-berrys-cocal-updates-may29.html>

Legislative decisions to starve Washington state higher education institutions of funding for basic teaching are fueling these problems. If you want to work on these and related issues, please join us by signing up for an AAUP membership. Our funds this year are aimed at employing a student to help us get organized. Join here using our simple online form: http://depts.washington.edu/uwaaup/membership_N.html

A recording of Joe Berry's talk is posted on our website (or will be soon).