



UNITED FACULTY and ACADEMIC STAFF of UWEC

AFT Local 6481

A Union of Professionals

May 13, 2014

To: UFAS (AFT Local #6481) Membership
(cc: All Faculty and Academic Staff)

From: Jim Phillips, Professor of Chemistry & UFAS President

Re: 2014 Annual President's Report

Greetings. Jim Phillips here: President of United Faculty and Academic Staff of UWEC (UFAS) - *your* faculty and academic staff union. The constitution charges me with the task of writing an annual "President's Report", and as I did last year, I have chosen to share this with all faculty and academic staff. This is an opportunity to inform you all about what we do to make UWEC a better place to work and promote student development.

State of the Organization: UFAS has been more active over the past year than at any point since WI Act 10 – see the list of activities and accomplishments below. Interest and enthusiasm for this organization is growing, as is overall member participation, and we have passed targeted, meaningful resolutions aimed at achieving tangible goals. Furthermore, we have had increasing numbers of people at our meetings and social gatherings, and we continue to build new relationships. **UFAS is getting stronger.**

Of course, challenges remain, but we will persevere, and we are learning how to build support for our issues and work with shared governance. In spite of our continued organizing efforts, which have greatly bolstered interest in UFAS, we are slowly losing members. At times, that trend can be discouraging, but at this point, I believe that building relationships, collecting feedback, and generating support for our agenda is far more important than signing up bona fide, dues-paying members. Beyond membership, we have met some roadblocks as we have tried to push various agenda items forward. However, we are adjusting to a newly defined role, and are learning a great deal about how to build grass roots support and navigate shared governance. Above all else, we will continue to develop our interface with the University Senate next year. Your President has been elected to the Personnel Committee, and your Vice President (Dan Strouthes) has been elected to the Compensation Committee. As such, we have established a direct conduit through which the University Senate will hear your feedback and ideas.

Membership: We have 66 members, of which only 49 are actually current with dues payments. Often, members simply get new bankcards and if they have not provided the updated information, the dues transactions fail. Some intend to stop paying and neglect to contact AFT in Madison, others believe they continue to pay dues, but either way the Treasurer and I continue to get "failed transaction" emails which can be distracting and require follow-up. Regardless, our numbers are down from about 75 at this point last year. Most members that have left the ranks have cited cost as a major reason, but most have elected to continue receiving communications from us. **Anyone who is interested in receiving our emails and/or attending our meetings is welcome.** Simply email me (*phillija*) and I will add you to our mailing list, we want your input and feedback. We will only allow members to vote in elections or on resolutions, however.

Finances: We are financially stable, with a current account balance of \$3020, which has increased slightly since last year, in spite of our efforts to spend money on events and visibility. It is worth noting that most of the monthly dues paid by membership goes to the State and National organizations to support the broader mission of AFT, and only about 10% is returned to us (but that is more than enough for us to function).

Activities & Accomplishments:

- **Criminal Background Checks:** Last summer, all UWEC employees, including instructional staff on 9-month contracts that were not currently on the payroll, were required participate in a criminal background check conducted by an outside employment firm. Initially, this process required employee consent that went far beyond terms of the Regents' policy, as it asked for the right to obtain information from ANY source and provide that to ANY future employer. UFAS stepped in, and **with legal input from AFT-WI, the process was halted**, and we further obtained written assurance that faculty without summer appointments were not punished by failing to respond before they were once again under contract. In the end, HR acknowledged the constructive role we played in this.
- **Constitutional Changes:** Early last fall we made some key updates to the UFAS Constitution. First and foremost, our name was changed to be more welcoming to academic staff. In addition, we added two seats on the executive council to represent non-teaching academic staff. One of these remains unfilled, so please contact me if you are interested in such a position.
- **Uniform 9-month benefit deductions:** At our meeting last fall we passed a resolution in favor of leveling-out the payroll deductions for instructional staff in 9-month contracts. The resolution actually called for a constructive conversation with HR about possible solutions. Unfortunately, the HR director refused to answer my emails requesting a meeting, which marked a disappointing shift in HR's attitude toward us that accompanied the change in leadership. Nonetheless, my appointment to the Senate Personnel Committee is an avenue for both long- and short-term progress.
- **Organizing:** We made a brief presentation at A&S Chairs' council (at the pleasure of Dean Baker) and made arrangements to visit every department in A&S to promote involvement in UFAS and collect face-to-face feedback. Ultimately, we visited most, but there are still a few that initially signed up and then neglected to schedule us. If you would like us to visit your meeting, talk to your chair about it.
- **Salary Resolution:** **We passed a comprehensive resolution on compensation issues, including: equity, compression, catch-up for unrealized merit pay, and fair treatment for long-term academic staff.** This called for very specific actions by the administration, most notably, an end to diverting "salary savings" from the compensation pool (i.e., when senior faculty are replaced with less-expensive junior faculty). This resolution was forwarded to the Senate leadership, however, the Senate Chair did not allow for any floor discussion or endorsement vote. We will continue to press on this measure by: i) Seeking an explanation from Senate Leadership as to their rationale for inaction, and what it will take to bring the key issues to the Senate floor, ii) Raising the issue once again through the executive committee and/or directly from the Senate floor via member-senators, and iii) seeking grass-roots support from all faculty and academic staff (e.g., via a petition drive).
- **Centennial Lecture:** We finished the year with a lecture on UWEC union history by our very own Jim Oberly (Historian and UFAS Treasurer). We had the largest turnout of any meeting I have ever presided over, and I learned, among other things, that **every single employee benefit that we have at UWEC was the result of union efforts.** *Every single one – gained without formal bargaining rights.*

Things to look forward to include an increased presence in shared governance as well as continued visibility and grass roots effort in support of our agenda. We will also hold regular social events next year.

What can you do to get involved? Sign up, attend meetings, sign our petitions, talk to your chair about inviting UFAS to your department/unit meeting, advocate for our resolutions to your Senator, or simply share feedback, observations, and concerns with UFAS leadership.

Feel free to contact me at: jim.jpmusic@gmail.com or phillija@uwec.edu.

In Solidarity,

