



A Union of Professionals

UNITED FACULTY and ACADEMIC STAFF of UWEC

AFT Local 6481



May 14, 2015

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

From: Jim Phillips, Professor of Chemistry & UFAS President

Re: 2015 Annual President's Report

Greetings: Jim Phillips here: President of *United Faculty and Academic Staff of UWEC* (UFAS). Each year, I opt to share my annual report with all faculty and academic staff, in order to inform all those eligible for membership as to what UFAS is and what we do on your behalf. Alas, this is my last President's report. I will soon pass the torch to Dan Strouthes (Geography and Anthropology), presuming he prevails in an uncontested election, but I will be continuing on the board as A&S Representative (*same qualifier regarding the uncontested ballot*).

State of the Organization: Over the past year, UFAS has continued to be an active and effective organization; we have made some impact with a few key initiatives, and we are also learning to cultivate media attention and navigate shared governance. Establishing our role in the post-Act 10 landscape has been the major conceptual issue we have wrestled with for the past two years. I believe we have figured that out, and the simple fact that we are at liberty to dictate our own agenda is the point of having this organization. Here are some specifics:

- **Membership:** Membership numbers have stabilized, somewhat. We had been slowly losing members for years, but recently, this long-term trend has tapered and we added a few members when the Governor's budget was proposed. There are currently 63 members on our roster (*many are not current with dues*), but there are 79 addresses on our email list, which includes non-members who have expressed interest in participating.

Anyone is welcome to be on our email list and attend meetings, contact me if you are interested.

- **Finances:** Our finances continue to be stable, and our current funds balance is \$3272. This is actually up a bit, despite an attempt to spend more money on our efforts. Our primary expenses this year were: Visibility items (see below), subsidies for student efforts to oppose the budget cuts (see below), and we also provided food and beverages at our first un-official campus budget forum. **If you need funds to promote an idea – contact me.**

Activities: We have been working, and our efforts have been largely successful.

- **Visibility Materials:** At a series of "brown-bag", meetings last summer, we developed a new logo (*above right, the design came to us in a dream*), and series of promotional materials, including: Bookmarks, buttons, & posters. We handed out ~500 bookmarks at the Blugold Breakfast, and about 1000 buttons at the budget rally. Note that if you see faculty, students, and community members wearing buttons with our logo or slogans based on the "[AND]" campaign (e.g., "Overworked [AND] Undervalued") – that's us!

- **Centennial Excellence Awards for all Faculty and Staff:** A few of us attended the AFT-WI leadership workshop held last fall on our campus, and we spent the day designing a campaign (it was refined subsequently). The centerpiece was a proposal for every UWEC employee to receive a "Centennial Excellence Award" (~\$1000), to be granted on 1/1/16, and funded via the UWEC Foundation. We ultimately met with the UWEC Foundation, and they acknowledged the idea's merit, but were concerned donors would be unreceptive. They did promise to meet with us again (*and we are still waiting...*). Our point was simple: What makes UWEC great is not basketball arenas – it is people; especially those who work directly with students in and outside of class [AND] and the people who maintain the environment (both physical and otherwise) in which we do that work. If we truly "put people first" here at UWEC, we must recognize them, and be willing to point out their importance to donors.

- **Budget Rally:** Both your VP & I spoke at the budget rally, several of our members attended and marched. UFAS also distributed visibility items at this event, and subsidized the postcards that students sent to Madison.

- *Budget Forums*: We had unprecedented turnout at our budget forum in March, and two on-going initiatives developed from that event. One is a “messaging” group that will develop set of talking points, and come up with ways to use them. The other is a “teach in” task force that, in collaboration with student and community groups, will be holding a series of workshops, beginning with a major event in September. The aim is to educate students, faculty, and community members as to the broader value of the university, shed light on the forces that are working to dismantle public education, and begin to develop an advocacy movement. I note that these are collaborative efforts, and we really do need more UFAS members to participate in them. **Contact me.**
- *Adjunct Walkout Day*: We did organize a demonstration of solidarity with our colleagues on fixed term appointments by wearing back arm bands for “Nationally Adjunct Walkout Day” on 2/25/15. Participation in this effort was relatively low among members, but we did get airtime – **lead stories on two local newscasts**, in fact.
- *Budget and Merit Resolutions*: Just recently, we succeeded in moving a resolution affirming the importance of tenure through the Senate. This was our first successful attempt at doing so, and above all else demonstrates conclusively that UFAS can have a real impact on this campus through shared governance. Another resolution on merit pay (*to allocate it via increments rather than % of base salary, which would reduce inequity*), was referred to the compensation committee with a directive to address the issue. The process was not entirely seamless, but we learned a great deal from it. For one, membership was not sufficiently engaged, and the resolutions would have benefitted from more input and editing before they went in (*a major edit/re-write did occur between readings*). Perhaps leadership could have been more deliberate about seeking that input, but these were on the agenda at the spring membership meeting (*very low turnout*), and were sent out to membership via email (*no feedback or suggestions were given*). Ultimately, these are growing pains; we took a big step with this effort.

Challenges: There are two issues for which candid commentary is warranted.

Numbers & Dues: We need to grow our membership, so that our initiatives have more “inertia” and reflect a broader consensus. The barrier to boosting or even maintaining membership is dues (currently \$49/mo.). That is the cost of affiliating with a major, national teachers’ union, and most of that money goes to AFT-WI and AFT national. As such, several members have raised the issue of discontinuing our AFT affiliation. I believe we need to address this issue with a candid, open conversation in the near term; we cannot longer avoid it. I do believe that AFT-WI has done its best to redefine itself in the post-Act-10 landscape, and, to the extent of their capabilities, have provided effective supported for our local, though much of that is not immediately visible. Recall that we did need AFT’s “muscle” when the Criminal Background Check policy went out-of-bounds two years ago. However, much of what they can offer is much more useful to a large, active organization, i.e., if our membership numbers were up. But again, the only way I foresee a dramatic increase membership is to discontinue our affiliation with AFT and lower the dues (considerably). So, there is the paradox. **Your feedback on affiliation essential as we move forward, please send your thoughts and attend our meeting next Fall.**

Engagement: To continue to escalate our impact, leadership must do a better job of engaging membership, and members need to commit to greater involvement. A large commitment of time and effort is not needed, most of all we need members to simply tune in to what UFAS is doing: reading emails, attend meetings, and providing feedback to the executive board (*though I must note here explicitly that contempt is not helpful*). Of particular importance is any input from our members in the University Senate. Four of our executive board members are also Senators, and two hold positions on the Faculty Personnel and Compensation Committees; but most of are are new to this. If fellow Senators were willing to share perspective it will help us, greatly (*see growing pains above*). In any event, the accomplishments noted above are the result of about 6 people putting in a few hours per month. We can do more, but leadership is performing at capacity (*and if we are not doing what you expect, it is because we have not heard from you*). What I have learned in my personal life over the past few years is that things seem to go better when I think about what I can give instead of what I can take. That may apply here.

A parting long-term thought: **Imagine UWEC as a “public authority” without an organized faculty and staff?**

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In Solidarity,

