



At *The Forum* we write about the pressing issues our members face on campus. We do so from the perspective of labor, connecting our local concerns to those of the statewide agenda of UUP, the national crisis facing public higher education and the issues of working people in the US and beyond.

## Table of Contents:

Year In Review	1
Graduation Gamble	2
UUP by the Numbers	2
Vocationalization	3-4
Legislative Agenda	5-6
Report on Professionals	6-7
Start-Up NY Update	7-8
Contingent Proposals	9-10
The Fallacy of Build to Strength	10-2
Faculty Diversity	12-3
Student Debt	13-5
Online Education	15
Performance Programs	15-7
A Call for Equity	17-8
Report on SIRFs	18-9
On the Cusp	19-20
Letter to the Editor	23-4

## Welcome to the final issue of the *Forum* for the academic year 2014-15.

This issue is meant to offer a snapshot of the issues that face us at what feels like a crucial moment in the University's history. The current leadership in the Union has been in place for two years and, with a few changes, will serve for another two year term. On the administration side, President Jones has also been at the University for two and a half years, Provost Stellar has just joined us, and searches for a number of senior administrative positions are currently underway. Both the University and the Union have undertaken a series of new initiatives, hence it seems an opportune time to address some of the key issues facing the university as it moves forward. Among these are the status of contingent labor on campus, the support offered our graduate students, the projected expansion of the university, the push towards online education, the importance of performance reviews, employee retention and recognition. Threaded through all of these articles is the crucial importance of shared governance. Simply put, the university can only work when its academic and professional faculty have a say in the decisions that directly affect their work-lives, when its expansion does not come at the expense of its existing structures and when all of its workers feel their labor – which is essential for the full functioning of this university – is valued and rewarded. To this end, we applaud recent efforts by the administration to maintain transparency and shared governance as we pursue our shared goal of building a better university.

## Year in Review

Bret Benjamin, Chapter President

As we look forward to a new term, I want to personally thank our Chapter officers for their exceptional work. Tom Hoey, Barry Trachtenberg, Janna Harton, and Rob See will all continue in their roles for another term. Roberto Vives, Eloise Brière, and Eric Warnke have chosen to step down, making room for others. We are pleased to welcome three new Officers: Rebekah Tolley (Contingents Officer), Paul Stasi (Assistant Vice President for Academics), and Linda Gallagher (Assistant Vice President for Professionals). These positions require a tremendous amount of time, energy, thought and commitment; all these Officers, present and incoming, deserve our collective gratitude.

I also thank the dedicated members of our Executive Committee, our Departmental Representatives, and those members who serve on our

See: **Year in Review**, page 21

## ■ Editor's Column

### The Graduation Gamble

Martin Manjak

When our students decide to attend a SUNY college, whether they know it or not, they have made a wager. They have laid down a bet that they will graduate within four years, having incurred a manageable amount of debt that will ultimately lead to higher lifetime earnings. For previous generations, the odds were in their favor, but for current students, the chances of achieving the desired outcome are looking more like those they would find in one of the governor's casinos.

Many factors are contributing to this shift: continued increases in tuition combined with flat support from the state, most egregiously expressed in the state's refusal to fund negotiated salary increases; increased enrollment which puts added pressure on a campus's physical and academic infrastructure; the limited amount of financial aid other than loans; the cost of textbooks; and the need for large numbers of students to find employment to help defray college costs while trying to attend full time. All these combine to make it increasingly expensive to attend college, and increasingly difficult to complete a degree within the traditional period of four years.

The cycle works like this: Tuition goes up; aid does not increase. The student (and his or her family) must somehow bridge the financial gap. They have essentially two choices: Borrow or get a job. Borrowing jeopardizes their financial future; working jeopardizes their academic success.

Add to this the scarcity of seats in required courses (the stress on the academic infrastructure) and the exorbitant cost of textbooks, which many students forgo (further slowing their academic progress), and you have a set of circumstances that will conspire to defeat even a determined student's effort to graduate on-time.

This amounts to a vicious cycle: I want to attend college, but I must work and keep my job to afford school. That work commitment prevents me from devoting the time and energy needed to advance toward my degree. As a result, many students fail to complete their program within the expected time frame. Now the student is facing another semester or two of (higher) tuition and fees, more debt, and even less aid because she has gone beyond the four year boundary for completion. In other words, the student has to double down, or risk losing the time and money already committed to her education.

For our students today, higher education consists of a constant economic calculus. Should I borrow or get a job? Should I go to class, do the homework, or go to work? Should I buy the textbook, or pay for rent and food?

This is a path that is unsustainable, either as a model for affordable higher education, or a method of funding public colleges. Without a renewed and forceful commitment on the part of the state to SUNY's mission, our campuses and students will continue to struggle to offer and realize the promise of a college education, a promise that for previous generations was fulfilled.

### UUP Albany: By the Numbers

<b>1590</b>	Total Membership
<b>481</b>	Agency Fee Payers
<b>2071</b>	Total Bargaining Unit
<b>1224</b>	Full-Time Members
<b>88</b>	Full-Time Agency Fee Payers
<b>366</b>	Part-Time Members
<b>393</b>	Part-Time Agency Fee Payers
<b>559</b>	Full-Time Academic Members
<b>40</b>	Full-Time Academic Agency Fee Payers
<b>227</b>	Part-Time Academic Members
<b>230</b>	Part-Time Academic Agency Fee Payers
<b>1056</b>	Total Academic Members
<b>665</b>	Full-Time Professional Members
<b>48</b>	Full-Time Professional Agency Fee Payers
<b>139</b>	Part-Time Professional Members
<b>163</b>	Part-Time Professional Agency Fee Payers
<b>1015</b>	Total Professional Members

## Education as Vocationalization

Peter Breiner, Political Science

Recently at a faculty meeting we were informed of a list of university initiatives, among them the attempt to establish a new homeland and cyber-security college, an alliance with a law school in financial trouble, and a new engineering school to compete with two other engineering programs in the area. Hearing all this, a member of my department remarked: "it seems that our university is increasingly undergoing a process of what I would call for want of a better word, 'the vocationalization of education.'" And indeed it struck most of us in the room that he was onto something. What he meant by this, or at least what I understood him to mean, was that the goal of a university to provide a well-rounded education to students and enable faculty to pursue research in any number of directions, some practically useful, some not, was increasingly being made subservient to training students for jobs and commercializing our research. It seemed to us that state-funded universities like ours were increasingly promising something they could not deliver, good jobs, while denigrating what they in fact could deliver, namely a good education.

What does it mean to speak of the university increasingly focusing on "vocationalization"? After, all do not many students attend universities in the hope their education will lead to satisfying and well-paying employment? Surely this is nothing new. But what we are seeing at the moment at universities throughout the country is something different. Specifically, what we are seeing is a set of deliberate policies that seek to adjust class offerings, majors, curricula, and programs, to say nothing of research, to the job market. New "certificate programs" are introduced that ostensibly will prepare enrollees for jobs in what appear to be upmarket sectors of government activity, such as security. Resources are redeployed not just from humanities and social science programs but also from the hard sciences engaged in pure research to set up engineering programs or specialized research on behalf of private industry in the hope that one day the profits of such undertakings will accrue to the university

and not to the private industry with whom the university has, so to speak, partnered. And more generally, research is encouraged that will be adapted to future commercial markets. The assumption here is that the university somehow can produce jobs in the economy even though it has no control over the economy's ups and downs. In sum, it claims it can funnel students into programs that promise jobs after they graduate and, in addition to all this, help produce jobs for them in specialized sectors, especially those involving business and technology.

### The Dangerous Turn toward Vocationalization: Wrong in Principle, Wrong in Practice

What is wrong with this turn toward vocation-driven universities? Simply put vocationalization of the university suffers from a fundamental misconception of principle, and it is precisely this misconception that renders it even more flawed in practice. What is wrong with the principle is simply that "education" is not identical with "training," even if "training" is often a part of education. Rather education, especially at the university level, is about learning to think interpretively, analytically, and yes, that much overused word, critically; to get distance from one's own culture and history as well as learn about its benefits and flaws; to gain linguistic competence and be forced to write in a clear and disciplined way; to learn the variety of ways one may reason rigorously in a scientific manner; to learn what it means to do research in a variety of fields from those who actually do the research; and above all to acquire knowledge one simply cannot acquire on one's own. And the reason education in a university provides this in a way that is not the same as training for future employment is paradoxically that universities are places where people pursue research because they think research is worthwhile in itself, all the more so when it also happens to produce social, political, or economic benefits.

To all this, one may add that a university education provides the one time in a person's life when she or he may step out of the rat race and think and argue, that is, be taught how to interpret

novels, argue philosophically, think through a mathematical problem to the end, or study the many forces at work in politics. And one cannot get this experience anywhere else, certainly not in the economic struggle for a livelihood.

Perhaps one might respond, “this is a lovely ideal, but not practical.” But in fact the reduction of university education to training is even more wrong in practice. First off, universities that adapt their programs and course offerings to the job market and funnel students into majors geared to present demand will leave students high and dry when the market changes—and in our present economy it changes rather rapidly. Universities do not control markets. They especially do not control or, for that matter, even affect the supply and demand for labor. The latter depends on government spending and macro-economic demand management. Indeed, as recent studies of economic inequality demonstrate, even if we provided a university education to more individuals, the general state of income inequality would be largely unaffected, especially for university graduates

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/01/upshot/why-more-education-wont-fix-economic-inequality.html?rref=upshot&abt=0002&abg=1>)

Second, the particular choices of universities to support certain programs and majors, say computer science or business training, to the detriment of others in the name of preparing graduates for future upmarket jobs may have the opposite result should every university adopt the same strategy. We may indeed produce more and more computer science students with BAs under the assumption that the high-tech industry can absorb them. However, if every university imitates this scheme, we will eventually have a glut of individuals with computer science degrees. This could easily happen if the industry should turn toward those with the most advanced training, say PhDs—or horror of horrors if the reverse takes place, and high-tech industry simply become a form of routine production. And how will such highly trained but inadequately “educated” individuals adapt?

Third, the turn toward “training” deprives students of precisely the breadth of knowledge and the range of possible life choices that will enable

them to get on in the world after the university. Unless s/he by some miracle can affect macro-economic policy, even a well-trained individual may find her/himself without the resources to take in new knowledge as his/her life alternatives change.

Fourth, the turn toward “vocationalization” at the cost of providing a broad education in publicly funded universities will exacerbate both economic and social inequality. Broad education with a focus on a broad acquisition of knowledge will not disappear. Rather it will become the privilege of those who can afford it: the students from those families that can pay for the tuition and the preparation to be admitted to elite universities and liberal arts colleges. These students will not just benefit from the contacts these institutions provide, but also the flexibility to adapt to a variety of professions that an education affords. Those who cannot pay the cost will be trained according to the latest trends in the job market. They won’t become wards of the state but wards of a constantly shifting labor market as we move from one job glut to the other. It was precisely the aim of publicly funded universities to overcome these status inequalities produced by elite education. The vocationalization of education in our public universities threatens to reinstate or rather exacerbate inequalities of status and ultimately inequalities of life prospects and income that once were typical of university education when only a small fraction of the population had access to it.

### **The Job of University Administrators?**

It is an irony that this kind of argument has to be made in a union newsletter. After all, it should be the administrators of public universities like ours who should be most sensitive to the dilution of its educational mission by the shift toward “vocationalization.” And it should be those same administrators who should be warning the public of its consequences. But in their absence, it falls on the union of faculty and professionals in the university to try to save the university from itself, from the very tendencies that threaten to devalue its function in our society.

## UUP's Legislative Agenda

Ivan Steen

When I first became a member of the faculty of the University at Albany in 1965, the State of New York clearly had made a commitment to build a major university system. A new campus was being constructed on the site of the former Albany Country Club, and by the next year it was operational, if not totally completed. The staff was rapidly expanding and adequate funding was available to support faculty and students. Most of the money to run the university came from the state; as I recall, there was no tuition at first, and subsequently it was only nominal. How things have changed! Now, tuition and fees provide 63 percent of SUNY's funding. Since 2008 state funding for SUNY's state-operated campuses has been cut by 30 percent.

UUP's 2015 legislative agenda asks the state to develop a plan with the goal of providing at least 50 percent of the university's operating funds. This year, we are requesting a \$131.4 million increase in those funds. Unfortunately, the Executive Budget only provides a very small increase in support (1 percent), but this increase, along with 10 percent of funding for the campuses, is being withheld pending submission of a "performance-based" program by each campus, which will need to be approved by the SUNY Board of Trustees. These plans, which will serve as the basis for future funding, are required to include some very disturbing elements. For example, one of the criteria to be addressed is post-graduation success, and that may well be tied to the fields in which students major. Thus, if a student majored in philosophy and did not go on to earn a living as a philosopher, the value of that major might be questioned. Also, all SUNY programs will be expected to include some experiential learning, which might work for many degree programs, but certainly not all. Moreover, the Executive Budget does not provide any resources for doing this. The performance-based plans must encourage research, but the most desirable research will be that which has commercial possibilities, with bonuses to be paid to professors who are most successful in those

areas. A further example of the attempt to commercialize the university may be found in the provision for bonuses to be paid to campus presidents who are most successful in opening their campuses to the governor's Start-Up NY program. These elements clearly have the potential to corrupt the academic mission of the university. Similar funding programs have been implemented in other states, and they have largely been failures. It should come as no surprise that UUP is calling for the rejection of this performance-based funding proposal.

UUP also is asking the state's legislature to guarantee a true "Maintenance of Effort" that would include inflationary and mandatory annual increases. Another key element in the union's legislative program is a request that the state create a dedicated public higher education endowment that "would rebuild the ranks of full-time academics and professionals at SUNY and CUNY to provide adequate instructional resources and support for New York's students."

One of SUNY's most successful initiatives has been the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which has graduated more than 60,000 students over its forty-six year history, and has a higher than average graduation rate. Yet, the Executive Budget proposes a decrease in funding of \$1.3 million. UUP is asking for that money to be restored.

UUP also opposes items in the governor's budget that relate to teacher preparation programs. Of particular concern is a proposal that would permit the State Education Department to deregister and suspend the operation of any teacher preparation program if for three consecutive years fewer than half its students fail to pass each required certification examination they take. A deregistered program could request that it be permitted to continue operation, but while awaiting a decision it would not be permitted to educate any students. What makes this situation worse is that it is tied to a new series of certification examinations. Education faculty were not involved in the development of these examinations, which are being administered by Pearson, Inc., and which have not been adequately tested.

Other parts of UUP's legislative agenda deal with increasing accountability and transparency of the SUNY and CUNY Research Foundations and campus foundations, support for SUNY's hospitals and Health Sciences Centers, and student debt relief for SUNY grads and SUNY contingent faculty, among other items. For more on the UUP legislative agenda, go to: [www.uupinfo.org/legislation/pa.php](http://www.uupinfo.org/legislation/pa.php).

Beginning with a scattered group of educational institutions, the State of New York has built a major university system with a fine reputation for education and research. But SUNY's reputation and its service to the students and the citizens of the state are in danger of being eroded without adequate funding. UUP, along with the New York State United Teachers, is working hard to see that SUNY receives the financial support it deserves.

---

## Report on Professionals

Tom Hoey

Vice President for Professionals

I would like to thank all of you who voted for me as chapter Vice President. It is an important position in our union that has many responsibilities that affect our members. I was quite pleased at the voter turnout, which was the highest in the state even though we are smaller than the other University centers. We have elected a large Executive Committee with many new members which is critical for the future of our union.

Over the past 2 years one of the key items my fellow officers and I have been working on is employee recognition and we are pleased that the University has agreed to offer some formal thanks and acknowledgement to those employees who have worked at UAlbany for 25 years or more. Our focus for the next two years will be on employee retention and the possibility of better career paths for our employees through internal promotion.

The first issue we want to look at is employee retention. Excessive turnover is an expensive problem for the University and in general for any organization as it results in the loss of institutional

knowledge as well as the high costs of replacing and training new employees. We see many areas where we can work with the University to help identify and reduce our turnover rate. We believe the University should start tracking the reason why employees leave. Though many departments do some type of exit interview, they are not standardized and the information is not kept in a central location such as Human Resources. Having statistics on turnover would help identify areas where problems occur and may offer opportunities to come up with creative ways to solve the problems that cause turnover. For example, problems may be solved by better manager training, better staffing or by addressing salary compression. This kind of centralized reporting would also help us understand the difference between a normal turnover rate and an excessive turnover rate. In the coming months, we hope to work with the University to develop systems to better track turnover so that we can more effectively address the issue.

The second focus is on career paths and internal promotion. This is a difficult problem and it is being addressed, in part, at the statewide level through a special statewide A-32 committee chaired by Marty Manjak and overseen by statewide VP Philippe Abraham. I am also a member of this committee. We will be looking at updating job titles that have been in place since the 1980s and creating job levels that will allow for promotion. In our last contract, the State, acknowledged the problem of outdated job titles and lack of career paths and they say they want to work with UUP to correct the problem. While the changes the A32 committee is working on may take years, there are also many things we can do today to ensure that internal candidates are given chances to advance. For instance, if the Chapter office is made aware of people leaving the University, we might be able to help solicit potential candidates for internal promotion. And if UUP members serve on hiring committees they should make sure they understand the policies of the contract and of the University on internal candidates, so that they can better help the enforcement of these policies. We have been working with HR and the VP for Finance and Business to ensure that clear communication goes

to managers and search committees, explaining the value of internal promotional opportunity, and the mechanisms for considering internal candidates. The Chapter will be glad to help with any questions.

In closing I would like to say that there are policies in both the contract and University charter that deal with leaves of absence, dropping out from full-time to part-time, long term disability and reasonable accommodation. We can help with these policies but we have to deal with deadlines so we need to know well in advance to help you be successful. We all realize that we are employees of a large and great institution and we have important responsibilities to support the education of our students through our various roles. Working together we can make our union and our University a model of cooperation that will be looked at and copied throughout the state.

---

## Start-Up NY and UAlbany: An Update

Gail Landsman

The first annual report on the Start-Up NY program was released on April 1, 2015 ([http://esd.ny.gov/reports/2014\\_startupny\\_report.pdf](http://esd.ny.gov/reports/2014_startupny_report.pdf)). In the "Commissioner's Message" prefacing the report, Howard Zemsky, President and CEO of Empire State Development (ESD) and Commissioner of the state's Department of Economic Development makes clear the purpose of the program: "The primary goal of START-UP NY is to create jobs by stimulating growth in business, be it new companies, expanding New York companies or companies new to New York. Key to this goal is to dispel the state's reputation as a high tax state and send a clear message that New York is open for business." At whose expense is this message being sent? By providing the opportunity to operate a business state and local tax-free for a decade on or near participating academic campuses, Governor Cuomo has opened New York State's public colleges and universities to businesses; the impact on higher education in the state is far from clear.

What do we know? According to ESD's annual report, in 2014, 47 public institutions and 15 private institutions were approved to participate in Start-Up NY; 72% of all eligible SUNY and CUNY schools were approved. Two more public institutions were approved in 2015, with 13 more listed as pending. In 2014 the combined 62 public and private colleges and universities created 356 tax free zones consisting of over 4 million square feet of space, most of it upstate. To date, 30 companies have begun to operate in the tax-free zones, and 76 jobs have been created. To meet the definition of a new job, a business needs to have been in the program for 6 months; as many in the program don't meet that threshold yet, the number of jobs is expected to rise in 2016, although the exact figure is not known.

Of the 30 current businesses, 5 came from out of state; 15 are start-up businesses, and 10 are existing businesses in the state that have relocated to the tax free zones. Classbook.com is one of the latter; looking to expand, it moved from Rensselaer County across the river to downtown Albany to take advantage of a location near a building rented by UAlbany and thus eligible for Start-Up NY status. This and Commerce.Hub's move from one building to another on the SUNY Poly campus, and thereby off the tax rolls, are examples cited by Editor-in-Chief of the Albany Business Review, Mike Hendriks, who notes that "people are beginning to question the wisdom of a program that mainly shifts companies and jobs from community to community within the state."

(<http://www.bizjournals.com/albany/print-edition/2015/01/30/the-other-side-of-start-up-ny.html>)

UUP's position on Start-Up NY is also one of skepticism, specifically as it relates to the wellbeing of public higher education in the state. In particular, UUP is concerned about the way the governor has tied funding for SUNY to campuses' ability – and willingness – to implement Start-Up NY proposals. In the words of UUP President Fred Kowal, "The governor's plans for a performance-based assessment system for SUNY and deep funding cuts to the state's teaching hospitals make UUP question if Start-Up NY is another of his thinly veiled

attempts to hand the state university over to profit-driven corporations. Why else would he bribe campus presidents with bonuses to lure businesses to SUNY?" (quoted in The Voice, Jan/Feb 2015).

Many questions have been raised by the union, including whether campus resources will be strained, and if the program provides restrictions to prevent companies from privatizing services and jobs done by UUP members. Of perhaps greatest concern is how SUNY students' college experience and the campuses' academic missions will be affected. What will drive curriculum development and expansion? Might control of the curriculum shift from SUNY faculty to for-profit companies? There is a lot we simply don't know and much to concern us.

Despite these very real concerns statewide, as of now the UAlbany campus appears not to have experienced any negative effects from Start-Up NY. Two factors may contribute to this situation. The first is that compared to other campuses, particularly those in the western part of the state, UAlbany has little move-in-ready space on campus to commit to Start-Up NY businesses. This has meant fewer proposals submitted to UAlbany by companies, and fewer applications sent on for approval to ESD. However that may change with the building of the Emerging Technology and Entrepreneurship Complex (E-TEC) on the main campus.

Another factor affecting the impact on universities and colleges may be the seriousness with which administrators overseeing the Start-Up NY program on a campus take the requirement to have companies align with the academic mission of the institution. Heading up Start-Up NY's implementation at UAlbany is Associate Vice President for Business Partnerships and Economic Development Michael Shimazu. When interviewed by a reporter for the Albany Business Review last December, Shimazu stressed the significance of this issue.

For those looking to team up with UAlbany, Shimazu said companies should ask what they can do to align with what UAlbany does. "Each campus is different, each campus has its own sense of alignment and its (sic) critical that each campus can

hold to that," Shimazu said.

(<http://www.bizjournals.com/albany/news/2014/12/19/what-albany-companies-can-do-to-get-start-up-ny.html>)

UUP commends Associate Vice President Shimazu for his public commitment to align Start-Up NY with the academic mission of UAlbany as he promotes job growth in the area, and hopes to see that commitment sustained in the future.

For information on what indicators are used to determine whether a business aligns with or furthers the University's mission, see <http://www.albany.edu/biz-ualbany/eligibility.php>. UUP's Q & A on Start-Up NY is available at [www.uupinfo.org](http://www.uupinfo.org).

---

## Contingent Proposals

Bret Benjamin

UUP defines contingents as those employees—whether appointed as academics or professionals, part-time or full-time—who have no pathway to tenure. This defining feature of permanent appointment—and the corollary issues of stable employment and equitable compensation—must, therefore, be at the heart of any efforts to address the crisis of contingency.

As many of you know, our Chapter conducted a survey of academic contingent employees late last semester. I have been presenting data from this survey to various campus audiences, along with a set of preliminary Chapter proposals (outlined in condensed form below). Some of the suggestions below relate specifically to academic contingents, though many apply to professionals as well. We plan to finalize both our analysis of the data and our proposals in the coming weeks, and will publish a final report by late this semester or early summer. We welcome your feedback on the proposals below as we begin to finalize our position.

These proposals move from the following three assumptions: 1) we must end the deplorable exploitation of contingent labor at universities across the country, especially as it exists alongside, but in obvious juxtaposition to, tenure and tenure

track employment. Rebekah Tolley argues elsewhere in this issue for the importance of equity in calculations about contingency. Protecting those who are most vulnerable and those who have the least representation stands as a core premise of unionism. 2) Tenure is the solution, not the problem; any call for contingent rights should aim to broadly expand the protections of tenure and the provisions of stable employment at a livable wage. 3) The working conditions of our contingent employees are simultaneously the living and learning conditions of our students; contingency undermines the university's capacity to provide the highest quality education to its students.

### Material Issues

It will likely come as no surprise that our survey respondents consistently ranked the material conditions of their employment as their highest priorities, the issues about which they most want UUP to advocate. We propose the following:

- Increase university allotments for graduate student Assistantship funding (both stipend amount and particularly duration of appointment). This will allow graduate students to devote more time to their research (and teaching) and by extension speed time to degree and raise placement rates. It will likewise help departments with recruitment. And, crucially for our purposes below, it will reduce the number of graduate student Lecturers teaching on a per-course basis, allowing for the possibility of moving more current part-time Lecturers into full-time positions.
- Implement a stepped system to extend the duration of contingent contracts and add stability to employment. For example, an employee who has worked for 3 years receives a 1 year contract; after five years, a 2 year contract; after 7 years, a 3 year contract.
- Move long-term, effective contingents into full-time positions.
- Move full-time contingents into tenure-line positions (using Instructor job title, among others).
- Increase the per-course salary for Lecturers, which represents the most exploitative and inequitable form of employment within our

bargaining unit. As Rebekah Tolley indicates (p. 17), we prefer the idea of pegging contingent per-course salary to a pro-rated portion of the salary for those Full Time Lecturers recently hired in the WCI program, which comes to approximately \$5700 per course. An equitable compensation model such as this, in addition to providing a living wage, removes the financial incentive to hire part-time lecturers, making possible more full-time and ultimately tenure-line positions.

- Where possible, ensure that contingents have 2 courses per semester to ensure eligibility for health benefits.
- Ensure stable, predictable appointments for those effective employees who only want 1 class per semester.
- Advocate for UUP's legislative agenda, which includes incentives for campuses that move contingent faculty into full-time and tenure-track positions, as well as a student debt-forgiveness program for SUNY contingent faculty.

### Evaluation

- The current system (or lack thereof) for evaluating contingent academics is entirely inadequate, often based on nothing beyond a casual review of SIRF scores (themselves a deeply flawed measure at best, see Aaron Major's article in this issue). We must end the practice by which contingents are renewed and non-renewed without any meaningful evaluation of their performance.
- Moving toward longer-term contracts requires the development of fair, substantive, holistic evaluation procedures, based on an employee's stated professional obligation, along with tenure procedures where applicable. This will require leadership and additional work both from University Administration, and from tenure-line faculty (UUP members!), in particular department Chairs.

### Participation, Representation, and Recognition

- Expand representation and voting privileges for contingents in departments and on University Senate.
- Ensure sufficient office space.

- List contingent faculty names on department websites.
- Dedicate more funds for research and professional development.
- Recognize excellent teaching, service, research.
- Establish a “Senior Lecturer” job title for employees who have demonstrated sustained, quality service.
- Encourage participation in Commencement.
- Identify additional measures that can incorporate more contingents into everyday University life, without creating new expectations for uncompensated service.

### UUP Organizing

Many of the proposals above are addressed to UAlbany Administration. UUP, however, also needs to redouble its efforts to increase communication and participation with and among contingents. Likewise, we need to educate tenure-line members about their role in the exploitation and subjugation of contingent labor, and clarify the obligations of UUP tenure-line faculty in providing redress.

- Membership: 87% of respondents in our survey think they are members, when in reality our membership rates for contingents hover around 55%. We have launched a membership drive aimed at contingents. (If you get a membership card mailed from us, please take a minute to sign and return!)

- Our Contingent Concerns Committee is active and growing, but we need to activate more members: 33% of our survey respondents say that they would like to participate but don’t know how. Contact me or Rebekah Tolley and we’ll get you plugged in.

- Develop better lines of communication between the Chapter and contingents. We’re working on setting up a Contingent Representatives structure that will work in tandem with our Department Reps. If you would like to serve in this capacity for your Department, please contact me directly.

- The survey indicates considerable uncertainty and concern about health benefit eligibility, General

Education teaching, and attitudes of Tenure-line faculty. UUP needs to educate our contingent members as well as our tenure-track members about these concerns.

- Encourage Departments and Senate to expand opportunities for meaningful participation by contingents.

- Hold regular orientation programs with contingents on health benefits and resources.

- Work with Chairs and departments to communicate best practices for contingent appointments.

- Expand contingent representation within our Chapter Executive Committee.

These preliminary recommendations remain open for debate and discussion; we welcome your feedback. Some of these items are relatively simple, others will require considerable resources and restructuring. Addressing the full slate of issues will require creative, dedicated, and persistent effort. We have been heartened by the UAlbany administration’s stated goal to become a national leader on this issue, and by the serious attention being given by members of the University’s Contingents Panel. UUP Albany pledges to contribute to those efforts in whatever ways we can, and to simultaneously continue to work for contingents in our contract negotiations, our legislative advocacy, and in our role as the union Chapter at UAlbany. As always, we invite the participation of members in shaping our agenda and in implementing the policies we support.

---

## The Fallacy of Build to Strength:

Paul Stasi, Editor

The opening sentence of the Mission Statement of the SUNY system is unequivocal in its understanding of the comprehensive nature of the University system:

The mission of the state university system shall be to provide to the people of New York educational services of the highest quality, with

the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population in a complete range of academic, professional and vocational postsecondary programs including such additional activities in pursuit of these objectives as are necessary or customary.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, however, at least at the University at Albany, we have heard much about “building to strength.” Given budget constraints, the argument goes, the University should support the things it is (or hopes to be) good at, with the inevitable result that things we are less good at (or that we consider less valuable) will fall by the wayside. This represents not only a fundamental misunderstanding of how Universities and academic disciplines work, but also a betrayal of the comprehensivity outlined in the Mission Statement quoted above.

Quite simply, all the intellectual activities of the university are, or should be, connected to one another. This is often clear enough when the disciplines in question are contiguous: students in biology need to understand chemistry; students in English will do better when they understand history. But it is also true even when we take into account fields that seem distinct from one another. When students from different disciplines enter my English classes they not only bring distinct bodies of knowledge with them but they also view my discipline from a different perspective. Indeed, this is the very meaning of interdisciplinarity: the idea that each discipline brings a distinct perspective on a world that does not separate itself into our neat disciplinary divisions. The only way to understand this world is by trying to understand its component parts through a range of disciplinary lenses. The general education structure of the university suggests as much and if we are to produce well-rounded citizens we need to be able to train them in a complete range of academic programs.

At the same time, a state university such as ours has an ethical responsibility to provide this complete range of academic programs to the state’s citizens. To do anything less is to engage in a subtle form of class warfare. Students who can afford to attend private institutions will still be able to study

all the various disciplines that exist. Working class students, however, will only be able to study those that we decide to support. Worse, if that support is tied to earning potential or the “needs” of the market – themselves hard to distinguish from short-lived trends in hiring or employment – then we reduce our institution to a vocational school. Now don’t get me wrong: there is nothing wrong with vocational training. But the public education system in this country was founded in order to provide working class people with opportunities beyond vocational training. Turning our backs on comprehensivity means turning our backs on the 100-year experiment in providing class mobility for working class students.

But the build to strength model also has a pernicious effect on the entire academic institution. Departments find themselves pitted against one another in the desire to prove that they are one of the strong. Most often this manifests itself in the quest for enrollments. Since enrollments and majors are signs of strength – and since only these numbers, rather than curricular or pedagogical need, can get departments resources – we must compete with one another for students. Now we may be able to attract more MA students or more Ph.D. students to our departments, but our undergraduate population is largely determined by the state we live in and the size of our campus. If one department increases its enrollments these, likely, come at the expense of another. Given that the University has committed itself to increase its Undergraduate enrollments, the only way to do so is not to create competition among departments for the same students, but rather to attract students by offering them a quality education. Such an education only comes from reducing student/faculty ratios by hiring more full time tenure line faculty in all areas of academic inquiry.

Finally, the build to strength model hurts our intellectual standing. We are still trying to recover from the deactivations of four and a half years ago which decreased enrollments in the Humanities and hurt the University’s reputation. Those decisions spoke of the University’s then-willingness to jettison whole fields of study rather than make relatively modest investments to maintain the University’s

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.suny.edu/about/mission/>

traditional commitment to comprehensivity. Hopefully we have learned from those mistakes. However, for those of us who continue to teach in the Humanities or other disciplines that may not immediately be considered “high needs fields” the build-to-strength model affects our research lives in concrete ways. It is difficult to conduct world-class research in English when one doesn’t have colleagues who study German literature, for instance, or Classics, or Indian History. And it is difficult to train graduate students to become world-class scholars when they lack similar resources. The University at Albany has articulated a desire to “reach the next level of academic excellence.” The first step in achieving this is to abandon the destructive “build to strength” model and instead to embrace the principle of interdisciplinarity by making it more than simply a fashionable slogan. For we can’t collaborate intellectually if we’re engaged in practices that pit us against each other, practices that, in the long run, hurt the viability of the very units with which we would like to collaborate. Like unions, the various units of the university are in it together.

---

## Faculty Diversity

Barry Trachtenberg  
Vice President for Academics

The recruitment, retention, and success of women faculty and faculty of color is essential to fulfill the university's educational mission, further civil rights, fight gender and racial discrimination, and make UAlbany a truly public university. Barriers faced by women faculty and faculty of color at institutions of higher education often comprise the marginalization of their research agendas, the lack of appropriate mentoring, academic bullying, the institution's historical legacy of discrimination or bias, the paucity of role models or mentors with whom to identify, the lack of institutional support, and what has often been called the "cultural tax": an over-reliance on women and faculty of color in service obligations.

UAlbany has been putting significant resources towards lowering these barriers since 2013, with its UACCESS initiative (Albany Collaboratively Creating Excellence, Scholarship and Success). In the past academic year, the Albany Chapter of UUP has partnered with UAlbany's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) and the Office of the Provost to further these efforts.

One initiative that is underway is to develop a relationship with the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity ([www.facultydiversity.org](http://www.facultydiversity.org)). The NCFDD provides mentoring and professional development training to academics at various stages of their career: from graduate students, through tenure and promotion, to full professors. The strengths of the program are well-documented, but the cost is very often out of reach for individual faculty members.

To test whether a formal relationship with NCFDD would be worthwhile, last Fall, our chapter and UAlbany was awarded a Campus Grant from the New York State/United University Professions Joint Labor-Management Committee Grant to enroll two new tenure-track faculty members (one in the Sciences and one in the Humanities) in the NCFDD's Faculty Success Program/Virtual Boot Camp. The program provides intensive individual and group mentoring to enrollees, resources for establishing and maintaining daily and weekly productivity goals, and strategies for overcoming the hurdles that prevent many new faculty members from successfully making it through the review, tenure, and promotion processes. The grant provided 60% of the funds and the administration provided the remaining costs.

During this trial run, we've been thrilled with the feedback that we've received. In the words of the participants themselves:

The program is all about setting up career related goals for the semester and holding yourself accountable for meeting milestones to accomplish those goals. Specifically, it really helped me focus on writing/research time. I think its been useful for me in that I am more aware of how I spend my time and am now more likely to spend my time on tasks that are

directly related to how I will be evaluated for tenure, namely research publications and grants. I am more likely to say no to other requests now that I am really aware of how I spend my time in the office. It has also been helpful to talk on a weekly basis to a group of assistant professors in science departments at other institutions.

and

Even though my teaching prep is still out pacing my research, I feel like I have nonetheless been incredibly productive this semester. I've been writing 30-90 minutes, six days a week and made significant progress on my manuscript revisions while teaching two brand new, fully enrolled classes and one single credit class for transfer students.... The daily accountability of the online system plus weekly phone calls with my small group is really phenomenal. I am right on schedule for meeting all of my semester goals. I am so grateful to be doing this program this semester because I think I otherwise would have gotten totally buried in teaching, grading and lesson planning, but the program mentors (and my small group peers) have been sharing great advice on how to reduce my time in those areas while still being a quality educator. I've been trying to pass along the tips, strategies and resources to some of my untenured peers as well since I feel really lucky to be in the program. I hope that the university and UUP are able to help get more folks in the program.

Efforts by UUP, ODI and the Provost's office are underway to expand UAlbany's relationship with the NCFDD. We are hoping to identify funds to allow us to make opportunities available for a larger number of faculty to participate in the Faculty Success Program. We are also exploring the possibility of establishing a formal Institutional Membership, which would make the NCFDD's wide range of resources available to graduate students and all members of the faculty.

## Growing Student Debt

Jackie Hayes

I am a doctoral student at the University at Albany and have \$72,000 of student debt, \$6,800 of which is interest, all from attending public Universities in New York State. What does this mean for my day-to-day life? It means that at least once a month I experience anxiety about my ability to lead a relatively debt-free life in the future. Earlier hopes of having a house, a family, or living abroad are quickly checked by the reality that I may never be able to afford any of them. Similarly, when I think about the work I want to devote my life to, calculus profoundly limits hopes and ambitions. Student loan debt has altered the way I think about myself and my place in the world. Unfortunately, my situation is not unique; many other graduate and undergraduate students at UAlbany share this experience. Total national student debt hit \$1.2 trillion last year, surpassing credit card debt. Today, U.S. undergraduates leave school with an average of \$28,400 of debt and graduate students leave with an average of \$57,600, signaling a dramatic shift in Higher Education.

### Statewide and National Trends in Student Debt:

When I talk with others about student debt, the conversation tends to revolve around themes like individual fiscal responsibility or, in the case of older SUNY administrators, personal stories about struggling to pay for education before they "made it." They usually punctuate these stories with questions like: "If I was able to work my way through college, why can't you?" The short answer is that education costs, financial aid, and the very nature of public education have changed significantly in the last few decades. Whereas our parents had a welfare state, we have neoliberalism and the gospel of austerity. (By 'welfare state' I don't mean the pejorative term frequently used by conservatives to demonize social programs; I mean a state that invests in the general well-being of its citizenry.)

The roots of this transformation in public higher education extend far back into US history. In New York, it started in the late 1970s when tuition was first instituted at the City University of New York (CUNY). Prior to this, CUNY had been free for most students, and tuition at public colleges was widely viewed as a supplement to strong public support of higher education.

Yet, only six years after CUNY adopted an open admissions policy, it began charging all students tuition. The initial cost was modest and was partially matched with state financial aid, like the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). But it initiated an ideological shift from public higher education being viewed and managed as a public good, to it being treated increasingly as a private commodity. Students broke down one barrier (access) while another was being erected (tuition).

Since tuition was instituted, it has increased dramatically alongside other education costs like books, fees, and campus housing. In 2011, *The New Yorker* reported that since the late 1970s college costs have increased at three times the rate of inflation; simultaneously, states have dramatically slashed financial support leading to a decrease in full-time faculty and an increased reliance on adjuncts. The personal finances of students and their families are replacing the financial support formerly supplied by the state. In other words, students are not paying more for a better education; they are paying more for a lower quality education.

More recently, disinvestment in public education has intensified. Following the bank bailout in 2008, which drained public coffers to the tune of \$700 billion, states across the US experienced profound budget shortfalls. At least 34 states cut funds to public colleges and universities, resulting in reductions in faculty and staff, and increases in tuition.

New York did not evade the maelstrom. In 2010, New York cut \$1.4 billion in total aid to public schools across the state. SUNY's budget was cut by \$210 million—this large reduction in funding, coupled with previous cuts, meant that SUNY's total operating budget had been reduced by over 30% in only three years. At Albany, funding cuts resulted in

the elimination of five academic departments: Italian, Russian, French, Theater and the Classics, as well as the elimination of staff positions campus wide. While technocrats may see such cuts through the lens of efficiency, these cuts actually represent a shift in what an education means: whereas at one time speaking another language or knowing cultural history was viewed as the mark of an educated person, today anything that cannot be quantified is carelessly thrown aside.

To fill the giant hole left by massive cuts in state support, SUNY and CUNY administrators have lobbied for tuition increases. In the summer of 2011, their efforts were successful and New York passed a bill entitled NYSUNY 2020, which included provisions to increase tuition by 30% over the following five years (the rate is double for international and out-of-state students). This year, the SUNY Chancellor returned to the Legislature asking it to continue the tuition increases for another 5 years, which would mean, if approved, 10 consecutive years of tuition increases. Rather than seek out creative solutions, SUNY officials and the Legislature have simply pushed the burden down to students and their families, relying on the fact that today a degree is perceived as a requirement for most career paths. We only have to look at the last few decades to accurately predict how financially stressed students and their families will get by. They will take out more student loans. The contradiction couldn't be more glaring. The same exact banks that created the conditions for a crisis in public education funding will reap the benefits of the crisis.

Aside from my own anxiety about my financial future, a more profound fear is how these alarming trends are altering the social function of education in general. When I signed up for a career as an educator it was, in part, because I saw the potential for higher education to transform the trajectory of students' lives in meaningful and positive ways. My deepest fear is that higher education's transformative potential will soon be eclipsed by its function as a debt trap. These alarming trends also make clear that it is more important than ever to have vibrant, robust unions on our campuses that focus on material gains, as well as on the content

and meaning of those gains. The current moment requires a creative vision for the future of higher education that, first and foremost, views it as a public good.

---

## Online Education: A Solution Without a Problem

Paul Stasi, Editor

In recent issues we have addressed online education in various contexts. In December of 2013 we addressed the high costs and labor associated with MOOCs (“Making a MOOC”) as well as the repudiation of MOOCs by Udacity founder Sebastian Thrun. At the same time we reported on the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE), which has produced a series of working papers that examine the profit motives behind the push for online education and rigorously refute the claims for accessibility often raised by defenders of online education. As the Executive Summary of CFHE’s October 2013 report on accessibility argues: “Realities of the digital divide (inequities between those who have regular, reliable access to the internet and digital technologies and those who do not) make basic access to online courses much more problematic for some groups. In fact, substantial evidence shows that the digital divide remains a reality for the very students that online promoters claim they want to reach— low-income students, students of color, and academically underprepared students” (for the full report see: <http://futureofhighered.org/workingpapers/>).

Similarly, we noted in our October 2014 issue, the remarks of University of California President Janet Napolitano, who questioned the premise that online education would work for students needing remedial work in general education classes. “I think that’s false,” Napolitano stated, “those students need the teacher in the classroom working with them.” Napolitano, here, echoes the findings of CFHE cited above. Her full remarks can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZPfSS8wVwg>

These comments are particularly relevant for the University of Albany as it moves forward into the brave new world of OPEN SUNY. To be sure, the University says it is only looking for “willing faculty” to participate in online education. At the same time, since every strategic plan each department is required to submit asks, simply, what are you doing for online education (rather than, say, “as a department of experts in teaching, do you think online education has a place in your discipline?”) it is hard not to feel pressured to produce online courses, regardless of their pedagogical soundness.

As with so many issues confronting us on campus, this one comes down to shared governance. Curricular decisions should be driven by those who deliver the curriculum and should be based on sound intellectual and pedagogical principles rather than either the fetish of a new technology or the pressure of contracts with corporations invested in producing online platforms. Indeed a large number of our students are precisely those CFHE and Napolitano describe. They come to us ill-prepared by their previous educational and social backgrounds for the rigors of a college education. For many of these students, college is a place to enter into a different environment, one that allows them to connect not only with faculty and staff but with other students as well. And it is often a difficult transition. These connections are among the most crucial ways that our students are able to overcome their socio-economic disadvantages. Online education, then, has a place, but it is likely to be a very limited one that will largely serve self-motivated, high-performing students. When over-used at a public university such as ours it threatens to become simply another barrier between working class students and the world-class education they deserve.

---

## Performance Programs & Employee Participation

Greta Petry, Grievance Chair

Each year your supervisor is required by the Agreement between UUP and the State to provide

you with a written performance program outlining the duties and responsibilities to be achieved during the coming year. At the end of that year, you are required by the same agreement to be evaluated, in writing, on how well you met those goals. Supervisors may not be familiar with this process. You can help your supervisor and advocate for yourself by learning what the process involves.

It's important to know that a performance program is designed to be a consultative process between supervisor and employee, so you should know what is expected of you. Throughout the year, your supervisor should let you know which goals you are meeting and which need more work so you are not taken by surprise during the evaluation.

It is the policy of SUNY, contained in the agreement, that employees are evaluated on the duties and responsibilities outlined in their current performance program. You cannot be evaluated without a written performance program. For example, if your performance program was written five years ago and ended four years ago, you can't be evaluated.

Be aware that if you want a promotion in the long run, your performance program should be used to document any permanent and significant increase in your responsibilities. The contract anticipates that duties can change, therefore, a performance program can be amended. For example, if you agree to do two jobs because your colleague left and they are not replacing him/her, you do yourself an injustice if you fail to get those new duties added to your performance program. You will also want your evaluation to account for the changes you undertook and the success you've achieved in those new duties. In addition, make sure the time lines for achieving your objectives are reasonable. If additional duties are added to your performance program, ask for others to be removed, or ask for a salary increase.

As your performance program is being developed make sure to:

- Ask questions and request clarification on anything that you are unclear about.
- If you are assigned a new task for which you have no training, ask that training be included.

- Know who your immediate supervisor is. This is the person responsible for writing your program and evaluating you, and the contract requires that you be given that information in writing upon hire and with each change.

Avoid accepting the following:

- Statements of duties that are not described, such as "any duties as assigned." You cannot be evaluated on something you are not specifically told about in writing.

- Duties or responsibilities that you have no authority or resources to carry out.
- Duties or responsibilities that are controlled by someone else.

Call us if you are asked to sign a "backdated" performance program, one that says you were retroactively responsible for duties that you were not informed of. Call us if you are retroactively assigned secondary sources, i.e., colleagues whose opinion of your work will factor into whether you get a positive or negative evaluation. **And remember: though you need to sign the performance program, your signature only acknowledges that you received it.** You can write "signed under protest" or "signature does not constitute agreement - I will be writing a response," should your supervisor add duties that seem way out of your job title or for which you will not be trained.

You should attach a written statement to the performance program within **10 days** of receipt if you object to any part of it. Call Grievance Chair **Greta Petry** at **956-8034** to review a draft of your response. If changes occur in your duties throughout the year, you can be directed to perform them, but you cannot be negatively evaluated on them. If you receive an evaluation that has "Unsatisfactory" checked off, you are entitled to a review by the Committee on Professional Evaluation. You should also seek a committee review if the characterization summary is "satisfactory" but the content of the evaluation is overwhelmingly unsatisfactory. To appeal an unsatisfactory evaluation, reach out to the Chapter within 10 working days of receipt of the evaluation

and our UUP chapter leaders can guide you through this process. Do *not* let an "unsatisfactory" evaluation go by without contesting it.

**Source:** UUP Guide for Professional Employees

## A Call for Equity

Rebekah Tolley, Officer for Contingents

For ten years I taught under full time contracts at a variety of institutions. Two years ago when I moved to the Capitol Region I believed with all the schools in the area, and my experience, I wouldn't have a hard time finding another teaching position. I was on unemployment when I moved here, and willing to take any work I could, so for the first time in my teaching career I accepted an adjunct position. The pay was unreasonable, but like other adjuncts, I found it hard to say "no" to the profession I built my career on for the past 10 years, and I also realized I didn't have a lot of alternative careers up my sleeve. Teaching is what I am trained to do, it's what I know, and what I enjoy. And so, for the first time in my adult life, I lost my financial independence, relied on my partner for healthcare and to pay the bills, and became an adjunct instructor in the Art department.

I do essentially the same work now as I did as a full-time professor, but I only get paid a tiny fraction of what I used to. I still work with students in the same way, help with advising issues, and write recommendations. I am, by necessity, the shop technician for the studio in which I teach, so I maintain the studio, its equipment and order supplies. I serve the University, and I still try to find time to do my own work, but I no longer have access to funds for professional development or conference travel. From this experience, I've come to believe that correcting the problem of underpaid adjunct labor is not only about calculating pay fairness in terms of a livable wage, but that our goal needs to start from the premise of equity.

What would this mean in practice? It would mean linking the compensation of adjuncts to compensation for full time employees by prorating

adjunct salaries with respect to the salaries of a full-time lecturer, which is currently about \$40,000. In addition, it would mean prorated amounts of healthcare and retirement for those teaching one course at multiple schools so that they could piece together healthcare and retirement. It would mean access to professional development funds and more stable contracts. Equity would also mean recognition and compensation for service by adjunct faculty. These elements together would create a more inclusive environment of fairness.

On the one hand, equity would lead to a significant jump in adjunct pay and benefits to help address the problems of poverty for those adjuncts who manage to string together full-time teaching loads, yet still don't earn a living wage. But understanding this issue as a question of fairness and equity points to something bigger. It builds into the compensation structure a recognition that adjunct instructors do the same kind of work of other instructors, and that we value the contributions of adjunct instructors as much as other instructors. We are all essentially doing the same work and so we need to be compensated equitably.

Many of us could likely agree in principle that basic salary equity, for example, would be the ideal achievement to help resolve the issue of exploited workers in education, but many will also argue that this will cost too much given the current crisis of funding and budget constraints in higher education that, we are so often told, prevent us from paying everyone fairly. Keep in mind, however, that adjunct compensation currently represents a tiny amount of most universities budgets (several recent studies have calculated that adjuncts make up less than 4% of the university budget for a workforce that teaches more than 50% of the classes)<sup>1</sup> and the kind of compensation increases that equity demands, while life-changing for many adjuncts, represent a

<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, <http://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2015/03/workers-adjunct-faculty-struggle-with-wages-comment-1929409603> or <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/most-university-undergrads-now-taught-by-poorly-paid-part-timers-1.2756024> or <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/why-u-of-t-york-strikes-are-more-than-labour-disputes/article23279298/>

relatively tiny increase in university spending. But, it would of course still cost something. We need to restore state funding to higher education, but we as a University community, must also tackle the extreme inequity in the current allocation of resources and make supporting all faculty a priority when decisions are made about how to allocate limited resources.

Reliance on exploited instructors hurts our students, our university, and our communities. Making equity and fairness a priority would demand a reprioritization of resources that values all faculty members on an equitable level and makes compensation for faculty a priority. And if we are committed to these values then that needs to be manifested in how we compensate people. The strength of our union, and our university community, depends on solidarity and equity, which is why we must call for some measure of equal compensation for equal work for all members.

This measure of equity would be a big step, but still only a first step towards the larger goal of moving us away from a system of compensation defined by the deeply flawed market logic and towards a system of compensation that reflects university principles in which teaching, service and research are all equally valued and reflects broader principles of equity and fairness.

*Please "Like" our page on Facebook "Supporters of UAlbany Adjuncts." Contingents are invited to join our group "UUP Albany Contingents". Bring your concerns to the CCC, or get involved, contact me at [rebekahtolley@gmail.com](mailto:rebekahtolley@gmail.com).*

---

## Report on SIRFs

Aaron Major

Being successful as employees of this University depends not only on the quality of our own efforts and the support of our colleagues and supervisors, but also on the systems that are in place to formally evaluate our performance. For the teaching faculty, that system puts a lot of weight on student evaluations of our teaching; indeed, for most

adjunct faculty, it is the only formal evaluation that they get.

In an effort to address growing concerns about the use of student evaluations in the review process for promotion, tenure, and reappointment, in 2009 the Provost charged a Course Assessment Advisory Committee (CAAC) to evaluate the University's course evaluation procedures and tools. As part of its report, the CAAC conducted a statistical analysis of student evaluations between 2005 and 2010 and published these results as part of its 2012 *Report of the Course Assessment Advisory Committee*.

The Committee's overall finding was that student evaluations are an imperfect instrument, but they are nevertheless a useful, and valid instrument upon which to base such decisions. After reviewing the Committee's report and the entirety of its statistical evidence I believe that the CAAC does not draw the appropriate conclusion from its own data, data that shows that student evaluations are biased against gender, biased by response rate, punish faculty who take on the burden of teaching large classes, and reward faculty for giving out higher grades. That these factors significantly influence student evaluations of faculty shows that the instrument is not a valid one, especially for making important, career-shaping decisions around promotion, tenure, and reappointment.

In its report, the Committee does draw attention to the finding that students who expect to earn a higher grade in a class evaluate faculty more favorably. Discussing this finding, the Committee notes: "the relationship between students' expected (or actual) grade and their ratings of instructors are potentially of interest in terms of the validity of ratings" (p. 12). While this finding by itself raises questions about the validity of the SIRF, more troubling is the report's silence on other factors.

Instructors teaching large classes are statistically more likely to get lower course evaluations, as are instructors who are female. In addition, the CAAC's data shows a strong effect from the response rate to the SIRF on evaluations; the lower the response rate, the lower an instructors' rating. Given that one of the Committee's charges was to specifically evaluate the validity of on-line evaluations, the Report's

complete silence on the effect of response rate on evaluation scores is troubling. The Committee does suggest that low response rates (below 30%) should be ‘viewed with caution” (p. 14). This would be an appropriate conclusion if the effect of low response rates were to increase random variability in evaluations. *Yet the regression results show that low response rates are systematically biasing evaluations downward.* This points to a negative response bias in evaluations—students who more readily do evaluations are more likely to be those with negative reactions to the instructor—which also points to the invalidity of the SIRF evaluations.

A close reading of the study shows that student evaluations are not just an imperfect measure of instructor performance: they are an invalid measure of instructor performance. The Committee’s statistical analysis shows that evaluation results are driven by gender, structural features of classes (size), the grade students expect to receive, and response rates to SIRF—all of which show that students are not appropriate assessors of faculty. These biases are not limited to on-line evaluations, but are strongly present in traditional in-class evaluations, suggesting that it is not only the way in which the tool is administered that is the problem, but also the tool itself.

#### **Selected regression coefficients from CAAC report (all coefficients significant at .05 level or lower)**

##### Evaluations given in-class

Instructor Sex Code Missing	-.721
Response Rate for Class Meeting	.531
Expected Grade	.322
Average GPA of students in class	.244
Instructor is Female	-.110
Class Size (150+)	-.093

##### Evaluations given on-line

Expected Grade	.444
Class Size (150+)	-.272
Response Rate for Class Meeting	.245
Average GPA of Students in Class	.230
Instructor is Female	-.093

## **On the Cusp: The Transition from Graduate Student to Adjunct**

Jessica Manry, Third Year Ph.D. Student

This semester I, along with five of my peers also in their third year, will take the comprehensive PhD exams in the University at Albany English Department. Should we pass—(knock on wood)—we will enter doctoral candidacy, a disciplinary and faculty-sanctioned recognition of our readiness to contribute to our field with a dissertation. To prepare over the last year, we have compiled reading lists for written and oral exams, taken language translation tests, and written and edited dissertation summaries to the approval of our committees. We have balanced these intensified responsibilities with our already-existing engagements—including committee work, teaching, and attending academic conferences to present our research.

On the other side of exams is a proverbial light at the end of a long, sometimes dark tunnel: fourth-year funding, or as the administration refers to it, “extended-year funding.” In the English department, fourth-year funding essentially means that PhD candidates in their first year of dissertation work can continue with their assistantships (teaching the same number of courses and students at the same rate of pay), providing them with the stability of established time, energy commitments and momentum to move forward. In the midst of our exam year, however, my cohort faces a somewhat unprecedented challenge: it has been made clear that extended-year funding is no longer a guarantee for students who pass exams and is, instead, highly unlikely for my cohort of six students. This situation is made more precarious by the fact that these concerns present themselves at precisely the moment that we are to take comprehensive exams, which has added unnecessary and extraordinary stress to that already difficult process.

Without funding, my peers and I (and other graduate students in our position) face uncertainty regarding not just our dissertations but also our educations and livelihoods. In large part this is

because we will very likely transition to adjunct positions the same year that we begin our dissertations, although there is no guarantee of the availability of that type of work either. If this is the case, our teaching workload will increase from one course per semester to two, while we will receive a \$2,800 stipend for each of the two courses we teach; in other words, we will double our workload while accepting an almost \$4,000 cut to our already small annual salaries of \$15,000. In effect, such a transition asks graduate students working toward PhD degrees to place their educations, and livelihoods, second to labor for the benefit of the university.

While this is not an uncommon situation, it is one that is worth highlighting for its potential detrimental effects on graduate students and adjunct faculty. Also worth highlighting is the fact that this predicament is unique, in many ways, to the humanities disciplines. That is, as is widely known, students in STEM fields, among others, have access to governmental and private external research funding rarely available in the humanities. At the completion of their coursework, many of these students have the option of transitioning into positions funded by these external grants, which often come with annual salaries of \$20,000 or more. For most UAlbany graduate students this amounts to a raise rather than a reduction in income. It seems imperative that we acknowledge this discrepancy as we take steps to make UAlbany a truly comprehensive research institution.

Below, I hope to briefly outline several additional points that address why this transition matters for my cohort and myself but also for graduate students here and elsewhere, for the humanities, and for the University at Albany community and administration.

#### Why it matters to SUNY English PhD students:

- We are unsure about the security of our employment at the University at Albany, as well as our ability to finish our degrees.
- We are asked to choose between our education and that of our students, an impossible bind.

- SUNY English PhDs already receive fewer years of funding and less money annually than any other English PhDs in the SUNY system as well as those at our institutional peers. (Source: 2014 University at Albany, SUNY English Department Self-Study).

#### Why it matters to graduate students at UAlbany:

- While grad students always assume the roles of both student and employee, curtailing assistantship funding subjugates the former to the latter, making clear that our primary value to the university is our "cheap labor" rather than our intellectual promise as future scholars and teachers.
- It divides graduate student bargaining power and the shared interests of graduate students broadly.

#### Why it matters to everyone at UAlbany:

- It will extend the humanities PhD time-to-degree statistic, which affects rankings and thus funding opportunities for everyone.
- Competitive and successful comprehensive research institutions depend upon healthy, productive disciplines university wide.
- Unequal education within a university inevitably compromises scholastic merit and integrity.

I hope I have demonstrated that these issues are larger than the worries of five or six graduate students, of English departments or even the humanities. I would like to emphasize the persuasive power that graduate students, faculty, and administrators have *together* in the quest for more state funding and better pay for graduate student and contingent laborers. In closing, I commend recent, promising steps that the University at Albany administration has taken to combat issues with graduate student and contingent labor funding and compensation. I am hopeful that we can make positive, collective changes in a shared effort to make University at Albany a truly comprehensive research institution.

## Year in Review

(continued from page 1)

various Chapter Committees. We have over 200 members actively involved in these Chapter roles, which has made possible a number of the initiatives listed below. I am proud that we continue to move new members into leadership roles within the Chapter: the recent election brings as many as 28 new members onto our Executive Committee (bringing the total to over 70). I'll be asking again for participation in Chapter committees in the fall, and would love to tell you in this column next year that our numbers have swelled to 300 active members.

I would like, in this space, to recap some of our chapter's events, issues and accomplishments for the year. But first I will articulate what have been the core principles guiding all of our efforts:

- Education, particularly public education, is a social good worth defending with tenacity, creativity, and vision. We fight to establish a university that is affordable, accessible, and that offers the highest quality education for its undergraduate and graduate students.

- As a corollary, we believe that the public research university must offer a comprehensive array of disciplines, shaped both by emerging forms of knowledge and by centuries-old traditions of intellectual work upon which the modern university was founded. The corrosive pressure to subjugate intellectual inquiry to market forces and bureaucratic management fundamentally undermines the university.

- UUP members make the university work. We are the teachers, the librarians, the computer technicians, the coaches, the advisors, the researchers, the admissions staff, the accountants, and much more. Without us there is no university.

- We fight so that all members of our bargaining unit can have better working conditions, but we pay special attention to those whose labor is most exploited, those who have historically had the least representation within higher education, and

those who are most vulnerable. This is at the heart of unionism.

- We do this because we believe that employees deserve compensation for, and control over, the valuable work they do. Moreover, we understand that the working conditions of our employees are also the learning and living conditions for the students who attend our university. Taking care of university workers translates directly into a higher quality institution for the students who attend. Further still, we believe that the provision of affordable, accessible, quality public higher education can be broadly transformative, yielding social benefits stretching far beyond the bounds of our immediate university community.

With these principles in mind, we have sponsored the following events:

- welcome back BBQ General Membership meeting
- spring General Membership meeting which, for the first time, hosted a Candidates' forum.
- two Department Representatives meetings
- "The Power of the Drescher Award" with Nuala McGann Drescher
- follow-up session on How to Apply for a Drescher Leave
- workshop on contingent employees in conjunction with National Adjunct Walkout Day
- screening and discussion of "Con Job" on Contingent Instruction in composition courses.
- BBQ tailgate on Homecoming weekend.
- sent an Albany delegation to the Labor Parade in New York City
- sent an Albany delegation to the Climate Change March in New York City.
- participated in the Labor Day picnic, Martin Luther King Celebration, campaign work and other initiatives with Labor groups from around the Capital District.

- legislative outreach training, featuring former Assemblyman Jack McEnaney
- Workload Creep workshop
- Education from the Inside Out public event
- film screening of "Lottery of Birth"
- Health and Safety Committee workshop on air quality
- training for A28 Committee Members
- joint UUP/EAP workshop on Practical Tips for Navigating Workplace Challenges.

And we have been forceful advocates on issues including:

- contract implementation on campus
- contingents' equity
- retention and internal advancement opportunities for professionals
- stronger faculty governance
- the renewal, tenure, and promotion process
- evaluation of instruction
- gender equity
- senior leadership evaluations
- policy for travel reimbursement
- StartUp NY
- campus accessibility
- on-line education
- health and safety
- parking

Among our accomplishments are the following. We have:

- expanded substantially the number of active chapter members (over 200 members serving on/as executive committee, departmental reps, and chapter committees).
- placed two members (Philippe Abraham and Tom Hoey) on the statewide UUP Executive Board. Two Albany Chapter stalwarts, Candy Merbler and Ivan Steen, were awarded, respectively, UUP's prestigious Nina Mitchell and Retiree of the Year Awards.
- conducted a successful Chapter election, which brings over 70 members into Chapter

- leadership roles. Albany had the highest vote total of any chapter across the state in this year's elections.
- played a formative role in the constitution of a University Panel on Contingents.
- conducted a Chapter survey of academic contingents, from which a report will be published.
- launched a membership drive, with a focus on contingent employees.
- developed a Chapter survey on equity in the workplace.
- strengthened relationships with campus governance.
- strengthened relationships with University administration, and played a formal role in the Provost search.
- worked with the University to develop an employee recognition program for employees who have worked at UAlbany for 25 years or more.
- collaborated with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion on a joint labor management campus grant for membership in the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity.
- produced regular, high-quality newsletters, that have voiced strong, principled positions on issues at UAlbany and beyond.
- worked closely with the Education from the Inside Out Coalition to remove barriers to access to higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- collaborated with newly unionized St. Rose Adjunct Faculty.
- developed draft proposals for a faculty ombudsperson, and a campus food pantry.
- worked with the University to ensure up-to-date Performance Programs and Evaluations for professionals.
- participated in legislative outreach, advocating for more SUNY funding, better public sector health and educational services, more transparency from the Research Foundation among many other issues.

Although this is another tough budget, the many days of advocacy and rallies at the Capitol helped stave off many of the Governor's worst higher ed. proposals.

- continued to build strong ties with the Graduate Student Employees Union and the Graduate Student Association (GSA)
- strengthened ties with the Albany County Central Federation of Labor as well as other local labor organizations.
- strengthened ties with community organizations including Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration, the Social Justice Center, and Holding Our Own.
- worked individually with members on a range of issues, to insist upon due process, procedural compliance, and employee solidarity.

I am proud of the work we've done over the past two years, even as I realize how much remains to be done. The chapter leadership has broad ambitions, and we plan to redouble our efforts in the coming year. We invite your active participation; we value all contributions, big and small. E-mail me directly [bret.benjamin@gmail.com](mailto:bret.benjamin@gmail.com) to get involved.

---

### Letters to the Editor:

From time to time, we will print letters to the editor of no more than 250 words. All letters will be edited for length and content.

---

To the Editor:

The October 2014 issue of THE FORUM, #130 featured a three-page article by Academic VP Barry Trachtenberg: <http://uupalbany.org/pdfs/Oct2014forum.pdf>. The article discusses the so-called Salaita Affair,

academic freedom of speech, anti-Semitism, criticism of Israel, and the American Studies Association's academic boycott of Israel. Because considerable time has elapsed since it was published, I urge the reader to revisit Professor Trachtenberg's piece and browse the Internet for a wealth of material on the Salaita Affair. While Trachtenberg supports Salaita unreservedly, as is his right, his article creates the impression that all of academia supports Salaita. Hardly.

Opinions, as we know, cannot be proved. Trachtenberg, however, quotes Salaita's tweet, "*At this point, if Netanyahu appeared on TV with a necklace made from the teeth of Palestinian children, would anybody be surprised?*" and opines that this "is clearly not hate speech." Clearly? If this is not hate speech, what is?

The issue of Salaita's *non-hiring* is utterly controversial – legally, ethically, and pedagogically. Opinions are sharply divided. UIUC Chancellor Wise's decision NOT to hire Salaita is supported by former national President of AAUP Cary Nelson, well-known for his defense of academic freedom: <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/08/08/essay-defends-university-illinois-decision-not-hire-stein-salaita>. Many of Salaita's *supporters*, among them the UIUC Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/250857474/CAFT-Report-on-Steven-Salaita-Case>), object to his hate speech and question his professional fitness – including his use of the f-word in literally every tweet and his denunciation of "civility" as a racist term: <http://www.popecenter.org/commentaries/article.html?id=3142>.

Space constraints prevent discussion of Trachtenberg's one-sided account of the American Studies Association's decision to boycott Israeli academic institutions. Please consult Wikipedia for unbiased information: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Studies\\_Association#2013\\_boycott\\_of\\_Israeli\\_academic\\_institut](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Studies_Association#2013_boycott_of_Israeli_academic_institut)

[ions](#). All the references provided by Wikipedia are easily verified.

Recent developments: In January 2015, the MLA rejected the boycott proposal: <http://legalinsurrection.com/2015/01/anti-israel-boycotters-lost-at-modern-language-association-but-claim-victory-anyway/>. Earlier this year, the American Historical Association, of which I assume Prof. Trachtenberg is a member, refused to consider two anti-Israel resolutions. See <http://www.algemeiner.com/2015/01/05/historians-rejection-of-anti-israel-resolutions-is-a-significant-day-in-american-intellectual-history-says-top-acade>.

I am stunned to discover Professor Trachtenberg, a historian, in full agreement with the biased decision made by the ASA. Why should ALL Israeli academics be boycotted? Hasn't history taught us what such sweeping generalizations can lead to?

Sophia Lubensky  
Professor of Russian, Emerita  
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

---

#### Barry Trachtenberg replies:

Prof. Lubensky would like for my views on the Salaita firing to be "unbiased" (like Wikipedia!), by which I suspect she means my position should reflect her own views that are heavily weighted in favor of Israel's maltreatment of Palestinians citizens of Israel and Palestinians living under an illegal occupation. In spite of her calls for objectivity, had my report supported the UIUC Chancellor's actions, I'm confident that she would not have filed her protest.

Prof. Lubensky's letter misstates the point of an academic union newsletter. Its goal is not to support state power, but rather to secure and defend the rights of academic employees. The issue of Dr.

Salaita's firing is one that directly impacts academic unions like UUP and as such, it would have been negligent of our Chapter *not* to address it. Similarly, UUP's statewide Delegate Assembly acted appropriately when it passed a resolution in October 2014 protesting his firing as a violation of academic freedom.

Prof. Lubensky is correct to accuse me of not being objective. Indeed, I am deeply invested in this matter. Dr. Salaita's firing and its celebration by scholars such as Prof. Lubensky endangers academic freedom everywhere and represents an assault on the authority of faculty to engage in the credible and meaningful evaluation of their colleagues during the hiring process. UIUC Chancellor Wise's unilateral action undermined the academic labor of the faculty and committees who vetted his credentials and recommended him for appointment. Further, as Michael Rothberg, the Director of Holocaust Studies at UIUC recently stated, "In one ill-conceived gesture, the administration and Board of Trustees of our university not only violated Steven Salaita's academic freedom; they destroyed a career, deprived someone of the means to support himself, and took away the fundamental security net of a family."

---

**Let us know what you think.  
Send your comments to:**

The editor at:  
[pstasi27@gmail.com](mailto:pstasi27@gmail.com)

#### Newsletter Committee:

Jim Collins  
Gail Landsman  
Marty Manjak  
Paul Stasi

---

## ***FINANCIAL RESOURCES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS***

*NYSUT Member Benefits is excited to launch its newly created online Financial Planning Center to assist NYSUT members & their families with making a variety of important financial decisions.*



Whether you have questions about retirement planning, saving for college or considering purchasing a home, the Financial Planning Center offers valuable tools & resources to assist you. Take the time to check out everything this new section of our website has to offer and remember to bookmark it as we will continue to offer new items on a regular basis.

**This unique resource provides  
NYSUT members with free access to the following:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial calculators</li><li>• An interactive planning module</li><li>• Customized Kiplinger's retirement newsletter</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kiplinger's Annual Retirement Guide</li><li>• 403(b) Field Guide</li><li>• Preventive Law Guides</li><li>• And more to come</li></ul> |
|---|---|

**To access the NYSUT Member Benefits Financial Planning Center, visit the Member Benefits website at [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) and click on "Financial Planning Center."**

UUP Albany Chapter University at Albany-SUNY CS B21 1400 Washington Ave. Albany, NY 12222	Office Phone (518) 442-4951	Fax (518) 442-3957
Chapter Website: <a href="http://uupalbany.org">http://uupalbany.org</a>	E-mail <a href="mailto:uupalb@gmail.com">uupalb@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:albany@uupmail.org">albany@uupmail.org</a>	Statewide Website <a href="http://www.uupinfo.org/">http://www.uupinfo.org/</a>

**EDITORIAL POLICY:** The opinions expressed in *The Forum* are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of United University Professions.



UUP Albany Chapter  
University at Albany  
1400 Washington Ave.  
LCSB 51  
Albany NY 12222