



The Forum



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 state-wide agenda of UUP, the national crisis facing public higher education and the issues of working people in the US and beyond.

Table of Contents:

Petition against Austerity	1, 3-10
O’Leary, yet again	2
Senate Resolution	10-11
NY State Budget	11
Professional Workload	11-12
Academic Workload	12
Working & Caregiving	14-16
Contingent Insecurity	17-18
Contingents are Essential	18-9
General Education	19-21
The 1970s	22-23
Disability Rights	23
Contract Negotiations!	24

(The following petition, signed by 596 of our colleagues, was delivered to the President, Provost and VP for Finance on March 22nd. To date, there has been no public response. We reprint the petition with our signatures here.)

Petition to Senior UAlbany Administration regarding planned budget reductions in Academic Affairs

In anticipation of announcements about Academic Affairs budget cuts following the budget metrics process, we write in response to Provost Kim’s comments, reported by the *Times Union* on March 1, regarding our campus programs and their value to the university. The article quotes the Provost as saying: “If our university stays static and has all of the programs we had in the ‘70s, how successful are we going to be? How supportive can we be for the students ... we can’t keep adding and adding and adding, we have to start to pivot a bit and reshape our university.”

This statement, from UAlbany’s chief academic officer, does our University community a grave disservice.

We do not share this view of how universities grow and innovate. Our academic programs have not remained static since the 1970s. Academic disciplines are inherently motivated to remake themselves and redefine their relevance to the contemporary world. Faculty in all of our departments are perpetually involved in creating new knowledge and training students to create new knowledge. Growing and innovating while preserving established fields of study is fundamental to our strength.

As a public research university UAlbany has a responsibility to produce research in, and give students access to, fields that may not draw huge enrollments or grant revenue, but that do help students and the public to better understand and participate in shaping our world.

(continued on pg 3)

The O'Leary Memo, yet again

In what is now becoming a kind of annual ritual, the O'Leary memo—which states that the campus has a universal 3-3 teaching load, with one course release for research production and one course release for graduate supervision and teaching—has been raised, once again, by the administration. But given that workload is a mandatory subject of negotiation and that UUP has never agreed to the O'Leary memo, it represents management's position rather than settled policy.

Here are the facts about workload:

- 1) Workload is unit- or discipline-specific, meaning there can be no universal campus policy about workload.
- 2) Workload is determined by past practice. If you have taught a 2-2 for years without any complaint from management, that constitutes your teaching load. (If you are a professional and your performance programs have been satisfactory, then that is your workload.)
- 3) No part of your professional obligation can be increased without a concomitant decrease in some other area of your professional obligation. An increase in teaching, for instance, must be accompanied by an equivalent reduction in either research or service.
- 4) If the administration deems you to be insufficient in one area of your professional obligation they must give you time to remedy that insufficiency. They cannot, simply, deem you insufficiently productive in your research and then immediately raise your teaching load.

If you or your colleagues have had their workload increased or if your supervisor has threatened a workload increase, contact your union representatives immediately. We are here to help.

By the Numbers:

Details of the American Rescue Plan:

\$300 Weekly federal unemployment benefits, extended through September 6th

\$130b Funds to aid a return to in-person teaching for public schools, including increased testing and modifying classrooms to make them safer, improved ventilation and the employment of school nurses for each school

\$25b Funds for renter's assistance

\$5b Aid for payment of home water and energy costs

\$34.2b Expanded subsidies for the Affordable Care Act

\$3,600 Child tax credit for children under 6; \$3,000 for those over six. (Previous amount was \$2,000/child.)

\$160b Funds for vaccine development and distribution

\$350b Funds for state and local governments

\$15 Minimum wage increase that failed to make it into the plan

32 Millions of American workers the minimum wage increase would have impacted

3.7 Millions of workers that a \$15 minimum wage would lift out of poverty

1.3 Millions of children that the minimum wage increase would lift out of poverty

Statistic on the minimum wage from Economic Policy Institute:

<https://www.epi.org/press/epi-ap-plauds-passage-of-the-american-rescue-plan/>

(continued from page 1)

Academic Affairs' budget reduction targets and implementation plans will soon be finalized and circulated. We, the undersigned academic and professional faculty at UAlbany, call on senior administration to ground this work in the following principles:

1) There should be no program deactivations, retrenchments, reorganizations, or budget-driven non-renewals of employees. The COVID crisis should not be used as an opportunity to clear the ground for new investments in perceived growth fields. We must, instead, invest in the programs and people that we have.

2) Substantial assistance from President Biden's COVID relief bill is coming. Use federal stimulus money and campus reserves to spread the economic pain of this moment over as many years as possible. It is the humane, academically responsible course of action.

3) The faculty must have a central role in crafting the vision of our University's future. Documents produced by the "futuring" working group should be made available to the faculty, and this group should be reconstituted with broad faculty representation.

Respectfully,

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Victoria von Arx,
Maria Alice Seixas, Lecturer
Bonita Sanchez, Adjunct Instructor, School of Social
Welfare
Frances Wittmann, Part-time Lecturer, Dept. of
Music and Theatre
Nancy Kreis, Training Coordinator
Jaime Puccioni, Associate Professor, Literacy
Teaching and Learning
Karyn Loscocco, Professor of Sociology

Senate Passes Resolution on Faculty Governance and Curricular Oversight

In early February, the Senate overwhelmingly voted in favor of an important resolution reaffirming the constitutive role of faculty in the oversight of university curriculum. In light of the university's plans for budget cuts, it is of paramount importance that our faculty governance bodies work to ensure that academic and professional faculty play a primary role in charting the key decisions about the future of our university.

The Senate resolution stakes out four key principles or arguments:

1) It reviews the relevant sections from those institutional documents that provide the basis for shared governance—notably the SUNY-wide Policies of the Board of Trustees, and the UAlbany Faculty Bylaws. These documents emphasize, repeatedly and consistently, the core principle that faculty have

the responsibility to oversee the curriculum and the broader “educational program.”

2) It echoes a Senate resolution to improve shared governance at UAlbany passed last year by reasserting the importance of shared faculty governance on our campus, and to work in concert with administration to address key institutional challenges.

3) It pledges the willingness of the Senate and of standing councils and committees to participate not just in the review of, but also in the planning and implementation of university efforts to address the budget crisis in what the resolution terms a “responsible and humane fashion.”

4) It argues, in the key “resolved clause” that, any university plans to reorganize units, retrench departments, deactivate programs, or non-renew sizable numbers of contingent faculty, constitute “changes in, additions to, or deletions from the curriculum” (the language of the Faculty Bylaws”) and hence must be approved or disapproved by the Senate before being enacted. This resolution ensures that any such significant curricular change requires Senate analysis and debate, and ultimately requires a vote to approve or disapprove. The language from the Faculty Bylaws reads, “the faculty shall disapprove or approve,” a clear and unambiguous assertion of faculty responsibility.

After a thoughtful and substantive debate that included contributions from many non-Senators who attended the meeting to weigh in on this important matter, the resolution passed easily.

Given the increasingly good news about available funding from both the Federal stimulus and especially the State budget, which appears to remedy a number of the structural deficits that the campus was projecting, we believe that our campus should certainly be able to avoid the sorts of large-scale cuts that it was contemplating earlier this term. However, should the university persist with making major curricular changes by unilaterally reorganizing units, retrenching or deactivating programs, or non-renewing contingent faculty en masse, this resolution ensures that those plans will go to the Senate, where they will be studied, debated, and

where Senators will ultimately vote to approve or disapprove such plans.

This does not constitute a “veto” of the administration. The Policies give the President authority over budgetary matters. That fact, however, does not supersede or invalidate the faculty’s authority over the curriculum. These two rights can both exist, and at times be in conflict. This, ultimately, is the very core of shared governance—sitting together at a table and hashing out a way forward that preserves both sets of rights. This resolution does not prevent the administration from making structural curricular changes, but it means that such action will be taken either with explicit faculty consent, or over the stated opposition of the Senate. It ensures that the Senate, when faced with the prospect of structural adjustments to the University, will act in its capacity as the representative body of the faculty with its foundational responsibility to oversee the curriculum.

This is an important step forward in clarifying the foundational authority of the faculty and the Senate to ensure the integrity of the University’s educational program. We applaud our colleagues in the Senate for taking this important stance. We trust that in light of improving budgets the University will not propose cuts that necessitate a Senate vote of this sort, but we welcome any and all steps to strengthen the role of faculty in the core decisions of the university about which they have unsurpassed expertise, and which most directly their lives and the lives of their students.

UUP Responds to NY State Budget

NY State has passed its 2021-2022 budget, and while it was not quite as good for SUNY as some had hoped, it still produced some real gain for the system as a whole. UUP President Fred Kowal noted, with disappointment, that the systems’ academic medical centers received no state funding.

“It’s shocking to me that when the state of New York needed a COVID-only facility in New York City, it turned to Downstate to fill that role,” Kowal said.

“But there is no money in this budget to cover the necessary costs the hospitals face: debt servicing and fringe benefit costs. Other state agencies don’t have to pay these costs. How can the governor and Legislature ignore the work these hard-working, dedicated health care professionals have taken on to defeat COVID? It’s unconscionable.”

The new state budget, however, does improve things across the system in other ways. It includes dollars to close the TAP Gap—phased in over the next four years —more funding for SUNY’s successful opportunity programs, and enough operating aid to avoid any potential budget or staffing cuts being considered by campuses to close budget gaps.

Thanks to the work of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, SUNY got \$915 million, which brings the total amount of federal pandemic aid to SUNY since last year to \$1.7 billion.

Kowal also warned SUNY campus presidents that they will have no excuse if they make any budget or staffing cuts over the next year.

“Campus presidents should know that between the federal aid and increased funding to help shrink the TAP Gap, there is plenty of money available to get us through this crisis,” said Kowal. “There is no reason to even consider cuts, let alone make them.”

Kowal applauded the inclusion of tax hikes for people making more than \$1 million, and corporate tax increases in the budget; they are expected to generate an additional \$4.3 billion each year. UUP went further in its advocacy, pushing strongly for taxes on the ultrarich, a pied-a-terre tax and the reinstatement of the stock transfer tax. Those initiatives could have provided more than \$20 billion in new revenue yearly.

“We welcome the new revenue,” said Kowal. “It’s a start and it’s moving us in the right direction.”

(This article is a modified version of UUP’s press release on the state budget. Full text available here: <https://uupinfo.org/communications/releases/210407.php>)

UUP Survey of Professionals: Summary of Results

UUP Albany Chapter professionals surveyed its professional members about their working experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on issues of health and safety, telecommuting, workload, and work-life balance. Between November to January 2020-2021, 302 professionals responded (a roughly 30% response rate). Several themes emerged from these responses, which are summarized below. Highlights from the survey results follow this narrative.

Telecommuting:

Relatively few (16%) of respondents noted that their job duties require them to work on campus frequently and the vast majority (90%) reported that they are not pressured by colleagues or supervisors to appear on campus to work. We found it notable that while 87% of respondents reported that they were approved for telecommuting, only 66% said that they were telecommuting. Taking these two sets of data points together suggests that some members' job duties make telecommuting difficult, even when approved to do so.

Roughly 85% of respondents who were telecommuting said that they could be fully effective in performing their job duties all or most of the time while telecommuting. A similar portion also believe that their co-workers and immediate supervisor share this assessment. However, a significantly smaller portion (70%) believe that this view is shared by upper administration.

These data points suggest that the Pilot Telecommuting program is working in two ways: many employees were given the ability to telecommute and have been able to perform their job functions while telecommuting. However, our data also suggests that upper administration is sending mixed, or confusing messages about its support of telecommuting.

Health and Safety:

While many of our members report that they never, or infrequently report to work on campus, many that do report to work on campus do not feel safe doing so. When asked how they generally feel working on campus, 39% (almost 4 in 10) responded feeling only a little or not safe working on campus. Nearly half reported that the mandatory surveillance testing program did not make them feel much (or any) safer.

One other notable finding in this area is that while the vast majority of respondents believe that employees and students are wearing masks most of the time, half reported that they were not comfortable enforcing mask wearing by students or fellow employees. This suggests that relying on employees to enforce mask wearing is not an effective tool in our health and safety efforts.

Workload:

There is a pattern of COVID-19 related increase in work, change in work schedule, and no accompanying change in performance program. Nearly 3 in 4 respondents report a COVID-19 related increase in workload at the campus at least some of the time, more than half (51%) report COVID-19-related workload has increased most or all the time. Three out of every ten respondents noted that they need to work seven or more additional hours per week outside of the traditional work day in order to keep up with their current workload, the equivalent of an extra work day per week. The vast majority (86%) reported working at least one additional hour per week to keep up with their workload.

We found it interesting that roughly half of employees who feel pressured to routinely work extra hours beyond their normal work day feel that pressure from themselves, not from their supervisors or upper administration. For many employees, changes in workload have not come with any increased flexibility in work schedules, nor have changes in workload or job duties been reflected in performance programs. There were a number of comments from respondents noting that they never get thanked for going above and beyond.

These data points reflect a common sentiment that we hear from our members: they have taken on additional job duties as staffing levels have been reduced, or new initiatives have been created in recent years which is not being acknowledged formally or informally. Our members have been asked to be empathetic and flexible with students but the feeling expressed in multiple comments received on the survey was that upper administration is not being empathetic toward them. 90 percent of our respondents reported higher levels of stress over the last ten months. This is not sustainable without people burning out.

Work-life balance:

Slightly more than half of our respondents reported that they have home caregiving responsibilities. 70% of those caregivers are responsible for small children and fully a third are responsible for caring for adult family members. Of those caregivers, nearly two-thirds reported that they have taken on additional caregiving work during the pandemic, and roughly one-third report that this work has increased significantly. When asked their reasons for requesting Telecommuting, 25% of respondents cited childcare needs.

We were pleased to see that the vast majority (88%) of respondents with caregiving needs felt that their co-workers and supervisors were supportive and accommodating to these needs. But these data do highlight the multiple stresses that our members are under.

UUP Survey of Academics: Summary of Results

UUP Albany Chapter also surveyed its full-time academic members about their working experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on issues of remote teaching, workload, and work-life balance. Between November to January 2020-2021, 170 academics responded. Several key themes emerged from these responses, which are summarized below.

Workload:

Roughly seven in ten academic faculty surveyed reported that their workload increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of this workload increase was due to the change in teaching modalities brought about by the pandemic. Three fourths of respondents reported spending significantly more time prepping for class and roughly half were spending more time helping students with course content and navigating course logistics. Our survey also found that other factors not attributable to the pandemic have also led to increased workloads. 70% of respondents reported that the loss of tenure track positions and the recent hiring freeze had increased workloads and half cited departmental and campus service demands.

These data suggest that even as instruction returns to pre-COVID modalities that are less demanding and faculty become more efficient at teaching within new modalities there will still be significant workload issues that need to be addressed. Years of tepid hiring of tenure track faculty have forced departments to distribute necessary service work onto fewer people.

Work-life balance:

Slightly less than half of our respondents reported that they have frequent home caregiving responsibilities. 76% of those caregivers are responsible for small children and fully one half are responsible for caring for adult family members. Of those caregivers, seven in ten reported this work has increased significantly.

Unfortunately, only 30% of those academic faculty felt that they were being adequately supported by upper administration. Significantly more faculty—60%—felt supported by their department chairs, but that also means that 40% did not feel such support. This is a point of real concern for our union since Department chairs are UUP members.

Health and Safety:

Most full-time academic faculty taught remotely in the fall and spring. 60% of those surveyed were teaching fully remotely while another 25% taught a mix of remote and in-person class sessions. We note that while most (75%) of respondents found their department chairs to be supportive of their requests to teach remotely, many fewer felt that their requests were supported by their college dean (58%) and the upper administration (37%).

Fully a third of academic faculty felt completely unsafe working on campus during the pandemic and only half of respondents felt that the campus surveillance testing program had made working on campus safer for them.

UAlbany Women UUPers Speak Out Working & Caregiving During the Pandemic

Loretta Pyles, Professor, SSW

“This isn’t work from home. It’s living at work.”

The challenges women in academia face are hopefully not news to anyone. These challenges include working in what has traditionally been a male-dominated institution, disproportionate service work and emotional labor that women are burdened with in their departments, along with their roles as caretakers in their personal lives for children, grandchildren or elderly parents; this is the double burden women continue to shoulder. The challenges of work-life balance; finding quality, safe, affordable childcare; and navigating workplace demands is perhaps old news, but one as a society we have made little progress in addressing, and one that still tends to fall disproportionately on women.

So, it was not surprising early on in the pandemic when we heard reports of women taking on more of the virtual schooling and childcare roles, while managing the increased demands of their jobs. In times of crisis, it is clear that women are thrust into their traditional roles, especially in a society that devalues, and renders invisible, caring work, i.e., “women’s work.” We learned that women dropped out of the workforce altogether at higher rates than men during the pandemic in order to attend to childcare and support online schooling. Women and mothers have been called the “shock absorbers” of society and this pandemic has shed light on this phenomenon.

What was especially impactful to me early on in the pandemic were reports indicating that academic men were actually more productive during the pandemic, that academic journals had seen a statistically significant reduction in articles submitted for review from women and an increase from men. (Wait, how do you get more productive amidst so much pain, loss, and human need?) Findings of one study that reviewed the gender of first authors in medical journals, for example, reported a 19% decrease of women first authors when comparing 2019 to 2020 (Anderson et al., 2020). Several studies corroborate this finding on productivity.

To learn more about the experiences on our campus, I reached out to some UAlbany UUP women who I knew were parenting (or heard about through word of mouth) and asked them about their encounters with working and caregiving during the pandemic. I e-mailed about 15 people and heard back from about ten. I do not claim this to be a social scientific study; I only suggest that the experiences I share here are powerful and I surmise that they are not isolated.

I asked the women to send me a couple of sentences (or more), if they were willing to, about their experiences. In turns out, this was not such a simple ask. Some wrote back and said that there is so much material there, a huge well of emotions, as if the territory was too raw to even tap into. Nonetheless, several people shared their experiences and wrote quite a lot, and some even reported that the process was therapeutic. My hope is that these voices can bring about greater awareness to the issue and, crucially, create a pathway to change in our university.

It is important to contextualize the lives of academic women, even pre-pandemic. One of the things that is noteworthy about the academic profession is that academics take jobs in places often far away from family, so this often means the absence of extended family support for child rearing. Moreover, many would say that there was a pre-existing child care crisis in terms of finding quality and affordable child care. One member reported being on waiting lists for months for childcare before the pandemic and that half of her salary goes to childcare. It is also important to remember that women UUPers come from many social standpoints, including racial/ethnic, contingency status, no tenure/continuing appointment, and some with immigration statuses precariously tied to their work.

“I would not wish it on my worst enemy”: Perspectives on Pandemic Parenting

What follows is what the women expressed about their experiences of caretaking and working during the pandemic:

"[The pandemic] meant homeschooling two children while doing my job, which is impossible. It is a stress that cannot be accurately communicated—I would not wish it on my worst enemy. And it is not possible to do everything."

"It has been very grinding, scary, and humbling."

"It was painful for me to realize that as I worked extra time and faced multiple stressors in the context of the pandemic—including in relation to supporting students, extending flexibility and helping them navigate the difficult online teaching situation—my own son was falling behind. We were in the same physical space of my household, both online—me teaching my classes, him trying to learn from his—and yet I had been completely absorbed by the logistical and emotional demands from the university, with little left for my own child."

"...While I squeeze in teaching, meetings, office hours, constant requests for evaluations and feedback, I'm also being interrupted every 15-30 minutes to help children navigate online platforms, print needed materials, search out child-friendly web resources for their projects, prepare meals and snacks, break up quarrels, and do the constant clean up necessary when four people are eating every single meal at home."

"As a parent of a 5-year-old, I spent the first half of the pandemic taking care of his material, developmental, and emotional needs, entirely unable to do any productive work. Even still now that my child is in school, there is a lot of time-consuming emotional labor in helping my child manage the stress of the pandemic."

"I have a wonderful and egalitarian relationship with my husband, but he works long hours too and we cannot keep up. We rise at 5:30 to start working to get a couple of hours in before the children wake up, and work long into the night just to keep things going. We are tired, snappy with our children, and just burned out. My children want to talk to me too, they deserve my attention, yet every time they ask me to look at something that they're working on or need help with, all I can think about is that these are the precious minutes that I have to do work. As my neighbor, a working single mom said (which she

heard from somewhere else), 'This isn't work from home. It's living at work.'"

"Students are also suffering, and I'm spending more time than ever supporting students, listening to issues, and producing accommodations for late and missed work."

These women's experiences were influenced by their social location. For example, those with tenure were acutely aware of the extra privilege that afforded them and wondered if they could have even survived to get tenure during the pandemic. People were creative with managing work, self-care, and children. One faculty who identified as an immigrant, and whose extended family was overseas, set her children up with video chat with their grandparents so that "one of their parents can work and the other could do something like take a shower!"

"A meaningless 'wellness day' or two...honestly is insulting": Supports and Barriers at the University

Some women remarked that the flexibility that technology provided was a good thing. For example, a late afternoon meeting that would normally require paying extra for daycare was now more manageable via zoom. People also expressed appreciation for having job security and health benefits during the pandemic. Others noted that the pandemic opened up some space to acknowledge workers as parents whereas before it was "treated like a dirty secret. I attribute this transparency to the fact that everyone—men, supervisors, administration, etc.—are all experiencing this too."

Here are some things that they said about barriers at the university:

"...I feel that there has been NO concrete recognition of this fact [parenting and working from home] in terms of workload—lots of platitudes and gratitude for all our labor, but little action in terms of thinking about what it takes to accomplish all of these tasks... There's been a general sense that life can go on remotely without recognizing the realities of what that means, particularly for working women. In fact, I feel that given the pressure on the university to demonstrate that parents are getting 'bang for

the buck' with remote teaching, there's even more pressure on faculty to be constantly available."

"The university needs to do more to support care-taking faculty beyond a meaningless 'wellness day' or two - which honestly is insulting."

"As a mother, I am encouraged to engage in 'self-care', yet the structures of our lives, especially work, have never been more blurred...The university has not made maintaining a work/life balance easy. Consistently meetings, town halls, and other opportunities to connect with the campus or even our respective units are scheduled during common lunch times, or crossover past the 'end' of the work-day. More needs to be done and acknowledged that if we are to level the playing field and raise the profile of parents (especially new parents) on our campus, flexibility needs to be at the forefront. I love my role at the University at Albany and what I have been fortunate to be a part of, but the lack of understanding of the dual role as a professional faculty and parent is often ignored."

"The burden of trying to care for at least one child while working a 'normal' day is laughable, yet the expectation is to 'parent like you do not work, and work like you are not a parent.'"

"[Acknowledging the privilege of having tenure], I consider myself lucky. Luck is not a fair policy for workplace equity."

Luck is indeed not a fair policy for workplace equity and so we must keep parenting, caregiving, and the concerns of women on the forefront as a university and as a union. There have been many lessons learned from the pandemic and we can hope that the realities of caretaking and working in academia will not be forgotten.

But, hope is not enough. As Frederick Douglass said, "power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." We must organize for the kind of workplace that we envision, whether it is more flexible work schedules and locations, more humane guidelines and norms related to tenure and promotion, on-site child care, improved family leave policies, and/or financial subsidies for child care.

These words of our colleagues can serve as a starting point for conversations, agenda building, and organizing strategies. There are many ways to get involved in UUP, including the Women's Concerns Committee, the Executive Committee, or the Department Rep structure. Also, negotiations for our next contract will be starting soon, and so when we have opportunities to convey our issues to the negotiations team, please take the time to do so. At a minimum, when you are able, talk to your colleagues about these issues, and communicate your concerns to UUP leadership and university administrators.

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A Tragic Loss

Carol Jewell, University Libraries

The courts have decided that it is NOT unconstitutional to mandate the wearing of masks. Still, we watch the news and see, repeatedly, people not wearing masks and using the constitution to support their "right" not to wear a mask.

You've all read the precautions, restrictions, and about quarantines, pauses, and so forth. Every day we are reminded of total number of pandemic cases, and total number of deaths. We hear US statistics, and statistics for the rest of the world.

Overwhelmed by all these rules and regulations and figures? Well, my family is, too, but not for the same reason. On November 13, 2020, I lost my sister-in-law, Heidi, to the Covid-19 virus. She was fifty-three. What about her rights: to live, to enjoy life, to love and be loved?

Heidi had added difficulties which may have contributed to her swift decline and death. She was born with Down Syndrome. I won't go into the details about her health. I want to tell you who she was. She was the middle girl of three daughters. She was a rabid sports fan of The New England Patri

ots and the Boston Red Sox. Later in life, she tried to love The Indianapolis Colts, and became a fan of Notre Dame.

Heidi didn't like candy, nor did she like witches, but she enjoyed seeing what costumes neighborhood children wore when they came trick or treating.

Heidi loved the movie, "Pretty Woman," and despite viewing it countless times, she always asked to watch it again. Or someone would put it on for her, knowing without asking, that she would sing along. Another movie she liked was "Risky Business," and she sang to the songs in that movie, too. She also liked "The Sound of Music" and "Grease." She didn't have a Rockstar voice. She had her own voice.

She was a proud American citizen, always standing when our anthem was played, and singing along. That's one of the hardest songs to sing, but she did her best.

She made her needs known. Is it time for "Jeopardy?" She could run through TV show theme songs in a heartbeat. Only I or her mother were allowed to guess the puzzles on "Wheel of Fortune." Heidi told me I was smart when I guessed correctly with rather few letters turned around.

I don't feel too smart right now. Why can't I explain to the anti-maskers how angry and sad I feel when I see them exercising their supposed rights? Don't they understand that it's a health issue? Do they obey or disobey other health-related rules such as not going barefoot and bare-chested into a store? Do they cough into their elbows? Do they rise when our anthem is played? No, they don't have to. But it's a matter of respect. It is inconceivable to me that someone would eschew wearing a mask. I will never understand.

This pandemic will not last forever. We'll return to our previous lives, perhaps with some changes. The biggest change for my family will be never seeing Heidi again.

Contingency and Job (In)Security Aaron Major, Chapter President

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck last March, and it quickly became clear that it would have serious consequences for colleges and universities across the country, only 1 out of every 3 UUP members on our campus had the job security that comes with tenure or permanent appointment. Fortunately, we did not experience the widespread job losses that we saw others in higher education go through, but we were not spared widespread fear and anxiety about whether we would be able to continue down our career paths, maintain our health benefits, or bring home a paycheck. Unfortunately, the University has reduced contingent contracts to the shortest time possible: academic faculty who have routinely been given three-year appointments have been reduced to one; those with one-year appointments are now semester by semester. These changes effectively eviscerate the University's commitment to increased job security for its contingent employees. Job security is an empty phrase if it can be rescinded at the first sign of crisis. As a union we fight for fair pay and to improve our working conditions in many ways, but this pandemic has reminded me that having secure jobs needs to be a top priority.

Many of our colleagues are excluded from these provisions and thus will never gain that sense of security that comes with tenure or permanent appointment. Contingency—terms of employment that never lead to tenure or permanent employment—is too common for comfort. It cuts across our membership and across the university. As stated in our 2015 Chapter report, Woven into its Very Fabric: "UAlbany's reliance on contingent labor has been both rapid and extensive."

The fact that the contingent academic labor force has grown dramatically in colleges and universities across the country is well known and documented thoroughly for our campus in that report. Over the last ten years the size of our academic labor force has not changed (fluctuating around 1,100), but its composition has changed dramatically. A decade ago a little more than 1 in 3 academics were full-time or part-time lecturers with no possibility

of being tenured; when the pandemic hit last year, it was closer to 1 in 2.

Less well known, but equally important, is how many of the professionals who do vital work for our university are themselves contingent. These are employees who serve in temporary appointments (often for periods of time that stretch the definition of temporariness to the breaking point), who work part time, and who work in athletics. As a whole, ten years ago this group made up about 15% of all professional employees. Over the last five years it's been closer to 25%.

These trends concern me deeply. Even as we can begin to see the end of this pandemic and feel more confident that we will come out of it without devastating job losses, it is disheartening to know that so many of my colleagues have continued to shoulder this wholly unnecessary anxiety.

It also makes me concerned about our ability, as a union, to fight for all of the things that we need and deserve. It is easy for me as a tenured member of our faculty to speak up, put my name to letters and petitions, and stand shoulder to shoulder with my fellow UUPers. I know that those things will not win me any favors, but they also will not cost me my job. For others who do not have, and will never have, the benefit of that protection the desire to join in collective action is necessarily weighed against the potential costs of doing so.

It is therefore not just out of a sense of workplace justice and concern for our colleagues that we need to reverse the trend of rising contingency, but also out of an urgent need to enhance our collective power as a union so as to prevent the erosion of the benefits and working conditions that we all deserve and depend on. Fortunately, there will soon be an opportunity for us to address these issues directly: the negotiation of our next Collective Bargaining Agreement. But it does not take a contractual provision to make these changes. Other SUNY campuses have promotional ladders for contingents, and

there already exists a job-title—Instructor—that could provide a pathway to permanency for some academic contingents. Indeed the University itself suggested that such a pathway be created in its contingent report. So while we should look forward to contractual negotiations as one key opportunity, we should also be demanding more from our campus administration to provide job security for its employees.

Academic Contingents are Essential **Wendy Roberts, English**

The OED tells me there are two senses to the Latin word *contingere* from which the adjective *contingent* derives: one is the literal sense “to touch”; the other is the figurative sense “to happen.” The first definition gives rise to meanings of *contingent* as a line touching another line; the second gives rise to meanings of chance, happenstance, and non-essential. It is with both of these definitions in mind that I say that my department has become a *contingent* department.

This became apparent to me as I worked to put together a fall 2021 schedule of classes for my department under the latest move toward an austerity budget. I am young in my career in service positions; I came to UAlbany right after the last economic downturn and the 2010 cuts were already completed. But, even from my limited experience, I can tell you that though no “official” cuts have been made, putting together the fall 2021 schedule has been a very different experience from putting together the 2019 and 2020 schedules.

Let me say from the outset my department was touched lightly by the first “unofficial” cuts to adjunct budgets that colleges issued before fall 2021 schedules could be made. Somewhat guiltily, I could put together my department’s schedule with very little visible disruption while other departments had huge cuts to adjunct lines. But, as I put it together and tried to take into account contingencies —those happenstances we can’t plan for like sudden medical leave, research opportunities, and any other number of circumstances—a deep irony appeared over my whole attempt to plan: the mechanism by which we

mitigate unavoidable contingencies had been fully absorbed into the schedule. That is, I had to spend my adjunct budget to cover an almost normal fall 2021 schedule. The inevitable changes that would come between April 2021 and August 2021 would have no adjunct solution. What I had understood to be the only legitimate reason for the adjunct professor status to exist—for temporary replacement of permanent faculty on leave—was no longer a functioning option. (To be clear, this legitimate use in no way justifies the shamefully low wages of contingent faculty.)

If, in fact, the budget I have been given is a hard line, I will be cancelling classes when contingencies arise, not hiring adjuncts to fill in the vacancies. The inability to plan means that we cannot rationally think about curricula and neither can our students. Now, I imagine scenarios in which I will need to shift, at the last minute, instructors from a general education course to cover an upper division class, or vice versa. Or cancel a section of a popular class to shift that instructor into a core class for the major. These classes are filled with students who are likely depending on the classes in which they have enrolled because they fit into their unique schedules. Canceling classes, whether they are upper division, core courses for the major, or general education, can hurt different students' graduation timetables. Then, there is the added weight of the inevitable rubrics the university produces to tell stories about which departments are most essential for the most students. If I cancel lower level general education classes to ensure our majors graduate, am I, in the end, creating what will be an essential piece of data on an excel spreadsheet disaggregated from this entire narrative that will justify deeper cuts to our department?

Adjunct professors, of course, have long stopped functioning as temporary replacements for tenured professors on leave. But, it gave me pause because it was the first time (in my admittedly short career), I had seen this previous function entirely disappear. We all know contingent faculty have become a cost-saving strategy, a way to create a temporary workforce rather than commit to a tenure model that administrators see as a drag when they need to perform cost-saving pivots. What was so audacious to me was that this suspension of the adjunct as

solution to scheduling contingencies came at the same time as the university returned to extremely short-term contracts for contingent faculty. Such a short-term contract could make sense for someone who is meant to fill in for a permanent professor for a semester or two. But, if this function isn't even available, what does it mean? I offer as a warning a now obsolete meaning of contingent from the sixteenth century: happening.

For those who have felt that their status as a tenured or tenure-line professor means they are somehow different in kind from their fellow contingent faculty, this might serve as a wake-up call. My department, like most others, depends on contingent faculty. Approximately sixty-percent of my department's classes are taught by graduate students and contingent faculty. We have not had a substantial decrease to our adjunct budget. But, the contracts have been shortened. Though our fall schedule gives the impression that everything is fine, it would be a mistake not to understand the full etymology here. Contingere: two lines that touch; something that may or may not happen. We cannot separate our department's existence as a viable research and teaching department that contributes to our college, our university, and society at large from the fact that our fate is entwined with the status of our contingent faculty, who are also making essential, if often invisible, contributions to our college, our university and our society. To return to the OED, we are "two lines that touch," who are "dependent for our occurrence or character on or upon some prior occurrence or condition"; "not fixed by necessity or fate"; "non-essential."

Proposed Changes to Gen Eds

Kendra, Smith-Howard, History

Paul Stasi, English

Edmund Stazyk, Public Administration and Policy

Meredith Weiss, Political Science

Recently the SUNY System has proposed changes to its General Education structure. It is important to note that these changes are meant to be the minimum that is required across the SUNY System; they are the floor not the ceiling for General Education. Currently, our campus's General Education Program is more rigorous than the system minimum.

Nevertheless, given the system's emphasis on seamless transfer, there is a tension between the idea that campuses have the autonomy to create their own general education plans and the one proposed for the system as a whole. We can think about these changes both in relation to what the system currently requires and also to our own campus.

Right now the system requires that students take 30 credits of general education courses covering at least seven of ten "knowledge areas," with two of these areas—Basic Composition and Mathematics—required. There are also two required "competencies"—Critical Thinking and Information Literacy.

The proposed changes reduces the number of knowledge areas and increases the number of competencies. The proposal names eight knowledge areas and requires three; Natural Sciences joins Basic Communication and Mathematics as requirements. To complete the remaining 30 gen-ed credits, students must cover at least six of the eight knowledge areas. The proposal places greater emphases on competencies—enlarging their number from two to six by adding Oral Communication, Diversity, and Technological Competency to the existing competencies in Critical Thinking and Information Literacy. A Global Learning competency replaces the "Other World Civilization" knowledge area. In each case, students have some flexibility in choosing their gen eds. Previously they could have fulfilled the system's requirements without an Arts, Humanities, or Social Sciences course. The same would be true in the new proposal.

Our UAlbany campus, however, has a more robust structure. Our students must take one course in each of a total of ten knowledge areas, which equals the 30 credits the system requires. These areas include the eight the system would retain as well as two more: "International Perspectives" and "Challenges for the 21st Century." We then require four competencies: Advanced Writing, Oral Discourse, Information Literacy, and Critical Thinking, which students satisfy within their majors. What is immediately clear, then, is that the Albany system is relatively close to what the proposed structure would imagine.

Nevertheless, the new proposal carries some signif-

icant risks to the mission of general education, and we feel it is imperative to advocate for a rethinking of that proposal. Failing that, we ask that the campus retain and improve its current structure, maintaining the rigor befitting its status as an R1 university and one of the four university centers of the SUNY system. We stress, though, that we would prefer system-wide to campus-wide improvements: a low floor leaves the door open for our university administration to pare back our requirements in future.

Here, as we see it, are the problems with the proposed structure. Again, it's worth noting some of these problems also apply to the current SUNY system requirements:

- 1) A general education structure that requires some disciplines but makes others elective is not fulfilling the most basic idea of general education which, as the report suggests, "promotes equity by equipping SUNY undergraduates, regardless of background, program of study, or campus, with foundational capacities fostered through a broad liberal education to prepare them for further study, work life, and global citizenship." Education is not broad if it allows students to graduate without taking a single course in the Humanities, Arts, or Social Sciences.
- 2) It is admirable that "Diversity" has returned to the general education curriculum. However, diversity is not a competency; it is not a skill that can be acquired (as, say, oral communication might be). Rather, diversity, if understood correctly, is a knowledge area, a concept with a history grounded in social realities and lived experience. The same might be said of "Global Learning" which is more plausibly a knowledge area than a competency. Students should be required to take dedicated, semester-length courses to responsibly fulfill these important requirements.
- 3) At the same time, it is not clear (a) how these new competencies were selected, and (b) why they are the appropriate mix/balance to ensure students have a "broad liberal education." As an example, one could easily make the case that the Communication, Information Literacy, and Technological Competency competencies are deeply entwined and that high performance in one competency is largely contingent upon performing well in the other two.

A clearer articulation of the logic behind the competencies would help us understand why this particular proposal is being offered. By the same token, the inclusion of new competencies will require new criteria for their inclusion, new courses, and new means to assess whether students do indeed attain these competencies; setting those standards will require a clear understanding of the premises undergirding these choices.

4) The proposal itself, though it provides a bibliography, seems uneven in its use of research and expertise. Academic faculty from the research centers are noticeably absent from the sub-committees and the members of these committees often seem to lack expertise in the “knowledge area” that they are addressing. This leads to confusing or irrelevant claims about the disciplines involved. Two quick examples: The Rationale for the Arts knowledge area includes the sentence “Now more than ever, our children need to see clearly, hear acutely, and feel sensitively through the exquisite language of the arts,” an admirable sentiment ill-suited to college instruction. The second concerns the language about civics, which is just as important to the social sciences as it is to the humanities; the report suggests the opposite.

In order to overcome these problems, we recommend the following changes, both for the system at large, but certainly for our own campus:

1) Require all eight of the proposal’s knowledge areas. (For Albany we should retain our current 10 knowledge area structure as outlined in 2 & 3 below).

2) Bring back “Diversity” as a knowledge area, requiring students to become familiar with the historical roots of inequality and their contemporary manifestations, examining ways that social and political systems and communication patterns exert and convey power; and strategies and movements that have worked for equity and inclusion. This knowledge area could replace “Challenges for the 21st Century.” Alternatively, we could retain the “Challenges of the 21st Century” knowledge area, but reframed more strongly to emphasize that issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are among the primary such challenges.

3) Similarly, “Global Learning” should become a knowledge area, taking the place of the current “International Perspectives.” This would continue Albany’s admirable practice of requiring students to take courses in subjects such as world literature, comparative politics, global arts, and history.

4) Retain “Advanced Writing” as a competency at SUNY Albany.

5) Finally, before we settle on competencies and knowledge areas, subject and field matter experts should have another opportunity to review and comment on any proposals.

The stakes of the proposed changes are significant. If they are implemented on our campus, there is a substantial risk that certain fields and disciplines will be harmed by this decision, given that it will alter the courses students are required to take and, therefore, their pathway through the University. Without a formal, widespread requirement that students take courses (a) beyond their degree, and (b) beyond the Communication, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences knowledge areas, students might never interact with other fields and departments. This could lead to a mismatch between students and their chosen careers. It may also limit other student opportunities, such as joining honors societies like Phi Beta Kappa, which requires more than minimal coursework outside the student’s core area.

For departments the stakes might be even higher. General Education substantially drives enrollments. Nevertheless, the campus continues to suggest that departments are responsible for their enrollments, and insists that it will, in turn, use enrollment data to drive funding decisions. These changes would almost certainly mean lower enrollments in certain fields and majors, which would then mean those programs or units would perform poorly on whatever set of budget metrics are then devised. We urge the University to push the system for a more robust and more intellectually sound general education system, and, crucially, we urge our own campus to maintain the rigor of its own structure. Finally, we urge all faculty on campus to become involved in the upcoming conversations about how to implement whatever changes are made.

Innovation, Success and the 1970s

Peter Breiner, Political Science

On March 1 2021 in an article laying out the administration's intention to impose massive budget cuts at SUNY Albany, Provost Kim made the following statement: "If our university stays static and has all of the programs we had in the '70s, how successful are we going to be? How supportive can we be for the students ... we can't keep adding and adding and adding, we have to start to pivot a bit and reshape our university." This reference to the SUNY system of the 1970s as something unsustainable is indeed an unfortunate remark as it implies that the legacy of this period is a recipe for failure while the new austerity contains a recipe for an as of yet undefined conception of future "success." But success in what sense? This could use a bit of examination.

First let me cite a bit of anecdotal evidence that speaks to the reputation of the SUNY research campuses during the 1970s. While I was in graduate school at that time on the West Coast having received my B. A. at UC Berkeley, I was well aware that the SUNY system at that period was flush with money thanks to Rockefeller's attempt to turn the system into something replicating the University of California system. Indeed, during the 1970s the research campuses built an incredible reputation in a very short period of time. Even at that time, though preoccupied with my own graduate studies, I knew that Sociology at SUNY Stony Brook had an up-and-coming reputation, and its Philosophy Department was and still is known nationally for its specialization in Continental Philosophy, as was the case for literary theory in its English Department. SUNY Buffalo had one of the best English and Comparative Literature departments in the country, having hired an array of luminaries—many of whom subsequently left. SUNY Binghamton, in 1976, had opened the Fernand Braudel Center, run by Immanuel Wallerstein, which focused on World Systems Theory and so was renowned in Comparative Politics and Sociology. This is what I remember, and I assume there are many other examples that faculty who lived through this period will recall. The relevant point for us today is that a lot of this expansion and academic innovation faded when in 1976 New York City declared insolvency, went into

a kind of receivership, and funds started to dry up. It took a while for the recently gained reputations of these departments at the SUNY research campuses to fade, and while many continued to maintain their high visibility thereafter, the SUNY system has not been able to maintain anything approaching the energizing, discipline-challenging expansions of the 1970s.

More recently, the administration has tied "success" to austerity by speaking of the need to foster "innovation." This, in turn, has led to the construction of a set of metrics to be applied to all departments, which will be used to allocate resources to some at the expense of others. However, the whole notion that we have to prove that we are innovative is misguided. To claim that we must start to be "innovative" is indeed problematic because what the administration views and what faculty view as innovative are not the same thing. The administration sees innovation as a marketing tool and a cover to cut departments, especially in the humanities and social sciences, to launch new programs that draw attention to the university—note in Provost Kim's statement above she fails to mention the faculty at all. The faculty, in contrast, see innovation as the usual changes that take place in our disciplines over time. Much that is innovative becomes the old standard as new approaches are introduced or new areas of research take pride of place from older ones. Conversely, faculty also know that innovation can mean rediscovering what has been left behind, but now once again speaks to the present. By contrast "innovation" for the administration has, in recent times, functioned largely as a barely veiled critique of existing departments and their tenured faculty. Over the years, faculty in established departments have watched their faculty lines slowly disappear as retired faculty are not replaced, and the remaining faculty have to do "more with less." Meanwhile, the faculty in many new programs similarly find themselves under-resourced and struggling to fulfill the promises made at their creation.

The lesson of the 1970s, in direct contrast to recent austerity, is that innovation only occurs in the context of full financial support, support that doesn't pit departments against one another in a competition for resources. Indeed, the 1970s saw the flourishing

of ethnic studies and women's studies programs, alongside the SUNY-specific programs mentioned above because of the funding that became available. These programs developed alongside existing disciplines, not at their expense.

Finally, while we are perfectly willing to admit that the university may have a budget crisis made worse by the Covid crisis, one would expect that the funds it receives from the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 would be used to protect and deepen already existing functioning departments rather than seek a metric to extract funds from some to give to others or start brand new programs at the cost of existing ones. After all, as many faculty have recently pointed out, the funds from the Biden administration are explicitly intended as a means to preserve jobs, not fund ways to eliminate them. The Provost's proposals are completely at odds with this principle. Merely saying that these cuts were planned before the pandemic is unconvincing given that increased State and Federal funding has been made available to higher education institutions specifically to maintain educational opportunities in the midst of a health crisis and economic downturn. And the new funds under the American Rescue Plan are intended as a fiscal investment by the Federal Government to produce employment and economic growth. The whole notion of inventing new programs by deploying funds away from existing programs with the effect of reducing programs and/or spreading existing work among fewer faculty does not comport with the trend of public policy at the moment. In short, it is not a recipe for future "success." One might even want to say it is "outdated."

Disability Rights, Carol Jewell, University Libraries

I would like to bring your attention to a number of significant numbers: statistics, and dates, and I'd like you ask you a few questions. For some of these, I give you answers. For others, I hope you will be interested enough in the topic to find out for yourself, even if you do not have a disability or you do not know a person with a disability. Because the truth is that, anyone can become a person with a disability at any time. It is the world's fastest growing minority group.

- Do you know what the phrase "nothing about us, without us" means and where it came from?
- Do you know what the clearest font styles and sizes are for people with print disabilities?
- What is the earliest date in U.S. history, when a law first attempted to assist workers with disabilities? August 26, 1776 (though the act only applied to soldiers)
- What is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and why is it important? It is the first U.S. federal civil rights protection for people with disabilities. It applies to any organization or entity that receives federal funds, such as universities.
- Passage into law of the ADA happened on June 26, 1990. Do you know what the five titles of the law are, and to whom, what, when, and where they apply?
- Passage into law of the ADA happened in 2008. Do you know what the letters stand for? Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act. Do you know why we required it?
- What are the "2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design?"
- If you think 1776, 1973, 1990, 2008, and 2010 are the only significant dates for people with disabilities, in the United States, take a look here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_disability_rights_in_the_United_States
- Approximately how many US citizens have one or more disabilities? 1 out of 8
- Do you know which agency produces the annual Disability Status Report and where you can go to read it? https://www.disabilitystatistics.org/Status-Reports/2017-PDF/2017-StatusReport_US.pdf
- What is a Reasonable Accommodation, and do you know how to apply for one at UAlbany?
- Do you know what microaggressions are, and how they affect people with disabilities?

Contract Negotiations Coming Shortly **Bret Benjamin, English**

Hard to believe it (for me at least—the scars from last round still feel fresh!), but we will soon be entering into the final year of our current contract. The current Agreement between UUP and New York State expires July 1, 2022. That means we'll be back to the table before long. I am honored to announce that I have been selected to serve as UUP's chief negotiator for the upcoming round of negotiations. It is an opportunity and a responsibility that I accept with the utmost gravity. I know full well how many lives are affected by the contracts we sign.

In the last round of negotiations, we were able to achieve a great deal. We secured annual raises, returned DSI to on-base awards for most of the contract, negotiated money to redress salary compression and inversion, instituted a long-fought-for, per-course minimum salary for academic contingents, bargained into the Paid Family Leave statute with a series of provisions such as tenure-clock stops that addressed needs of our members, reinstated the UUP dependent scholarship fund, and much more. Just as important as our gains, we were able to hold off demands from the State for steep increases in health benefits costs, and a host of other proposals that we believe would have eroded the job security, autonomy, and dignity of our workforce.

Some version of this dance will take place again this round—trying to win gains for members while trying to stave off demands from the state that we consider unreasonable or harmful to our members. I cannot promise anything specific about the contract that we will ultimately bring back to the membership for ratification. At this earliest stage I can only assure you of two key points: first, the agreement we settle on will be the best contract that we feel we are able to secure, and second, that we will be open and honest in communicating with the membership throughout the process.

The process of soliciting member feedback will begin next fall. Expect to see a member survey asking for input on the key items that you would like

to see in, or out, of the contract. I'll also be doing campus listening tours including, of course, a visit to Albany. We'll have virtual options along with in person sessions this year to maximize participation. Moreover, the members of our campus know better than anyone else how to reach me. Don't hesitate to be in touch with ideas, suggestions, concerns, or questions. I will rely on your collective expertise to help guide the process.

Finally, expect to be called upon to organize and participate in initiatives, events, and activities on our campus to work in parallel with the negotiations process. I am firmly convinced that the work our chapter did to build a sustained, principled, detailed campus dialogue about the crisis of contingency within the university helped UUP secure some of the contractual provisions in our current agreement for contingents, most notably the per-course salary minimums. Statewide negotiations are buoyed considerably by concrete workplace organizing in which union members are actively engaged in campaigns to institute gains that benefit workers, students, and the university. It is the actions taken by members on campuses that lay the groundwork for much contractual bargaining.

We are at the earliest stages of preparations for this round. But now is the time to begin thinking about the contract you want to see, and the steps we'll all need to take in order to achieve that. Talk with colleagues. Make sure your department or unit has active department reps. Make sure recently hired colleagues know about the union and have signed their union cards. Begin thinking with colleagues about the sorts of initiatives that we might undertake on our campus to improve our work-lives or to better serve students. Consider events or initiatives that might be sponsored by the chapter. Let's build on the collective workplace strategizing and organizing that so many of our members are doing in their units, through Senate, or through UUP. Contract negotiations are a chance for us to envision the sort of university in which we want to work, and following from that vision, to develop concrete initiatives with colleagues that will allow us to realize that vision. I look forward to collaborating with all of you on this worthy endeavor.

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