The Forum

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By the Numbers:

International Trade Union Confederations
Global Rights Index 2019

85	Percentage of countries which have violated the right to strike
80	Percentage of countries which deny some or all workers collective bargaining
107	Number of countries which exclude workers from the right to establish or join a trade union
72	Percentage of countries in which workers had no or restricted access to justice
54	Number of the 145 countries surveyed that deny or constrain free speech and freedom of assembly
52	Number of countries in which workers experienced violence
4	Rating given to the United States of America for "Systematic violations of worker's rights" (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest)
0	Number of other so-called developed nations in this category
10.5	Percentage of American workers in a union in 2018*
33.9	Rate of unionization in the public-sector
6.4	Rate of unionization in the private sector

82 Percentage of unionized workers median weekly earnings taken home by non-union workers.

*US statistics from US Dept. Of Labor

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Dear Chancellor:
SUNY Needs State Funding

Our chapter president, Aaron Major, delivered the following testimony at the Board of Trustees Meeting on November 20th, 2019:

Thank you for this opportunity to address the board. My name is Dr. Aaron Major and I am an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University at Albany and am serving as the President of the Albany Chapter of United University Professions. I am here today because our university is in a financial crisis. This is not hyperbole, this is a fact. And we at UAlbany are not alone in this. My colleagues across the SUNY system find themselves in the same situation. How we got to this point is complicated, but the solution is clear: we need a significant restoration of state funding to the SUNY system and we need this Board, and the Chancellor in particular, to advocate for that funding.

I joined the faculty at UAlbany in the fall of 2008. I like to say that, when I was hired I felt a bit like Indiana Jones--diving under the closing door as the unfolding global financial crisis resulted in cancelation after cancelation of academic job searches around the country. Ten years later, despite repeatedly being told of an economic recovery and state spending increases for health care, P-12 education, and the state infrastructure, that feeling of crisis persists. For the 2017-2018 academic year our campus authorized only twelve searches for full-time academic faculty--the fewest number that had been authorized since the dark days of the Great Recession. This was in response to a $7 million budget deficit. This year, five of those searches have been cancelled. Despite having cut faculty and staff and taken other measures to close that deficit, we are facing an even larger, $11.5 million shortfall this academic year.

More distressing than the size of this deficit is its source. While our campus administration had planned for a modest, 1% increase in total enrollment, it not only missed that target, but saw our student body shrink by 380 students. The problem is not the enrollment figures themselves, but the fact that tiny swings in enrollment can throw us into financial turmoil. Despite being a public, research-intensive university with nearly 18,000 students across nine colleges, we find ourselves in the same financial boat as the small, private liberal arts colleges.

It is for this reason that I say that we are in a financial crisis. Our recent budget woes are not due to "one-off" circumstances, but rather are the predictable outcome of SUNY's funding model, put in place by the SUNY 2020 "compromise." I arrived at UAlbany just a few years before we joined the rest of the system on the SUNY 2020 experiment. The crux of that arrangement was that the State would agree to stop cutting the system's budget, and the system would somehow make up the difference in lost revenue through a combination of tuition and enrollment increases.

While tuition revenue on our campus has nearly doubled from roughly $75 million to $150 million, all of that increase comes from the increased cost of attending the University at Albany, not an increase in the student body. This should come as no surprise to any of us. We know that enrollments across the system have been declining as a result of the strengthening economy and a general population decline in the state. And we also know that we are not alone in facing these demographic pressures as colleges and universities across the country struggle to maintain enrollments. What is surprising is that we continue to base all of our hopes for fiscal solvency on increased enrollment. We grab at the water's edge, and then act surprised when the tide still rolls out. At my own campus we have added two completely new colleges in the last five years, created massive supports for our incoming students through our new Academic Support Center and our first-year writing program. But our student body is no larger than it was ten years ago. We are becoming the institutional embodiment of that old joke about the definition of insanity.

So far, our campus has managed to cover the deficits of the last two years, but not without real sacrifices. We are already beginning to cut too deep. Without a significant change in how the system is funded, we risk being unable to live up to the promise of public higher education.

All of us who do our part for higher education in the SUNY system should feel good knowing that in New York State that promise is alive and real. Normally I don't pay that much attention to the various university rankings that are put out, but there is one that I have been paying attention to. In recent years a few places have begun to rank colleges and universities in terms of their ability to create real economic opportunity for their students. In 2014, CollegeNet--a tech and data company servicing Universities--began to publish its Social Mobility Index for colleges and Universities. It's 2018 rankings put the University at Albany at 43rd out of more than 1,300 colleges and universities. Earlier this year U.S. News and World Report added a social mobility ranking to its list of college classifications, and the University at Albany came out 27th out of 380 campuses. That's pretty good. But what is even more impressive is that if you limited the pool to just the small family of research-intensive public universities of which we are a part, we're in the top 10.

It is this fact that motivates me every time I walk into one of my classrooms. It is this fact, more than any other, that makes me proud to be a faculty member at the University at Albany. For many of our students, college is a dream, not a given. In 2008, 30% of our incoming freshmen qualified for Pell Grants; this year, it's 40%. In that same time span, the number of black and hispanic students on our campus has doubled. We do what you want a public university to do: give students from every background the chance to work with accomplished faculty in state-of-the-art facilities and a real chance at a secure financial future.

Our current model is not only financially untenable, it undermines this vital mission. Our student body is, and will increasingly be, one defined by limited economic resources and a strong need for guidance and mentorship throughout their academic careers. We are fooling ourselves if we think that we can saddle these students with higher costs, denying them the resources that they need to be successful, while still expecting that they will enroll, stay, and graduate in growing numbers.

As I said at the outset, how we reached this point is complex but the solution is simple: we need to get back to a place where SUNY and the state are equal partners in supporting higher education. When I arrived at the University at Albany in the fall of 2008 direct state tax support for our operating expenses was slightly higher than tuition revenue. Since then, state tax support for our campus's operating budget has fallen by roughly $25 million per year. Revenue from the rising cost of tuition, fees and room and board is now five times that of state support.

Had the state's contribution to our operating costs stayed flat at 2008 levels we would not be struggling to come to terms with an $11 million deficit, but would be thinking about the kinds of investments that we want to make with a $15 million surplus. For the past two years our campus has managed to scrape together funds to support new initiatives aimed at attracting and retaining new students to our campus.

I am in awe of what my colleagues have been able to do with so little, but you can only squeeze so much blood from a stone. In the last ten years we have opened two new colleges and launched numerous new programs to attract, retain, and graduate our students--all of this done with fewer faculty and staff than we had before the recession. This is important work, but it will not be sustained, let alone expanded, by placing more burdens on fewer and fewer shoulders. This important work needs real, permanent, predictable funding to support the needs of a growing and diversifying student body. It needs funding that would make New York a national leader in higher education, a goal we rightly aspire to.

Am I expecting that we can reverse the erosion of state support for SUNY overnight? Of course not. But we need to begin, and we can begin today. To this end, as you make your budget request to the State, I urge the Board to frame that request within the erosion of state support for our campuses and the negative impact that this is having on our ability to fulfill our public mission. By simply acknowledging the scope and depth of the problem you have the ability to shift the conversation around funding for public higher education in a profound way. Following from this, I urge the Board to explicitly ask for a general increase in direct state aid to the SUNY with the goal of returning us to pre-recession levels over the next few years. As a small, but significant step in that direction, I urge the Board to support concrete measures to increase state funding for SUNY that are currently the subject of debate in the legislature. Key among these is the effort to increase the State's contribution to the TAP program and close the "TAP gap" that has emerged as maximum TAP awards have stayed flat while tuition has increased.

Thank you for your attention today, and thank you for support for public higher education and the students that we all serve.

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Get Involved!

Marty Manjak, Chief Information Security Officer
UUP Political Coordinator

This past summer, I got a mysterious request from our chapter president, asking if he could meet with me in person to discuss something important. My initial reaction was a combination of curiosity and a certain amount of trepidation. Did someone's email get hacked? Were we going to the mat with management? As it turned out, the request was more mundane, but also much more significant. Aaron asked if I would assume the role of the chapter political coordinator. It only took a few seconds for me to agree, and I'd like to tell you why.

The Supreme Court's Janus decision in 2018 made it very clear that powerful, well-financed, forces (e.g., the Koch brothers) are determined to put a stake through the heart of public-sector unions.[1] The instant appearance of New Choice NY within days of the court's decision, and its targeted, state-wide mailing campaign trying to convince members to abandon their unions, illustrates the depth of organization and financing behind this effort.

Combine this with the anti-union policies and practices of the current administration (its SCOTUS nominees, its nomination of Eugene Scalia, a man who has made millions legally representing large corporations, as the

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[1] https://www.vox.com/2018/6/14/17437832/janus-afscme-supreme-court-union-teacher-police-public-sector

Secretary of the Department of Labor), and it's clear that working women and men face mortal threats to their political autonomy.

These political attacks are occurring in the context of a massive, multi-generational shift in wealth. From 1979 to 2017, the average real, annual wages of the top 1% in this country rose 156%, while the average American saw their purchasing power remain flat. This despite increases in production and the proportion of the American workforce with college degrees. In fact, average hourly wages for recent college grads, when adjusted for inflation, are only slightly higher than what they were in 2000.

Who has benefited from all the economic growth of the past 40 years?

"After-tax corporate profits have doubled from about 5% in GDP in 1970 to about 10%, even as wages as a share of GDP have fallen by roughly 8%. And the wealthiest 1 percent's share of pre-tax income has more than doubled, from 9% in 1973 to 21% today. Taken together, these two trends amount to a shift of more than $2 trillion—a year—from the middle class to corporations and the super-rich."[2]

Yet it isn't just our economic well-being that's in jeopardy. As the International Trade Union Confederation points out in its 2019 Global Rights Index, governments around the globe are becoming increasingly hostile to democracy and organized labor.[3] (See "By the Numbers" for details). The legal, political, and economic assaults on working families here in America, and around the world, emphasize the need to engage not

[2] https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/07/education-isnt-enough/590611/

[3] https://www.ituc-csi.org/RI19

only with immediate employers, but with the much larger political environment at the local, state, and national levels.

This is the role that I hope to serve in the coming months with our chapter, proving information about, and coordination with, larger political activities that are essential to our survival as a union, to our success as educators and professionals, and to our families in providing them with a financially secure future.

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No Hands on Deck

Aaron Major, Chapter President

The announcement of a more than $11 million budget shortfall for this academic year comes as a real blow. One of the consequences of last year's smaller $6 million deficit was the creation of the Workforce Planning Committee and the further centralization of academic hiring decisions in the Provost's Office. Both were put in place with one goal: to reduce the campus's personnel costs. That was achieved, but at a real cost to our working conditions. Facing an even larger budget shortfall this year, the budget reduction plan circulated by the VP for Finance calls for an additional $1,000,000 in savings from the Workforce Planning Process. This is a significant increase from the $750,000 target for last year's Workforce Planning Process.

We have heard from members across the campus who are not only struggling with the results of the Workforce Planning Process but who feel like their insistence that they need more help is falling on deaf ears. Every complaint that we are being asked to do more with less is met with the reply that, in reality, our campus is bloated with personnel. We can learn to make do if only we trust in the process and learn to, as the old HR adage goes, work smarter, not harder.

In order to help contextualize these individual experiences with the Workforce Planning Process, the Chapter asked for the list of positions lost as a result and was provided with a spreadsheet identifying not only all of the UUP positions lost or gained over the past year, but all of the positions lost or gained for all of the employee divisions on campus--UUP, CSEA, PEF, Research Foundation, UPD and Management Confidential. Even with the data provided to us it is difficult to paint a clear picture of the net result of last year's Workforce Planning Process. While it answers some questions, it raises just as many. Nevertheless, some initial points can be made about the data we have received.

Workforce planning, round 1

First, many of the positions lost through the Work force Planning Process were not positions in a way that we might typically understand them, but pieces of positions that were carved off in ways that are not obvious. For example, the Biology department lost two 10% professor lines as a result of this process. It is hard to imagine what a 10% time professor looks like in practice. The only reasonable interpretation is that what was lost was not the line itself, but some of the money that had been set aside for those lines. Other losses were not even positions, but were budget categories. For example, the data contains the opaque title "Funds Remaining After Implementation," of which 10% was lost through Workforce Planning. I have no doubt that the Campus would be happy to explain each of these items in detail, but what these line items suggest is that this was not so much a workforce planning process as it was a budget planning process aimed at reducing personnel costs across the campus.

I think this distinction is important to make and to keep in mind as we look forward to the recently-announced next round of "workforce planning." The name "Workforce Planning" implies a systematic, rational review of the Campus's workforce with the goal of making the best use of its people. This is not what we actually went through, as our VP for Finance himself noted during his budget presentation the campus earlier this fall. This was a budget cutting process that targeted personnel costs in a way that belied any notion of systematic planning. Low-hanging fruit was harvested and when that did not achieve sufficient savings, budget lines were shaved.

Second, while the data provided to us by the campus shows actual positions (or budget-items) gained or lost, it does not tell us anything about the number of requests for positions that were denied by the Workforce Planning Committee or the number of requests that were never made because people understood that it would never get through the Workforce Planning Committee.

With these caveats in mind, let's look at what the data shows and here I'm going to focus almost entirely on the reported gains and losses of full-time positions as these are not only the easiest to interpret but also have the most profound effects on our working conditions. If we look at the overall positions gained and lost (and this is up to July, 2019) we basically get a quantitative indicator of the frustration that we've been hearing so much of over the last year. UUP is down 24 full time positions. On the academic side, we had a net loss of 21 tenure line faculty members, some of which was made up for by the hiring of 9 non-tenure track full-time academics. If you're worried about the erosion of tenure on our campus, this is where it is happening. These losses are significant, but understate the true impact of the Workforce Planning Process on the working conditions for both academics and professionals. The net loss of UUP positions is magnified by the fact that CSEA is also down 22 positions. Many of those duties have, out of necessity, been picked up by UUP employees.

Management tried to sell the Workforce Planning Process by telling us that these were not real cuts to the workforce, but rather a re-allocation of resources that were being tied up by positions that had long been vacated. And yet of the 104 full-time UUP lines lost, nearly half of them (47) had been filled by someone doing that job as of the fall of 2018. Only six of those lines had been vacated before the fall of 2015, and only one position had never been filled. To characterize this process as simply cleaning-up budget lines and rationalizing resources is very misleading. What this data shows is that what the Workforce Planning Process did was formalize the more informal erosion of the workforce that has been going on over the last few years.

Finally, we can't end this overview of the results of last year's Workforce Planning Process without noting one striking anomaly. As was made clear by management, the purpose of this process was to reduce costs by cutting positions and in every workplace division on this campus lost full-time positions (UUP, CSEA and Research Foundation) or stayed even (PEF and UPD). There is one glaring exception to this pattern: management increased its own ranks. They know what we all know: that to get done all of the things that need to be done you need people in place to do it.

Blood from a stone

The announcement of a higher savings target from the Workforce Planning Process raises the question of where these additional savings are going to be found. Perhaps there is still a supply of open lines from which to tap some additional resources, but given that this is the easier, less painful way of allocating resources from personnel costs, it's more likely that the last round of Workforce Planning already scraped up most of the long-vacant positions.

If last year's experience is any indication, these additional savings can only come from employee turn-over. For academics this means not only fewer authorized searches (if that even seems possible) but, in all likelihood continuing conversion of existing tenure-track lines into full-time, non tenurable positions. For professionals it means that those who remain will shoulder more of the work that used to be done by their former UUP and CSEA colleagues. And it means that even when searches are approved they will be approved at lower salaries—and lower titles—than those positions lost.

In this context, President Rodriguez's call for "all hands on deck" to support enrollment and student success falls flat. It is not that those tasks are unimportant, but rather that this call to action presumes that university employees have some slack in their work day. We have been in "all hands on deck" mode for over a decade now, all the while watching as fewer and fewer hands are available to pitch in.

Indeed, the "all hands on deck" idiom tells us that the challenges that we face and the work in front of us require even more people to pitch in than are normally present: "all hands" are being summoned from all quarters of the ship to gets us through some rough waters. The idiom falls apart when everyone is already up on deck and there's no one left to answer the call.

	Full lines	**(Including Part-lines)**
Total UUP Lines Lost	**104**	**141**
Recently occupied lines (filled as of Fall 2018)	47	57
Tenure line academics lost	54	

Professional lines lost	44	
Total UUP Lines Gained	**80**	**86**
Tenure line academics gained	33	
Professional lines gained	38	
Net UUP Position	**-24**	**-55**
Total CSEA Lines Lost	**32**	**38**
CSEA Lines Lost since Fall, 2018	10	10
Tota CSEA Lines Gained	10	10
Net CSEA Position	**-22**	**-28**
Total MC Lines Lost	**6**	**8**
MC Lines Lost since Fall, 2018	5	6
Tota MC Lines Gained	8	8
Net MC Position	**2**	**0**

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Letter to the Editor: "Merit" DSI Determinations: Our Annual Zero-Sum Socio-Economic Milgram Experiment

Timothy Sergay, LLC

As we all know, a pool of annual discretionary salary increase (DSI) funds remains in each unit after the addressing of "equity" issues of "inversion" and "compression." These funds are distributed to academic and professional employees on a basis of individual merit. Their minimum amount is $500, and they are added to salary base—a considerable gain for UUP members, unlike the one-time discretional salary award (DSA) system of the previous contract. But the precise amounts of DSIs are indeed "discretionary": they must be adjudicated, calibrated, and justified with performance data gleaned from annual employee Activity Reports. But one does not find specific procedures for performing this delicate process of adjudication in the Agreement between the State of New York and United University Professions, July 2, 2016–July 1, 2022. It is left to campus presidents, and ultimately to individual units to work out their own procedures for setting and distributing DSIs each and every year, procedures that at least appear to be "evidence-based" and nonarbitrary.

In my own unit, and probably in yours, customary practices have evolved for managing this annual discretionary salary adjudication process as fairly as seems possible. The onus of determining who gets a DSI and how much of one has fallen essentially to the employees themselves. In my own department, the executive committee meets and reviews their colleagues' and one another's Activity Reports, compares everyone's achievements, reckons somehow, ad hoc, with considerations of quantity and quality, and finally decides who's been naughty or nice this year. My objections to this process almost certainly apply to the practices in other units, since the basic logical problems are the same. I will set out a few of them here in a modest bid to revive and widen the conversation on this disagreeable issue.

It would be hard to design a more dispiriting DSI adjudication system for a *university*, the foundational idea of which was a community of scholars, not a multilevel marketing scheme, and not Dostoevsky's troubling vision of battling spiders trapped in a jar. If there is a pool of money available for DSIs to faculty and professional staff, then that money should be divided equally within those respective categories. As far as academic workers are concerned, about whom I feel more qualified to judge, I do not know a single professor or instructor fortunate enough to be employed at all in the present era, whether contingent or noncontingent, who is not evidently working flat out, far more than full time, as hard as they can, to accomplish all that they can as scholars, teachers, and university citizens, given their extremely varied personal situations and handicaps— situations so varied that there is simply no rational, equitable way to even out everyone's chances at earning "merit"-based raises. Everyone's needle has hit its peg. How do you compare the number of hours above 50, say, per week still available to be expended on work, still "disposable" by (1) single young-adult faculty, (2) empty-nester faculty or (3) parents of school-age children, to name just one obvious factor? How do you weigh the research contributions of faculty members with multiple colleagues in their same programs with the contributions of members who have only one or zero such colleagues and thus bear outsize responsibility for keeping entire programs alive, a necessity that consumes voraciously the hours they might have been able to devote to research? How do you adjust the "merit scores" of your colleagues to correct for the natural ebb and flow of their teaching and service duties and their research careers?

Professors and educational professionals chose their careers for largely psychological, axiological, spiritual reasons, probably least of all for material incentives. If we wanted to be characters in David Mamet plays like *Glengarry Glen Ross*, then we would have gone into more cutthroat, more scoreboard-oriented, and/or frankly lucrative fields. Squeezing yet more “excellence” out of us all by forcing us to compete with one another on inevitably fuzzy criteria with respect to “merit” is demeaning. It amounts to an annual zero-sum socio-economic Milgram experiment that we are required to perform on one another. Yet the State of New York evidently refuses to allow units to distribute DSI pools evenly across the board, because it insists on enforcing highly questionable ideas about “competition” and “excellence.” If you are awarded a DSI, how do you escape the sensation that it comes at the expense of your very closest colleagues whose records of recent formal achievement you have somehow managed to outshine this year? Does such a system manifest true equity and truly encourage achievement? Or does it breed suppressed resentment and actually undermine morale? As a community of scholars and professionals, would we have chosen such a system for ourselves, and do we feel confidence in its fundamental equity and dignity? I do not. I do not call for Bolshevik-style socialism, God knows; I do not long to see obligatory equality of all outcomes or any other of Friedrich Hayek’s nightmares. There are simply better mechanisms for performance review and meaningful promotions, meaningful raises, and other recognitions. This one demeans us needlessly and supports the loathsome and outdated myth of the “pampered” or “deadwood” prof who needs to be prodded, shamed, or “incentivized” to start pulling their weight. We need to discuss a system that is fair and true to today’s realities.

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Drills and Alarms: How to Get Out?

Carol Jewell, Chair Disabilities Rights & Concerns Committee

Are you mobility impaired, either permanently or temporarily? Do you sometimes use a cane, crutches, a walker, a wheelchair, a scooter, or other mobility device? Do you know where to go in case of a fire alarm or other need to evacuate a building you are in? Technically, there is a difference between a scooter (power-assisted mobility device) and a cane, but the meaning is clear: how do people with disabilities exit a building when an emergency happens? Technically, we are supposed to go to a stairwell, and wait for emergency personnel. But if you are newly-disabled, you might not know this.

Some institutions have assistive devices that can be used by the person with the disability (PWD) and volunteers that happen to be nearby at the time of the emergency. However, I have never heard of one of these devices being used or, for that matter, even available, in case of emergencies.

Have you ever been in the position of being the PWD who followed the directions, and waited for help, and help didn't come? Some disabled people actually believe that they were ignored, left alone, as happened at an unnamed Florida University some years ago.

Administrations raise the hue and cry of "not enough money!" Libraries and other buildings on campus respond with "reallocate funds." Some users think the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) can't be considered reasonable accommodations, but I disagree. In an emergency, there is no time to make a formal accommodation request, and wait for an acceptance (or not), so it must be found in the text of the law.

The ADA, found at "42 U.S. Code § 12101 Findings and purpose," (which you can read here, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/42/12101) makes it clear that PWDs have the same rights as non-disabled people in public settings/schools, etc., (for instance, in institutions getting Federal monies, like the University at Albany). If accessibility to something is difficult for PWDs, it must be made accessible for PWDs. THAT IS THE LAW.

Next year (2020) is the 30th anniversary of the passage of the ADA, but there is still work to be done so that that the true intent of the law is made clear to all people, not just people with disabilities. If you would like to work on such issues, I invite you to join our Chapter's Disabilities Rights & Concerns Committee. Let's work together to make our campus community accessible for everyone.

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Graduate Student Employees Left Behind by New Stipend Minimums

Samantha Rider, Business Agent, GSEU (Albany)

This semester, the University Administration began discussing plans for increasing minimum stipends for graduate student employees working on graduate assistantships. The decision is, in part, due to the Administration's recognition that many graduate programs across campus are increasingly unable to attract top candidates because graduate stipends at UAlbany fall below national averages. Further, Vice President of Finance and Admin istration, Todd Foreman, acknowledged in a meeting with CAS faculty earlier this semester that the University Administration received pressure from the SUNY Board of Trustees (BoT) to implement the new minimums as a way to help justify the continuous increases in student fees paid by both undergraduate and graduate students. This comes on the heels of testimony from members of the Graduate Student Employees Union on the impacts of University fees on graduate student employees at several SUNY BoT meetings last year. And it follows the implementation of new minimum stipends at Buffalo and Stony Brook in response to mass protests by graduate student employees on their campuses.

In determining how the new minimums will be implemented at UAlbany, the University relied on a 2015 Graduate Stipend Report that identified competitive stipend amounts for different graduate programs. In the official roll out, it was clarified that only doctoral students employed on assistantships in academic departments qualify for the new minimums, which will be $18,000 for most programs and $20,000 for select programs. Though the higher minimums are a good start, there is still more work to do to ensure livable wages for graduate student employees. And while the new minimums are certainly a welcome development for the employees who will benefit from them and for graduate programs hoping to attract competitive candidates, there are large numbers of graduate students employees being left behind.

Of the 700+ Graduate Assistants and Teaching Assistants that make up the Graduate Student Employees Union on the Albany campus, between 200-300 do not qualify for the new minimum stipends, either because they are Master's students or because they are employed in various Program Offices across campus, such as Res Life, Admissions, Athletics, and Dean's Offices, among others. There are also serious problems with the funding mechanism for the new minimums, the cost of which is being covered entirely by increases in student fees. This means not only that graduate student employees who do see an increase are, in part, paying for their own raises, but also that graduate students who do not qualify for the new minimums will be paying for raises that they will not receive. While all GSEU members will see 2% annual raises as a result of our recently ratified bargaining agreement, the University's regular practice of using student fees as a source of revenue means that these contractual gains are substantially undercut, especially for those GAs and TAs who are already earning the lowest stipends. For these employees, the financial burden of low stipends compounded by ever-increasing fees mean that they are barely earning enough take-home pay to get by. We have heard from members who struggle to afford safe housing, face food insecurity, and whose academic performance is compromised by the stress of barely making ends meet. Others must take out loans or are forced to take on second or third jobs in addition to their graduate course load and the 20 hours of work required by their assistantships. The hardships these graduate student employees face exposes the fact that these policies are aimed solely at increasing the rankings or competitiveness of the University rather than increasing the well-being of its students and employees.

Though this may seem like an issue of interest only to a certain segment of the graduate student population, it is important to place this situation within the context of the current budget shortfall at UAlbany and disinvestment from SUNY by NY State over the last decade. In a recent assembly meeting of the Graduate Student Association, Dean Kevin Williams argued that increasing stipends for graduate students employed in Program Offices is outside the purview of the Graduate School because for these employees, GA stipends are determined by the individual program office in which they are employed. However, we know that these program offices are themselves being squeezed by budget cuts and staffing shortages as almost every department and program office on campus is increasingly being asked to do more with less. Faced with a budget crisis, management seems unable to offer any meaningful solutions while expecting students and employees to bear the burdens of the increased cost of higher education and increased workloads.

To echo a sentiment expressed by UUP chapter President Aaron Major, it once again falls to the Unions to do the necessary work of fighting for ourselves and our students. Like UUP, GSEU is increasingly taking this fight to the state-wide level. This began last year with the introduction of our bill to abolish University fees for graduate student employees in the State legislature and calls for the SUNY Board of Trustees to reject proposed increases to University fees for graduate students. The fight has continued this year as my counterpart on the Stony Brook campus, Andrew Dobbyn, testified on the rising costs of higher education at the NY Senate Committee on Higher Education hearing. On the UAlbany campus, GSEU is currently partnering with UUP to plan campus-wide actions calling on State Legislators to fully fund SUNY. We look forward to continuing this collaboration as we move into the legislative session and to more opportunities to strengthen solidarities between bargaining units on the Albany campus and across SUNY.

Solidarity! In an attempt to connect with the broader labor movement throughout the region, we have invited a few representatives of local labor groups to describe their activities. We hope to continue this practice in subsequent issues.

Solidarity On and Off Campus

By August Schneeberg, SEIU 200United
Research & Communications Director

SEIU 200United is an amalgamated union of service workers in public, private, and federal sector jobs. At colleges and universities, SEIU janitors, food service workers, grounds keepers, and tradespeople, have fought for better conditions for decades. Recently, a few thousand contingent faculty at a dozen schools (including Siena and St. Rose) have joined our ranks.

Job standards vary between schools, due to things like institutional financial health, however, job qualifications and required experience seem to have little to nothing to do with it. We see union janitors earning $60k with great benefits, while unorganized adjunct faculty earn under $1000 per credit hour, and an ever-growing hoard of administrators earning six-figures for whatever it is they do.

In our experience, the single biggest factor affecting the pay, benefits, job security, academic freedom, and ability to demand justice on campus, is union density. Simply put, the more workers on campus and in the broader community are in unions, the better off we all are. Yet we are all so focused on the struggles we face on our campuses and in our unions; meanwhile most working people on aren't in a union. They aren't getting decent pay, benefits their families can rely on, or even baseline respect form their employers. Are we seeing the forest for the trees?

This of course isn't new or novel thinking – but how often do we stop to think about how the fight of the outsourced shuttle bus drivers on campus, the housekeepers at the hotel across the street, or the adjuncts at the for-profit school across town, impact us, in our union, at home, in our community?

Solidarity between all working people has always been our most powerful tool in the fight for justice, and is more important now than ever.

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The Albany County Central Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO)

Bill Ritchie, President

The Albany County Central Federation of Labor (ACCFL), established in 1888 by workers in the Capital District, is a local labor council through which the AFL-CIO works to build and strengthen the labor movement. We draw delegates from 38 local and statewide affiliated unions and conduct monthly delegate meetings at the Albany Labor Temple. Our mission is to bring social and economic justice to working people by giving them a voice on the job, in their communities, in government, and in a changing global economy. The ACCFL supports unions during organizing drives and contract negotiations, backs campaigns for social justice, environmental sustainability and health care for all and works for progressive political candidates. In addition, we are committed to maintaining positive relations with our community partners.

Our most recent and top priorities have focused on the vetting, endorsement and election of labor-friendly county and town legislators, the fight for adoption of paid sick leave for all working people in Albany County and working with the New York State Nurses Association as RNs at Albany Medical Center struggle for a first contract. Eight of our endorsed candidates for the Albany County Legislature and two Colonie town candidates were elected November 5. We believe the changed composition of the County Legislature augurs well for passage of paid sick leave legislation in 2020.

Our over-arching goal is the development of working-class capacity and power grounded in class-consciousness and a rational analysis of the many factors which govern the everyday lives of working people. Our labor council includes enthusiastic UUP delegates and retirees who are diligent in sharing information about issues such as those cited above and who work actively to organize on-the-ground support for the union and community struggles we embrace. We are working together to achieve our short- and long-term objectives.

We truly appreciate the participation of UUP delegates both as members and leaders of our labor council. We can assure a warm welcome for additional delegates as we march forward under the banner of SOLIDARITY.

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Nurses Battle for Their First Union Contract at Albany Medical Center

Larry Wittner, Professor of History Emeritus

As workers and their unions have learned over the centuries, a nonprofit employer is not necessarily a better boss than a profit-making one. That sad truth is reinforced by the experience of some 2,200 nurses at Albany Medical Center, who have been fighting for a contract since April 2018, when they voted for union representation.

Even that union recognition struggle proved exceptionally difficult. The management at Albany Med—a vast, sprawling enterprise with roughly $2 billion in annual revenue and 9,500 workers, making it the capital district's largest private employer—fought vigorously over the years to prevent unionization. As a result, three union-organizing campaigns conducted between 2000 and 2003 went down to defeat, although by very narrow margins.

But worker discontent grew over subsequent years. In April 2009, Albany Med informed workers that it was eliminating scheduled raises, freezing hiring, cutting vacant positions, and reducing employee time off. This announcement followed a year in which James Barba, the hospital's president and CEO, received $4.4 million in total compensation. In 2011, Albany Med—hit with a federal class-action lawsuit charging that its officials had conspired with their counterparts at other area hospitals to keep down the pay of registered nurses—grudgingly agreed to settle its share by providing the aggrieved nurses with $4.5 million. Moreover, nurses complained of short-staffing, computerized duties that left them with less time for their patients, and low salaries.

Against this backdrop, the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) began waging another union organizing drive in 2015. As the campaign gathered momentum and a union representation election loomed, management resistance grew ever fiercer. Nurses reported receiving daily emails from administrators discouraging them from voting union, managers pulled nurses aside for on-on-one meetings to question them about how they would vote, pro-union flyers were torn from bulletin boards, and Filipino nurses on work visas were warned that unionizing could jeopardize their immigration status. The situation became such a scandal that, in March 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo ordered the state Labor Department to investigate complaints of intimidation, threats, and coercion by the Albany Med administration.

Finally, in April 2018, with 1,743 nurses casting ballots in a government-supervised representation election, the pro-union forces emerged victorious by a two-to-one ratio. Nevertheless, rather than accept defeat and engage in good-faith collective bargaining, the Albany Med management has adopted a well-established corporate tactic for undermining a fledgling union: denying it a first contract. Thus, more than a year-and-a-half since contract talks began, they appear stalled. NYSNA has not been able to resolve the major issues of concern to the nurses at Albany Med and, as a result, has been unable to deliver on its promises. Seizing the opportunity, anti-union employees, reportedly with the assistance of management at Albany Med, have begun a petition campaign to decertify the union.

Meanwhile, NYSNA—anxious to expose Albany Med's stalling tactics, bring public pressure to bear on management, and maintain union morale—has begun running television ads and staging lively, colorful informational picketing outside its New Scotland Avenue hospital. Hundreds of nurses and supporters from other unions have joined the picket lines, including members of UUP.

The primary issue for the nurses remains adequate staffing. As Albany Med's management admits, the hospital is short almost 200 nurses, a vacancy rate of about 10 percent. From the standpoint of the nursing staff, this short-staffing is appalling, both because it leads to overwork by the remaining nurses and because their patients are receiving inadequate care. "You're afraid to end your shift and go home because there's just not enough nurses to go around," declared Kathryn Dupuis, a nurse who has worked there for 24 years. As a result, she often works overtime. "Bottom line is it's my conscience. I got into this to help people." Another nurse, Curtis Strife, observed that he regularly works beyond his shift in the post-anesthesia care unit. When the recovery of patients is complete, he's supposed to move them to the next stop. But if those floors are short-staffed, he has to keep his patients in place, which in turn causes a backup in the operating rooms.

Other issues are important to the nurses, as well. According to union activists, nursing salaries at Albany Med are substantially lower than at other upstate New York hospitals, while the health insurance plans available to hospital employees are very expensive. Naturally, these conditions interact with the problem of maintaining adequate staffing at Albany Med. "It's a really great place to work," one RN remarked at a public forum. "But when you have a family and you have to pay a lot for health insurance or your wages barely cover your mortgage, it's just easier to go someplace else with competitive wages and benefits."

Yet another issue that has come to the fore involves Albany Med's use of Filipino nurses for what the union charges is "forced labor." This October, NYSNA filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the hospital was violating the labor provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The lawsuit focused on an Albany Med program, begun in 2002, that recruited nearly 600 nurses from the Philippines. These nurses, the lawsuit noted, were required to sign a contract including clauses providing for a penalty of up to $20,000 if the recruited nurse resigned before a three year period ended. The contract also included "the threat that if the nurse breached the contract," the hospital "would report the nurse to federal immigration authority, which could result in deportation proceedings." In response, management at Albany Med claimed that the exorbitant "penalty" was designed to recoup the expense it supposedly incurred in bringing a nurse to the United States and denied that the hospital had reported employees to immigration officials.

Just as Albany Med maintains unusual leverage over some of its nurses, so, too, can it bring considerable pressure to bear on the City of Albany. As a nonprofit enterprise, Albany Med is tax-exempt, as are other major nonprofit institutions located in the city. This means that only 36 percent of the value of Albany real estate is taxable, a situation limiting the revenue available to fund the city's operations and resulting in higher taxes for the city's homeowners. As the nonprofits, with their thousands of employees, are major users of city services, the city administration pressed them to make voluntary payments in lieu of taxes. Consequently, Albany Med initially agreed to pony up $500,000 per year—a pittance for this enormous enterprise, but badly-needed revenue for the city. Even so, Albany Med failed to make this payment in 2017, and skipped it again in 2018. The inconsistent nature of these payments, which remain entirely at the discretion of Albany Med, has left the City of Albany a perennial supplicant to the giant medical complex. In 2019, the city administration named a downtown street after Albany Med's CEO, James Barba.

Of course, Albany Med is capable of providing safe staffing, decent wages, affordable health insurance, a less punitive approach to immigrant labor, and regular payments to the City of Albany. After all, it is a very wealthy enterprise, "a vast organization" (according to an Albany Med announcement) that, in addition to the New Scotland Avenue complex, has more than 100 locations throughout the region, including affiliations with Columbia Memorial Health and Saratoga Hospital, as well as a network of urgent care centers and multi-specialty centers. In recent years, Albany

Med has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on an enormous building and expansion program and now owns a considerable portion of downtown Albany.

As a result, although Albany Med seems determined to maintain its long-time anti-union stance, NYSNA—with the support of UUP and other unions—will be waging a heightened campaign to secure a first contract for the hospital's nursing staff. And there may soon be efforts underway to pressure Albany Med and other nonprofit entities into tighter agreements to help fund the city services they use. Stay tuned . . . and be ready to support them!

We Welcome your comments.
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