



Welcome!

This "Forum" intends to be just that, a place where members can learn about their union, and contribute to the larger debate about unions and their role in a working democracy. Join us in these important discussions!

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Where are they now?

Paul Stasi, Editor

On October 1, 2010, then SUNY Albany President George Phillip announced the suspension of programs in Classics, French, Italian, Russian and Theatre, as well as the end of Project Renaissance. "This decision," Phillips wrote in an email "was based on an extensive consultative process with faculty, and in recognition that there are comparatively fewer students enrolled in these degree programs." Eschewing the typical measures of academic merit—research productivity, academic influence, teaching excellence, distinguished University service—in favor of a set of numbers that were themselves the subject of great dispute, the university here revealed a logic deeply at odds with the very idea of a public research university. What was left of its mission to provide a broad based education to the citizens of New York State? At the same time, the much-touted "consultative process" was suspect in a variety of ways, from the constitution of the Budget Advisory Groups to the unclear relationship between the directives they were given and the eventual actions taken. The result of these actions was twofold. Internally, a deep distrust opened up between faculty and the administration. Externally, the University's reputation took a direct hit from which it has yet to recover.

Response to the crisis was swift. Campus groups organized. Letters of protest poured in from an impressive number of national and international organizations as well as thousands of individuals, pointing out the short-sightedness of a University cutting language and humanities programs while simultaneously proclaiming the world to be "within reach." The SUNY-Wide Faculty Senate took the unusual step of passing a resolution condemning the deactivations, and our own University Senate passed a series of resolutions asking for an investigation into the consultation and governance procedures. This investigation produced a deeply conflicted report, one that could not agree on the contentious use of the term "violation" to describe what it nevertheless clearly saw as a divisive and problematic process. Why else would it state "in the strongest possible terms, that in the future, the administration must remain mindful of the need to consult with the Senate," if it did not feel that the administration had not done so in this particular instance?

There are some who will say this is all water under the bridge, that we should let the past be the past. But the issues raised by this troubling set of events are not past – and they touch on some of the most important concerns of our working life at the University: job security, academic freedom and workload. When the smokescreen of lower enrollments fell away, and the administration was left without any compelling academic reason to have acted as it did, many suspected that the deactivation's only

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President's Column

Solidarity

Bret Benjamin, President

We unionists, almost out of habit, use the word *solidarity* again and again. But what do we actually mean by it? In this column I want to try to explain how I understand solidarity in light of our new contract and the inequities it introduces as well as those it tries to redress.

Solidarity is a complicated word. It refers, on the one hand, to an ethical decision. We stand in solidarity with our union brothers and sisters in times of need. We show solidarity with the causes and struggles in which we believe. In such cases, solidarity stands as a collective expression of individually held values or principles.

However I want to make the case here that solidarity, in the context of a union, arises from a more fundamental commonality. Solidarity in this sense is not a choice or a value, but rather is the direct expression and founding premise of the union to which we all belong. Some of you will scoff at such a notion. After all, our bargaining unit appears heterogeneous and contradictory, composed of academics and professionals, full-timers and part-timers, all of whom are spread across a wide range of positions with varied obligations and widely divergent salaries. Despite this appearance of radical diversity and discontinuity, however, all of us are bound together by our shared position as workers. Solidarity arises from this basic fact. This is not a choice; it does not depend on the expression of an individual's ethical commitments. We share in common the fact that all of us are employees of the State of New York, working within the SUNY system. This basic structural unity, though easy to overlook or forget, should therefore inform any analysis of our individual work lives.

Consider, for instance, the difficult process of implementing the euphemistically termed Deficit Reduction Program (DRP) or furlough days. The State's provision insisting on furlough days is about both money and discipline. On its face, it sets out to take back salary from state workers, foregoing many other revenue sources that would have been more equitable and more just. When the numbers are ultimately tallied—when overtime costs, disruptions and loss of services are all calculated—I have my doubts that DRP will end up saving the State much if any money; regardless, a rational tax structure would have generated far greater revenue with far less pain. More important than money in my estimation, is DRP's function as a tool to discipline labor unions. With threats of both layoffs and health-care cost increases considerably higher than the ones we eventually negotiated, the State insisted that DRP would be part of all of the public sector union contracts. Put plainly, furloughs are about busting unions.

As we have seen, however, when implemented on a university campus, furloughs take on a strange, contorted appearance. This is especially true for academics. Should faculty miss class? Should they answer e-mail or do research on days when they've been furloughed? Should they ask colleagues to guest lecture? Should students be spared from any knowledge of the furloughs? My position, quite simply, is no. To their enormous credit, our academics and professionals alike have an unflagging dedication to the students of UAlbany and to the University's core educational and social missions. We are inclined to take on extra work, to go above and beyond, to "do more with less," all in an effort to ensure that the institution delivers the highest quality education. We do this, I am arguing here, to a fault; indeed we do it at our own peril. In such moments, we would do well to momentarily set aside our various identities as teachers, department chairs, librarians, network technicians, advisors, coaches, and so forth. Instead, we should remind ourselves of

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Corporatization: By the Numbers

\$2,800 Typical per course pay for adjuncts at SUNY Albany

78 Percentage of U.S. college and university teaching positions that were tenure-track in 1969

33 Percentage of U.S. college and university teaching positions that are tenure-track today

90% General drop out rate for students enrolled in MOOCs

500 Billions of dollars in potential profit to be made in the education market, according to Rupert Murdoch

9 Annual reported global earnings for Pearson, in billions of dollars

12,000 Number of students who enrolled in Duke University's Bioelectricity MOOC

313 Number of students who achieved a passing grade in this course

80 Percentage of 34,000 students surveyed who had taken at least one of MOOC offered by the University of Pennsylvania who had already completed a bachelor's degree

72 Percentage of Professors currently teaching MOOCs who state that guest students in their courses should not be awarded credit at their home universities

59 Average answer given when a survey of over 5,000 Americans asked what percentage of total U.S. income is owned by the top 20% of Americans

32 Ideal percentage of total U.S. income that would be owned by the top 20% in a just society, according to the same survey

84 Actual percentage of total U.S. income owned by the top 20%

93 Billions of dollars owned by the bottom 30% of Americans *and* the six members of the Walton family

Milestones 11/18/13

Professional Vice President's Report

Thomas Hoey

As we witnessed the 50th anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, we saw a great deal of reflection on that event in newsprint and television. My own memories of November 22, 1963 are still very vivid and, though as a second grader I did not understand what was going on, by watching the reaction of others I learned that something very bad and scary had just happened. The principal made an announcement that the President was shot and we continued our lessons until some minutes later church bells all over town started ringing. We were sent home early and when my mother came to the door, tears were running down her cheeks and we all huddled around the television to watch the events unfold. Evening newspapers were very common in those days, and the one memory that I will never forget was the tears of our teenaged newspaper boy as he came to our door with the headline that our leader was dead. It was a tragedy that we are still pondering today and many of us who look at his work for the common man ask the unanswerable question "What if?"

The world stood still for a brief period, but it did not stop. Life continues changing and evolving as the years go by. One sad change that we see today is the decline of good union jobs that pay workers living wages. The headlines today speak of General Electric, which does not pay federal taxes, closing its Fort Edward plant and laying off 200; Heinz, which was just bought out, cutting 1350 jobs; Lockheed Martin cutting 4000 jobs. And all this is happening while the stock market and CEO compensation have reached record highs. We as a workforce need to question the policies and practices that brought us this income inequality and loss of our freedom to retire at an age when we can enjoy our lives after long years of labor.

What exactly has gone wrong for our workforce on our economic journey into the 21st Century? To find out, we need to look at the many factors that play into the general decline of labor and its compensation. One factor is easily found in

the line "Greed is Good" spoken by corporate raider Gordon Gekko in the 1987 film *Wall Street* by Oliver Stone. Gekko makes his money buying companies and closing them down and selling off their assets in order to make a profit, leaving workers with no jobs. Although a fictional movie, it does reflect the actual day to day activities which have changed us from being a manufacturing economy to a consumer economy at a cost of hundreds of thousands of jobs. It shows how greed plays a major role in labor's decline and how it prevents an equitable sharing of income and profits from business.

Another factor is the "Global Economy," and this is indeed an insidious factor as companies have learned that they can move their operations to regions that use "slave like" labor and avoid health and safety regulations that protect workers and consumers and make huge profits. To add insult to injury most of these companies receive tax breaks to close down and move their operations. We have seen the headlines of babies poisoned by baby formula tainted by imitation ingredients to increase profit margins and how many other safety regulations are being avoided by going overseas for profit. Just recently a plan was announced to change food regulations that would allow the shipment of U.S. chickens across the Pacific Ocean in order to be processed and then shipped back to be sold in our supermarkets. Low wages and a lack of safety regulations are what make this profitable.

We seem to be blessed at the University in that the strife of the real world market place does not directly impact us immediately. Over time, however, we do see the effect of declining tax revenue and the increase in the cost of doing our work and of course the "doing more with less" philosophy that is being forced on us. As a union we need to push back and stay educated on the daily issues. And we need to stay united. After all, we are "United University Professions."

Recently, my reputation was attacked by a member in another unit and I was called destructive because I pointed out to our managers that they were giving our unionized professional titles to the

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Making a MOOC

How many workers does it take to build and operate one?

Marty Manjak

Forget the sage on the stage or guide on the side. For online learning experiences to work seamlessly for students and instructors, a team of behind-the-scenes technical experts is key. The conversation about MOOCs, or massive open online courses, frequently omits the cast of thousands who make the whole thing work. But those counting on MOOCs to disrupt higher education and solve the problems of cost, accessibility, retention, completion, innovation and so on, underestimate the costs of technical support at their peril.

In New York State, State University of New York Chancellor Nancy Zimpher has committed SUNY to enrolling 100,000 students within three years in online course offerings through a program called Open SUNY. SUNY has also entered into an agreement with Coursera, one of a number of MOOC-for-profit developers.

The premise of much of this effort is that online courses, through their broad reach, electronic nature, and ability to deliver content asynchronously, will, in the long run, be less expensive in providing instruction than traditional classroom-based teaching, and that savings will be passed on to students.

Putting aside the question of pedagogical value for the time being, what does it take to build and operate a MOOC?

Content prep and delivery

Let's start with the content. This has to be delivered to participants in some electronic format: text, audio and visuals have to be prepared, assembled and presented synchronously (real-time), asynchronously (pre-recorded) or in some mixture of the two. Pre-recorded elements have to be produced in an environment that lends itself to high-quality recording of the event. There may be substantial post-production work if the content has to be edited or supplemented with other visual or

audio components. This work is the province of audio engineers, lighting technicians, videographers and editors. Visual artists may be called upon to produce special graphics, images and animations. The process is comparable to designing and producing a textbook which requires many specialized skills to complement textual content.

Once the content is prepared and recorded, it has to be delivered to the participants. This requires hardware to store and transmit the content (including student contributions), and software to manage it, keeping in mind all the different types of transactions that will occur in the course of the MOOC involving students, instructors and the course material.

Managing the servers

Let's start with the hardware layer. To paraphrase Roy Scheider's famous remark in the film *Jaws*, we're going to need server farms—way bigger server farms! It's going to require a lot of hardware to run the databases and applications that will make it possible for tens of thousands of participants to interact within the MOOC. This means we're also going to need dedicated system administrators to manage all those servers, even if most of them are virtual. Aside from the MOOC software itself, the servers will need patching and updates for the operating systems that underlie these applications. They're going to need to be secured against cyber-attacks and monitored to assure 24/7 year-round access, with little, if any, lag in performance.

All these machines will need to talk to each other and be publicly accessible via the Internet. To assure communications, technicians will be needed to design the internal and external networks—the switches, routers and cabling that make it possible to deliver content to tens of thousands of participants distributed around the globe in every imaginable time zone. Aside from scheduled maintenance, there's no allowance for downtime when the MOOC is in session.

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Contingent & Crazy Standards

Caitlin Janiszewski, President of the UAlbany Graduate Student Association

Three days after the GSA passed a resolution which seeks to raise adjunct pay from the typical \$2,800 to a minimum \$5,000 per three credit course, graduate students presented their case to President Jones at our public President's Forum. We titled our argument for better GTA contracts, higher adjunct pay, better access to childcare, and guaranteed maternity/paternity leave "graduate student well-being". Risking ambiguity, we hoped to disrupt a logic which seems rampant: that graduate students *should* be low paid contingent laborers. Not only is this "rite of passage" logic evident in popular culture but it has emerged in various ways as I have campaigned for this resolution.

At our assembly meeting, students spoke of the desperate need for teaching experience to secure a job down the line. The implication was that the linear conception of academic careers—which suggests that if you act as a good slave for enough years you may be able to buy your freedom—is still in operation. I'll leave it to a different article to discuss how this logic discriminates against women and their childbearing years, and stick with how this logic is used as a scare tactic to get graduate students to accept low pay or even, more absurdly, course credit. What I will stress, here, is that it is precisely the University's reliance on cheap adjunct labor that makes it difficult for graduate students to eventually land the jobs that will allow them to escape contingency. This apprenticeship model only works when administrations actually hire faculty, thus allowing adjuncts to reach the imagined promised land of the tenure-track.

The economic logic driving the University, however, seems not to admit this. The Provost's response to our concerns, for instance, emphasized "market forces" as the reason for low adjunct pay, even as she inflated the average salary of UAlbany adjuncts – raising them from \$2,800 to \$4,000 while seemingly failing to understand that even \$4,000 is not a living wage. Her retort implied that we had little right to complain. The lack of reaction from the

crowd reaffirmed a dangerous common sense that contingents should be paid crazy low wages.

Less than a week later I brought an adapted version of the resolution to the SUNY system Student Assembly where a crowd of undergraduates (in fact mostly community college students) found the well-being of contingent faculty foreign to their interests. It clearly fell through the cracks that many contingent faculty *are themselves students* and that even at schools without graduate programs, increased reliance on contingent faculty shrinks the academic job market. Instead I was met with the classic yet blindsiding response that "budgets are fixed" and paying adjuncts more would cause tuition hikes. Unfortunately, these students could not see that their own educations are being compromised by the ill-treatment of the majority of their instructors. Instead, they believed I was crazy to suggest that contingent faculty deserved some level of security because they believed it would inevitably infringe upon theirs. Finally, acknowledging a gap in understanding, the body tabled the resolution until the spring conference pending a report from the UAlbany GSA Wages and Benefits Committee.

But this staunch defense of a perceived attack on undergraduate security revealed to me the depth with which the logic of deserved vulnerability is built into our understanding of contingent faculty and graduate students. Graduate students are more likely than undergraduates to accept that this is supposed to be hard, because it is. We should not, however, confuse the notion of academic rigor with unfair treatment. And yet we seem to when we continue to show up, teach classes and work for the administration for terrible pay on a contract that has been expired for 4 years, or worse teach for barely over 2 grand after taxes. We continue to stretch ourselves to meet academic and employment expectations despite the fact that financial support of our work continues to decline. This oppressive common sense normalizes the idea of the overworked, underpaid graduate student or recently graduated PhD. And while dollars and cents are of course a critical part of this problem, it seems to me that the logic which standardizes contingency (ie. devalues and works against the

well-being of young academics) is even more critically damaging, threatening to undermine graduate and undergraduate instruction alike. In this way the question of adjunct labor touches all of us who teach and learn at the university. Only by uniting around this issue, can we hope to preserve the promises of public education that are being eroded at every turn.

<http://www.albany.edu/hr/assets/ADA-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf> The University at Albany's Reasonable Accommodation Policy and Procedure

There are other websites which may assist you, and I can also be of help to those determining what possible accommodations might be, so, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at cjewell@albany.edu or (518) 442-3628.

Disability Rights

Carol H. Jewell

Brothers and Sisters!

If an employee comes to you with a request for a Reasonable Accommodation, do you know what the possible accommodations are, and where to look for them?

Reasonable accommodations include (but are not limited to): amplified telephones, glare guards for computer monitors, foot rests, adjustable/ergonomic chairs, alternate keyboards, speech recognition software, door knob grips, tool wraps for handles, hand magnifiers, lumbar cushions, copy holders, and modified work schedules.

Here are some links which may help you:

<http://askjan.org/Erguide/Three.htm> Job Accommodation Network, Employers' Guide

<http://askjan.org/soar/index.htm> Job Accommodation Network, Searchable Online Accommodation Resource

<http://www.ada.gov/qandaeng.htm> US Government website for ADA Questions and Answers

http://www.newenglandada.org/sites/ADATitle1_HTML/3ReasAccom.html New England ADA Center

http://www.ahead.ie/employment_employers_reasonableaccommodation Association for Higher Education and Disability

In the News:

Chancellor's Zimpher's Consultation

Recently the Albany Times Union published a report detailing Chancellor Nancy Zimpher's use of what is called the "Strategic Plan Allocation Fund." According to the report, around \$2.7 million of grant money won by SUNY researchers goes, via the Research Foundation, into this Fund. Faculty, who are under enormous and increasing pressure by the administration to generate outside research money, thus, have a legitimate interest in learning where some of these dollars go. The answer seems to be, primarily, to outside consultants and marketing groups, with high six figure sums routinely going to firms designed to examine SUNY's "brand," "strategic plan" and for lobbying purposes. Given the consistent erosion of state support, --for more of which, incredibly, Zimpher and SUNY have been reluctant to lobby in recent budget cycles--and the resultant loss of research support, as well as the destruction of several academic programs, one wonders about the utility of such efforts.

Other details from the article of interest concern Zimpher's active participation with two organizations that received funds -- SUNY officials argue that there is no conflict and that these contacts benefit SUNY -- as well as the fifty-four weeks it took the Research Foundation to comply with the Times Union's Freedom of Information Act request. The Foundation defends these actions by saying that "branding is critically important" for the

university, and notes that all past Chancellors have used the fund in similar ways, which does not, of course, tell us whether it is a wise use of such a fund. We encourage you to read the article in full at <http://tinyurl.com/l7vtz9h>.

Supreme Court and Labor

Two important cases concerning unions will come before the Supreme Court this term that could potentially have a large impact on how unions organize and collect dues. The first concerns what are known as Neutrality Agreements, whereby an employer agrees not to interfere with a union's organizing drive in exchange for the union's commitment, in the specific case under consideration, not to strike during the organizing period. The crux of the case turns on an anti-corruption statute which prevents employers from giving unions "things of value." The obvious intent of the statute is to prevent outright bribery, but the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation (NRWLDf), which has helped bring the case forward, argues, somewhat torturously, that neutrality agreements are "things of value," and thus prohibited by law. The NRWLDf also are trying to eliminate "card check" recruitment drives, whereby potential union members indicate their willingness to join a union with cards rather than a secret ballot. While disallowing each of these tactics would in and of itself constitute a blow to union organizing, the ramifications of such a decision are potentially even larger, criminalizing, in A.F.L.-C.I.O. General Counsel Craig Becker's words "a large, swath of ordinary voluntary labor-management relations."

The second case concerns the status of home care workers in the state of Illinois, who have, for the last ten years, been considered state employees since Medicaid funds pay for their salary. Here the case turns on the issue of those employees who do not wish to join the union, but nevertheless benefit from union representations – agency-fee payers or, in the Illinois case, "fair share" payers. Once again, the NRWLDf is behind the case, arguing that such agreements are a violation of First Amendment rights.

In both cases the clear anti-labor and conservative cast of the current Supreme Court has frightened labor leaders, and in this particular case Justice Samuel Alito, Jr., writing for the majority in a June 2012 decision, clearly stated his view that First Amendment concerns generally override the argument that nonmembers unfairly benefit from the actions of unions and therefore should be forced to shoulder part of the financial cost of such union activism. Indeed, conservative scholar Ilya Shapiro sees this case as potentially transformative, arguing that "unionizing independent contractors may be critical to the survival" of organized labor.

For more information see the following two articles: <http://tinyurl.com/ngfhko> and <http://tinyurl.com/o6tug5m>

Solidarity

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our fundamental unity as workers, and hence our structural position relative to our employer: the State (not SUNY it should be emphasized). We do no favors to our students, current or future, when we participate willingly in the defunding of public higher education and the disciplining of labor unions.

Another form of disciplining labor, at once subtler and more perverse, stems from the contractual provisions for discretionary raises, now called Discretionary Salary Awards (DSA). Some of you, I imagine, are upset about not receiving an additional raise this year. I understand this frustration, and I understand why these increases have come, erroneously, to be considered "merit raises" by many. I've benefited from these raises in the past myself, and considered them fair compensation for my hard work. It is important to recognize, however, that discretionary awards are exactly that: *discretionary*. At once carrot and stick, discretionary raises function as a tool of management to "incentivize approved behavior." "Merit" in this context comes to look more like favor.

None of us, of course, are happy to lose a mechanism for on-base salary raises; that this contract offers one-time bonus payments rather than on-base salary increases is undoubtedly a loss. My point here is that discretionary awards have always been a questionable mechanism for a union to pursue wage growth, and particularly questionable as a mechanism to help offset wage inequalities. This is clearest in provisions that affect contingent employees, the majority of whom are part-time employees. (As an aside, I proudly note that our Chapter joined with campus allies in GSEU, GSA, SA, and several national campaigns during Campus Equity Week to draw attention to the working conditions of contingents). Our contract secured on-base salary increases as fixed dollar amounts (\$500 this year, \$250 next, and \$500 the following) in addition to a pair of 2% increases in the final years of the agreement. Moreover, for the first time our contract dedicates a fixed pool of DSA money for part-time employees. At the campus level our Chapter advocated that the two DSA pools be divided equitably and distributed to all employees. Ultimately the University elected to distribute 2/3 of the DSA money across the board; the remaining third was awarded at the discretion of managers. This means that all full-time employees received bonuses of \$200, and all part-time employees received a pro-rated bonus share of \$654 (e.g., a half-time lecturer teaching two courses will receive a bonus of \$327).

Here we see the promise and challenge of solidarity as it relates to equity. On the one hand, the union advocated for equitable distribution. All employees have taken big financial hits this year with DRP reductions and increased health costs. We believe that all employees deserve a bonus to help offset those costs. On the other hand, we work, albeit modestly, to correct past and present inequity. Previous discretionary increases went overwhelmingly to full-time employees; only a tiny handful of part-timers ever received raises in past rounds. Designating a specific pool of money based on system-wide ratios of part-timers reverses one form of historical inequity. Likewise, this model provides a half-time employee with a larger bonus than a full-time employee. Inequitable? Yes. But

given that most of the part-time academic faculty on campus (about 40% of all academic faculty) make less than \$12,000/year, far below a living wage, such inequity, I contend, works in the interest of a resolution that is ultimately more fair than a strictly equitable distribution. Likewise, the across the board fixed salary increases go further than percentage increases for our low-salary contingents; \$500 represents a much higher percentage of a \$12K salary than of an 80K salary. Such attempts to help the lowest-paid among us amount to but the tiniest drop in the bucket of what is needed to address the far greater structural inequities in higher education employment that Campus Equity Week set out to highlight. Indeed, a far more *inequitable* system of distribution is needed to move us towards the ideal of equity.

Which returns me to the concept of solidarity. It is a term, I've tried to suggest, that encompasses two foundational union tenets. On the one hand, solidarity stakes out a set of ethical principles that underpin much union work, such as the commendable choice to stand along side those who are most vulnerable as we strive towards a more equitable society. On the other hand, solidarity issues from the basic nature of our relationship with our employer, the State of New York, and that binds us inexorably to our fellow workers, both here and afar. If we untether the former from the latter we risk losing sight of the very thing that allows us to speak and act in union.

Where are they now?

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purpose was the elimination of a handful of tenured faculty salaries that could be replaced with cheaper adjunct salaries. Understandably, the whole episode has had a chilling effect on faculty, who have become concerned about the status of their own programs, a concern that often pits departments against one another and prevents people from speaking out about these issues. It also dovetails with other initiatives, such as the hiring priorities of NYSUNY202 that appear to be reshaping the

academic offerings of the University, withdrawing support from the humanities and other disciplines that do not bring in lucrative sponsored research grants, and developing a lopsided emphasis on revenue-generating programs and institutes. And since the savings achieved from deactivation appear to have been negligible—given that many of these faculty were about to retire anyway and that reductions of the contingent faculty of Project Renaissance have now been offset by the lecturers at the new WCI program—the whole process seems less about cutting costs than about the restructuring of the University's priorities, a process that is ongoing. The issues raised, then, concern the basic relationship between labor and management on this campus. They are, that is to say, matters of grave concern for our union.

Many of our union sisters and brothers have left campus as a result of these actions, some pushed into retirement, some onto better jobs, others caught somewhere in between. And those of us who remain have seen our workplaces transformed in dramatic ways. In the issues to come, we at the Forum will be printing accounts from those most directly affected by this assault on the Humanities here at SUNY Albany. We do this for two reasons. The first is that these stories deserve to be told. Many people dedicated decades of their lives to this University and they should not simply pass quietly into the night. At the same time, however, those who are left should understand what has happened, in the hopes that we can prevent it from happening once again.

Milestones

from page 3

non-unionized Research Foundation. Part of my job is to protect all union members and non-members in our bargaining unit. Do we want people responsible for our health and safety on non-tenured lines, where they can be fired on a moment's notice because they may find a "costly to fix" condition? My late wife Cathy worked for the

Research Foundation, and she was paid thousands of dollars less and accorded fewer benefits than the unionized members in her department. Yet she was doing exactly the same job.

Education on the issues is the key for all of us and understanding the truth behind the hype is what critical thinking is all about. Hearing about the "thousands" of new jobs being created through various programs, one needs to ask, "What kind of jobs are they?" The fact is that the biggest employers in our country today are Walmart, Target and McDonald's. You don't really need to ask "Are they good union jobs?" or if they are offering anything above the minimum wage. In your heart you know the answer. In your heart you know "Greed is bad!" and in your heart you know that when your time in this world is over, the big houses and fancy cars mean nothing but your reputation will live on. What do you want your reputation to say? I hope it will say, "Worked for the common man."

MOOCs

from page 4

Maintaining academic integrity

Now let's move up to the application layer. A MOOC is a complicated content-management system that must carry out some form of authentication to limit access to valid participants, deliver specific content modules, track users across its entire landscape, allow for the submission of user-produced content, manage the subject threads of discussion boards, run an email service, generally record every transaction conducted within its environment, and provide an audit trail for each one.

The authentication and auditing capabilities are essential to maintaining academic integrity. Any online course presents unique challenges in positively identifying participants and their assignments. How do you know that Eddie Murdstone is in fact *the* Murdstone who enrolled in

the course? And how do you know that Mr. Murdstone actually took that test or produced the work he submitted to satisfy a course assignment? These are difficult problems to solve when class enrollments are in the hundreds. The problems are magnified when ramping up attendance by orders of magnitude and recruiting students from around the world.

As you can well imagine, the course management software and its various, interdependent components (web servers, database management systems, application servers) will need monitoring and management to address performance, security and functional issues. To continue with the analogy of publishing, pressmen will be needed to make sure the entire operation runs smoothly.

Staffing the help desk

Finally, we're going to need a technical support layer that users can contact and consult with to answer questions, reset passwords and serve as liaisons to the technical production staff. Of course, the help desk will have to be staffed 24/7, particularly if the content is being delivered asynchronously. Users can be logged-in and engaging with content at any hour of the day, any day of the week.

Based on the scope and nature of online learning, the answer to the question we initially posed—What does it take to build and operate a MOOC?—is: a secure, robust IT infrastructure with a lot of highly skilled, professional technical staff working across three shifts.

If the product is plagued by performance issues, if students have difficulty navigating the site, if questions arise concerning the academic integrity of tests and assignments (particularly in for-credit courses), if faculty feel their material is not presented in a lucid and coherent fashion or they are not getting the technical support they require to do their job—in short, if the necessary investment in people and technology is not made—online education, on the scale proposed by some, will compound, not solve, the serious problems facing

American colleges and students. And the expected savings may prove to be elusive.

One thing is clear: The increasing emphasis on technology to deliver and mediate instruction will result in increasing demands on the expertise and time of our professional staff. Failure to realize this will doom any attempt, massive or otherwise, to move learning online.

What Are People Saying?

(A summary of some recent articles relevant to the issues we face here at SUNY Albany)

On Moocs:

Cornell's David Skorton and Glenn Altschuler discuss whether MOOCs can actually provide a college education online. Touting some benefits of MOOCs, such as "the dissemination of knowledge to unprecedented numbers of people," the promotional value for participating colleges, and the instructive feedback available to faculty from huge numbers of students, Skorton and Altschuler nevertheless argue that successful MOOC students are rare. MOOCs, they state in Forbes, "should not replace a residential undergraduate experience for young men and women able to afford it or who qualify for financial aid. The intellectual and developmental impact on students who live and learn together cannot be replicated by online classes, even if they solve the problems of scale."

For more info:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/collegeprose/2013/01/28/moocs-a-college-education-online/>

It turns out that Sebastian Thrun, the Computer Science Professor who effectively kicked off the MOOC craze by opening up his computer science course, is now having second thoughts. The company he founded, Udacity, one of three major corporations in the MOOC world – along with Coursera and Pearson – has recently decided to back out of the business. The reasons are many, but turn mostly on the impossibility of turning a

profit. Thrun has some great quotes, claiming that Udacity offers a “lousy product” that fails to do “anything as rich and powerful as what a traditional liberal arts education” offers. He also dismisses the notion of increased access, saying that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are “a group for which this medium is not a good fit.”

For a summary from the Higher Education Strategy Association: <http://higheredstrategy.com/udacity-has-left-the-building/>

And for the full profile of Thrun:

<http://www.fastcompany.com/3021473/udacity-sebastian-thrun-uphill-climb/>

Susan Meisenhelder, Professor Emeritus of English at California State, San Bernardino, has an excellent article in *Thought & Action* entitled “MOOC Mania.” This article, from which many of our “by the numbers” stats were taken, analyzes the claim that faculty resist MOOCs because they are “slow-moving, self-promoting Luddites.” Instead, Meisenhelder argues that faculty are themselves the people best positioned to understand the way students learn and that the claim that MOOCs promote access to education is hard to sustain.

For the full article see:

<http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/TA2013Meisenhelder.pdf>

The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE) has recently written a series of working papers on the subject of online education. These papers take on a variety of topics, from the profit motive behind the push to online education, to the false rhetoric of accessibility and cost-cutting with which this profit motif disguises itself. Basing its work on a series of core principles – which take aim at the high stakes testing, blind devotion to technology, abandonment of the principles of a broad liberal education and the increasing reliance on adjunct labor characteristic of today's neo-liberal university – the group is working on a series of public campaigns that are likely of interest to our members.

For general information about CFHE go here: <http://futureofhighered.org/>

Working papers can be found here:

<http://futureofhighered.org/workingpapers/>

About the monetization of education:

In a New York Times Op-ed piece, Frank Bruni decries the identity crisis of American colleges and universities. Should we, he asks, be judging a college degree in terms of the income its recipient makes five or ten years later? Herding students into specific programs based on predictions of future earnings, he suggests, threatens to turn a college education into vocational training. Bruni quotes Yale professor Bruce Ackerman's concern about an “overly tiered, wildly inconsistent college landscape of ‘a few superstars and then a lot of glorified teaching systems’ that aren't all that constructive.”

See:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/13/opinion/sunday/bruni-colleges->

Where are we at SUNY heading? Will Open SUNY provide a lower tier substitute for those who can't afford the real thing? Will our students be provided the opportunity only to get vocational training geared toward short-term job prospects, while the wealthy can go elsewhere for an education that prepares them to become creative, innovative, critical thinkers?

Let us know what you think about these and other issues.

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