



NEWS

PRESIDENT: Wendy Roworth

VICE PRESIDENT: Louis Kirschenbaum

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President's Column



by Wendy Roworth

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As your new URI/AAUP President I want to welcome back all faculty for the start of the 2009-2010 academic year. We expect this year to present both challenges and (I am trying to be optimistic here!) opportunities. As the public research university in a state with a budget deficit, high unemployment, and shrinking support for higher education, URI faces an uphill battle for resources. There will undoubtedly be demands on faculty to do "more with less" with diminished operating funds while sources of external funding from foundations, corporations, and the federal government are cut back. There are pressures to cut academic programs and positions, and at the same time we may be enrolling more Rhode Island students choosing to pursue degrees at their home state university, transfer students from more expensive private colleges, and veterans under the new GI Bill. Curriculum changes, establishment of new programs, and abolishing or consolidating majors are the province of the Faculty Senate, but we can assure you that AAUP will closely monitor how changes might affect faculty working conditions or other contract provisions. We want to work in conjunction with the Faculty Senate to ensure that faculty are part of the process of dealing with fiscal challenges and any structural changes through shared governance.

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SAVE THE DATE

URI/AAUP

PROMOTION & TENURE WORKSHOP

SEPTEMBER 25, 2009

1-4PM

UNIVERSITY CLUB

Watch campus mail for more details

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Meanwhile we are starting the final year of our three-year contract with the Board of Governors for Higher Education. We will begin negotiations for a new contract later in the year, so it's not too early to begin planning ahead. Continuing faculty received a 3% salary increase this year as well as higher supplements for department chairs, \$150,000 in faculty development funds, and automatic enrollment in the sick leave bank among other provisions, though we also increased our share of the cost of the health care premium and have yet to see what the future holds for health insurance locally and nationally. AAUP members will elect the All University Collective Bargaining Committee (AUCBC) to develop proposals for the next contract, so start thinking about what we should consider and volunteering to serve. As we plan for negotiations we are entering the election season for a new state governor and legislators, so our AAUP Political Action Committee (PAC) will be keeping an eye on how that develops. These are just some of our challenges.

On the side of opportunities, we have a new university president, Dr. David Dooley, who brings to URI his experience as an internationally recognized and highly prolific scholar, a successful provost and fundraiser, and fresh ideas for enhancing URI as a first-class research and teaching university. The AAUP Executive Committee looks forward to meeting regularly with President Dooley and developing a good working relationship. We know that URI faculty are dedicated teachers, productive researchers, and providers of service to the community, state, the nation, and the world, and it's also up to us to help spread the word to recruit top-notch students, state support, and external funds.

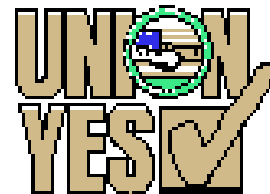
My personal agenda for this year is to increase AAUP membership and participation in chapter activities. Membership in the URI/AAUP chapter grants you the right to vote on contract ratification, for officers and committee members, changes to our constitution, and to serve on AAUP committees. Chapter membership also makes you a member of the national AAUP, the leading professional organization for all academic disciplines dedicated to protecting and defending tenure, academic freedom, shared governance, and collective

bargaining for tenure-track and contingent faculty and graduate students. (See <http://www.aaup.org/aaup> for information on national AAUP activities and benefits.) The more members we have, the stronger we are, especially during tough times. To become an AAUP member, tenure-track faculty pay dues of (\$6.56) per pay period, which can be deducted directly from your bi-weekly pay along with the mandatory collective bargaining fee, and we offer half-price discounted dues for new faculty in their first four years at URI and Lecturers. If you are not currently a member, or are not sure if you are, contact Mary Pinch in the AAUP office to join and for more information.

The URI/AAUP represents and defends the welfare, rights, and professional interests of all faculty, and we appreciate your input. Please feel free to contact me, other members of the Executive Committee, or Executive Director Frank Annunziato if you have questions, problems, ideas on any of these issues, or have an interest in serving on one of our committees. I encourage and welcome your participation!

NEWSLETTER EDITOR WANTED:

**URI/AAUP IS SEEKING A
NEWSLETTER EDITOR. IF YOU
ARE INTERESTED PLEASE
CONTACT MARY PINCH IN THE
AAUP OFFICE**



Executive Director's Column



by Frank R. Annunziato

SET On-Line Administration: A Failed Experiment

Last semester, the Provost asked the AAUP to permit students to complete the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) IDEA Instrument on-line. The Provost made the request because the leadership of the student senate had urged him to do so and also because the Provost felt that on-line administration would be better environmentally. Even though many faculty members familiar with on-line surveys told us that this was a bad idea because of potentially poor response rates, we reluctantly agreed to allow it on an experimental basis. Once again, I am sad to say, our colleagues were correct; the response rate for the entire University was barely fifty percent. When AAUP found out how low the response rate was, we immediately wrote the Provost to tell him that the experiment has failed and that we would no longer support the on-line administration of Student Evaluation of Teaching. You should know that when SETs were administered in the classroom, the University-wide average response rate was 75 percent. To make things clearer, many of you received your evaluative summaries from the IDEA Center that were prefaced by a statement that the low response rate indicates that no claim of representation can be made. In other words, the IDEA Center doesn't know who responded and whether the responders were truly representative of the entire class room population. The AAUP joined the Administration in bringing the IDEA instrument to URI. We continue to believe that as an evaluative instrument it is much more faculty-oriented. We believe it provides much better information that can help our colleagues prepare their courses. Our concern is not with the instrument, but with its on-line administration.

Why is this so important? Simply because so much of a professor's career here at URI depends upon the SET. Deans regularly cite the SET as reason to deny tenure and promotion. Even though the Collective Bargaining Agreement indicates that the SET is just one way to assess teaching, for many URI administrative managers the SET is the only way they know to assess teaching. Granted this poor student response rate to the on-line administration of the SET, how could anyone believe that the results of this evaluative process are fair and typical?

The URI faculty did a superb job in trying to improve the response rate. Professors urged students to fill out the questionnaires, many times in class. URI faculty also overwhelmingly prepared their part of the evaluative procedure, with a response rate of 95 percent. URI faculty kept their end of the bargain. The students, however, did not respond in the same manner. While no one has surveyed the students to find out why their response rate was so low, I personally believe that asking them to fill out a questionnaire on-line for three, four, or more courses, on their own time, is unfair and unreasonable. I have talked to many faculty members who share this opinion. To tell you the truth, I must admit that I never fill out on-line questionnaires, even when they promise me untold millions of dollars.

Where are we then? We continue to talk with the Provost about this issue. AAUP President Wendy Roworth will put this at the top of the agenda for the first AAUP Executive Committee in September. I want to thank all of you (and there are many) who contacted me to express their concerns about the low student response rate. Please continue to call, write, email, etc. Your thoughts and feelings will be incorporated in our conversations at the Executive Committee and with the Provost.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are invited. Send us your concerns, opinions and ideas. *Letters to the Editor* should be sent c/o Mary Pinch at pinch@uri.edu or mailed to AAUP, 302 Roosevelt Hall, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI 02881 or you may fax them to 874-5147.

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