

AAUP-UD Open Letter to the UD Community

Mon 10/12/2020 8:47 AM



AMERICAN
ASSOCIATION OF
UNIVERSITY
PROFESSORS

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AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS-UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE CHAPTER (AAUP-UD)

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, **we at the AAUP-UD have been working in good faith with the University of Delaware administration to protect the health and welfare of the University and its members.** A prime example of this was our willingness to return early to the collective bargaining table this past May despite the fact that our contract at the time did not end for more than a year. As part of this impact bargaining process, and recognizing the financial impacts of COVID, we agreed to forgo our scheduled 3% raises for the 2020-21 academic year. This results in a savings for the University of approximately \$6 million for this year. It also was agreed to extend our contract through June 30, 2023 with modest 2% structural raises during each of the two extension years. We signed this newly amended contract on July 13, 2020. Thus, we bargained very recently, have a binding agreement, and are not required to bargain again until the 2022-2023 academic year.

Faculty continue to make additional sacrifices in multiple ways including continuing to develop online strategies for better learning by our students, working longer hours, purchasing equipment and supplies to facilitate online instruction, and bearing additional cost and time for the care and schooling of family members. In short, faculty are working longer and harder than ever to ensure that UD's primary source of income (instruction) does not diminish. These additional sacrifices and efforts by faculty to keep our university running have gone largely unrecognized as such by the administration.

On September 18, 2020, just a few short months after contract re-negotiation, the administration asked us to return to the bargaining table, claiming that the decision to reverse course on opening the campus had left the university with much greater revenue shortfalls than they had anticipated. Because we had so recently completed a round of bargaining—a costly and time-consuming endeavor—and because the administration's past and current budgetary secrecy left us with little specific data about the true state of the University's finances, we sent the administration a request for detailed financial information so that we could determine whether a return to the table was warranted. **The administration wholly denied our request for information** on October 2, indicating that they would entertain the possibility of sharing the requested information only if we formally reentered collective bargaining negotiations. They responded, “[W]e will be happy to discuss those requests in the context of bargaining, but not as a prerequisite.” Because of the lack of any commitment to providing us with detailed information, we would have little reason to believe that they would comply with our request if we agree to reopen bargaining.

On October 7, Provost Morgan and AAUP-UD President Galileo had a conversation during which the Provost indicated that the AAUP likely would be provided with some of the requested financial information in a timely manner, possibly before our Steering Committee meeting scheduled for October 9. This meeting originally was scheduled to discuss a potential response to the October 2 communication from the administration. On mid-evening of October 8, we were informed by the administration that the information “will not be ready by tomorrow. It will be ready, along with an explanatory narrative, early next week, and it will include more detailed budget information than was presented at the General Faculty Meeting last week.” **After extensive discussion at our meeting on October 9, the Steering Committee voted unanimously (23-0) to reaffirm its earlier decision that we should not return to the bargaining table at this point because we are unable to determine if this is warranted without first analyzing the requested financial information.** We hope that this forthcoming information will be sufficiently detailed to allow the Steering Committee to make an informed decision on whether or not to return to the bargaining table. A subcommittee has been formed by the Steering Committee to analyze the forthcoming data.

For several weeks now, the administration has created the impression that if we at the AAUP-UD were to refuse to renegotiate the faculty contract, we would be forcing them to make more drastic cuts against staff. More specifically, the administration has created a false narrative in which a refusal by the AAUP-UD to agree to additional “shared sacrifices” from its bargaining unit members would make the AAUP-UD responsible for further staff layoffs and furloughs. We reject the administration's characterization of the situation and of our organization. **There is little, if any, reason to believe that what we might agree to**

would have any impact on what sacrifices the administration is imposing on the staff. The administration already is looking to commence the process to lay off full-time staff who hold certain positions. Furthermore, the administration knew on October 3rd that we would meet on October 9 to discuss returning to the bargaining table, yet they imposed the university-wide 5% cuts to staff one day before that meeting (October 8). Additionally, we have reason to believe that these 5% pay cuts were incorporated already into some college budgets as COVID-related cost reductions. All this is good evidence that whatever we do as faculty has no bearing on what the administration does, or will do, to staff.

It is the administration that should fully assume responsibility for past and future furloughs and layoffs. It is the administration, for example, that will utilize only \$102 million (Pres. Assanis, 10/1/20 General Faculty Meeting) from an endowment with a market value >\$1.6 billion (Investment Office 2019 Report) to cover COVID-related shortfalls, which appears to be significantly less than the “>10% of value” that Pres. Assanis stated they were utilizing and only a fraction of what could be used for this purpose. It is the administration that has decided to retain lands and properties rather than selling those for which there is little current use, thereby putting these assets before essential employees. It is the administration that has decided to take only small cuts in their large salaries and to continue to hire highly paid employees despite their so-called “hiring freeze,” thereby continuing to add to the projected deficit. The list continues of the administration’s questionable actions in mitigating the financial fallout of COVID and, unfortunately, so does the list of consequences to University personnel. These consequences include potentially jeopardizing the well-being of faculty and staff who support the core academic mission of the university and who are committed to the academic success of our students.

President Assanis has shown the university community only a “high-altitude” picture of the university’s budget situation, yet apparently wants AAUP-UD to make critical decisions about faculty salaries and benefits by blindly trusting his numbers. However, **the bottom line is that with what President Assanis has shown so far, it is impossible to know the bottom line and what alternatives might exist to lessen further sacrifices by the faculty and essential staff who constitute the core of our great university.** We faculty, along with staff, are the front-line workers at UD. As unionized faculty, we are protected against arbitrary and unjustified decisions by the administration to cut our salaries and benefits, and it serves neither faculty nor staff if we voluntarily relinquish our protected position.

The administration should commit to true and permanent financial transparency and provide solid evidence, if it exists, that the only feasible cost-reduction measures left for them to pursue require personnel actions. That is a reasonable request for us to make prior to agreeing to return to the bargaining table, since the only reason we are being asked to return to the table is to make concessions. This financial information should be provided to both the AAUP-UD and the Faculty Senate Budget Committee, which has the codified charge of “becoming fully informed on the financial and planning issues of this University” and reviewing university budgets. Until that time, we oppose all personnel-related actions—including furloughs, layoffs, non-renewals, and reductions in salaries and benefits—taken against University faculty or staff. **If, as President Assanis has said, the University of Delaware is a “family,” then we family members should be treated as more valuable than its property.**

AAUP-UD

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