

North Carolina State Conference of the AAUP

April 15, 2009

Dear University of North Carolina System Leaders:

Across the country, universities are having to make difficult choices in the midst of a severe economic downturn. We, the leadership of the North Carolina Conference of the American Association of University Professors, are aware of the challenges our public university system faces.

We want to acknowledge that we are seeing a few stellar examples of meaningful faculty involvement in budget decisions – where universities have built systems of not just communication with the faculty, but of meaningful deliberation with them.

But we are writing today because we are concerned about a number of institutions where we are witnessing both a lack of transparency, and administrators calling for what we believe are premature extraordinary measures. We are hearing reports of contingent faculty being fired via email, and of staff reductions-in-force (RIFs) without a careful, articulated process in place.

These actions are leading to an increasing erosion in trust. The recent UNC Employee Forum vote against furloughs partly reflects the increasing worry that decisions are being made without meaningful consultation, as does the March 26 protest of students, staff, and faculty at the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees meeting. And at ECU, faculty are pointedly asking for greater involvement in the budget process. These are only a few of the many examples we could cite.

UNC President Erskine Bowles's call for the flexibility of furloughs may be a wise one; nonetheless, there is a general lack of trust that such furlough power will be used in a careful and progressive manner – and only as a last resort before layoffs. Many of our colleagues are not convinced that other cost-saving measures have been exhausted. Simultaneously, we believe some of the current budget priorities need to be rethought. North Carolina public universities increasingly are using poorly paid contingent faculty, as well as engaging in such practices as outsourcing housekeeping to firms that pay workers poor wages with few benefits. In the meantime, administrative positions and administrators' salaries have increased substantially.

The North Carolina AAUP would like to make three general and feasible recommendations to administrators and faculty leadership across the state public university system. We believe that these principles and actions are not only sound ones, but are critical for the long-term health of our universities.

Transparency

While one or two universities in the system are being clear about the numbers of positions being cut, the vast majority are not. Many universities do not have accessible budget information on their websites, or the information is either so vague or so spun as public relations as to be unhelpful. The UNC system does not have updated information of any kind on its website. We are also hearing numerous direct reports of contingent faculty being cut to half time, thereby losing any benefits, or not having their contracts renewed at the very moment that a university is publicly noting that no faculty will lose positions. The AAUP is very clear on its position: Contingent faculty are faculty. Loss of teachers affects the classroom, whether or not they are tenure-track or tenured faculty. These very real layoffs need to be publicized concretely by each university, with weekly updates. It is not sufficient to use general figures as a political tool. Each university needs to report, clearly and concisely, and in a timely fashion, how many people have been laid off, have not had contracts renewed, or had their hours reduced. The general job position and area those personnel come from also needs to be clarified. Reductions-in-force (RIFs) and lay-offs, and positions moved from full to part time need to be plainly noted on a budget site that is

clearly linked off the homepage website of each university. This can be done without endangering privacy. This transparency needs to occur not only for employees of the university; it needs to occur because the public and the legislature need to fully realize the exact areas affected.

Meaningful Participation

Being informed is only a portion of the equation. Faculty, including contingent faculty, and staff need to be involved in the decision-making process, and their input and proposals given serious consideration. Lack of meaningful participation is leading to an increasing and perfectly understandable lack of trust. Faculty budget committees and staff budget committees, which meet regularly and use the aforementioned principles, exemplify meaningful participation. The building of democratic structures of shared governance will also enable meaningful participation.

Building Faculty Involvement and Democratic Governance Structures for the Future

The economic downturn provides an opportunity not just to react in a moment of crisis, but build structures that will benefit our universities into the future. Rebuilding trust in our institutions, regaining the trust of the employees of our institutions, and engaging a wider array of faculty devoted to the well-being and health of their institutions is not utopian thinking. But it means doing more than placing a chair of faculty senate on a committee that includes top-level administration, or allowing them to attend a board of trustee meeting. It means rethinking the increasingly hierarchical administrative structure that has pervaded our system. But collaboration with faculty and staff will make the hard decisions easier. The idea that employees across the University of North Carolina System might come together to discuss the future of higher education in North Carolina is not simply a good idea – it's critical to our future.

Attached are three policies from the American Association of University Professors' Policy Documents and Reports (*Redbook*): Regulation 4c of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*; *On Institutional Problems Resulting from Financial Exigency: Some Operating Guidelines*; and *The Role of the Faculty in Budgetary and Salary Matters*. They are a critical resource for faculty senates and administration, and we commend them to you.

Through AAUP chapters, we are also urging faculty to involve themselves in the process of discussing budget cuts and the principles that should be applied when and where cuts are necessary.

We, as leaders of the North Carolina AAUP, would welcome a meeting with campus senates or with campus administration to address these matters. We should also note that several of the campuses in the UNC system have active AAUP chapter leadership. They are being included in this communication and would be happy to meet with you.

Sincerely,



Professor Martha McCaughey, President, Appalachian State University
Associate Professor Cat Warren, Immediate Past-President, North Carolina State University
Associate Professor Steve Wing, Vice-President, UNC-Chapel Hill
Professor Janet Land, Secretary, Gardner-Webb University
Professor Emeritus Glenn Howze, Treasurer
Associate Professor Purificación Martínez, Member-at-large, public institutions, East Carolina University
Professor Kent Blevins, Member-at-large, private institutions, Gardner-Webb University

cc: UNC President Erskine Bowles and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Harold Martin; UNC System Chancellors, Provosts, and Faculty Senate Chairs; North Carolina AAUP Chapter Presidents; AAUP General Secretary Gary Rhoades and AAUP President Cary Nelson