

AAUP

Voice

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"Academic freedom for a free society"

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Survey on Professional Expenses and Computer Technologies

A brief questionnaire asking faculty members about their personal expenditures on professional activities and on the increasing use of computer based technologies on the academic work environment was sent out last spring by the AAUP. The results of this survey indicate that faculty members spend considerable amounts of money out of pocket for professional activities including travel expenses to conferences and purchasing materials for teaching and research activities. The results also suggests that a large majority of faculty members believe that computer based teaching and advisement technologies are beneficial. At the same time, the survey indicates that they do not have the time to learn new computer technologies and, moreover, that these technologies have increased the time that they spend on instructional and advisement activities.

The questionnaire was mailed to all faculty members represented by the AAUP. 237 responded to the questionnaire. Since there are 1,086 members of the bargaining unit, the response rate was about 22%. When asked how long they had been working at the University of Delaware, 18% answered six years or less, 14% seven to ten years, 14% eleven to fifteen years, and 54% more than fifteen years. When asked to characterize their department or program, 24% indicated arts and humanities, 32% science, 26% social science, and 33% professional. The respondents to the questionnaire do not constitute a random sample of bargaining unit members. In addition, the questionnaire was limited to 13 items so that it could be completed in a short time. As a result, the survey, while indicative of faculty views and concerns, does provide data for a systematic and scientifically accurate analysis. The questionnaire provided space for comments by respondents.

Unreimbursed Professional Expenditures

When faculty were asked how much they spent on travel, registration and expenses related to attending professional meetings that were not reimbursed by the University, 42% of respondents report spending more than \$600 a year, and 28% report spending more than \$1,000. A majority of respondents, 53%, report spending more than \$300 a year on books and journals that they use for teaching and research. About 20% indicated that they spend more than \$600 a year on books and journals. A majority of respondents, 53%, report paying more than \$300 for memberships in professional associations, and 18% indicated that they spent more than \$600 on professional memberships. When it comes to out of pocket spending on professionally related computer and computer software expenditures, 50% report spending more than \$300 and 26% more than \$600 a year. In addition, 23% of respondents reported spending more than \$300 on professional activities not accounted for in previous questions.

The responses to the questionnaire items are given more specificity by written comments by faculty members. One respondent stated, "On average, I spend \$300-599 on materials related to publishing processes, including permission and reproduction fees for images, research fees at public libraries, and postal expenses." Another stated that "since so much of my work is done via the internet (evaluating graduate dossiers for admissions, using Web Ct, using e-mail) it would be nice if paying for high speed service wasn't entirely out of pocket." Finally, several respondents wrote comments similar to this, "I spend money on calls from home, mail from home, and inviting guest colleagues for meals." Also echoed in several comments was the following, "I receive funding to present a paper at one conference per year, but usually give two to three at national and international conferences. Sometimes the conference organizers provide funding, but usually it comes from my pocket. The only other choice is to decrease my professional involvement."



Work Environment and Computer Based Technologies

When asked to assess new computer based teaching and advisement technologies, 71% of respondents indicated that they are beneficial or very beneficial and 11% reported that these technologies are not beneficial. In responding to a question that asked if they had enough time to learn to use new computer technologies given other professional responsibilities, 67% answered "no." In estimating how much time they spent on email communication with individual students per week, 51% reported 2 to 4 hours and 49% reported more than five hours. A majority of respondents, 57%, indicated that new technologies increased or increased by a great deal the amount of time they spend on instructional activities and 32% indicated that the time spent was the same. When it came to advisement activities, 13% indicated that new technologies decreased the time spent, 46% indicated no change, and 37% reported an increase. Finally, when asked whether they agreed or disagreed that computer based technologies have lessened their control over the pace and timing of their work, 46% agreed or agreed strongly, and 25% reported no change, and 28% disagreed.

Faculty comments on computer-based technologies amplify the responses to the questionnaire items. One faculty member stated, "Email has greatly increased workload." Another said, "My time is affected tremendously with the amount of time on email, UDSIS, and processing forms." Another said, "Email has changed students' behaviors for the worse. They no longer come to the office in person but expect instant answers to their questions. With 500 students, I find this difficult." Another said, "Technology means students expect you to be on 24/7." On the other hand, one respondent wrote that the "upside of new computer technologies is the flexibility and options for communicating with students." Another said that computer technologies allow instructors to "reach students outside of the state" when traveling. Also, it is "fantastic for answering questions and solving problems."

Conclusions

Respondents to last spring's survey indicate that they spend considerable amounts of money out of pocket on a variety of activities and materials necessary for their scholarly and teaching responsibilities and for core missions of the University of Delaware. The visibility and participation of faculty members in scholarly associations, the use of journals, books, and computers for research and educational activities that faculty members pay for out of pocket directly contributes to the quality of the University of Delaware. Greater and more equitable funding by the University for these core activities would enhance the capacity of the faculty to realize the research and teaching missions that are at the center of the University's life.

When it comes to computer-based technologies for teaching and research, respondents overwhelmingly considered these new resources and tools as beneficial. There are, however, deep concerns among respondents that they do not have the time to learn how to use these technologies. Further, these technologies add considerably to demands on their time, making it more difficult to exercise control over the time and pacing of their work. These are not peripheral issues. Academic work often requires intense concentration and the capacity to organize activities to maximize focus whether in the classroom, the lab, the office, or in the study. These issues require thoughtful and innovative approaches to the changing nature of faculty workload.

Freedom in the Classroom

The AAUP's seminal statement, *The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, affirmed, "teachers are entitled to freedom in classroom in discussing their subject." In order to amplify and to clarify this fundamental principle of academic freedom in the face of contemporary challenges, a subcommittee of the AAUP's Committee on Academic Freedom prepared a report entitled *Freedom in the Classroom*. That report was released to the public in September 2007 and was emailed to more than 300,000 faculty members in the United States and in other countries. It is available online at <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/comm/rep/A/class.htm?PF=1>

AAUP Voice

Gerry Turkel, Editor

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The Executive Council acts as editorial board. During contract negotiations or when otherwise warranted, Bargaining Team members also participate on the board.

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The report identifies four major charges that have been made against professors in recent years by vocal and well financed social movements that have sought to create a sense of crisis around claims of biased teaching and indoctrination of students and to push for legislation in more than twenty states and in the Congress of the United States to regulate classroom activities. The four charges identified by the report are (1) instructors “indoctrinate” rather than educate; (2) instructors fail to fairly present conflicting views on contentious subjects, depriving students of “diversity” or “balance” necessary for education; (3) instructors are intolerant of students’ religious, political, or socioeconomic views, thereby creating a hostile atmosphere inimical to learning; and (4) instructors persistently interject material, especially of a political or ideological character, irrelevant to the subject of instruction. In what follows, key excerpts from the report are presented on these four charges:

Education, Not Indoctrination

It is not indoctrination for professors to expect students to comprehend ideas and apply knowledge that is accepted as true within a relevant discipline. For example, it is not indoctrination for professors of biology to require students to understand principles of evolution; indeed, it would be a dereliction of professional responsibility to fail to do so. Students must remain free to question generally accepted beliefs if they can do so, in the words of the *1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, using “a scholar’s method and . . . in a scholar’s spirit.” But professors of logic may insist that students accept the logical validity of the syllogism, and professors of astronomy may insist that students accept the proposition that the earth orbits around the sun, unless in either case students have good logical or astronomical grounds to differ.

Balance

The ideal of balance makes sense only in light of an instructor’s obligation to present all aspects of a subject matter that professional standards would require to be presented. If a professor of molecular biology has an idiosyncratic theory that AIDS is not caused by a retrovirus, professional standards may require that the dominant contrary perspective be presented. Understood in this way, the ideal of balance does not depend on a generic notion of neutrality, but instead on how particular ideas are embedded in specific disciplines. This is a coherent idea of balance, and it suggests that balance is not a principle that can be invoked in the abstract but is instead a standard whose content must be determined within a specific field of relevant disciplinary knowledge.

If scholars must be free to examine and test, they must also be free to explain and defend their results, and they must be free to do so as much before their students as before their colleagues or the public at large. That is the meaning of “freedom of the classroom.” To charge that university or college instruction lacks balance when it does more than merely summarize contemporary debates is fundamentally to misconstrue the nature of higher learning, which expects students to engage with the ideas of their professors. Instructors should not dogmatically teach their ideas as truth; they should not indoctrinate. But they can expect their students to respond to their ideas and their research. As students complete different courses by different professors, it is to be hoped that they will acquire the desire and capacity for independent thinking.

Hostile Learning Environment

The statement *On Freedom of Expression and Campus Speech Codes*, adopted as Association policy in 1994, acknowledges the need to “foster an atmosphere respectful of and welcoming to all persons.” An instructor may not harass a student or act on an invidiously discriminatory ground toward a student, in class or elsewhere. It is a breach of professional ethics for an instructor to hold a student up to obloquy or ridicule in class for advancing an idea grounded in religion, whether it is creationism or the geocentric theory of the solar system. It would be equally improper for an instructor to hold a student up to obloquy or ridicule for an idea grounded in politics, or anything else.

But the current application of the idea of “hostile learning environment” to the pedagogical environment of higher education presupposes much more than blatant disrespect or harassment. It assumes that students have a right not to have their most cherished beliefs challenged. This assumption contradicts the central purpose of higher education, which is to challenge students to think hard about their own perspectives, whatever they may be. It is neither harassment nor discriminatory treatment of a student to hold up close to criticism an idea or viewpoint the student has posited or advanced. Ideas that are germane to a subject under discussion in a classroom cannot be censored because a student with particular religious or political beliefs might be offended. Instruction cannot proceed in the atmosphere of fear that would be produced were a teacher to become subject to administrative sanction based upon the idiosyncratic reaction of one or more students.

Persistent Irrelevance

How an instructor approaches the material in classroom exposition is, absent breach of professional ethics, a matter of personal style, influenced, as it must be, by the pedagogical goals and dynamics of a particular course, as well as by the larger educational objective of instilling in students the capacity for critical and independent thought. The instructor in Melville or classical philosophy or Roman history must be free to draw upon current persons and events . . . Instructors must be free to employ a wide variety of examples in order to stimulate classroom discussion and thought. If allusions perform this function, they are not “irrelevant.” They are pedagogically justified.

At root, complaints about the persistent interjection of “irrelevant” material concern the interjection of “controversial material.” The complaints are thus a variant of the charge that instructors have created a “hostile learning environment” and must be rejected . . . So long as an instructor’s allusions provoke genuine debate and learning that is germane to the subject matter of the course, they are protected by “freedom in the classroom.”

Preparing for Contract Negotiations: Online Survey

In preparing for contract negotiations, AAUP bylaws require that the Executive Council survey bargaining unit members with questions on salary, benefits and working conditions. This survey has been very useful in developing the AAUP's contract proposals. In the past, this survey was sent to faculty members through campus mail. This year, the survey will be conducted online. Information and instructions will be provided to you before the survey is conducted.

University Forum

The AAUP and the Provost's Office are jointly sponsoring a University Forum scheduled for Thursday, October 25 in Trabant from noon to 1:30 PM. David Breneman, Professor of Economics and Director of the Mater's Program in Public Policy at the University of Virginia will speak on aspects of his recent book, *Earnings from Learning: The Rise of For-Profit Universities*. Lunch will be served.

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