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The Right Flier

The Newsletter of AAUP-WSU

Volume 13, Number 3
2012-2013

A Special Issue for NTE Faculty

Editors: Marty Kich and Linda Farmer

What It Takes to Get a Good Contract

by

Rudy Fichtenbaum, Chief Negotiator

and

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We have a union. What's it going to take to get a good contract? The answer is *not* to have a clever negotiating team skilled at debating with the other side. In fact, negotiating is really about political power. On their own, individuals have very little power. Together, they *can* have power, but it doesn't happen automatically.

What does it take to have power at the negotiating table? The key is convincing the other side that failure to respond reasonably to your demands will have serious consequences. Of course, everyone understands that the ultimate power workers have is to withhold their services, i.e., to go on strike. However, there are many ways for workers to engage in activity that has consequences for an employer short of striking.

Employers are very conscious of their reputation. At a university, the employer – the administration – cares about how the university is perceived in the community, among students, and among alumni. Putting pressure on the administration to make concessions at the negotiating table thus entails making your demands look reasonable and the administration's position unreasonable.

Part of looking reasonable is convincing your own members that your demands are truly reasonable! For example, if you are asking for a raise and the administration says it doesn't have the money, it is going to be hard to convince your members to engage in some action if they believe the administration. So, the first thing to do is to show that the administration does have money for raises. Often this means looking at the ways that the administration is misusing funds that it has, i.e.,

talking about priorities. What is more important? Spending thousands of dollars to be the home team in a post-season basketball tournament that no one has ever heard of, or insuring that the administration can offer competitive salaries to attract and retain high quality faculty?

With respect to workload, you need to think of the consequences of the increase in workload you and your NTE colleagues, including those in other departments or colleges, have experienced since the transition to semesters. How does this affect your ability to offer students a quality education? How does this affect your ability to provide service to the university?

One important factor is teaching overloads or independent studies. If you are teaching overloads, it is very hard to argue that your teaching load is too high. If you regularly teach overloads, the administration will argue that you are already teaching a lot and you claim to be doing a good job, so now we are just arguing about how much we are going to pay you for the teaching that you do. Likewise, you may offer independent study courses to students to help them complete their degree requirements, but that just allows the administration to get by on the cheap and to avoid its responsibility to schedule courses that students need to graduate.

If you think that the current workload -- more classes and bigger classes -- keeps you and your NTE colleagues from doing a quality job teaching, you have to tell students that you can't spend as much time grading their papers or developing assignments that will help them learn. If you just suck it up and do the extra work on your own time, then the administration has won. It has increased the amount of work it gets out of you without paying you for the extra work. The administration can be counted on to take advantage of people who are willing to work for free.

It is not enough to make an argument that your workload is unfair. Telling others that it is unfair may not elicit a lot of sympathy, especially if your workload is not that much different than that of instructors and lecturers at other universities. What will convince people to support your demand for a fair workload is the recognition that your workload has implications for the quality of education that students receive.

What are some concrete steps that you can take to get a fair contract? First, tell your colleagues that you have joined AAUP-WSU and that they should join, too. For NTE faculty, the needed form to print out, fill in, and return is available online at

<http://www.wright.edu/administration/aaup/nte-pd-form.pdf> .

The greater your membership, the more the administration realizes that you can engage in effective collective action. Right now, membership among NTE faculty is about 60%. That is good, but we would have more power if membership were 85%. This would show the administration that you are determined to get a fair contract.

What else can you do? Hang a sign on your door demanding that the administration give you a fair contract! Talk to your students, and let them know that because of the administration's misplaced priorities, they are not receiving the quality education they deserve despite the fact that tuition continues to rise. Think about the extra work that you do for the administration that is not really part of your job, and stop doing that work. Sign a pledge that you will vote to reject any contract unless your concerns over workload are addressed.