



Setting a Future Agenda: Lessons, Rationale, and Accomplishments

By Rob Compton, UUP Oneonta Vice President for Academics and Incoming Acting President



Introduction: The Themes of Salary, Respect, and Professionalism

Many of our members are aware that Chapter President Bill Simons will be on sabbatical during the Spring 2015 semester. The UUP Oneonta Executive Board elected me Acting President for the next semester. The transition has begun with discussions in the Executive Board, with Statewide UUP, and with Oneonta UUP officers.

At the Executive Board meeting on November 25th, I spoke, as Vice President for Academics, about some of UUP Oneonta’s recent successes and priorities. I also outlined some of the initiatives past, present, and future that would require ongoing effort.

I started that academics are concerned about their future and that of the College as we move forward. In particular, I stated that the themes of salary, respect, and professionalism ring loud and clear. In the era of stagnating salaries, diminished respect for the academic components of higher education, and the rise in attempts to de-professionalize what academics do, have led to concerns and low morale. This College must find a way out of this morass if we are to endure.

UUP Academics Accomplishments: Salary

UUP Oneonta noted, for years and on multiple occasions, full-time academic salaries are at very low and unsustainable levels relative to benchmark institutions within and outside of New York. The administration’s studies have confirmed this. UUP has also stated that part-time salaries were embarrassingly low and a violation of human rights.

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Credit is due to the administration for finally moving to address issues of salary inequity and compression through Phase I and Phase II of the address in salary. The administration's response sought to address issues noted in the *Vision for the Future* meetings held and the 5th UUP Survey: Quality of Professional Life and Administrative Assessment. Themes of salary, respect, and professionalism were issues that dominated that survey. In the 6th UUP Survey: Quality of Professional Life and Administrative Assessment just completed and currently being tabulated, we will see similar issues dominate the concern of UUPers. Our members have spoken in the survey once again and I want to thank all of those who participated.

Respect for Academics on this Campus

Academic endeavors on this campus provides the *raison d'être* for the existence of the institution. Teaching, research, and service by academics must remain focused on the academic enterprise. Many academics are quite concerned about the encroachment of neo-liberal managerialism on the operations of this campus especially as it relates to departmental and classroom activities. These include issues of assessment, hiring, and course coverage. We are not blithe to the economic realities of higher education. But as many people have stated in the survey, the current path of merely responding to new fads does not lead to any type of "excellence." Academics are concerned that non-academic factors are given too much weight and sometimes even over-ride academic reasoning and rationale as decisions about curricular matters occur.

Issues of concern about respect for academics center on remuneration. Juxtaposed with administrative salaries, academics are well aware that their state of compensation. As academic sharecropping increases with the permanence of lowly paid part-timers, we often ask, why not have adjunct administrators paid by piecemeal? Clearly, the thought of this may seem absurd, but so too is the fact that part-timers have seen their salaries stagnate more than any other group of employees on this campus. Yet, they remain the most vulnerable. Despite the rhetoric of "valuing teaching," the remuneration of part-timers at the current level is unacceptable. As noted in *Inside Higher Ed* (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/24/house-committee-report-highlights-plight-adjunct-professors>), the US House Education and Workforce Committee formally designated the treatment of adjuncts as "exploitive" in their report titled *Just-In-Time Professor*. I believe that the treatment of part-time faculty is a problem for full-time faculty and professionals because it signals a lack of respect for the academic enterprise and the work that we do.

Over the past several years, I have noticed a drift away from funding professional development of faculty. Increasingly, funding for conferences related to research and field work as declined as assessment workshops and conferences, high impact practices training, chair's training, and the visitations of consultants displace the importance of research. Without research and research output, academics become merely teachers and content deliverers. Our teaching becomes stale and interchangeable with each other. Our specific experiences with research enrich our classroom and provide students an education that is tailored to the faculty's expertise that remains current. I believe we are losing that strength as ancillary demands eat away at the resources for research, including time and money.

Administrative Bloat and Compensation

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Administrative bloat represents a threat to our institution’s long-term health. The reasons for administrative salary increases may be complex. However, the fact that administrative salaries have risen as much as they have and that the increases are large relate to the issue of administrative bloat. To say that administrative salaries are part of the academic budget is dishonest. UUP believes that there needs to

be a systematic mechanism to address salary inequities that exist among our Professionals. The amount of salary increases for administration from 2013 to 2014 is also more than enough to cover all of the adjuncts increases for the year.

An institution cannot survive based on an administrative elite that does not teach in the classroom. Those who supervise at different levels should make it a point to teach courses. Several administrators do so on a consistent basis. Too many do not. As education undergoes changes, it is important that the managerial class see the impact of their policies on instruction. UUP wonders about the process and rationale for the types of increases provided to members of administration. What is included in their AAR (Administrative Annual Report) and who decides what should be in it?

Future Directions: UUP in spring 2015

An Acting President is more about continuity than change. As such, I intend to work closely with the existing UUP Officers, the Executive Board, and Darryl Wood, our Labor Relations Specialist. Late in the spring semester, UUP Oneonta, like other chapters will once again have elections for its positions.

It is critically important the all components of UUP: professionals, academics, part-time and full-time and retirees work together to strengthen our union. I am aware of the fatigue factor of many of our members, so I will try to make judicious use of your time. Nonetheless, we must work to build solidarity and reduce the pervasive gap of understanding among our components. No one’s gain comes at the expense of the others.

As such, Professional need and deserve an equity study of their salaries. They should have been included in Phase II of the equity salary adjustment plans. The time for salary augmentation for part-timers is now. I’d like to work with administration on this and other Part-time concerns emerging in several departments. Real progress needs to be made and I trust that Management recognizes the urgency of the matter.

“In Honor and Good Faith,” a motto most fitting is also a challenge to us as a College. It is also a challenge to the union. From Good Faith seems Trust. At the same time, I believe that trust is something that must be earned and nurtured, or it will evaporate. I’d like to do my part.