Oneonta
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The Sentinel

UUP Negotiating Team Update

By Bill Simons, VP for Academics

Representatives from UUP's Contract Negotiating Team—including Oneonta Chapter President Norm Payne—shared pizza and insights with more than twenty chapter members on 10/25 in Morris Hall. Thanks for your presence, especially on a scheduled day "off"! Negotiations for the next contract promise to be particularly challenging, so stay abreast of events by staying current with *The Sentinel*.

Members asked questions about workload, compensation, grievance procedures, the political climate for negotiations, pension, early retirement options, and benefits. Exchanges were candid and productive. If you haven't already done so, please complete and return the contract survey that was attached to last month's *Sentinel*. Feel free to contact Peg Carney if you need another copy.

Scholarships

Applications for the 2003 Eugene P. Link Scholarships, offered by the UUP, are now available. The application deadline for these annual scholarships—granted to up to three SUNY undergraduates dedicated to the goals of trade unionism—is March 1, 2003.

UUP established the Link Scholarship Trust Fund in 1985 to acknowledge the union's commitment to the mission of service exemplified by one of its founding members: Eugene Link, a former professor of History at SUNY Plattsburgh.

Interested students can call the Oneonta Chapter office, at 436-2135, for information and an application. Applications are also available at the Financial Aid Office in the Netzer Admin.Bldg.

Food for Thought

Who says there's no free lunch? Our next gathering will be on Tuesday, November 26th, in Morris Hall's *Le Café*. In addition to complimentary pizza and soda, we will have a two guest speakers dispensing free advice on how to prepare for retirement.

Our speakers will present two perspectives: one from a person who will show you what you need to do, and one from a retiree who will tell you first-hand what he wished he had known. As always, other topics are also discussed. Past attendees have reported that they enjoy the camaraderie and information at these gatherings (and the free pizza is always a hit!), so join your colleagues for a wind-down day before the last surge to finals.

The Sentinel Online!

All issues of your *Sentinel*, starting with the November edition, are now available online at http://organizations.oneonta.edu/uup/.
Thanks to Phil Bidwell of Computer Services for his hard work and willingness to share his abilities!

Live and Die by the Bell Curve

By Norm Payne, President

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All faculty who teach classes give exams to measure how much students have learned. These grades are recorded in a grade book, and are used to assign midterm and final grades. Some students will do well, and some will not. If a faculty member wanted to plot the grades students earned in a given class, the result might look something like a bell. It seems that many of the "older" faculty subscribe to the bell-curve method for the purpose of final grading and even departmental grading. As I understand it, their method is the reverse of the above example. A bell curve is plotted before the students start the class. The assumption is that some will fail, most will fall in the middle, and some will do very well. No matter how effective the instruction, some have to get an "E", and some have to get a high grade: the distribution is predetermined by the bell curve. If a department subscribes to the bell curve, then the faculty in that department who do not subscribe to the "system" must be careful not to teach all the students well, as a class that does not fail anyone will throw the department bell curve off.

I pity the professor of an honors course that subscribes to the bell curve. This means that even though he or she has a class of the supposed best and brightest, one or two students must fail to keep the bell curve's integrity.

Enrollment management is a snap. Throw the bell curve on the incoming class, determine the number of dismissals, and factor this into acceptances. There have to be dismissals: the bell curve says so. This would make the Admissions Office's job easier too, knowing that every year we have to lose a set number of students.

As a side note, I find it interesting that our retention is going up. This is attributed to higher quality students, when in fact a number of faculty that use the bell curve has been dropping each year as they retire.

I am not passing judgment on faculty who use the bell-curve method. It has worked for generations, and it is supported by sound mathematical reasoning. I just think that if it were to be applied across the campus in all parts of our lives, our jobs might be easier.

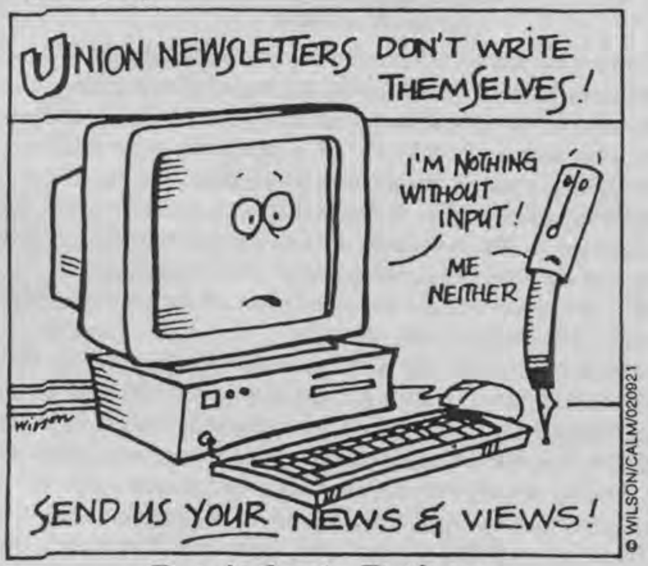
First, new faculty should be taught the bell curve method as soon as they arrive on campus, because the art of the bell curve seems to be lost on the young. They only seem to find out about the bell

("Bell Curve", continued)

curve when the department's grade distribution starts looking like a ski slope, and they are told to do something.

Next, the whole structure of the campus should be run on a bell curve. A certain number of new faculty have to be non-renewed. Think of how easy our lives would be if we could blame the bell curve? A certain number must not be given tenure. A fixed number of department chairs will not get discretionary salary increases, nor will members of each department. Everything would be cut-and-dried, black-and-white, bell-curved.

Your son or daughter comes home from college and says "Someone had to fail out, the bell curve said so, and I just happened to be the one!" The next day you get a letter from Human Resources: "I'm sorry, but you can't retire this year because the bell curve says we have to deny 3 out of 61, and guess what, you are one of the three." What a stroke of luck you say, no one wants to be stuck at home with a teenager anyway!



Reminder to Retirees:

Stay active in your Union as it watches over your pension, your benefits and your future! Continue your membership for only $34 per year. Contact Office Administrator Peg Carney at 436-2135 for information on extending your membership.

Use Your Membership!

Remember to take advantage of your membership in the UUP and its affiliated groups, the AFT and NYSUT. Union membership might provide the only job and income protection you have in these uncertain times, so support our affiliates and use our combined clout for savings and opportunities. For example, this ad, from the AFT, speaks to food and family: what could be more important than that?

From the UUP Wire....

This fall's enrollment in the State University of New York—the largest system in the country—is the third highest in history, officials said. Full-time undergraduate and graduate enrollment at the system's 64 campuses is up 3.5% from last year, with a total of 402,111 students matriculated. Commenting on this fact, SUNY Chancellor Robert King stated that "These increasing enrollment levels are further proof that SUNY is moving to the front ranks of public higher education in the United States. (*Newsday*)

Funding for research at SUNY institutions reached $565 million in fiscal 2002, up 18% from the previous year. SUNY Stony Brook received the largest amount of money, $135 million, followed by SUNY Buffalo, with more than $115 million. The federal government provided more than half of the money. Lasy year, the SUNY system, for the first time, submitted a system-wide request for federal funds. (*Democrat and Chronicle*)

Students in New York pay more for college than students in all but thirteen other states. A report issued by the independent, nonpartisan National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education found that New York families pay nearly 30% of their income, after financial aid awards, on college. The report, "Measuring Up 2002," found that national averages for post-financial-aid income expenditures averaged 16%. The Center's findings reinforce reports by the New York Public Interest Research Group and other student advocacy organizations that the state's higher education costs are too high. NYPIRG's report concludes that New York's four-year public colleges are the 14th most expensive in the country, and that the state's public community colleges are the 5th most expensive in the nation. The following websites have additional information:
www.nypirg.org/higher_ed/shifting_burden/release
www.highereducation.org

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Guest Column

Editor's Note: *In an effort to provide a forum for members to speak to issues of common concern, we will—on occasion—present commentary from our colleagues. The opinions expressed in this column are the writers' own.*

Recent Stock Market Declines – Another Perspective

by Robert Rothenberg, JD, CPA and Dr. Richard Insinga

In the last few years, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) has gone from an inter-day high of 11750—on January 14, 2000—to an inter-day low of 7197—on October 10, 2002: a drop of almost 39 percent. A number of companies that enjoyed favored status have disintegrated into virtual nothingness (WorldCom, Enron, etc.) Others are mere ghosts of their former selves (Lucent, Corning, etc.)

Walking through the hallways at SUNY Oneonta, we overhear comments from faculty and others about how bad the situation is. Many of these are humorous in nature, but seem to reflect an underlying despair. (One faculty member in his 50's was overheard to comment that he would probably still be teaching the grandchildren of the students he was currently teaching.)

This seems to us to be a problem, since positive faculty and staff morale is essential to the performance of our duties. While it is always better to have more than less, and any reduction is wealth is unsettling, we thought it might be interesting and useful to see how the recent market declines have affected our retirement options, and to see how we are doing overall.

We obtained several contribution histories to TIAA-CREF accounts and analyzed them to determine the average rates of return over time. We did not try for absolute precision, assuming contributions were made at the end of each year. We also did not try to get representative histories, but merely those that were readily available. These accounts were all started in the mid 1970's, include investments in both TIAA and CREF, but reflect different fund choices.

Using the highest reported year-end portfolio values (12/31/99), the rates of return range from approximately 14.70 to 15.25 percent. Using the lowest reported portfolio values (9/30/02), the rates of return range from approximately 10.06 to 10.95 percent. So even at the low point, the rate of return is a respectable 10-plus percent. (Several economists were asked, informally, what they would expect as a reasonable rate of return over a 20-to-30-year period. Their estimates were in the three to six percent range.)

We contacted a company that sells retirement annuities. Using the values in the retirement accounts at their lows, persons represented in our sample, if aged 65, could purchase an annuity for life—with a guaranteed payout to others in the event of the death of the primary beneficiary within the first ten years—in an amount equaling 60-70 percent of their current salary. These quotes were from a conservative underwriter. (Use of a less conservative underwriter might have increased the returns by 2-5 percentage points.)

Three additional factors should be considered: first, the participants in this survey all expect to receive Social Security benefits amounting to an additional 20-30 percent of their current salaries, increasing their expected retirement income to 80-100 percent of their final income. (It is generally considered healthy if a retiree receives a retirement income of 75 to 80 percent of his or her final income.) Second, none of these participants had any expectation of retiring in the next few years. They expect the values in their retirement accounts to increase during the remainder of their working lives (although this is certainly not guaranteed). Third, since the bottom of the market, the DJIA has increased approximately 16 percent, and the reported values of the participants' portfolios have increased 6.5 to 9.5 percent.

The conclusion we reached is this: while there have been dramatic declines in the DJIA and reported retirement portfolios from December 31, 1999 to September 30, 2002, the overall impact has been far from catastrophic when viewed from a longer-term perspective.

A Life Insurance Policy for You

The basic premise of life insurance is simple - your beneficiary receives a death benefit when you die. Then why are there so many kinds of life insurance? The reason is because people use it differently for various circumstances. New York State United Teachers Member Benefits offers four distinct life insurance policies.

Term Life Insurance is purchased for a specific period of time, or a "term." Benefits are paid to a beneficiary only when the insured dies within the specified period. Coverage is guaranteed renewable to age 70. The coverage amount reduces by 50 percent at age 65. Applicants must be under age 65 and can apply for up to $500,000 in coverage. Financial experts consider Term to be the most economical type of life insurance because it is "pure" insurance. In addition to providing a death benefit to beneficiaries, term life may be your best value as a means of insuring your mortgage.

Senior Term Life Insurance is designed for people between the ages of 65 and 84. Coverage amounts are lower than the Term Life Insurance plan, as financial obligations are generally lower in later years. Depending on age at issue, applicants may choose up to $30,000 in coverage. Coverage decreases with age and ends at age 85.

If you are looking for a cash value plan, NYSUT offers two distinct options. Both are based on universal life insurance structures. **NYSUT Variable Universal Life Insurance** is "permanent" insurance; it contains both insurance and cash value accumulation. You can choose to invest your cash value in fixed and/or variable investment options. You have premium payment flexibility. Death benefits are level or increasing. At age 100, the life insurance coverage ends and you receive the account value. Applicants must be between the ages of 21 and 80. The minimum face value amount offered is $50,000; the maximum is $500,000. Loans are available.

If you prefer not having to make investment choices, the **NYSUT WrapPlan® Term Life Coordination Program** may be an option for you. This product "wraps" around existing term life insurance coverage to restore full coverage when term life insurance decreases or terminates. While there are no investment options, guaranteed interest rates provide cash accumulation. At age 95, the life insurance coverage ends and you receive the account value. Applicants must be age 65 or under and can apply for up to $300,000. Loans are available.

For more information, call NYSUT Member Benefits at 1-800-626-8101, e-mail benefits@nysutmail.org, or visit the Web site www.memberbenefits.nysut.org.