



## What's Up with Faculty Negotiations? APSCUF Bulletin #3 for Students

The contract between the professors at the fourteen universities of the State System of Higher Education — including West Chester University — expired in June. The negotiations have been going on since the Spring, but they haven't gone well. The two sides, the State System, which is management, and APSCUF, which represents the professors, are far apart on a number of important issues.

For more information on this and other issues, see <http://www.apscuf.com>.

### It's About the Quality of Your Education

It really boils down to this: will all Pennsylvanians continue to have the opportunity for high quality higher education? Or will this university and all others like it in this Commonwealth die a “death by a thousand cuts”? At each and every opportunity, the administrators in Harrisburg try to slice off just a little bit of academic quality at our universities.

#### Graduate Students Instead of Professors

The State System's proposal would have graduate students, and “other technically proficient non-bargaining unit personnel” teaching labs without faculty supervision. They want to save money, and graduate students are cheap. Yet no part of the State System's proposal mentions any method of evaluating or checking on the quality of their instruction. These people are not faculty, and thus do not go through the rigorous evaluation process to which faculty are subjected. Nor is there any method mentioned for evaluating their ‘technical proficiency’ to see if they are even minimally qualified. Which would you want to be in: a Chemistry Lab taught by a first year graduate student, or a lab taught by a professor with years of knowledge and experience?

#### More Temporary Instructors

The State System is also proposing to remove any limits on temporary faculty at the System universities. To be sure, there are some good reasons for hiring temporaries, such as sabbatical replacements and grant buy-outs. But they want to be able to massively increase the number of temporaries in the System for a simple reason: temporary faculty cost a lot less—and don't get benefits unless they're hired for a full year. Temporaries often have to cobble together jobs at two or three institutions just to make a living. Many are fine teachers, but between their travel and their part-time status, they cannot be as effective in teaching and especially advising West Chester students as a full-time, tenure-track professor, who has roots in the community. Four temporaries teaching four courses are usually less effective and committed than one full time professor. The effect of large numbers of temporaries on student advising and university service can also be devastating, all directly attacking the quality of education at our universities.

#### “Pack ‘em In to Larger Classes!”

The State System negotiators have made it quite clear what they want: bigger classes. As one administrator aptly summarized, “**Big classes are cash cows!**” Already they created a huge class at

Bloomsburg of over 700 students, and one IUP class has over 400. Face-to-face contact with a real professor may quickly become a thing of the past at our universities. APSCUF is working to limit class sizes in its negotiations, trying to maintain the quality of personal contact our students deserve.

### **Losing Our Best**

The State System's proposal also risks the universities' future, the recently-hired faculty. Their proposal would eliminate a provision of the contract: annual service increments, better known as "steps." These are an escalator for the junior-most faculty, designed to accelerate them more rapidly in the pay scale than the senior faculty. It helps keep newer faculty at the university, and lowers the turnover rate. The majority of current faculty do not receive steps. But public universities are having a tough time keeping up with private schools. In the March/April 2003 issue of *Academe*, an annual survey of faculty salaries reveals this disturbing trend:

Faculty at public institutions received lower salary increases than did their counterparts at private institutions. The continuing disparity in the salaries offered between the two sectors means that public institutions find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain qualified faculty. One indicator of this difficulty is the continuation rate for associate professors, which has been lower at public institutions during the last several years.<sup>1</sup>

Why, then, is the Chancellor so willing to cut back on the very people who maintain the quality of education at the universities, the professors?

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<sup>1</sup>"Unequal Progress: The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2002-03," *Academe*, March-April 2003.