

Contract Negotiations Update: Arbitration Hearings Conclude

On July 27, 2010, your Negotiating Committee and the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (BOG) representatives met for the final arbitration hearing – we now await the Arbitrator’s decision on the remaining unresolved items: salaries, benefits, a genuine seniority system, and an equitable and fair overall assignment policy. Previous to the conclusion of the final arbitration session, the Negotiating Committee succeeded in securing a number of Tentative Agreements on important contract provisions. The most significant items include:

- ***Academic Freedom*** – this agreement provides Part-Time Faculty at URI with the same protections afforded Full-Time Faculty at URI and at other universities across the country. The statement is adapted from the National American Association of University Professors seminal document, “The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom.”
- ***Maintenance of Bargaining Unit Status*** – part-time faculty at URI will retain all the rights and protections afforded by our contract by teaching an average of only one course section per year over any two year block of time. This provision, which bases maintenance of status on a workload average, will allow Bargaining Unit Members from all disciplines to pursue their professional lives in view of our current reality, taking advantage of semester and one-year opportunities without the loss of Bargaining Unit Member protections.
- ***Grievance and Arbitration Process*** – this section provides a process for any aggrieved part-time faculty member and delineates specific steps which begin with the PTF’s immediate supervisor and ensures Union representation, thus providing for the greatest chance disputes will be quickly and immediately resolved. In the event any such dispute cannot be resolved in the first, aforementioned step, the process then includes three additional steps up to and including a hearing with the Commissioner of Higher Education, before ending with Binding Arbitration, if necessary, thus ensuring closure and finality to the settling of PTF grievances.
- ***Performance Evaluation*** – PTF will be able to rely on professional performance evaluations, a process that “includes direct classroom observation and specific, written steps which will provide a rational basis for employment decisions.” Further, any decision not to reappoint a part-time faculty member must be justified by that PTF’s written performance evaluations.

Election Results: PTFU's Inaugural Executive Committee

During the Spring 2010 semester, elections were held for the URI/AAUP PTFU's Executive Committee (EC).

The Nomination Committee, chaired by Thomas Gidley, solicited nominees for the EC's six positions: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and two At-Large Members. The Elections Committee (also chaired by Thomas Gidley) took over the process at the end of March, after nominees had been solicited for each of the six positions. No part-time faculty member who planned on running for EC membership served on either the Nomination or Elections Committees.

On Friday, April 23, the Elections Committee mailed hard copies of the ballots to all eligible PTFU members, which stipulated Monday, May 10, as the deadline for submitting the completed ballots. Several email reminders about the ongoing election were sent to PTFU members. The ballots were counted by the Elections Committee at CCE Providence on Tuesday, May 11, at 9:30 AM. Jessica Sherwood and Tatiana Uhoch served as election tellers. PTFU members who wanted to attend the ballot-counting meeting were invited to do so.

Below are the election results for the URI/AAUP PTFU's inaugural Executive Committee:

*President: David Malley

*Vice President: Bruce Johnson

*Secretary: Alexia Kosmider

*Treasurer: Tammy Bolotow

*At-Large Member: Roy Panciera

*At-Large Member: Robert Leuci

PTFU Union Offices

The EC is in the process of obtaining a main office for the union on the Kingston campus and working toward establishing a satellite office at CCE Providence. The PTFU needs professional space on both campuses in order to inform, educate, and organize URI's adjunct faculty as it moves forward in the implementation of its first contract and to be readily available to provide assistance to the URI/PTFU membership.

BOG Says, “NO!” So What Comes Next?

First of all, if we were all willing to accept a contract that provided **NO** pay increases, **NO** job security in the way of a *real* seniority system, and **NO** benefits (not even mere access to group plans), then we would, of course, have a contract by now. The BOG has rejected PTFU’s reasonable compromises on these critical issues – this is the very reason why going into Arbitration was necessary. We all know that such a contract would serve no purpose whatsoever, save those of the BOG, and would in no way serve to address the issues part-time faculty at URI are faced with on a daily basis.

Second, what comes next? Now that arbitration hearings are completed, we need to wait for the Arbitrator’s decision, which could take up to a few months in the rendering – nobody likes to wait, including the Negotiating Committee, but we must remember that it is the BOG’s adamant refusal to be reasonable, their resounding “**NO!**” in response to all compromises put forward by the Negotiating Committee concerning the unresolved contract provisions listed above, that has left us no choice but to enter into the arbitration process. While in the short term we are all left to wait, the potential long-term gains make this wait not only worthwhile, but absolutely essential. One would think that the Chair of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, Frank Caprio, as well as the other BOG members, would be embarrassed by the Board’s decision to perpetuate the decades long list of inequities and abuses that the part-time faculty at URI have endured. To reiterate here a relevant statement that is noted below: **URI pays its part-time faculty approximately \$4 million annually, in return for the generation of between \$45 and \$55 million in annual tuition revenue from courses taught by the part-time faculty. Additionally, it would cost upwards of \$20 million to pay “New-Hire Full-Time Faculty” to teach those same course sections. Currently (and for the past decade or more), part-time faculty at URI are paid either \$3200 on the Kingston campus or \$3548 on the Providence campus (for the same course) for a three (3) credit 15 week semester course. And, it is a fact that the university would not be able to deliver its undergraduate program without its part-time faculty.**

Part-Time Faculty Assignments – Fall 2010

It has come to our attention, anecdotally, that the URI Administration has taken the unusual step of canceling a significant number of upper-level, undergraduate course sections, staffed by full-time faculty, that it deems to be “under enrolled;” in the past, clearly, these course sections would have remained open until at least the final weeks of August, by which time most of them would have sufficient enrollment and never be

canceled. As some part-time faculty are already painfully aware, the Administration has taken the further step of reassigning 100 and 200-level course sections originally assigned to part-time faculty – many of whom have already signed contracts – so that full-time faculty whose course sections were cancelled will have a full load.

Given that URI pays its part-time faculty approximately \$4 million annually (in return for the generation of between \$45 and \$55 million in annual tuition revenue from courses taught by the part-time faculty), and it would cost upwards of \$20 million to pay “New-Hire Full-Time Faculty” to teach those same course sections, we believe the current course cancellations are occurring for a number of reasons. In light of the obvious fact that these actions make no financial sense whatsoever – especially as the URI Administration and the BOG are currently yelling “Financial Crisis” in a crowded theater – as they are – the most transparent reason, in our opinion, is their desire to create division and dissent among the Part-Time Faculty Bargaining Unit members and to break our collective resolve prior to the Arbitrator’s decision – **this the URI Part-Time Faculty Union will not allow to happen.** *These course restriction actions undertaken by the Administration serve the interests of no one – not the University’s, not the full-time faculty’s, not the part-time faculty’s, and most importantly, not those of URI’s most important constituency, the undergraduate student body.*

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