

814 Oakland Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
Telephone: 269.34530151
Fax: 269.345.0278
Email: wmuaaup@ameritech.net
Web site: www.wmich.edu/aaup

January, 2004

Editor: Jo Wiley

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Advocate

At Western Michigan University

Welcome Back To Western

Gary Mathews, Ph.D.

"Too many Chapter members think of us as a service organization with themselves as customers and do not realize that we are actually a social movement with every-

We come back to a University which is still in the process of responding to budget cuts, many of which impact our work on campus. The Chapter has received communications from faculty who are displeased with the closing of the library during the break. No doubt the diminished hours of operation that the Dean of Libraries just announced will further upset many faculty.

There will be less snowplowing this winter, and probably fewer flowers in the spring (not to be confused with the spring semester, which is mostly winter). Certainly, other reductions mean it will be less convenient for faculty to work at Western for awhile. But let's also remember that many employees in support services, administration, student services, and athletics no longer have a job at Western. No faculty members have lost their jobs so far, and for that we should be grateful. Practically all of the cuts in Western's budget have been absorbed by the non-academic units. This is evidence that the administration recognizes the faculty and their work as the core function of the university.

A Busy Agenda for the AAUP

We have a very busy semester ahead, which we are in the process of planning. On the agenda is to schedule, in col-

laboration with the administration, a tenure/promotion workshop focused on faculty who are currently in the process of being reviewed. We are arranging a series of focus groups for recent faculty hires to explore how the AAUP can better serve their specific needs. The staff is in the early stages of preparing the evaluations of all Chairs except those in the College of Arts and Sciences. We also plan to collaborate with the administration in working with eligible faculty who must choose between an addition to the "across-the-board" increment and continued eligibility for the supplemental retirement payout. Also, each month of the semester the Chapter has scheduled either an Association Council or Chapter meeting, as well as weekly Executive Committee meetings.

Welcome to Our New Contract Administrator

Karen Blaisure is beginning her new position as contract administrator this semester, as Robert Ricci returns to his full-time teaching position. We thank him for his valuable contribution to the Chapter and look forward to his continuing role on the Executive Committee as immediate past chief negotiator. Karen has been active in the Chapter for many years, and brings a lot of energy and enthusiasm to the role. Welcome to

From Your Contract Administrator...

Karen Blaisure, Ph.D.

I began serving as WMU-AAUP contract administrator on January 5th. One day later, I'm writing this column to introduce myself.

I joined the WMU faculty in the fall of 1992 as an assistant professor in Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology. I was fortunate to have department colleagues Drs. Robert Betz, John Geisler and Edward Trembley mentor me in the history and importance of the AAUP at Western. Like many faculty members arriving from doctoral programs or from other non-unionized universities,

I was unaware of the need for or benefit of a faculty union. The perspectives and experiences of these colleagues set me on a path of union support. During the next seven years, including a few in which I was the "union rep" for the department,

I learned of situations around campus that solidified for me the crucial role of the union in the *daily* well-being of faculty.

In 1999 I was granted a transfer to the department of Family and Consumer Sciences, my "home" discipline. Again I served as the department representative and also substituted as the College of Education representative to the WMU-AAUP Executive Committee for one semester. During the 2002-2003 academic year, I was on sabbatical in the United Kingdom. I had decided, when I returned to campus this past semester, that I wanted to work toward more involvement with the Chapter. I did not expect the oppor-

tunity to arrive so quickly, however!

On a beautiful October day, the Chapter president, Gary Mathews, called and asked me to consider interviewing for the position of contract administrator. Friends and colleagues with whom I spoke urged me to interview, citing my long-standing support of the Chapter and desire to see situations resolved justly. At the end of October, I interviewed with the WMU-AAUP Executive Committee. When asked why I wanted to serve as the contract administrator, I noted my deep appreciation for the union and desire to do my part in helping colleagues around campus. In addition, I frankly acknowledged gaps in my "contractual" knowledge but was reassured that the contract administrator works in collaboration with the president, the grievance officer, and the rest of the Executive Committee, and that on-the-job training is part of the excitement of the job! At the November meeting of the Association Council, department representatives voted in support of my appointment as contract administrator. Thank you and members of the Executive Committee for that support.

First, let me begin my service by acknowledging all who have served in the WMU-AAUP leadership and as staff since 1992. Their collective behavior over the years has so impressed me. When calling or visiting Montague House with a question or concern, I have been received with respect, patience, and sincerity. In particular, I must mention with gratefulness Ariel Anderson, who over the years has responded to my questions with seemingly unending patience and insight. She, along with staff members Gail Nagle and Susan Esman, has set the bar extremely high, and I will strive to serve the faculty with this standard in mind.

I welcome the opportunity to learn more about the issues and daily life of faculty across campus and am willing to meet with faculty individually or as a group. If you have questions about the contract, including department policy statements, please phone me at my AAUP office (345-0151) or academic office (387-3663) or email me at (karenblaisure@ameritech.net). If I do not have an immediate answer, I will find it and contact you promptly. You are always welcome at Montague House on Oakland Drive where I have office hours. However, if you find yourself near Kohrman Hall, currently a quieter corner of the university since the College of Engineering & Applied

WMU-AAUP Officers' Hours*

Gary Mathews

President

Wed 1:00—3:00pm

Fri 1:00—3:00pm

Karen Blaisure

Contract Administrator

Mon 1:30—3:30pm

Wed 9:00am—12:00noon

Pam Rooney

Grievance Officer

Wed 10:00am—12:30pm

Fri 1:00—3:00pm

Jo Wiley

Information Officer

Wed 8:30am—1:00pm

*And by appointment

For Your Health

*C. Dennis Simpson, Ph.D.
WMU-AAUP Vice President*

Based upon the number of calls I have received from Chapter members, faculty continued to have questions and concerns regarding the healthcare plans that shifted on January 1, 2004. While I will continue to respond to individual questions, some are worth repeating and answering for all members. This column addresses a few of the immediate concerns. Additionally, the Chapter website will soon host a Healthcare FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page as another way to assist faculty in this transition.

Many of the questions I've been asked have to do with determining if a healthcare provider is contracted as a Community Blue PPO provider. For faculty electing the Community Blue PPO option, this is a significant concern if they are to avoid additional out-of-pocket healthcare costs. While calling your provider is one option, the most direct and probably the quickest way to determine if a provider is contracted with the Community Blue PPO Plan is to access the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Website at www.bcbsm.com/hp. Once at the homepage, click on "Find Your Doctor" under Top Requests (on the right hand side of the box). You will need to chose a plan (Community Blue/Blue Preferred PPO) and then either enter the name of the provider or list the specialty of the healthcare service. Either of these options will provide you with information as to the provider status of your chosen provider. If the provider you have chosen is listed as a Community Blue PPO provider, the services are cov-

ered under the conditions of the healthcare plan. If the provider is not listed as a Community Blue PPO provider, you must make a decision as to whether you want to continue with this provider (and assume significant out-of-pocket billings and costs) or change to a Community Blue PPO provider to eliminate such out-of-pocket expenses.

Another topic of frequently asked questions is prescription drug coverage and differences between co-payments at Sindecuse and other pharmacies. In the past, the differences in co-pays were primarily related to whether the drug was generic or brand name. The new co-payment differences no longer relate to brand, but rather to a mini-

that difference, co-payments at Sindecuse Pharmacy compared to other pharmacies could vary significantly. In order to have Sindecuse dispense a prescription with a 90-day supply, the medication would have to be taken for an extended period of time. The prescribing physician should write "maintenance drug" on the prescription, therefore allowing for the 90-day supply.

Another set of questions concerns whether or not faculty who have elected the Community Blue PPO plan need to inform their healthcare providers of the change in plan. After consulting with Blue Cross Blue Shield, the AAUP is suggesting faculty who have elected the Community Blue PPO Plan do, in some manner, notify their ongoing healthcare providers of the plan change. You should have received a new insurance card; most providers will want to photocopy it or at least record the new information. While not required, early notification will eliminate (or at least greatly reduce) problems in billing for both you and your provider.

Changes to healthcare services and benefits are extremely stressful, but please try to keep in mind that there are bound to be some transitional snags that aren't really an indication of a "problem," but rather merely adjustments that still need to be made as the changed plans start up. However, any faculty member faced with a healthcare situation

The Chapter website will soon host a Healthcare

mum and maximum co-payment. Many Chapter members have asked why there is not much of a difference between co-payments at Sindecuse and other pharmacies. While at first glance the co-payment differences between pharmacies do not appear significant, the difference is meaningful. During negotiations and in conversations and communications since, the administration stated that Sindecuse Pharmacy will dispense a 90-day supply of maintenance drugs on one prescription while most pharmacies will only dispense a 30-day supply of maintenance drugs. Because of

**WMU-AAUP
Email**

WMUAAUP@AMERITECH.NET

The Importance of Department Policy Statements

Pam Rooney, Ph.D.
WMU-AAUP Grievance Officer

Perhaps the most unpleasant aspect of being grievance officer occurs when I must tell a faculty member that what has happened to him or her, no matter how egregious, unfair, or just plain cruel and vindictive, does not “rise to the level” of a grievance. These situations occur when there is no obvious violation of the agreement to be found, even with diligent and careful searching on the part of the Chapter’s attorney, and occurred more than once last semester as chairs and deans scrambled to reduce their budgets in face of the reductions to the University’s state funding by cutting back on course offerings for Summer I and Summer II. Senior faculty across the University suddenly found themselves without Summer teaching—in some cases with courses they would normally have taught being offered to junior colleagues.

My answer to the questions “Can they do this to me?” and “Can I grieve?” generally took the form of two more questions. First, were the classes assigned to someone outside the bargaining unit? Second, does your departmental policy statement spell out a procedure for an equitable distribution of teaching opportunities in Summer I and Summer II? An affirmative answer to the first question would have reflected an obvious violation of the Agreement, which gives preference for assignments to bargaining unit faculty and, therefore, something could have been done on the faculty member’s behalf. When the

answer was invariably a negative, the answer to my second question became critical because violation of procedures set forth in a policy statement would have provided an avenue for seeking a remedy or reversal of the loss of opportunity.

To my shock and amazement, I heard time after time that departments had no policy statements, that they had never needed them, that it was too much bother to develop one and that having one should be “beside the point.” Unfortunately, not having a policy statement in this situation is not “beside the point”; it is the whole point since

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the absence of one makes it much easier for management to assign courses to junior members of the bargaining unit to save money. Faculty confronted with this reality were understandably angry and frustrated, but their plight should be a cautionary tale to all departments that have no policy statement or an outdated policy statement and to all faculty who believe it is still business as usual at this university and that summer teaching is a “given.”

It is pretty clear that the budget constraints we are facing are probably going to get worse before

they get better. At some point the tensions created by on-going budget cuts could have the potential of further eroding the principle of faculty participation in departmental governance while strengthening management rights. Article 23 spells out the principles and role of department policy statements and sets forth mandatory policies that should be covered in all statements. These policies include allocation of summer teaching. I urge each department to find its policy statement or begin to develop one. We have a variety of examples at Montague House for you to look at, and Karen Blaisure and I are available to consult with any department that would like some assistance. If you are in a department where a chair tries to short circuit this process, please let us know. Chairs may comment on the policy, but they should not dictate its contents nor, ideally, participate in its creation.

Not following through and enacting our hard earned contractual rights puts the union membership at risk—individually and as a collective whole. Strengthening departments will strengthen the union’s ability to protect and assist us all. We must be vigilant about preserving and protecting what we have

**WMU-AAUP
website:**

**[WWW.WMICH.EDU/
AAUP](http://WWW.WMICH.EDU/AAUP)**

Association Council Representatives

Accountancy	Jerry Kreuze	7-5266	jerry.kreuze@wmich.edu
Africana Studies	William Santiago-Valles	7-2141	santiago-valles@wmich.edu
Anthropology	Allen Zagarell	7-3978	allen.zagarell@wmich.edu
Art	Richard dePeaux	7-5387	richard.depeaux@wmich.edu
	John Link	7-2453	john.link@wmich.edu
Aviation Sciences	Mark Murphy	269-964-9448	mark.murphy@wmich.edu
	Dominic Nicolai	269-964-4078	dominic.nicolai@wmich.edu
Biological Sciences	Robert Eversole	7-5640	robert.eversole@wmich.edu
Blindness & Low Vision Studies	Marvin Weessies	7-3447	
	marvin.weessies@wmich.edu		
Business Information Systems	Alan Rea	7-4247	alan.rea@wmich.edu
	Jo Wiley	7-5515	jo.wiley@wmich.edu
Career English Language Center for International Students	Ila Baker	7-3034	ila.baker@wmich.edu
Chemistry	John Chateauneuf	7-5677	john.chateauneuf@wmich.edu
Construction Engineering, Materials Engineering & Industrial Design	David Middleton	7-8140	david.middleton@wmich.edu
Communication	Sue Ellen Christian	7-3110	sueellen.christian@wmich.edu
	Marilyn Kritzman	7-4741	marilyn.kritzman@wmich.edu
Comparative Religion	Rudolf Siebert	7-4398	rudolf.siebert@wmich.edu
Computer Science	John Kapenga	276-3108	john.kapenga@wmich.edu
Counselor Education & Counseling Psychology	James Croteau	7-5111	james.croteau@wmich.edu
Counseling & Testing Center	Joetta Carr	7-1850	joetta.williams@wmich.edu
Dance	David Curwen	7-5351	david.curwen@wmich.edu
Economics	Jon Neill	7-5551	jon.neill@wmich.edu
Educational Studies	George Haus	7-5974	george.haus@wmich.edu
Electrical & Computer Engineering	Johnson Asumadu	276-3147	johnson.asumadu@wmich.edu
English	Mary Anne Loewe	7-2606	mary.loewe@wmich.edu
Environmental Studies	Lynne Heasley	7-2778	lynne.heasley@wmich.edu
Family & Consumer Sciences	Richard Zinser	7-3007	richard.zinser@wmich.edu
Finance & Commercial Law	Norman Hawker	7-6118	norman.hawker@wmich.edu
Foreign Languages	Eric Russell Webb	7-3020	eric.russellwebb@wmich.edu
Geography	Jordan Yin	7-3484	jordan.yin@wmich.edu
Geosciences	R.V. Krishnamurthy	7-5425	r.v.krishnamurthy@wmich.edu
Health, Physical Education & Recreation	Michael G. Miller	7-2728	michael.g.miller@wmich.edu
History	James Palmitessa	7-4640	james.palmitessa@wmich.edu
	Bill Warren	7-4644	wilson.warren@wmich.edu
Industrial & Manufacturing Engineering	Leonard Lamberson	276-3367	leonard.lamberson@wmich.edu
	Colleen Phillips	276-3371	colleen.phillips@wmich.edu
Libraries	Michael McDonnell	7-5208	michael.mcdonnell@wmich.edu
	Galen Rike	7-5181	galen.rike@wmich.edu
Management	Bret Wagner	7-5222	bret.wagner@wmich.edu
Marketing	Robert Reck	7-6107	robert.reck@wmich.edu
Mathematics	Gina Garza-Kling	7-4758	gina.garza-kling@wmich.edu
	Dennis.Pence	7-4538	dennis.pence@wmich.edu
Mechanical & Aeronautical Engineering	Iskender Sahin	276-3436	iskender.sahin@wmich.edu

Association Council Representatives

(continued)

Music	Thomas Knific	7-4710	thomas.knific@wmich.edu
	Scott Thornburg	7-4701	scott.thornburg@wmich.edu
Nursing	Juanita Manning-Walsh	7-8192	juanita.manning@wmich.edu
Occupational Therapy	Paula Jamison	7-7233	paula.jamison@wmich.edu
Paper Engineering, Chemical Engineering & Imaging	P. Daniel Fleming	276-3511	dan.fleming@wmich.edu
Philosophy	John Dilworth	7-4383	john.dilworth@wmich.edu
Physician Assistant	William Fenn	7-5318	bill.fenn@wmich.edu
Physics	Thomas Gorczyca	7-4913	thomas.gorczyca@wmich.edu
Political Science	Need Rep		
Psychology	Galen Alessi	7-4470	galen.alessi@wmich.edu
Public Affairs & Administration	Eric Austin	7-8946	eric.austin@wmich.edu
Social Work	Gary Mathews	7-3198	gary.mathews@wmich.edu
Sociology	Gregory Howard	7-5100	gregory.howard@wmich.edu
Spanish	Gary Bigelow	7-3024	gary.bigelow@wmich.edu
Speech Pathology & Audiology	Susan K. Carlson	7-8050	
	susan.k.carlson@wmich.edu		
Statistics	Joshua Naranjo	7-4548	joshua.naranjo@wmich.edu
Teaching, Learning & Leadership	Ariel Anderson	7-3493	ariel.anderson@wmich.edu



WMU-AAUP Chapter
814 Oakland Drive
Kalamazoo MI 49008

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED