



The Advocate

November 2019

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

December 13 5:00 p.m. **Holiday Happy Hour**
Saugatuck Brewing

The Road Ahead

Carol Weideman, WMU-AAUP President

The negotiation team has been selected, and the work has already begun. As we wind down Fall 2019, the opportunity for a well-deserved break should be enjoyed, but the efforts to bring notice to common concerns for our bargaining unit are percolating. The team will be starting in earnest this spring, and our responsibilities also begin. Expect rumors and propaganda to surface regarding issues of compensation, healthcare, and retirement. We encourage members to search for verification and stay engaged with our social media platforms, enews, and office. This is YOUR union. YOUR voice. OUR STRENGTH TOGETHER.

Know your Contract

Article 42.14 Class-size

“Department faculty may submit recommendations on class-size capacities for all courses to their department chair. The chair shall work with the faculty to develop class-size policy recommendations that are mutually agreeable. The department chair shall then carry the process forward to the dean and the provost for their review, input, and approval. The dean and provost shall complete their review within twenty (20) business days.” When approved, “class-size shall not be increased above a recommended and approved cap without the approval of the assigned faculty member or an appropriate department committee”. **Check your WMU-AAUP Contract for additional information on this topic.**

“How Many Grievances Have You Filed?”

Robert Trenary

Grievance Officer August 2017 – August 2019

This article is written as both a valedictory after two years as Grievance Officer and the fulfillment of a commitment made too long ago to Mark St. Martin.

My two-year tenure as Grievance Officer ended in August. I was often asked how many grievances I had filed. Hearing that question would make me realize how much of the work of the Grievance Officer (GO) is not captured in the job title (The same can be said of the Contract Administrator).

If the number of grievances filed were seen as a quality measure of the GO, one ought to ask whether the optimal value should be zero, or as large as possible or, like Goldilocks’ porridge, just right.

Approximately ten grievances were filed during my two years, some leading to what felt like a resolution that was an actual ‘win’ (we rarely receive a written apology) but the majority yielding various resolutions. Two are still in process.

The amount of discussion and analysis that each of those ‘cases’ required was significant – particularly the grievance regarding the administration’s abrogation of the Sindecuse pharmaceutical benefit.

But that slight history does not begin to describe the work of the Grievance Officer and faithful companion, Contract Administrator (CA). Those two positions are workhorse positions for providing services to individual members. Other officers have significant duties of a more Chapter wide nature.

I think members should understand the additional activities of the GO beyond the work of grievances. Please allow me.

Counseling Members (with sympathy and some skepticism)

I often joked that I didn’t have the proper licensure for the GO work. Members come to us because they have concerns.

This can be an issue about contractual violation, workload, promotion or tenure review, or that terrifying letter requesting an investigatory hearing. In other words, they arrive in stress and require understanding, explanation and guidance. Assuring members that the Master Agreement gives them rights is often needed!

This counseling work takes time and is largely invisible. (I must repeat that the work tends to be shared between GO and CA, sometimes jointly and sometimes separately.)

Working with Director of Academic Labor Relations

Dr. Nancy Mansberger is the current Director of Academic Labor Relations with administrative responsibility for three contracts, chiefly the Agreement with WMU-AAUP. As such she is the contact person for learning more about the issues members bring (If only I had a penny for each email, text, and minute of phone conversation I have shared working with Nancy!). Conversation with Nancy often provides an informal feel for the administrative view on a member's concern, and sometimes the conversation reveals that perhaps the member did not tell the whole story. *Advice*: always tell your lawyer and your GO *all* the details, even if embarrassing.

Investigatory Hearings and Beyond

When administrators have a concern about member work performance the catch-all formal first step is an investigatory hearing (IH). The notice for such a meeting is a daunting piece of boilerplate that can terrify the unsuspecting member.

There are reasons for the form of the IH notification letter that I once explained in a previous article. However, the panic it can engender is an unfortunate side-effect of our processes as presently constituted. Almost invariably the member needs counseling, and discussion with Nancy is required so the trigger for the IH can be understood. And then, planning for and accompanying the member to the IH is needed. For most members this process is very threatening, and justly so, because the IH can be a first step in discipline. An IH almost always generates a great deal of phone and email work with the member, CA and the staff, and if actual disciplinary steps occur a 'case' can become very time consuming.

Accompanying Members

The IH is one of several situations where members request Association representation. The chapter staff always warn "Wait until October 15", the day that the first tenure and promotion reviews arrive, generating a flow of GO and CA work that continues through the last provost appeal in April. This work involves meetings with members about reviews, and accompanying members to appeal meetings. Although GO and CA are not expected to craft such appeals they are frequently enlisted as editors. The stress of tenure and promotion reviews is intense and meeting with the authors of such reviews (typically administrators) requires understanding of social dynamics in departments that may be completely new to GO or CA. Other less predictable requests to accompany members can occur in efforts to resolve conflicts. The juggle of calendars and meetings is constant, especially as it must be arranged around the *other* job which also commands half of one's time. Magically it feels like $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 2$.

Maintaining the Organization

The GO, and all other officers, is involved in the internal workings of the Association, with the associated meetings (Officers, Executive, Council and Chapter) and policy discussions formal and informal at Montague House. The GO also attends the regular conversations with the provost intended to keep the Association ahead of issues that will affect us all. The responsibility to help keep the Association alive and well is serious as we all try to fight the good fight.

And if I may suggest: *every* member should try to somehow be involved in Association work to keep our extraordinary organization healthy and connected. Talk to colleagues at other universities and you will realize why our association commands such solid commitment. 'Solidarity' is no idle watchword.

Finally ...

Yes, the Grievance Officer does file grievances. But the number of grievances measures surprisingly little of the real work (Just ask Steve Durbin who is just starting in the position).

The work is fascinating and emotional and challenging and satisfying. Thank you for the opportunity in my final years at WMU.