



The Advocate

Spring 2019

WMU-AAUP President's Update

By Carol Weideman

MARK YOUR CALENDAR Events, Meetings and Workshops

March 15	1:30 p.m.	Association Council 157 Bernhard Center
March 22	5:00 p.m.	4th Friday Happy Hour Arcadia Brewing Co.
April 8	9:00 a.m.	Coffee at Montague 814 Oakland Drive
April 19	1:30 p.m.	Chapter meeting 157 Bernhard Center

Know your Contract:

In preparation of summer teaching assignments, "Article 41.1 Preference. Bargaining unit faculty members shall have preference for work assignments, as provided in this article. Preference applies to teaching of courses in the faculty member's department that the faculty member is qualified to teach. Pursuant to article 23.2.2, there is to be "equitable distribution of opportunities to teach in summer sessions and Extended University Programs." **Check your DPS for guidelines for a description of equitable distribution.**

Save the Date:

The annual faculty BBQ is scheduled for Thursday, September 5.

What a great start to my tenure as president! I've enjoyed the opportunity to meet with members and start the process of learning the responsibilities and duties. I'm excited to work with the members, officers, and executive committee with the support of our staff. We are extremely fortunate to have a strong bargaining unit, and this is becoming evident as labor challenges of our neighboring universities such as Wright State make national headlines reaching a tentative contract agreement after a 21-day strike.

To date, I've spent significant effort listening and learning. Mark St. Martin, vice president, and I are empowered to represent you. We're attending the 46th Annual Conference for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions in April. We'll divide and conquer to get maximum information. I'm particularly interested in the sessions on bargaining for the common good in higher education and an interactive workshop training on bargaining healthcare in higher education.

As our bargaining unit moves forward to the next negotiation, be assured my focus is to provide information on the work that is done on your behalf. I welcome your feedback on the correspondence received from the Montague House.

I value your support and confidence in the work we do. Reach out if there is more that can be done to maintain connection. March 11 from 9 to 11 a.m. is the next scheduled Coffee at the Montague House. I've taken the liberty to propose a discussion topic, and it revolves around working conditions. The basis of the topic is described in Natalio's article and the email invitation dated February 28. This is just the beginning of important issues our bargaining unit needs to unite around. Another opportunity is the Fourth Friday event at Arcadia Brewing, March 22, 5-6 p.m.

On Workload and the Land of the Equivalent

By Natalio Ohanna

WMU-AAUP Contract Administrator

Among the many contractual issues that have spawned controversy and conflict in the current academic year, workload has its own special place. The frequency with which bargaining-unit faculty members, either individually or in groups, approach WMU-AAUP with concerns about work assignments, misunderstandings or disputes, and the variety and intricacy of these matters, all show that workload represents the most noticeable and complex labor relations problem on campus. To get to the heart of the matter, it is important to bear in mind the definition offered in article 42.4 of the Western / WMU-AAUP Agreement:

For bargaining unit faculty members who are not faculty specialists, the maximum full-time faculty workload shall be twenty-four (24) credit hours of regularly-scheduled courses **or equivalent** in any one (1) academic or alternate-academic year, or six (6) credit hours or equivalent in the summer I or summer II sessions.

However clear it may appear on first reading, this passage has been the focus of endless discussions between WMU-AAUP and WMU Labor Relations. What does equivalent mean in this definition? What does it mean for faculty and for the administration? How does one determine what exactly is equivalent to 3 credit hours of teaching? Who decides? Can any sort of activity be considered part of the equivalent? Things get even more complicated in the case of faculty specialists, governed by article 20. From my perspective, the most rational and realistic interpretation is that all work done at WMU or in the name of WMU or from which WMU benefits must be recognized as such, that is, as part of our academic work and, consequently, as workload within the maximum credit hours stipulated in the Agreement. Period, full stop.

Unfortunately, the vagueness and the interpretive nature of this language has given rise to a myriad of work conditions-related conflicts, which have been increasing in a colorful spectrum of peculiar modalities and characteristics. It should be noted that the equivalent has either been diminished or simply ignored in many units. There are departments in which service at the college and university levels is equivalent to nothing. There are units in which departmental service is worth nothing in terms of credit hours. And there are units in which research equates to only one credit hour or is completely overlooked in workload calculation.

WMU-AAUP has represented members who have been subject to inequitable, abusive, and absurd practices. There are a number of cases that affect faculty members and shed light on the meaning of the equivalent in the eyes of some unit heads, including, for example, being required to use sick leave hours to cover the time spent on a university level committee. We could place on the same level of absurdity the strategy of some department chairs who have unilaterally decided to split the credit hours in their calculations of workload assignments, depending upon registration or available seats. The fewer students enrolled, the fewer credits recognized for the faculty member, regardless of whether those courses appear in the catalog as 3 credit hour classes. Through such calculations, teaching loads can soar to the preposterous level of 28 credit hours (without counting research or service) in a single semester and without overload pay. That is not an exaggeration. I counted the credit hours myself from the course offerings website. It's a bird..., it's a plane... It's Superprofessor.

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Setting aside the most extreme and abusive cases, broadly, we perceive a large-scale effort to extract more and more hours of work from us, which most often means additional hours in the classroom. Of course, this tendency can be easily read as a response to the budgetary pressures derived from Western's financial dependence on tuition, which is narrowing the margins of maneuverability in the upper administration. To give an example that is both recent and controversial, there are teaching load increases for traditionally-ranked faculty showing low levels of research performance. In my opinion, an action like this is counterproductive: more hours in the classroom do not incentivize research. Exhaustion does not contribute to teaching quality.

Beyond the contradictions involved in handling teaching hours as sticks and carrots, I find problematic the use of data from FARS (Faculty Activity Reporting System) to identify levels of research productivity. This instrument has no place in the contractual explanation of professional recognition (17.3.2 and 18.3.2). Moreover, FARS does not reflect the particularity of each academic field in terms of the process of research production. An entry in FARS means, for many of us, a bureaucratic requirement that plunges us into painful struggles with unfriendly technology. The lack of entries does not necessarily mean lack of work. Think of a book that involves years of data collection or archival research, analysis, writing, review and rewriting, submission and resubmission for publication. How do we take into account the gap in funding access between disciplines? How do we measure the inequalities that derive from the wealth or scarcity of research funds available in each unit, which certainly has an impact on productivity?

Considering this whole issue in its broadest sense, I believe that a constructive way to approach work conditions-related problems and identify long-term solutions lies in our Agreement. I do not refer to extreme cases or contractual violations for which, fortunately, we have procedures to defend a member's rights, such as workload appeal (42.10) or even grievance (12). I am thinking of our right to shared governance, our ability to participate and actively contribute in the shaping of administrative decisions, as prescribed in one of the most beautiful and well-crafted passages of our contract:

By virtue of their command of their disciplines, University faculty have as a unique resource, the abilities to assist in the governance of the departments in which they will exercise their respective disciplines. Faculty, therefore, should participate in the governance of their departments *in order to create and maintain harmonious relationships among colleagues, and to fashion and maintain the departments in such a way as to make them maximally appropriate for instruction, research, service, and other professional activities of the disciplines.* Fundamentally, what is desirable and what is intended by the sections that follow is to ensure meaningful participation by department faculties, with the ultimate power of decision-making by Western, but *with an assurance of procedural regularity and fair play.* (23.1)

It is noteworthy that all of our work is recognized in this article, including the activities that article 42 concentrates in the category of equivalent. The same article 23 establishes the procedures for drafting Department Policy Statements, and clearly indicates, among the permissive policies, that "faculty may also have procedures for measuring workload in terms of credit hours as stipulated in article 42" (23.2.3). This statement, then, gives us the opportunity to explain in detail the equivalences in terms of credit hours for each and every one of our work activities. The Agreement gives us the power to underline the value of our work, the chance to make coherent and equitable recommendations regarding how service and research can be measured. The more de-

tailed, accurate and meticulous our DPS in this respect, the more efficient it will be for us in a friendly conversation about work conditions or in formal appeals.

A clear and well developed instrument for measuring workload can only have mutual benefit. Faculty members will use it to show their contributions to their departments, to the college and to WMU at large. Similarly, department chairs and directors will have a tool that helps them to allocate assignments more equitably. They will also be able to identify inequities or work condition related conflicts before matters become critical and reach Montague House. For higher administration, workload measuring instruments created by the experts (faculty members within their own departments and disciplines) will make much more sense and will be far more efficient than FARS when it comes to taking a look at what is happening on campus and how much we are working.

Obviously, a good instrument for measuring workload will not solve every problem. Nor will it provide more resources out of thin air or give us additional off campus quality time for recreation and relaxation. However, this could serve to get us one step closer to “procedural regularity and fair play” (23.1). In the same way, it could help to promote greater recognition of the value of all the activities that we are undertaking for our students, our departments and WMU, and can only help the administration to better understand how much time we are spending on the uncertain and slippery land of the equivalent.

As I write this note, on a Sunday at home, after having spent Saturday in the nightmare of the new TargetX system for graduate applications, and sending letters of acceptance or rejection to candidates for my department’s M.A. and Ph.D programs, I can imagine how many colleagues are in a similar place. I wonder how many of us are working during the weekend and afterhours, how many will continue working through Spring Break, how many will work in the summer, without salary, advancing their research and advising students or participating in a WMU committee, investing invisible hours that are not always reportable for the magic workload calculation. The truth is that the vast majority of us works hard and devotes countless hours to the equivalent. Judging by the stack of workload appeals and disputes that has been accumulating this semester at Montague House, frustration is rising. Many faculty members are getting tired of it.