

► Bargaining Update: Concerns Over Core Issues Unite Membership

Bonnie Halloran

On April 19, LEO members came together in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint to assess progress at the bargaining table. Members were united in their frustration with the Administration, particularly in their dissatisfaction with the meager and unjust terms of compensation offered by the Administration and in their outrage at the unreasonable nature of the termination of LEO's Vice President, Kirsten Herold, by the English Department in Ann Arbor. These concerns reflect what has been an on-going challenge—the Administration's lack of interest in the reasoning behind our salary and benefits proposals—and what has emerged as a pressing problem—that lecturers are vulnerable to a review process that is less than fair and open.

The discussion of the salary package showed the most variation across the three campuses, with suggestions ranging from no cuts in net pay to improvements in equity pay in relation to high school teachers and the teaching proportion of the median salaries of tenure-track faculty. Some members expressed concerns about the Administration's proposal for a bifurcated system for raises, comprising both a defined percentage in Ann Arbor and a percentage tied to tenured faculty raises in Flint and Dearborn. Others, however, noted that the deep and entrenched differences in the structure and culture of the University's three campuses might necessitate more than one approach to the calculation of lecturers' raises.

Whereas there was spirited debate on the system for raises, the membership as a whole showed its commitment to protecting part-time lecturers in the face of the Administration's benefits proposal, which would put a disproportionate burden of health-care costs on lecturers with a 50-79.9% appointment. There was clear agreement that these lecturers, who—like everyone

else—need affordable health insurance, should be made secure in terms of benefits eligibility. (The financial ramifications of the Administration's proposal for full- and part-time lecturers were laid out in the "Bargaining Update" in *LEO Matters* 8.)

Discussion of the failed remediation plan for Kirsten Herold prompted dismay at the flimsy reasons given for her dismissal. For example, although students made positive comments in their evaluations of her teaching, according to the English Department they didn't give the "right kind" of positive comments. Members were also astonished at the number of failed reviews in English since the formation of LEO: they amount to more than the total number of failed reviews on the entire Flint campus. Concern over Kirsten's termination extends beyond the membership, as the unsolicited letter of support written by Kirsten's students demonstrates. To read their letter and for information on how to support Kirsten by sending your own letter to the English Department and the Administration, go to leounion.org.

In view of the circumstances surrounding Kirsten's dismissal, the membership has called for improvements in the review process to prevent capricious evaluations: standards must be objective and consistent so that a lecturer is not "blindsided." Our Bargaining Team has now entered into contentious discussions with the Administration over this very issue.

In a strong sign of solidarity, the membership on each of the three campuses identified the same issues as essential for the next rounds of bargaining—a good salary package, a fair benefits proposal, and a transparent review process. The pace of the resolution of these issues will determine when we come to a tentative agreement.

Additional bargaining dates have been scheduled for the next few weeks (see "Get Organized" on page 2). Now that most of us have finished teaching for the academic

year, you are encouraged to come to some of these sessions. Big issues are still outstanding and discussion at the table promises to be exciting. Join with your fellow LEO members as we all work to improve our working conditions.

► Bargaining Framework: Time to End the Destructive Status Competition in Higher Education

Ian Robinson

Why do tuition costs at UM—and at other universities like it across the country—keep rising at twice the rate of inflation year after year? Why, despite these rapid increases in revenues, is there such pressure—in good times as well as bad—to replace more expensive professors with less expensive lecturers, and to reduce lecturers' salaries as a share of university expenditures? Why do top university administrators feel so pressured to hold down our compensation that they refuse to engage in a discussion of pay equity, even when the merits of our case are plain enough to others?

Former LSA Deans John Cross and Edie Goldenberg, in *Off-Track Profs: Nontenured Teachers in Higher Education* (MIT Press, 2009), argue that the most important reason is that the top research (R1) universities are engaged in a kind of arms race to attain (or maintain) top rankings vis-à-vis one another (60-4). Along some dimensions, competition is constructive. For example, a hundred universities can offer an excellent undergraduate education, and if one develops new programs to improve that education, others can copy it, resulting in quality improvements in these institutions. Competition to achieve useful, concrete outcomes can thus lift all boats.

It is just the opposite with competition over rankings. Only five of these hundred universities can be ranked as the top five: for



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a university to move up, another must fall. The zero-sum quality of such competition raises the stakes dramatically, while eroding the benefits. Compare actual arms races, which constitute a special case of efforts to improve one's position in a status hierarchy. At the end of a such a race, each participating nation has spent a larger share of its income on, say, battleships that are useful only for sending other battleships to the bottom of the sea, and no nation is more secure than it was at the outset of the race. Arms races thus tend to induce destructive forms of competition.

Analogously, status competition among universities, by driving up tuition costs, results in the matriculation of fewer and fewer students from the bottom two thirds of the family income distribution. As a result, class diversity in the student population is reduced, which harms society in two ways. First, as UM argued in our US Supreme Court defense of affirmative action, racial and

gender diversity is conducive to many kinds of valuable learning; it is no different with class diversity. Second, it is contrary to our fundamental commitment to equality of opportunity—and thus, unjust—to ration access to education in R1 institutions based on family income. Such a policy reinforces the injustice of the K-12 public school funding model under which richer local communities get better resourced schools. Also, status competition drives the effort to create more lower-status faculty and, in turn, legitimizes lower pay, no matter what the cost to the faculty in terms of decreased collegiality and increased personal stress.

Cross and Goldenberg believe that universities would be better off if they could end this destructive competition, but they do not see how it can be done. Universities cannot just stop competing, they say, because this would “entail the loss of outstanding faculty and outstanding student prospects along with them” (62).

Yet there is an answer: reorienting the goals of the university toward improving concrete outcomes rather than status rankings. Such goals should include improving the quality of undergraduate education and increasing the amount and quality of research that addresses pressing social and economic problems in Michigan, the USA, and the world. All R1 universities could improve on these scores without begging other universities, faculty, and students. The goals universities pursue are a political choice that top administrators and—at UM—regents make. In this domain as in others, politics determine the scope and the rules of competitive markets. The real challenge is to build the political coalition of faculty, students, and citizens that will induce university leaders to realign their goals along the lines suggested. This will take time, but the status quo is unsustainable. We have to get off this accelerating treadmill. The only question is when and the answer is—the sooner the better.



LEO Links

leounion.org

theleosshare.blogspot.com

twitter.com/leounion

Facebook: Lecturers' Employee Organization

LEO office: 734-995-1813



Why Me?

Greg Sax, Philosophy, Ann Arbor

Member, LEO Bargaining Team;
Member, LEO Benefits Subcommittee

My life inside UM: *I've taught all sorts of philosophy and logic to Michigan undergraduates and graduate students under a number of labels: first as a TA (as we used to call them), then as a GSI (and founding member of GEO), next as a Visiting Assistant Professor, and finally as Lecturer. Now, though, my department confines me to introductory courses in general philosophy, the philosophy of science, and logic.*

My life outside UM: *Hmm... I used to do a lot of interesting things when not working, but I gave up most of them for my dissertation and haven't replaced them since. I am still obsessed with acquiring beautiful knick-knacks, bric-a-brac, and curios, and have crammed so many into my tiny apartment that it has been transformed from a residence to a chaotic museum. And, the older I get, the more I understand and desire the pleasures of wine.*

Why me? *LEO worked hard to stop my department when it tried to cut my pay, and out of gratitude I responded to the Union's subsequent pleas for members to attend meetings and conventions. But after seeing more of the University's institutionalized animus against lecturers, and especially its nasty malfeasance over lecturers' pay raises, it's my anger and dismay that keep me involved.*

My favorite...time of the day is 8 p.m. Because... *that's when my girlfriend and I stop work and throw ourselves into the pleasant creativity of cooking dinner. Then we open a bottle of good wine; set out the good china (from Treasure Mart), my favorite stemware (collected from German flea markets), and my favorite flatware (Pott, from Germany); light the candles; and dine.*

Get Organized!

- *At this point, three more bargaining sessions are scheduled. Bottom line issues remain on the table. The team needs your support more than ever—come for an hour or two. We continue to meet at the School of Social Work.*
- *Thursday, May 13
9:30-5:30*
- *Friday, May 14
12-5:30*
- *Thursday, June 3
9:30-5:30*