

► Bargaining Update: The True Costs of the Administration's Benefits Proposal

Kirsten Herold

As most of you know, the Administration is in the process of shifting more health insurance costs to employees through an increase in both co-pays and co-premiums. It imposed these increases on all non-union employees as of January 1, and it hopes to do the same for the campus unions when their contracts come up for renegotiation, as is now the case for LEO.

LEO objects strongly to this proposal. Not only will it produce a sizeable cut in take-home pay for nearly all lecturers, it is regressive, placing the heaviest economic burden on those who earn the least.

The overall goal of the proposal is to change the current 80% employer-20% employee split in coverage to a 70% employer-30% employee split—"on average." But not all types of expenses reflect this ratio, and not all categories of employees are treated equally. In fact, "on average" masks serious inequity.

The shift in co-pays is simple: an increase from \$15 to \$20 for office visits, from \$50 to \$75 for emergency room visits, and from \$30 to \$45 for top-tier drugs such as Lipitor. Although this aspect of the plan will cause hardship for many lecturers, we have chosen not to challenge it.

The shift in co-premiums is more complicated, problematic, and urgent for us to resist. For full-timers, newly defined as those whose appointments are 80% or above, the Administration has created a modest sliding scale, along which those who earn less than the median income for all UM employees pay slightly less than those who earn more than the median. The formula is complex, not only because of the differential by income but also because the Administration has changed the percentage of the contribution it will make toward covering dependents. The Administration claims to have

been somewhat progressive in designing the contribution scale, but the adjustment for the lowest-paid full-timers does not make up for the more regressive aspects of the proposal.

The most dramatic impact of the proposal will be felt by part-timers whose appointment is between 50% and 79.9%. For these employees, the Administration will contribute only 80% of the amount it contributes for full-timers. A comparison of the contributions for solo coverage (after the first year of implementation) is instructive: no full-timer will pay more than 10% of the premium; no part-timer will pay less than 26%. Furthermore, dependent adults for part-timers will be covered at a 53-47% split and minors at a 60-40% split—at a lower percentage, that is, than the dependents of any full-timers. The overall goal of the proposed 70-30% split, as it turns out, is achieved in large measure through the disproportionate burden placed on all part-time benefits-eligible employees and their families.

What does this difference mean in real dollars? For a full-time employee electing Premier Care and covering no dependents, the new premium will be \$29 to \$41 a month depending on income, up from the current \$18—or between \$132 and \$276 per year for solo coverage. If the employee is covering a partner and kids, the co-premium range will be \$246 to \$311 per month, depending on income, up from the current \$209. Thus, the annual cost of family coverage would increase by \$444 for the lowest-paid full-timers and by \$1224 for the highest-paid full-timers.

For a part-timer, the increases are more dramatic: \$105 a month more to cover just oneself, \$424 a month more to cover a family—for an increased annual cost of \$1046 and \$2582 a year respectively.

Not only would the impact of this proposal be harsh, but a significant number of lecturers would be affected. Part-timers are not a stable population. In any given semester, 200 lecturers may have 50-79.9% appointments—but these are not necessarily the same 200

people every semester. All together around 300 lecturers a year, or about 25% of our membership, are regularly affected in this way. Anyone dropping below the 80% appointment threshold in a given semester thus would experience a dramatic increase in health-care costs, at the precise time that his or her income drops. Moreover, anyone below 80% in the Winter would be assessed at the higher co-premium rate during the spring-summer benefits bridge period.

On multiple grounds, the Administration's proposal is unfair and regressive—doing the most financial harm to those least able to pay! For more information, visit leounion.org/no-cuts.

► Bargaining Framework: Are Lecturers Facing an Erosion of Academic Freedom?

Ian Robinson

At the turn of the 20th century, university faculty—like most other workers in the U.S. then and now—were "at-will" employees. They could be fired whenever their employer deemed it convenient, for any reason. Faculty who challenged the political or economic status quo were often fired; many more self-censored rather than suffer the same fate. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) set out to change this state of affairs. Its 1915 Declaration of Principles laid out the rationale for what it called "academic freedom":

The responsibility of the university teacher is primarily to the public itself, and to the judgment of its own profession; and while, with respect to certain external conditions of his vocation, he accepts a responsibility to the authorities of the institution in which he serves, in the essentials of his professional activity his duty is to the wider public to which the institution itself is morally amenable.... University teachers should be understood to be,



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Our students are our biggest supporters— don't hesitate to answer their questions about where their tuition dollars go!

with respect to the conclusions reached and expressed by them, no more subject to the control of the trustees, than are judges subject to the control of the President, with respect to their decisions.

In short, academic freedom protects competent faculty against pressures from university management who wish to constrain or direct teaching and research missions in ways that conflict with the responsibility faculty have to increase the share of the population with a well-grounded and sophisticated understanding of how the world works and how it can be changed for the better. Students are a key component of the public whose interest faculty serve and protect.

It took many years of struggle to push university management to acknowledge the concept of academic freedom, and to create a system in which all competent faculty gained the tenure that the AAUP argued was necessary to protect. By the 1950s and 1960s, tenure-track jobs were the near-universal standard in American higher education. From that point forward, however, the tenure-track share of teaching jobs began to decline. Today, only about 35% of all faculty in public colleges and universities have tenure or a tenure-track job. There is now a deep tension between the

professional ideal of academic freedom and the reality that most higher education faculty are again, as they were 100 years ago, at-will employees.

One response has been the formation of faculty unions. Collective agreements can include an academic freedom article and/or articles spelling out the criteria that will determine whether employee contracts are renewed. The LEO agreement contains articles of both kinds, and so, offers two sorts of protections for lecturers' academic freedom, though the articles fall well short of the protection offered by tenure.

In the current round of bargaining, UM's Administration has decided to challenge an important aspect of lecturers' academic freedom: our capacity to talk with students about how the Administration treats us, and through us, them. The Administration argues that any such discussion deviates from the subject matter that we are paid to teach, and as such, constitutes a "work stoppage" that violates the "No Strike" article in our agreement. They have said this of our in-class teach-ins in the past, but this time they want to modify the "No Strike" article to provide for various penalties against the union and individual members should teach-ins (or anything else that they deem a "work stoppage") occur.

We reject this effort to restrict our academic freedom. We have a professional responsibility to help our students understand the world they live in, including their university. Discussions of curriculum and pedagogy, of the factors shaping them and ways in which they could be improved, are among the topics of in-class exchange that are necessary if our students are to gain such an understanding. We will not betray them. The AAUP fought long and hard for the principle of academic freedom, as protected by tenure. We, the non-tenure-track faculty, have paid a high price for the erosion of the AAUP's power. But those of us who have organized ourselves into unions have a greater capacity for collective action than the AAUP ever had. It's time now for us to pick up the torch.

Get Organized!

- *Email fellow lecturers in your department to remind them to attend bargaining and membership meetings.*
- *Call LEO staff and tell them how you would like to help.*
- *Wear your LEO button.*
- *Put the "LEO bug" on your final class papers. Download one from the LEO website.*



LEO Links
leounion.org

theleosshare.
blogspot.com

twitter.com/
leounion

Facebook:
Lecturers'
Employee
Organization

LEO office:
734-995-1813

Why Me?

Sheryl Edwards, Political Science, Dearborn

Chair, LEO-Dearborn; Member, LEO Bargaining Team

My life inside UM: *I teach a variety of courses: American Government, Comparative Governments, International Relations, the American Executive, Public Opinion—wherever they need me to fill in. I also volunteer for the Women's Mentorship Program, Blueprints (a leadership program for students), Martin Luther King Day, etc. I teach about 260 students a year.*

My life outside UM: *I have a very large family, with whom I spend a lot of time. My three grandchildren are the lights of my life. They stay with me for at least three weeks a year. I accompany them to Cedar Point yearly (and Disney this spring break!), go camping with them (another one of my favorite activities), and take them to museums. My two dogs take a lot of my time. I walk them for at least half an hour every day, even if it is freezing, snowing, or raining. I am also an avid gardener, spending up to fourteen hours a day outside when I am not working.*

Why me? *When I was first approached to join the Union, I was third in line, waiting my turn to use the computer that three lecturers were assigned to at the same time. Virtually no one in the department knew my name. I knew I could be out the next semester for no reason, and I was teaching at two other schools. I was ready to become a real person at the University. Since then, I have been very happy to help other lecturers. A side benefit has been getting to know so many lecturers whom I would never have met without LEO.*

My favorite...thing is being a grandma. Because... *it gives me hope for the future. I feel I am contributing to the future by instilling values and learning in the children, and they make me feel alive—and younger!*