

TAKING STOCK

Your bargaining team has met with management eight times since late March, and at our last meeting on August 7th we agreed to put no more new proposals on the table. From here on, any proposals will be counter-proposals concerning issues already opened in bargaining. So now that we know what the bargaining universe looks like, this seems like a good time to take stock.

If you read our message from late May entitled “The Soul of a University” (available here: [The Soul of a University](#)), you will remember that management had presented an unprecedented series of proposals which are all about **increasing management control, wringing savings out of unionized staff, and situating UMass squarely in the national race to the bottom**. Those concessionary proposals remain on the table.

At the bargaining session last week, there was continued discussion of tuition benefits for employees, spouses and dependents. The union reiterated our stance that **continuing ed fees should be 100% waived for employees, spouses and dependents**—as they are for staff at UMass Lowell—rather than the current 50% fee waiver. This is especially necessary as more and more programs are shifted to continuing ed, forcing employees to pay significant tuition for courses and degrees which used to be a free employee benefit.

We presented a proposal which would encourage staff and departments to take advantage of various “**alternative work options**” (telecommuting, flexible schedules, etc.), something which has proven successful at institutions across the country and which will become more urgent at the Boston campus as transportation chaos grows.

We also presented a proposal aimed at improving economic benefits for our non-exempt staff (those who earn overtime pay), and we addressed some issues concerning our remote staff (those whose jobs are entirely off-site, often outside of Massachusetts).

MONEY

On May Day, the union proposed salary increases of 3.5% each July 1 for 2014, 2015, and 2016; these would be across-the-board cost-of living increases, with no portion skimmed off the top for so-called “merit pay.”

Management responded on August 7th with a proposal for increases of 1.75% every six months, thereby delaying half of our raises for six months and reducing the increase to our take-home pay by approximately 25%.

Still worse, though, **management proposes to make 50% of all increases “merit”-based**. Allowing campus administrations to create huge slush funds to distribute at their whim is not in the interest of any of us. We’ve had enough experience at UMass Amherst with abuse of “merit pay” to understand that **no fair system exists for its distribution**. Coincidentally, the Board of Higher Education just signed a contract with the Association of Professional Administrators (representing professional staff through the

state university and college system), and their salary increases will be distributed across the board with no diversion to “whim pay.” What is it about the University of Massachusetts that the campuses continue to insist on skimming off the top in order to create these slush funds?

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

What’s at stake in management’s proposals to eliminate comp time, eliminate the Salary Administration Program, increase “merit pay,” reduce vacation and sick leave benefits for new employees, eliminate on-call pay for many staff, decrease access to Family Medical Leave and our Sick Leave Bank, weaken hiring opportunities for internal candidates, allow a company doctor to decide whether we’re fit to work, and eliminate the notice period for less-than-satisfactory evaluations? **They would all make UMass a much worse place to work:** less rewarding, less collegial, and above all, less fair. We don’t intend to let that happen, and we hope you don’t either.

We are not a union which sells out new employees just coming in the door in order to protect those who have already built their careers at UMass. We do not turn our backs on those of us who need help. We work together to raise ourselves up as a whole, both because it’s right, and because we’re stronger that way. We’re not fighting for anything outlandish—only benefits, working conditions, opportunities and pay which will enable all of us to serve our students and provide for our families throughout the long and productive careers we relish and deserve.

*If you share that vision and want to be part of that effort, now is the time. **Look for the petitions going around your campus.** Sign one and spread the word! And contact your campus Contract Action Team representative below to find out how you can join us in this battle:*

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or

your PSU Area Rep

In solidarity, your PSU bargaining team

Anneta Argyres (Boston)

Sarah Bartlett (Boston)

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