

NEIU UPI

Newsletter / Update

September 12, 2018

Thank you to everyone who attended our first membership meeting of the new academic year. I know there were some conflicts with other events at the same time, so these meeting notes are to fill in folks who were not there, and to follow up on some of the issues that were discussed.

We thanked our outgoing and recent leadership – Tim Barnett and Sophia Mihic --for all they have done to carry us through the recent challenges. We introduced new officers and members of the executive board (see the list below), as well as our two NEIU UPI members who are officers of the UPI Local – Steve Frankel (Biology) who is VP and Liz Villareal (Proyecto Pa'Lante) who is Secretary.

State of the Union

We are emerging from the most extreme budget crisis of the past several years, but the new reality we face is still uncertain in terms of what it will mean for our work lives. Our new university president, Dr. Gloria Gibson, offers hope of leadership that will take us in positive directions. However, the current political economy of Illinois and NEIU's enrollment challenges likely mean that the austerity regime will continue for quite a while. Everyone wonders what decisions might be made based on the Forward 150 project.

FASTFund

Last winter I attended a *Bargaining for the Common Good* gathering, along with a few UPI people from other campuses. One result of this is that I wrote a grant proposal to the Believe in Students Foundation, and we have won a matching grant of \$5000 to start a UPI-run emergency assistance fund for students. This is to be a quick, low-bureaucracy way to help our students who run into a crisis that interferes with their ability to continue in school – a threatened eviction, a car repair, utility shut-off, etc. This reflects the values of Bargaining for the Common Good because it demonstrates that our commitment to the union is about more than just our own pay and work conditions. Compassion and helping our students are an expression of our collective values as a union working toward social justice.

The Power of Membership in the Union

Let's all make sure that everyone understands the value of our union, and persuade them to be full-fledged, dues-paying, voting members! The Janus decision by the US Supreme Court in June has done away with fair share fees by people who choose not to be members of the union. However, these people are still members of the *bargaining unit* and the union still represents them in all the same ways as union members. I ask every member to be an organizer – talk to each other about the union and ask your colleagues to join if they are not members! We will be continuing last year's project of getting members to sign the new UPI cards, but your old card is still valid. We are in good shape, with about 85% of the bargaining unit being members of the union.

We are currently negotiating the MOU (memorandum of understanding) revising the current CBA to reflect the legal changes brought about by the Janus decision.

Elections 2018!

It's an election year and your involvement is important! Not only do we have the opportunity to unseat the governor who has been so disastrous for public higher education and other public services (e.g., child care, mental health, senior services), but we need state representatives who have higher education on their minds! UPI will be doing

some voter registration tabling over the coming weeks. Please come help! Include civic engagement announcements in your classes (you can't advocate a candidate – see ethics rules – but you CAN teach students about the value of becoming informed voters). If you can sign up for a couple of hours of phone-banking or canvassing, that is even better! Our union affiliate the IFT is organizing these efforts.

Union visibility in electoral politics is part of the currency of power to influence elected officials, and as you know, who the elected official are and how they see public higher education matters to us very directly!

Our Contract and Negotiations

Our current CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement) lasts until August 2019, so now is the time for us to start considering our approach to negotiating the next contract. To start that process, UPI leaders will be collecting your views about what is most important as we look at next steps. A survey will be sent out through the off campus email list. Please respond! We need to know from you what is working and what is not! Following the survey, there will be additional conversations and updates on the process.

Supporting the Prison Strike

NEIU has restarted a degree program in an Illinois prison for the first time in decades through our University Without Walls program. Incarcerated people work for ridiculous, exploitative wages -- our NEIU students who are incarcerated work -- running the prison -- for less than a dollar a day in wages. Since access to public education is central to social justice, we support those striking for

their right to education and fair compensation for their labor.

We took a sense of those gathered at the meeting to support and endorse the 2018 National Prison Strike as an act of solidarity with those engaged in these struggles.

Time Sheets

We had a lively discussion of the new requirement that instructors turn in time sheets. Reactions range from outrage to confusion to resignation. Here are the facts, but you can read my commentary for other thoughts: Auditors of the university have demanded documentation of our work hours.

Administrative and professional people (including deans and provost-level people) have been doing these for 8 years; three years ago TP faculty and RP were required to start. Now instructors are included.

Compliance can be easy or complicated. The easy approach is to take the formula for the number of hours that corresponds to your percentage of employment, and fill out your time sheet with that number of hours in each week. If a university holiday falls on one of your usual workdays (e.g., you teach on Monday and Labor Day is on Monday), then be sure to put some of your hours on that day. If you miss a teaching day due to illness, record the hours for that day with the sick leave code.

If your contract is for	Include this many hours per week:
100%	37.5
75%	28.25
50%	18.75
25%	9.25

NEIU UPI Executive Board

Nancy Matthews	President
Nikolas O Hoel	Executive VP
Katy Smith	Treasurer
George Gerdow	Secretary
Rachel Birmingham	CAS - TP
Essam Elshafie	CBM - TP
Sunni Ali	COE - TP

Tyler J Zimmer	CAS - Inst
William S Escalante	ASP
Mary C Thill	Library RP
Maria E de la Torre	TP/RP Constituency
Shan Wang	TP/RP Constituency
Gary Gaspard	Instructor Constituency
Melanie Bujan	Instructor Constituency

Further Thoughts about the Time Sheets

When TPs had to start doing time sheets 3 years ago, we felt the same outrage and initially many of us felt the urge to record actual work hours, no matter how many or how distributed over 24/7 weeks, but that urge quickly gave way to pragmatism, because the work of actually keeping track becomes another time-consuming task. Then the state budget crisis hit us, and this problem receded behind the more urgent issues we faced.

I share the deeper concerns that many people have expressed about the danger of creeping surveillance and monitoring, not to mention the complete disconnect and disrespect this policy reflects about our actual professional work. We are not hourly workers, so a time sheet is always going to misrepresent our actual work. We are not lawyers or accountants working on a "billable hours" basis. When we put in more hours, it is because we have internalized professional standards of quality, it doesn't mean we get paid more.

The concern that at some point in the future, these records that are essentially legal fictions, might be used against us in unanticipated ways is valid, even as it is fairly unlikely. Recent developments of CMS now using a private corporation to do its auditing of health insurance and the havoc it has created for people employed less than full time is an example of a change that can happen that can create new conditions.

What, then, shall we do? If the union membership wants to take this on, I will commit to researching this whole project further. What actually happens to the time sheets? Who has access to them? How does our HR use them? How are other universities dealing with this, etc. I don't see how we don't have standing for grievances (someone can correct me on this if I am wrong). However, if we want to resist this policy collectively, we will need to do a lot more specific research and political work before we commit to that course of action.

In the meantime, I recommend following your conscience. I plan to submit my time sheets, for the reasons above. I will most likely continue to do so in a somewhat lackadaisical way (I realized this week when the issue came up that I haven't turned one in since January). I have still gotten all my paychecks.

-- Nancy Matthews