



A Union of Professionals

AFT HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM AND POLICY COUNCIL ACTIVITIES MARCH 2009

This is a summary of the AFT Higher Education activities monitored by the higher education program and policy council (PPC). The PPC, which meets three times a year, currently consists of 29 elected leaders of AFT higher education affiliates. Members are chosen for a two-year term by the AFT executive council following each AFT Convention. In addition, PPC deliberations are informed by a number of advisory bodies consisting of PPC members and non-members, including advisory committees on part-time/ adjunct faculty, full-time nontenure-track faculty and professional staff, as well as the Alliance of Graduate Education Locals.

Fight for America's Future

Higher education is a key component of the new AFT national campaign to promote greater investment, not disinvestment, in education and critical public services during the current economic crisis. The campaign, spearheaded by AFT president Randi Weingarten, is called ***Fight for America's Future: It's Dollars and Sense***. AFT Executive Council members from higher education were among those who helped shape the campaign. In January, the PPC was briefed by top AFT staff about the campaign, and PPC members, in turn, briefed national staff on the challenges confronting their affiliates.

Throughout the twists and turns of the legislative process that produced the federal stimulus bill, AFT lobbyists worked to ensure that substantial funding would be available for higher education. Higher education affiliates were active participants in the Fight for America's Future campaign, joining their colleagues in sending thousands of letters to Congress as well as writing letters and demonstrating in their own states for postsecondary investment. In the months ahead, the PPC will continue to work closely with AFT staff on stimulus-related state and national activities.

Academic Workforce – Faculty and College Excellence (FACE) Campaign

At the union's higher education conference in Portland, Oregon two years ago, the AFT launched FACE, a national campaign to reverse the crisis in instructional staffing. FACE is designed to achieve two goals simultaneously:

- Phase in full equity in compensation for contingent faculty members; and
- Ensure, after a phase-in period, that 75 percent of undergraduate classes (or an appropriate number determined at the state or local level) are taught by full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty without job loss for existing faculty.

Initiated primarily as a legislative campaign, the PPC expanded FACE in 2008 based on a recognition that there are many different avenues to achieve academic staffing goals, and that what works in one state or locality may not be the best way to pursue FACE in another. FACE is now a multi-faceted

campaign focused on five different areas: political action/legislation; collective bargaining; public outreach; research and organizing.

Political Action: Despite a tough economic climate, AFT state federations are still working the state legislative process to promote FACE legislation. AFT Washington and AFT Oregon, for example, recently pushed for the introduction of FACE bills, testified at hearings on the legislation and are still lobbying on behalf of this legislation. Other states are building support for bills that are already filed. AFT Pennsylvania is conducting a comprehensive state-wide study on academic staffing, which will serve as the basis for trying to move this legislation. Other state federations, such as the Alaska Public Employees Association/AFT and AFT Wisconsin, are preparing to join the FACE legislative campaign for the first time.

Bargaining: AFT affiliates around the country have already used the collective bargaining process to achieve or move toward the goals of FACE. Based on those experiences and on the assumption that collective bargaining arouses more member interest than any other union activity, AFT Higher Education is producing a toolkit to help affiliates integrate the goals of FACE into their collective bargaining campaigns. The toolkit will be available later this year.

Research: The PPC has promoted a very active research agenda for FACE. Along those lines, in the last six months, the AFT produced a report called *Reversing Course*, which attracted wide attention in the media for the data it supplied on the exploitation and overuse of contingent faculty. National conference packets also include copies of a new research report, which will be the first in an annual series of academic staffing under the overall title, *American Academic*. In addition, AFT Higher Education is in the process of conducting a national survey of part-time/adjunct faculty (not just AFT members) to develop a more detailed profile of the demographics, characteristics, working conditions and aspirations of part-time/adjunct faculty members around the country.

Public Outreach: AFT Higher Education has also been ramping up electronic FACE communications through the FACE Web site (www.aftface.org), the e-newsletter FACE Bulletin, and by using social media platforms such as Facebook. The PPC has approved a new initiative to be unveiled very shortly called “Just Ask.” Just Ask is an initiative aimed at students, parents and counselors, urging them to ask prospective colleges how many full-time faculty are teaching undergraduates and how the institution treats contingent faculty members in terms of compensation and professional support.

FACE-related Organizing: Finally it all comes down to organizing—organizing more contingent faculty into our union and organizing our unions for this fight. Contingent faculty organizing is one of the AFT’s top priorities (more below), and all of the FACE initiatives are oriented toward activating more of the union to work on issues of academic staffing. In addition, the AFT organizing committee, working with the higher education PPC, is exploring strategies to strengthen the economic and organizational structure of locals representing contingent faculty.

Stronger Together: The PPC is concerned that a key obstacle to successful FACE campaigning is the negative perception higher education constituencies sometimes have about each other in the workplace and in the union itself. The AFT hopes to develop a program called “Stronger Together” to break down barriers and build unity in the campus workforce. The Saturday morning plenary session at this conference will initiate an ongoing discussion about barriers to solidarity and how to overcome them.

Other Contingent Faculty Issues: As the recession deepens, issues of job security for contingent faculty become more important than ever. The PPC believes there is nothing inconsistent about ensuring fair treatment and due process for contingent instructors employed on campus and furthering the FACE goal of increasing the ranks of full-time tenure-track faculty. The AFT will continue to pursue job security issues in the coming year and will work on the federal front to alter language in the federal unemployment program, which has often blocked contingent faculty from obtaining unemployment insurance when they are not teaching.

Academic Freedom / Free Exchange on Campus

The Free Exchange on Campus coalition, coordinated by the AFT, as well as last year's political and electoral work, has allowed us to turn the corner at least temporarily on the attacks on academic freedom perpetuated by the likes of David Horowitz and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. The Free Exchange on Campus coalition has beaten back attempts to legislate an Academic Bill of Rights, or so-called "intellectual diversity" bill, in each of the 30 states in which it has been introduced up until now. Furthermore, the results of the 2008 election suggest that the "intellectual diversity" movement has run out of steam for the moment—this year only two ABOR-like bills have been introduced, and both have been pronounced "dead on arrival." Free Exchange on Campus is still active in state legislatures, however, in opposition to so-called "academic freedom" bills, which would expand the definition of academic freedom to allow for the teaching of "alternatives" to evolution.

The AFT has also been active promoting academic freedom internationally. Last fall, the AFT and its Free Exchange coalition partners provided information on the lessons of our fight against the Academic Bill of Rights to an Australian parliamentary committee investigating "liberal bias" in Australian universities. Like their colleagues in state legislatures in the United States, members of the Australian committee found no evidence to merit enacting ABOR-type legislation there. Also, in 2008 and 2009, the AFT has reinforced its strong opposition to academic boycotts of scholars and institutions as inimical to academic freedom.

Faculty and Staff Diversity Working Group

In 2008, the PPC initiated a multi-year effort to bring more visibility to the issue of affirmative action and faculty and staff diversity. The goal is to prepare academic unions to confront and remove obstacles to diversity in faculty and staff hiring and retention. To accomplish this, the PPC formed a small working group that has met a number of times to discuss these issues and began developing recommendations for the union. At the closing plenary conference session on Sunday, members will hear a brief presentation about the working group's findings and progress, after which participants will talk in groups about various obstacles to diversity and how to overcome them. Results of the plenary discussion will be taken back to members of the working group and the PPC as the project moves forward.

Professional Staff Issues

AFT Higher Education and the PPC are exploring how to strengthen the union's activities in support of higher education professional staff members. This conference will include a number of workshops on professional staff issues such as promotion, security on campus, bullying on the job and the

greening of the campus, which will be followed by a professional staff forum on Saturday afternoon. Participants in the forum will discuss issues such as internal organizing, collective bargaining and promoting respect among constituencies, as well as how to implement the AFT standards of good practice for professional staff. Recommendations from the forum will be brought back for further action by the PPC.

Accountability, Assessment and Accreditation

The imposition of “outcomes measures” for institutional performance, along with standardized student assessments, is a hot issue in higher education today. Another key question along these lines is whether regional accrediting agencies can or should impose an outcomes agenda on accredited institutions. AFT Higher Education is exploring the feasibility of developing a new electronic mechanism for collecting and sharing information about developments in accountability, including critical analysis of proposals arising from the states, accrediting agencies and the federal government.

Political/Legislative Activities

After seven years of work, Congress finally reauthorized the federal Higher Education Act in 2008. A couple of years earlier, PPC members met with their counterparts in the NEA to develop joint legislative priorities related to reauthorization. PPC members worked with AFT Higher Education and the legislative department to promote these priorities through the long lawmaking process, including appropriations and budget reconciliation bills which made significant changes to strengthen student aid programs.

On the electoral front, AFT higher education affiliates worked with our union brothers and sisters to elect Barack Obama and Joe Biden, as well as the new 111th Congress. To begin recognizing the important political action work of our affiliates, both legislatively and electorally, the PPC has launched the new higher education political action award, which is being given for the first time at this conference to 15 locals. Recipients of the award are listed in your program.

Collective Bargaining Assistance

The PPC subcommittee on collective bargaining has been focused on expanding AFT electronic resources for local leaders and also on providing a mechanism by which local leaders and bargainers can communicate with each other on questions about negotiations and contracts. To that end, AFT Higher Education has:

- Piloted an online healthcare benefits seminar for AFT higher education leaders that was created in conjunction with the National Labor College.
- Created the AFT Higher Education Data Center (<http://highereddata.aft.org>), which provides 10-year trend data on every college and university in the country in areas such as salary, instructional staff levels, institutional expenditures and much more, as well as 5-year trend data on state budgets.
- Worked to ensure that the AFT Collective Bargaining Contract Database (<http://www.aftlaborcontracts.org>) has hundreds of current higher education contracts in it for bargainers to use either for comparing contracts or seeking ideas for new contract language.

- Established a Higher Education Collective Bargaining Listserv for local presidents and bargainers to ask questions, share information and strategize about negotiations. To join this listserv simply have your local president send a request to AFT Higher Education at highered@aft.org.

Organizing Activities

PPC members participate in planning and executing virtually all higher education organizing campaigns. A PPC organizing subcommittee recommends priorities for higher education organizing and monitors the union's commitment to organize every segment of higher education workers, particularly contingent academic employees. The AFT is also exploring prospects for organizing major state universities jointly with the AAUP, as well as new organizing possibilities among professional staff. Currently, there are over ten campaigns underway or under consideration that target over 25,000 potential new members. Over the past five years, AFT higher education locals were certified at approximately new 50 institutions, adding almost 19,000 new members. Over two-thirds of these have been contingent faculty and instructors. The AFT is also looking at opportunities to overturn the NLRB *Brown* decision, which had the effect of cutting off collective bargaining rights for graduate employees at private universities, as well as the Supreme Court *Yeshiva* decision, which cast a pall over efforts to unionize the faculty at private institutions.

Higher Education Conferences

Finally, the PPC plays a principal role in planning the annual AFT National Higher Education Issues Conference and the annual AFT Higher Education Special Leadership Conference for new leaders. PPC members also represent the union at numerous conferences and meetings each year, including the Hunter College Conference on Collective Bargaining in Higher Education, meetings of Education International and the bi-annual conference of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor.