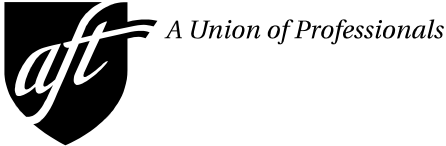


THE AFT  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
PROGRAM AND POLICY  
COUNCIL  
STRATEGIC PLAN



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## *Background: Our Principles*

AFT stands for the best in American higher education. We stand for student access and diversity. We stand for public higher education—we believe higher education is not just a personal benefit but a public good that requires strong financial support from the body politic. We believe that there should be a wide diversity of colleges and universities with many different educational programs and standards. At the same time, we believe that higher education should be broad-based and not solely vocational in nature.

We believe that higher education faculty and staff should have primary authority over decision making in their areas of expertise. We believe that the corps of full-time tenured faculty should be expanded, not diminished. All college faculty members should be chosen under comparable high standards. Higher education faculty should be in charge of shaping the institution's curriculum and academic standards. Faculty members should have academic freedom in conducting teaching and research and should control their own intellectual property. Tenure and shared governance are the building blocks of academic excellence. Individual faculty members should be in complete charge of evaluating their students' work.

We are a union of professionals. We are committed to advance union organizing and collective bargaining throughout the higher education workforce. We believe that all elements of the faculty—full-time tenured faculty, part-time/adjunct faculty and full-time non-tenured faculty—deserve equity in compensation and professional supports. Graduate teaching and research employees deserve compensation and professional treatment commensurate to the contribution they make to the institutions. Professional staff deserve better pay and benefits, more promotional opportunities and a greater role in decision making in their areas of expertise. To confront negative administrative practices, we believe it is essential to build greater solidarity and mutual support within the higher education workforce.

Every day we are defending these principles, advancing our members' rights and organizing throughout higher education. We have an ambitious program at the national level and we've enjoyed many successes. However, the higher education program and policy council decided to develop this strategic plan out of an understanding that, despite our successes, key trends in higher education are still not going in our direction.

- Public officials who do not share our values have assumed control of policymaking in many venues across the country, including the Presidency.

- From localities to state governments to the federal government, public services (and therefore, public colleges and universities) are being starved of funding and sometimes privatized. Funding, particularly at the state level, is down substantially. Public agencies are aggressively seeking freezes or givebacks of hard-won gains in salary and benefits, especially health benefits. We're seeing a building drumbeat for higher education vouchers and charter colleges, as well as privatization of administrative services and even basic education, etc. It sometimes seems as though every week brings a new scheme to weaken the academy.
- Higher education institutions and faculty are being routinely demonized in the public domain. Governance rights are being removed and tenure recommendations are increasingly ignored. Under the guise of "accountability," some public officials want to impose externally-developed curricula and measures of college success. Some are calling for the installation of standardized tests (which would bring with them standardized curricula) on college campuses. There are even calls to promote the hiring of Republican faculty to correct a so-called ideological imbalance instead of hiring solely on the basis of scholarly merit.
- There has been an explosion in the number of part-time/adjunct faculty and full-time non-tenure track faculty. Full-time tenured faculty lines are going unfilled. Part-time/adjunct faculty are paid a small proportion of full-time salaries, receive little or no benefits and have few if any professional supports. Graduate employees are being asked to teach an increasing proportion of courses with absurdly poor pay and benefits. Too often, we are seeing the full-time and part-time faculty looking upon each other as enemies, worried that any advances for one segment of the faculty will lead to setbacks for another.
- The number of for-profit higher educational institutions is growing. Most of these institutions offer a more standardized and vocational course of study, often in cyberspace. The Bush Administration favors the elimination of all rules limiting fraud and abuse in the proprietary sector.

It is against this backdrop that the program and policy council developed the following strategic plan.

## *Five Priority Categories*

The PPC agreed in January that the priorities we need to pursue fall into five categories:

- Win greater government support of public higher education— Strengthen advocacy, political action and the union’s message.
- Expand higher education organizing—“Grow” the union and expand member activism.
- Protect faculty and professional control of teaching and research.
- Counteract the academic staffing crisis / Structure the academic workforce to increase full-time tenure lines and achieve pay equity and professional rights for all.
- Build bargaining capacity / Strengthen the ability of affiliates to bargain effectively.

Most of these goals have been priorities of AFT Higher Education for a long time. But they also reflect areas in which the union needs to re-think, renew and strengthen its activities to be successful in the long run. It is also obvious that the categories intersect with each other in many ways—they are not self-contained entities. One way of looking at this is to think of the first two goals—political action and organizing—as activities necessary to successfully achieve the next three goals—protecting faculty control, counteracting the staffing crisis and strengthening our collective bargaining capacity. Following is more detail about the priorities.

*Win Greater Government Support of Public Higher Education—  
Strengthen Advocacy, Political Action and the Union’s Message*

**PRIORITY:** Elect and support higher education-friendly politicians.

No matter how good may be our lobbying and advocacy efforts, the PPC believes we will continue to suffer serious setbacks in the public arena until we are able to elect public officials who share our values and goals. The 2004 action plan calls for a major effort to help AFT higher education locals improve the effectiveness of their political action in the 2004 elections and beyond.

**PRIORITY:** Refocus the public discourse of colleges and universities as well as academic workers.

The PPC is concerned that our opponents are often winning the “message battle” about what higher education is for and what the higher education workforce does. The 2004 action plan calls for the PPC with the assistance of public affairs consultants to develop easily-understood public messages around our higher education principles, particularly the connection between the interests of our members and our students.

*Expand Higher Education Organizing—  
“Grow” the union and expand member activism*

**PRIORITY:** Establish an ongoing, shared process for setting organizing priorities and conducting campaigns in higher education

AFT is organizing higher education more actively than any other union. Our campaigns are reaching every constituency and sector of higher education. Nevertheless, the potential growth of higher education unionization is almost limitless while organizing resources are not.

As a result, a key element of 2004 action plan is to establish a system for looking more strategically at potential higher education targets and setting clearer criteria for taking on (or declining to take on) organizing campaigns. The plan also calls for the systematic involvement of higher education leaders in establishing, conducting and supporting campaigns.

**PRIORITY: Strengthen internal organizing**

The PPC is also concerned about the political and bargaining implications of having a sizeable number of people in our units who are not members. The 2004 action plan calls upon the PPC to establish a committee on internal organizing which will work with AFT staff to survey our locals on membership density and develop a best practices manual on internal organizing for the next AFT convention, as well as establish a leader-to-leader network to assist locals in their internal organizing.

*Protect Faculty and Professional Control of Teaching and Research*

**PRIORITY: Preserve and expand professional control and educationally-sound academic practices.**

The influence of market forces on higher education, along with the ascendancy of the political right, have resulted in a growing attack on academic procedures that until now were recognized as the benchmarks of quality education. The AFT has long been active (and very often successful) in defending tenure, academic freedom and shared governance, as well as alerting the public to dangers inherent in privatizing basic services and expanding profit-based distance education without quality controls.

However, the attacks continue to grow and are now expanding into new areas, particularly in a movement to impose mechanistic “accountability” requirements on colleges and universities. There is also a push to begin outside standardized testing of college students. The committee believes AFT needs to get its message out aggressively and move to suppress further incursions into good professional practice. The 2004 action plan calls for issuing significant research studies and expanding activism to prevent the federal government, state and local governments, private accrediting agencies and private foundations from interfering in curriculum, teaching and assessment.

**PRIORITY: Develop student success initiative for the union.**

The 2004 action plan calls for the establishment of a PPC task force to plan and conduct union-sponsored programs to improve student success in higher education. Among other areas, the PPC plans to focus on teacher education, implementing the recommendations of the union’s 2000 report, *Building a Profession*.

## *Counteract the Academic Staffing Crisis*

**PRIORITY:** Structure the academic workforce to increase full-time tenure lines and achieve pay equity and professional rights for all.

The 2004 action plan calls on the union to explore new ways to increase full-time tenure lines and at the same time achieve pay equity and professional rights for contingent faculty—such as part-time/adjunct faculty, full-time non-tenure track faculty and graduate employees—as well as professional staff. The plan calls for the publication of standards of good practice for all components of the contingent workforce (we have one for part-time/adjunct faculty today) as well as new efforts to build solidarity among our members.

## *Build Bargaining Capacity / Strengthen the Ability of Affiliates to Bargain Effectively*

**PRIORITY:** Ensure high quality health care benefits for all members, including access for faculty and staff who do not currently have benefits.

The PPC believes that the union needs to act forcefully to get the best possible advice and assistance to our affiliates in light of the sheer importance of the issue to our members, especially the extent to which health care benefits are decreasing while health care costs (and employee contributions) are rising. The 2004 action plan calls for the implementation of a train-the-trainer program to preserve health care benefits focused on higher education affiliates.

**PRIORITY:** Establish new networks to share best practices on collective bargaining issues and strategies.

AFT already has HECAS, a contractual database with word searches to assist locals in their bargaining. This will be put on the Web later this year. The AFT staff also provides “over the transom” advice to negotiators and the state and local staff who work with them. The 2004 action plan builds on that foundation by expanding technical assistance on key contractual issues through publications, the Internet and leader-to-leader interchange.





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