

**In Attendance**

Chapter: Jason, Emma, Dianne, Janet, Sophia, Michelle (LRS).

Management: Sharon, Rashmi, Lindsay.

**Old business from the last meeting:**

**1. Does HR have an update on the faculty extra service issue?**

A majority of SUNY campuses pay the regular adjunct rate for extra service teaching. SUNY Empire is one of few campuses that pays a reduced rate yet is one of the most financially solvent. What is the rationale for this policy? (UUP)

**Discussion of Old Business 1:**

This work is still in progress.

**2. Does HR have an update on the chair stipend issue?**

The department chairs object to their low stipend and increasing workload. The stipend -- \$4,000 -- has not been raised in close to ten years (UUP).

**Discussion of Old Business 2:**

This work is in progress. A proposal is currently being discussed.

**3. NYC high school partnership (College of Arts and Science).**

UUP would like further clarification on the nature of this partnership as our members in Arts and Science have raised workload and copyright concerns about it (UUP – Jason).

**Discussion of Old Business 3:**

Rashmi explains that we hand the courses off to schools and the schools manage them. No alterations happen. The University holds the IP rights for the courses. Schools cannot keep the content, even if the partnership ends.

**New Business:**

## **1. Wellbeing Session at Annual Conference (HR - Sharon)**

### **Discussion of New Business 1:**

Sharon explains she'll be leading a practitioner session on this at Annual Meeting. She highlights the importance of wellbeing at work at a place like Empire, which is a distributed campus and people are working remotely. For example, what can we do in HR to help build community and connectedness among employees. Sharon explains that she would like to collaborate with the union on something on this at some point in the future.

## **2. Enhancing EAP services project (HR – Sharon)**

### **Discussion of New Business 2:**

This is connected to the wellbeing item. HR is looking into expanding service offerings to employees, just as we offer a robust range of services for students. The focus is on providing mechanisms for connectedness in a remote workplace and providing access to support for employees when/if they are experience challenges. We'll have more information about this in April after vendor discussions. Stony Brook and Brcokport both have expanded EAP services.

Rashmi adds that the interest is in building social connectedness and social capital amongst faculty, newer and tenured, etc. Dianne explains that other similar initiatives exist and suggested building on their success or using them as a model. Emma highlights various PE-focused resources and activities currently happening as well. Rashmi, Emma and Dianne will meet to discuss these activities further in a separate meeting.

## **3. Update on Performance Management (HR – Sharon)**

### **Discussion of New Business 3:**

HR will be moving to NeoEd, an Ellucian-adjacent product, to assist with a number of processes. More information is forthcoming as implementation begins. This process will take 4-5 months and should be completed by the end of the year.

## **4. Automation in HR: project update (HR – Sharon)**

### **Discussion of New Business 4:**

Same as #3: HR will be moving to NeoEd, an Ellucian-adjacent product, to assist with a number of processes. More information is forthcoming as implementation begins. This process will take 4-5 months and should be completed by the end of the year.

**5. Cheektowaga and Staten Island closures. (UUP – Jason, Dianne)**

Concerns have been brought to UUP regarding difficulties with setting-up home offices, and about confidentiality when interacting with students should faculty and professionals need to use essentially public spaces as their workplaces.

**Discussion of New Business 5:**

Michelle (LRS) stated that if there are any impacts on employees working conditions or economic benefits related to location closings, these are areas subject to negotiation. Emma explains there was some information sent out about the utilization of space that was not fully accurate and misrepresented that no employees used a facility at least 50% when, in fact, that is not true and can make members feel invisible so it's important to be mindful of this kind of stuff as the university makes choices about their language discussing closures.

**6. Ed.D. faculty workload (UUP - Dianne)**

The faculty working in this program are supervising an enormous number of dissertations

**Discussion of New Business 6:**

One faculty alone is chairing 24 dissertations, which is objectively an unreasonably high and burdensome. This comes after the retirement of two EdD faculty. Impacted faculty have been asking for release times, a request advocated by their supervisors, but have not received it. They have shared that their scholarship activities are suffering because of the overwhelming strain of this workload.

Rashmi says there's a clear mismatch and tension between the number of enrolled students and the number of faculty. In terms of workload implications, faculty should be getting their mentoring workload credited as well as their teaching workload. Rashmi will follow-up with those managing the program and the dean, and Dianne will follow-up with impacted faculty. Rashmi wants to better understand the program structure better—for example, what the optimum faculty-to-student ration might be for this program, what number of students would be sustainable for this program, is there room or possibility to expand the program into other disciplines, etc. Dianne also suggests considering if another approach might be to bring other faculty into the program.

Michelle (LRS) wants to acknowledge that this discussion happening today is a wonderful example of how discussions around workload and compensation should be happening. It's a positive example of how we should be coming together to address issues impacting employees.

**7. Part-time faculty non-renewals (UUP – Dianne)**

UUP would like to further discuss how part-time faculty have been informed they are not being renewed, and how they will be informed in future terms

#### **Discussion of New Business 7:**

Rashmi explains we have a 40-day non-renewal policy. Sharon adds that there is also a SUNY-wide policy about section changes up until the 1<sup>st</sup> day of classes which can also impact faculty. Rashmi asks to keep this on next month's agenda for further discussion and comprehensive information because this is an issue of section management.

Michelle would like to put a pin in the conversation to pay attention to the preparedness of full time faculty about any courses they might be assigned as a result. One of the concerns about a course not filling up for an adjunct and then being reassigned to a FT faculty is what does that impact have on the FT faculty member and does that workload look like for that FT member.

While we don't have the numbers in front of us, when we look at the spread of individual targets it's important when thinking about someone's annual obligation to consider the percentage of that breakdown should look like in an ideal world. What percentage of your target should you be at in the fall, roughly? These are conversations that need to be looked at because we find that some folks are at 90% of their obligation in the fall and it's not by choice. We find ourselves in these predicaments because the conversations that need to happen before work is assigned aren't or don't happen.

Emma circled back to the circumstances about six part-time nursing faculty who were non-renewed (notified in the fall, effective in December). Their work ended up falling on first-term advisors, despite there being months to prepare for appropriate coverage for the work. There was a temporary surge of work in addition to the need to also onboard these advisors in advising nursing students, which is specialized work. Rashmi and Sharon will go back to review the situation, and circle back for further discussion.

#### **8. Advancement office structure (UUP - Emma)**

Can the administration comment on reorganization in the Advancement office?

#### **Discussion of New Business 8:**

There's a new Advancement leader starting Monday. They will likely be looking at how things work, etc. There's no reorganization, just realignment of Communications moving into Advancement. Emma explains that there are many members are expressing concern and some general worries about morale.

#### **9. Recruitment office restructuring (UUP - Emma)**

#### **Discussion of New Business 9:**

This was announced a short while ago, but it's not really a restructuring. Emma explains hearing about a partial merger with Admissions and worry about shifting workloads. Rashmi explains that a new org chart is going to be posted soon. Janet adds that three people from recruitment will be moving into Partnerships, five people from Marketing have moved into Admissions this week, that process with Marketing folks was very transparent including a lot of employee engagement, and that it's overall a positive change that makes a lot of sense. She also explains that the recruitment moves into Partnerships is also viewed as generally positive.

Emma reiterates that when employees are moved into new departments without being consulted, it impacts them and their coworkers, both from a workload perspective but also from the perspective of creating a sense that perhaps their work isn't valued in their existing department, and that folks remain concerned about their workloads creeping up. Sharon says she does not have first-hand knowledge of the changes mentioned here, but will find out more, and that based on these discussions it sounds like perhaps there is room for improvement in areas of communication and consultation with employees.

**10. Office of Student Success structure (UUP - Emma)**

Can the administration comment on reorganization in the Office of Student Success?

**Discussion of New Business 10:**

*See discussion in #s 8 and 9.*

**11. SALE concerns and untenured faculty (UUP - Jason)**

UUP is hearing ongoing concerns about the SALE. When does the administration intend on engaging in negotiations over it?

**Discussion of New Business 11:**

Sharon says they are still waiting for approval to negotiate this. Dianne has heard from untenured faculty that they feel they can't turn down a course because they are pre-tenure.

**12. Brightspace shell requirement (UUP – Jason, Dianne)**

Mandating that all course content be in Brightspace will create considerable extra work, especially in specific programs and departments, and is therefore a subject of impact bargaining.

**Discussion of New Business 12:**

Jason explains he understand why management would want everyone to have a Brightspace shell, but for some faculty like Van Arsdale adjuncts and faculty who are teaching in-person there is additional workload burdens to make this happen. Michelle adds that if they're being asked to do this work without a guarantee that the course will run, then you're asking them to do uncompensated work.

Rashmi explains that this directive doesn't involve any new instructional material or student communication is required. The shells and templates are being designed by Empire Online. Michele asks for clarification: what I hear you saying is that if someone has the request materials that are needed for Brightspace, they can simply email the material to a staff member at Empire Online who will then enter the info in there? Rashmi explains that faculty manage the instructional materials and communication with students, and that this is a neutral process of moving from one instructional modality to another.

Dianne explains that the process of converting on-site, in-person activities into online course activities is much more labor intensive and not really neutral given the particularities of each modality. The timeline for this request creates a workload issue and contributes to the moral situation. Rashmi highlights that there's always a learning curve for new technologies in any workplace, and that much of the workload for this particular work falls on those in Empire Online.

Emma asks what discussions happen with potentially impacted employees prior to some decisions and timelines are implemented.

### **13. Faculty annual plan language (UUP - Jason)**

UUP understands that the chairs are going to be directed to include language in faculty annual plans mandating participation in Empire Online training pertaining to accessibility and course design as part of their professional development. Appendix 3 – Continuing Development of Faculty Expertise and Competency in the Faculty Handbook outlines the types of professional development activities in which faculty may participate.

Participating in mandatory training run by Empire Online is not mentioned in the Handbook – indeed no mandatory professional development activities are described in it -- and faculty cannot be compelled to participate in such training. UUP also wants to emphasize that Appendix 3 draws on the SUNY Board of Trustees criteria for faculty review

### **Discussion of New Business 13:**

Jason explains there are many serious issues with this and a lack of discussion with faculty (see #14 below). If implemented, this will trigger IPs.

### **14. How are management responsibilities being divided in the Provost's office (HR – Jason)**

The interim Provost has not met once with the Faculty Conference

**Discussion of New Business 14:**

Rashmi explains that his inability to attend is entirely related to conflicting schedules. The interim provost is making all of the current decisions and takes full ownership of them. Jason explains there is concern among faculty that Nathan is making the decisions, and that his appointment to his current position was seen as a confrontational act from management.

**15. Faculty review and Watermark (UUP – Jason, Dianne)**

There continue to be issues with Watermark and the review process

**Discussion of New Business 15:**

Jason explains if we can't agree on anything, can we please agree to the very least update the dates in the Faculty Handbook so that we're operating with current dates. Rashmi says they will be doing a total review of the entire process in April / May to find out where the glitches and issues are and align the process with the handbook.

Dianne explains that many faculty received incorrect information about dates and processes over the weekend, which added more stress to the already stressful process of tenure. Michele explains that if there is a process issue with a negotiated process, then we have a valid grievance for an individual because the process wasn't followed with fidelity. We want to avoid getting into situations where a person's career trajectory is impacted by a process issue.

Rashmi explains they will be doing a full review at the conclusion of the cycle, and would like to include faculty input on their experiences with the software and the process.

**16. Has the administration reconsidered its position on the hiring of retirees? (UUP – Jason)**

Concerns have been brought to UUP regarding difficulties with setting-up home offices, and about confidentiality when interacting with students should faculty and professionals need to use essentially public spaces as their workplaces.

**Discussion of New Business 5:**

Rashmi explains there's no current change in this practice. Sharon explains that we use adjunct faculty a lot and it's important to ensure that we have a diverse pool of adjuncts, and there's no policy on not hiring retirees. Dianne agrees and adds that institutions are richer also because of institutional history, such as that contributed by retirees.

**17. General morale issues (UUP – Emma, Jason, Dianne)**

Concerns have been brought to UUP regarding difficulties with setting-up home offices, and about confidentiality when interacting with students should faculty and professionals need to use essentially public spaces as their workplaces.

**Discussion of New Business 5:**

Emma discusses hearing from many PEs that the culture at Empire feels more toxic now than ever before. Consultation and communication with employees before moves and changes aren't happening and this lack of engagement is making people and their work feel unseen. This is not limited to one area but is pervasive across Empire, offices, positions and salary levels.

Michelle asks if we can get copies of the current climate survey data. Sharon explains that a culture survey was done some years ago (perhaps 2022 or 2023). Out of 1600, only 100 responded, and 40% were of concern and negative. Jason explains that the lack of engagement may likely be due to a fear of retaliation and lack of privacy in the process. Sharon says that's why they are using a third-party vendor who keeps employee information and responses confidential. The results of current climate research has not yet been given to management.

Sharon circles back to how this low morale is connected to organizational changes made since June; she would like to share this information with Cabinet. Dianne explains that the faculty feeling disheartened and frustrated isn't new to this administration and has been ongoing for some time now. Faculty working conditions are student learning conditions so if faculty feel seen and supported, they bring that energy to students. If they're feeling unsupported and unseen, they'll disengage.

Sharon and the chapter agree to come together to make positive changes to the climate and communications.