



November 2006

COMMENTARY ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AT FAU

Why does the United Faculty of Florida have a place at the bargaining table negotiating the terms and conditions of employment at FAU? The answer to this question is that UFF has a *legal* right to represent the members of the collective bargaining unit. By law, UFF represents faculty. UFF/FAU has a collective bargaining team that has extensive experience at FAU. The team that negotiated the last contract three years ago had more than 70 years of collective experience at FAU performing the core teaching, research, and service missions of the University. The current UFF/FAU collective bargaining team has continued this tradition by bringing to the collective bargaining table a team whose collective experience includes the following:

- Serving on and chairing departmental, college, and university promotion and tenure committees.
- Conducting promotion and tenure training sessions.
- Serving as trained grievance officers responsible for Contract enforcement.
- Serving on and chairing college bylaws committees.
- Serving on the governance task force that wrote the FAU constitution.
- Participating actively and taking leadership roles in faculty governance bodies with responsibility over academic policies.
- Serving on committees and task forces charged with improving the quality of undergraduate education at FAU.
- Playing leadership roles in providing professional development at FAU.

It is common sense for an institution of higher education to engage with professional organizations such as the UFF about terms and conditions of employment. After all, it is the faculty who have experience doing the core missions of the University.

One concern of UFF/FAU is that there seems to be an assumption on the part of the Administration, repeatedly expressed at the bargaining table, that the way to make FAU run better is to give administrators more discretion. A previous Provost quoted with approval the theme of Philip Howard's book, *The Death of Common Sense: How Law is Suffocating America*. The assumption that law/rules are suffocating the University is simply mistaken. Giving administrators freedom to hire or evaluate personnel without criteria is not the way to improve FAU. Everyone on the UFF/FAU bargaining team is committed to improving FAU. We know how important that goal is. We also know that unfettered discretion over personnel matters is not the way to accomplish that.

The Administration's conceptualization of the University seems askew in other ways. An article in the September 2006 issue of *Florida Trend* describes FAU's ranking among public and private colleges and universities in Florida on two measures of quality: we rank 15th out of 19 institutions in mean GPA of accepted applicants and 11th out of 15 in mean SAT of accepted applicants. Yet we do not see any mobilization of the Administration to improve this picture. Then there is the matter of the Administration requiring the faculty to become more "productive" - teaching more students, teaching more classes. P and Q may be close to each other in the alphabet, but Productivity and Quality are not necessarily so in the real world of academia. The Administration cannot simply slap an "excellent" label on things and make them so, yet this is what they have had a propensity to do, enabling them to bask in the delusion that all is well and there is no need for important improvements generally, including in faculty well-being.

The salary proposals that UFF has made at the bargaining table here at FAU were based on the Administration's publicly-stated commitments to addressing the problem of non-competitive faculty salaries at FAU. We consider ourselves match-makers trying to bring the Administration's words and actions closer together. It is unfortunate that the Administration has decided to match its words to its actions (by abandoning the commitment to a plan to solve the salary problem) rather than matching its actions to its words (by acting on the salary goals in the strategic plan).

During current Contract negotiations the Administration's bargaining team has repeatedly stated that its position on the Contract proposals that UFF has made was determined in each and every case by the proposal's fiscal impact. According to the Administration team, it does not make any difference whether the issue is more decent salary raises, improved promotion increases, free tuition for spouses and dependents, better sabbatical policies, or paying faculty for the currently payless extra day every leap year, because their paramount concern is the impact on the budget. If it costs money, they reject it. The UFF team recognizes that one of the facts of university life is tight budgets. Members of our team understand the need to allocate scarce resources. However, it is problematic for both public and private sector organizations to be driven exclusively by budgetary considerations.

The fact that the budget is the driver of FAU's policies is one of the reasons why FAU is in the fix that it is in, and faces the troubles that it faces. We lurch from one budget crisis to another. Last semester the dean of one college told the faculty that the college had excess productivity in undergraduate education, causing budget problems, so that there was a need to reduce undergraduate productivity and focus instead on graduate productivity. This academic year the problem will be something else, and the academic year after this the problem will be something else again. Lurching is not leadership. The budget should not be in the driver's seat. UFF/FAU recognizes that the Administration has an obligation to be fiscally responsible. What is needed, though, is truly competent budget crisis management that will keep FAU on an even keel and allow for progress toward attaining long-term goals of benefit to all parties.

The Administration does find money for other things, just never any to benefit the faculty. For FAU to thrive, however, it is going to have to learn how to move ahead with more than one thing at a time in order to accomplish the goals laid out in its Strategic Plan.

HOLIDAY PARTY

ATTENTION UFF MEMBERS:

THE ANNUAL UFF HOLIDAY PARTY IS SCHEDULED FOR SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, STARTING AT 8 P.M. AND LASTING INTO THE NIGHT. IT WILL ONCE AGAIN BE AT THE HOME OF SHARMILA VISHWASRAO AND BILL BOSSHARDT, 4580 NW 26 COURT, BOCA RATON (TELEPHONE: 561-994-2718). ALL UFF MEMBERS (INCLUDING ENROLLEES AT THE DOOR) ARE INVITED – FEEL FREE TO BRING YOUR SPOUSE OR SIGNIFICANT OTHER. ALL THREE STATES OF MATTER WILL BE PRESENT: SOLID (DELICIOUS FOOD), LIQUID (VARIED BEVERAGES), AND ... GAS (ENJOYABLE CONVERSATION). REMEMBER THE DATE: DECEMBER 9.

Directions for getting there: Get off I-95 at the Yamato Road exit, and proceed west 3.3 miles to Powerline/Jog Road. Turn south from Yamato onto Powerline and proceed to the first left-hand turn you can make. Turn left there into the Colonnade development (NW 46 Street) and proceed past a stop sign to the end of the street (where the road turns right and becomes NW 26 Court). The house will be directly in front of you there. You can park on the side of the street anywhere nearby.

REMINDER: MEMBERSHIP OFFER

ALL FACULTY JOINING THE UFF FOR THE FIRST TIME UP UNTIL THE EIGHTH OF DECEMBER CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A SPECIAL OFFER: MEMBERSHIP DUES AT HALF-OFF FOR THE FIRST YEAR OF MEMBERSHIP. FIND THE HALF-OFF

MEMBERSHIP FORM AT www.fau.edu/org/uff/halfpriceform.rtf. PRINT, FILL OUT, AND MAIL TO ANITA PRITCHARD, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT ANITA (7-3089, pritchard@fau.edu) OR LYDIA (7-3287, smiley@fau.edu).