

NEWS

Faculty meet with Trustees & administrators to discuss Pearson concerns

The Faculty/ Administration Communication Team (FACT) met Nov. 3 for about 90 minutes, with two College Trustees attending, to begin discussing faculty concerns about possible agreements between the College and the for-profit company Pearson Embanet.

Faculty members said the discussion covered a wide range of topics including the background of Pearson involvement with the College, the nature of services that might be provided by Pearson, and the possible risks of entering into a large-scale agreement with a for-profit publishing and distance learning company.

No date has been set for a follow-up meeting, but faculty representatives said they expect additional meetings to take place in the near future.

The Nov. 3 FACT meeting was convened at the request of College administrators and Board members.

FACT is defined in Article 3 of the AAUP contract as a group that is intended to improve communication, expand and improve working relationships, and assist in solving problems

of mutual concern to faculty and administrators.

Prior to negotiation of the current AAUP Unit 1 contract, FACT met for more than a year, with two College Board members participating, to discuss and debrief on the negotiations that took place in 2011, which included the first-ever faculty strike.

AAUP and administration representatives agreed that the FACT discussions which preceded the 2014 contract negotiations contributed

significantly to the effective resolution of bargaining.

Board members Michael Oestreicher and Mark Walton, who participated in the previous FACT discussions, attended the Nov. FACT meeting. Other administration representatives included Academic Vice President Monica Posey and Dean Robbin Hoopes, both of whom participated in previous FACT discussions and served on the Administration Bargaining Team for the Unit 1 contract.

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Annual appointment notices distributed; AAUP Unit 1 contract will be online Nov. 17

The Human Resources Office is distributing Annual Appointment Notices to faculty members this week. The Notice is used to document a faculty member's salary and semester off. The Notice should be signed and returned to the Human Resources Office by Dec. 1.

Bargaining unit members with questions about the Notice can talk to AAUP Contract Compliance Officer Geoff Woolf.

The complete contract for 2014-2017 for members of AAUP Unit 1 will be posted on the Chapter website, www.cinstataaup.org, on Monday, Nov. 17.

Chapter President David Simmermon said faculty will be notified by email when the contract has been added to the website.

Dave said all faculty members in Unit 1 will receive a printed copy of the contract in January.

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Chief Financial Officer Michael Geoghegan also attended the FACT meeting.

Faculty representatives included Yvonne Baker, Pam Ecker, and Geoff Woolf, all of whom participated in previous FACT meetings and served on the Faculty Bargaining Team. Other faculty representatives were Faculty Senate President Ryan Shadle and Co-Chair of the Academic Policies and Curriculum Committee Amy Richardson.

According to the faculty participants, the administrators and Board members said their goals for FACT include gaining understanding and “getting specific issues on the table” related to why faculty members are concerned about possible agreements between the College and Pearson Embanet.

Pam Ecker said, “Some of the meeting time was spent tracing the history of Pearson interactions with faculty and administrators over the past two years. Other parts of the discussion focused on reasons that some faculty are uncomfortable with possible ‘deals’ that we think could diminish or harm the College’s mission.”

“One of the points the faculty reps expressed is our lack of trust in administration statements about the academic elements of possible agreements with Pearson,” Pam said.

“The College’s chief financial officer seems to be included in every discussion with Pearson, but faculty members have had limited and inconsistent involvement in the numerous discussions of potential Pearson partnerships that have taken place in the past as well as more recently,” Pam added.

Ryan Shadle pointed out that faculty members were excluded from almost all activities during the Pearson Embanet “Institutional Readiness Assessment” that took place in October, even though it was apparent from the published agenda that many parts of the assessment focused on academic matters.

“In the one session I was permitted to attend, the topic was distance education,” Ryan said. “The questions asked by Pearson personnel included things like asking how faculty who teach online classes communicate with their students, and whether faculty like using Blackboard. Yet no faculty who teach online classes were in the session.”

Geoff Woolf said faculty members also are concerned about the possible influence of for-profit companies on academic decision-making.

“Mr. Geoghegan has compared a possible agreement with Pearson to the relationship the College has with the for-profit company Higher Education Partners at the Middletown campus,” Geoff said.

“Higher Education Partners paid for the rehab of Middletown campus buildings, and supported the initial marketing for Middletown,” Geoff said.

“Now this company seems to be attempting to control decisions about how classes and student support services are provided at Middletown, and even seems to be influencing decisions about which programs should be offered at Middletown,” Geoff added.

“Faculty members are aware that the College needs to make

decisions that help maintain fiscal stability,” Geoff said.

“However, that does not mean executives of profit-making companies should replace academic administrators and faculty in determining programs and services that allow us to implement our mission and maintain academic quality,” Geoff said.

According to the faculty representatives, the Board members attending FACT said they are interested in possible financial benefits that could be attained through a partnership with Pearson Embanet—particularly increased enrollment of students in traditional and online courses and programs—but not at the risk of diminished quality.

“Mr. Oestreicher and Mr. Walton told us they are interested in learning how Pearson Embanet services could help increase enrollment and retention without added costs, but they also want to maintain Cincinnati State’s reputation for quality and ‘high-touch’ education,” Pam said.

Pam noted that at the end of the meeting, Dr. Posey said she would prepare a list of the “categories of concern” raised during the meeting, so each point could be discussed in more detail at future FACT meetings.

“We did not set the date for the next FACT meeting,” Pam said. “However, Mr. Oestreicher told us he would like the discussion to move efficiently, so I expect that another meeting will occur relatively soon.”

New contract FAQs: All about office hours

Article 9, section (I)(1), of the AAUP Unit 1 contract discusses faculty office hours, and includes some elements that were not part of the previous contract. The following FAQs are intended to help faculty members better understand these contract provisions.

If you have questions about any part of the contract, get in touch with AAUP Contract Compliance Officer Geoff Woolf.

Q: How many office hours am I required to keep?

A: Instructional faculty who are not teaching any online or hybrid courses (designated on College schedules as WEB or HYB) are required to keep 10 “in-the-building” office hours per week. Information about “virtual” office hours is below.

Q: What does the contract mean by “in-the-building?”

A: In the past, some administrators have attempted to insist that “in-the-building” means “in your assigned office in your division.” This definition has never held up under challenge.

The spirit behind the 10 office hours is that you should be available to meet your students where they are (literally).

That means if you’re doing clinicals at a hospital or healthcare facility off-campus, and that’s where your students are, it’s appropriate for you to hold some of your office hours in that facility. If you teach at multiple campuses, it might be entirely reasonable for you to keep some of your office hours at each of those sites.

The most important point of office hours is that your students

(and others who might need to talk to you) should be able to find you on-demand during these times.

Be sure you’re transparent about your schedule and location(s) by keeping your weekly Outlook calendar updated, by making announcements in class and on Blackboard, and by following any other procedures for “posting” office hours used in your division, so your students can always be aware of your office hours.

Q: Do my office hours have to be on the same schedule every week?

A: No. The contract does not dictate a fixed office hour schedule. However, if you’re going to move your office hours around, be sure you’re transparent about it (as described in the previous paragraph).

Q: Can I keep all of my office hours on one day if I want?

A: Nope. Providing good access for our students is guaranteed in the new contract. The contract requires that office hours be distributed over multiple days. So you have to hold office hours on at least 2 different days each week

Q: Can I go to a meeting during my office hours? If I go to a meeting, do I have to “make up” that time by scheduling more office hours?

A: Provided that you don’t already have students scheduled to meet with you, it is OK to attend an occasional meeting during your office hours.

Whether you need to schedule “make up” hours is a matter of professionalism, to be determined on a case-by-case

basis. A canceled office hour on a Friday may not be as essential to “make up” as a canceled hour on a Monday.

The key is to maintain availability to your students, and to provide timely communications to those who might be affected.

It’s not OK to have students show up for your scheduled office hours, only to learn that you suddenly canceled that time on that day.

When a recurring meeting you need to attend (for instance, a screening committee for a new hire) is scheduled during time you set aside as your office hours, you should schedule alternate office hours. Placing a standing committee meeting within your scheduled office hours is not appropriate.

Q: I’m a Program/Department chair. Am I expected to keep more than 10 office hours?

A: The short answer is “Heck, yes!” The long answer is longer.

Here’s what the contract says about Chair Office Hours: *In addition to the ten (10) office hours, Program Chairs and Department Chairs, in consultation with their Deans, will develop mutually agreeable methods through which they will establish their availability for the remainder of the week.*

Don’t forget, “chair points” are not a special “plum” or prize for being the chair; they have a specific purpose: to release you from classroom teaching hours to provide you with time to be in your office (or otherwise around the College) doing the things that need to be done to keep your program/department running smoothly—including advising students.

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This is why you'll often hear people around the College refer to chair and other special project points as "release time."

So if you are a chair, your minimum office hours are 10 per week, but some weeks you might be expected to spend significantly more time around the College (in or out of your office) conducting "chair" business.

There is a natural ebb and flow for some chair activities (like helping students register for classes) but some of the patterns for chair responsibilities might vary in a department, program, or division.

The real question is this: "Where do you need to be to get your chair job done well?"

That's what the contract means when it says that faculty chairs will "establish their availability" with their dean.

In the past, some deans have attempted to turn chair points into a formula, such as X number of chair points equals Y number of office hours. Eventually, such "one-size-fits-all" formulas turn out to be unrealistic and, frankly not "mutually agreeable" (because of the above stated "ebb and flow" of chair work).

Right-thinking deans generally take a pragmatic approach to dealing with their chairs'

"additional hours," which boils down to this: as professionals, we are expected to be on campus when we're needed, and if that means 10 hours in the office one week and 40 office hours another week, so be it.

Most deans are fully sensible to the fact that a great deal of our chair work is the sort that can be done from anywhere, including home--so faculty who don't abuse their "release time" generally have no problem finding a "mutually agreeable"

The keys to fulfilling your responsibilities for office hours are transparency and timeliness. Make it clear (to students and others who need the info) when your hours (in-person or virtual) are scheduled, and provide prompt updates if the hours change.

work pattern that suits both the chair and the dean.

You might also choose to think of your chair release time this way: Approximately how much teaching-related work does your chair load release you from? Then, there you go! That's how much time you should be putting into the chair job between working from the office and/or any other locations that are appropriate. (But remember, it's not a one-size-fits-all formula.)

Q: What's the rule in the new contract for keeping office hours during a non-teaching semester?

A: If you are teaching during your non-teaching ("off") semester, you should schedule "proportional" hours, meaning 2 office hours for every 3 credit hours taught. For example, if you are teaching two 3-credit classes during your "off" semester, you should schedule 4 office hours per week, on at least 2 different days.

If all of your teaching during your "off" semester is online classes, you need to establish regularly-scheduled "virtual" office hours. (More about that below.)

If you are doing chair work (earning chair points) during your "off" semester, then you need to schedule your availability, as discussed in the previous FAQ.

Q: What are "virtual office hours?"

A: Virtual office hours are scheduled times when you are easily accessible to students, but may be off-campus and available by means other than an in-person meeting.

Virtual office hours may be satisfied through on-demand availability by telephone, email, Skype, synchronous chat apps, text message, Facebook, and a variety of other means.

As stated previously, you must be clear about which of your office hours are virtual, when those hours are scheduled, and which tools can be used to reach you.

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Office hour FAQs, continued from 4

Q: How many virtual hours may I keep?

A: Instructional faculty who teach hybrid classes (identified as HYB in the College registration system) may schedule up to 2 “virtual” office hours per week.

Instructional faculty who teach fully online classes (identified as WEB in the College registration system) may schedule up to 4 “virtual” office hours per week.

Q: Can everyone hold virtual office hours?

A: No. Currently, virtual office hours are available only to faculty teaching courses identified in the College registration system as hybrid (HYB) or fully online (WEB).

With rapidly changing, improving, and expanding technology, AAUP leadership believes that virtual office hours are increasingly relevant to all faculty, even those not teaching online or hybrid courses.

In bargaining (including the recently-concluded bargaining), we have proposed expanding virtual office hours to include all faculty. However, the administration was not receptive to the idea.

This is a topic we can take to the bargaining table in the future, so let AAUP officers know if this is something you would like us to continue to pursue.

Q: Do I have to show my virtual office hours on my schedule like my in-person office hours?

A: Yes, you need to show your virtual as well as your in-person office hours on a published schedule.

The intent of scheduling office hours--virtual as well as in-person--is that you're letting students (and others who may need to talk to you) know with confidence when you are “on call” and available.

Virtual office hours are exactly like in-person office hours--but they may be held somewhere other than a College location (see previous FAQ about holding in-person office hours at places other than your faculty office).

Virtual office hours should be explicitly blocked out on your schedule each week, and you should be ready to respond to student communications “on demand” during those times.

Of course, if you are working with one student when another one makes contact, the second person will have to “wait their turn.” But if a student gets in touch with you during posted office hours (virtual or in-person), the waiting student should get your help as soon as you're available again.

Q: But I'm always monitoring my email, and I always get back to my students right away when they contact me. Doesn't that count for anything?

A: Absolutely, it counts for something. It's that kind of work ethic that makes us the great faculty that we are.

However, there's a difference between having virtual office hours and being a great, responsive teacher.

During non-posted times, you don't HAVE TO answer student messages. You can try, if you want, to create some work/life balance. You can wait until you're back in the office or in official virtual office hours to answer email.

Many faculty members include a statement on their syllabus to help students set expectations for turn-around time when they send you an email message. For instance, you might have a statement that says you will respond within 24 hours (or whatever timeline you have set).

Virtual office hours for online and hybrid courses give students a guarantee of times when they can get a faster response, if needed.

Therefore, virtual office hours must be treated as “on the clock” time. Those other times you choose to respond to students quickly may be treated as “bonus” virtual office hours--but if the office hours aren't posted, they're not official.

Remember (as stated in a previous FAQ) that it's OK to be flexible in setting the times for your office hours (virtual or in-person) each week. The hours do not have to be “fixed” for the entire semester.

The keys to fulfilling your responsibilities related to office hours are transparency and timeliness. Make it clear to students (and others in your division who want to know your office hours) when your office hours occur, and if your times change.

Faculty Senate & AAUP collaborate on administrator evaluation surveys

In January, all full-time faculty members will have the opportunity to complete evaluations of the College President, the Academic Vice President, and their division Dean.

The Faculty Senate is coordinating the process for conducting the evaluations, with funding for independent analysis of survey results provided by the Cincinnati State AAUP.

The evaluation surveys will be distributed via email. All survey responses will be compiled and analyzed by StrataMark Dynamic Solutions, a Cincinnati company specializing in consumer and business research.

StrataMark will prepare reports on the results of the evaluations, which will be provided to the Faculty Senate.

StrataMark compiled and reported on the previous administrator evaluations conducted in Spring of 2013, which included the President,

Academic Vice President, and the two Deans who had served for at least a year.

Faculty Senate and AAUP representatives subsequently met with Board of Trustees members, in Executive Session, to discuss the survey results.

Faculty Senate President Ryan Shadle said the survey will be sent to off-campus email addresses for all faculty members.

“When we conducted the evaluations two years ago, some faculty members had problems receiving or completing the survey through College email,”

Ryan said. “We’re going to distribute the survey to off-campus email addresses to try to avoid those technical difficulties.”

The AAUP chapter has conducted or sponsored evaluations of the College President and other academic administrators since the 1990s.

AAUP Vice President Pam Ecker said, “When we met with the Board to discuss the 2013 evaluation results, they appreciated the long history of this process, and the fact that survey results can be compared from year to year.”

Chapter officer elections completed

Voting for Chapter officers was completed in October. The results are:

- Vice President - Pam Ecker
- Secretary - Heather Hatchett
- Member-at-Large - Tracey Stivers

Each officer is elected to a term that ends in October 2016.

Chapter President David Simmermon thanked all nominees, candidates and voters for their participation.

“We are happy to welcome Tracey to the AAUP Executive Committee, and we thank Peggy Rolfsen for her years of service as the Member-at-Large,” Dave said.

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