



MSP Chronicle

MARCH 2004

Volume 1, Issue 4

Massachusetts Society of Professors
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SPRING FORWARD by Jenny Spencer

In January, faculty and librarians received a paycheck with raises won through our enormously successful fall contract campaign. Congratulations to us all! Retro checks covering the few weeks between Jan. 1 and our first "raised" paycheck are virtually in the mail. And non-unit members will receive their raises by the end of April.

But there is even more good news. Thanks to the hard work and persistence of State Senator Stan Rosenberg, the University system also won an additional 10 million dollars in the January legislative session. This money could not have come at a better time, and we are deeply grateful for what, after our contracts, must have been a tougher sell. Though this money does not make up for the devastating cuts the University sustained last year, it does indicate that the legislature may be responding more favorably to the University.

With Romney's budget, which supports neither the retroactive pay increases nor an appropriate level of funding for a flagship University, we cannot let up now. Gay marriage is consuming the legislator's attention at this moment, but by April the budget battles should begin in earnest. Building upon our past victory, we plan to be more organized than ever before.

The MSP Executive Board identified three overarching goals for the union this semester:

- Fight for the retroactive pay due to all members, including retirees
- Fight for a decent University budget
- Prepare for contract negotiations

One of the Board's biggest concerns has been how to keep, and build upon, the energy, activity, and good will generated during the fall campaign. Towards that end, MSP held a retreat on February 20. The invitation went to all faculty members through the action alert: we were seeking a core of committed folks to help move the union's agenda forward this spring. Over 35 people attended this event, and the reports from various groups appear throughout this newsletter. Thanks to all who participated, and everyone who could not but have promised to remain active this year. Our hope is that many of you will be willing to give a few hours of your time this semester to insure that we reach our goals: retroactive pay, a good budget, and a decent contract!

MSP DEBUTS INTERACTIVE WEBSITE

Thanks to the work and vision of Randy Phillis (Biology) and Steve Brewer (Biology), MSP has a new interactive website that we hope will generate a lot of use this semester. Please go to www.umassmsp.org and read the simple directions that appear on the front page. To register, type in your first and last name, capitalizing each but without spaces (for example, JennySpencer). Your password is everything to the left of the @ sign in your university email account (for example, jspencer). Once you are logged in, you may go to Preferences and change your password.

Once on the site, click on "Forums" which appears on the left-hand side. A number of forums will appear, each with a different subject matter. You may read messages, post a reply, or begin a new subject. We're still learning, so if you have suggestions or questions, email sbrewer@bio.umass.edu. The old website is still up and linked to the new website if you need, for example, to look up something in the contract.

MSP CALENDAR

Wednesday, March 3:

MSP Officers Meeting
9 a.m., 121 Hampshire House

Friday, March 5:

Department Representative Luncheon
Noon, CC 804-08

Wednesday, March 10:

MSP Executive Board
8:45 a.m., CC 917

Thursday, March 11:

Faculty Senate Meeting
3:30 p.m., Herter Hall

Thursday, March 11:

MTA Higher Education Leadership Council (HELC)
4 p.m., Crowne Plaza, Natick

Friday, March 12:

MTA Higher Education Leadership Meeting
9 a.m., Crowne Plaza, Natick

Friday, March 12:

Non-Tenure Track Working Group Meeting
11 a.m., 101 Gordon Hall

March 13 - 21

SPRING BREAK

Wednesday, March 17:

MSP Officer's Meeting
9 a.m., 121 Hampshire House

Wednesday, March 24:

Deadline for April Newsletter Submissions

Wednesday, March 24:

MSP Executive Board
8:45 a.m., CC 917

Thursday, March 25:

Faculty Senate Meeting
3:30 p.m., Herter Hall

Wednesday, March 31:

MSP Officers Meeting
9 a.m., 121 Hampshire House

Friday/ Saturday/Sunday, April 2-4:

MTA Board of Directors Meeting
Crowne Plaza, Natick

ROMNEY PROPOSES MAJOR CHANGES TO PENSION PLAN

Since he assumed office, Governor Mitt Romney has been talking about various schemes to undo the current pension system for public employees. He has cited examples of individuals he believes have received "unfair" pensions and used these few selected cases to call on the Legislature to "reform" the system.

Romney unveiled his "reform" proposal in his version of the FY2005 State Budget (House 1), which was filed at the end of January. Should this be passed, it would take away public employee's pension security and place at risk their currently guaranteed pension benefits. It adversely impacts thousands of MTA members *with an initial devastating impact on higher education faculty.*

Magnani/McGee Proposal

The Legislature's Public Service Committee held a hearing on February 12, 2004, to take testimony on a bill (SB 2138) filed by Sen. David Magnani (D-Framingham) and Sen. Thomas McGee (D-Lynn). This proposal is designed, as well, to address those publicized cases that the press has labeled as "pension abuses."

MTA, other public sector unions and the states largest retiree organization testified in opposition to SB 2138 chiefly because it sets a precedent to further erode the traditional guaranteed employee-defined benefit plan. As this time, the bill is being redrafted. MTA will provide members with information about the bill when it is redrafted.

Because the pension discussion could take place before consideration of the FY 2005 budget as a separate bill, it is imperative that we stay on top of this issue. The governor has made pensions a key part of his "reform agenda" and will use it against candidates who do not support his pension "reforms" in this election cycle. If you lobbied for the contracts this fall, you know the drill: legislators need to be contacted in March and early April, since the House Ways and Means is expected to release its budget mid-April.

Current Pension Plan

Defined benefit plan that is fixed and guaranteed, based on years of service, on age and on highest three consecutive years salary average.

Pension predictable.

Romney Plan - MTA Opposes

A person, upon retiring, would receive the **lesser** of two options either current defined benefit plan or calculation of a defined contribution arrangement proposed in Romney plan.

Governors calculation based on what theoretical lifetime annuity would yield annually upon retirement. Calculated on 15 percent of ones annual salary for each year worked when invested at a certain rate of return. Calculated on salary over entire career.

Will apply to current employees, if enacted.

Built on variable investment rate of return set by Legislature and governor. If rate lowered (a likely scenario), individuals pension is substantially less than under current pension plan.

Particularly negative impact on members who receive substantial raises through negotiations, promotions, or advanced degrees.

Other changes include:

- 1) significantly increases the cost of "buying back" any creditable service
- 2) repeals involuntary job lost retirement benefit
- 3) significantly increases the costs of making benefit improvements such as increased COLA and vocational education creditable service.

Status: If considered, will occur during FY05 budget debate

NON-TENURE TRACK FACULTY VOICE ISSUES

A group of non-tenure track (NTT) faculty met at the February 20 MSP retreat (Holly Lawrence, Steve Brewer, Doron Goldman, John Stifler, Judy Holmes, and Richard Sanders) to discuss issues associated with non-tenure system faculty. The retreat provided a follow-up to a meeting MSP organized for NTT faculty in the fall.

The primary task was to establish a set of priorities to propose to the bargaining team that will be negotiating the new contract. The items that are under consideration include, but are not limited to, policies governing salary, leaves, incentives, and re-hiring practices. By April, the group hopes to have specific language that can be provided to the bargaining team. According to Beth Boyer from MTA, the ability of the negotiating team to gain substantive benefits will depend upon developing a persuasive case that demonstrates the scope of these items in human terms for the faculty that will be affected.

MSP RETREAT: MEMBER SERVICES REPORT

Just what are the services that members expect from their union? Under the direction of David Barrington and Jenny Spencer, the “member services” group began by brainstorming around all the areas related to what MSP has, does, or could provide its member in the future. The list was long: in addition to bargaining our contracts, we answer individuals’ questions, run pre-tenure and PMYR workshops, advise members undergoing major personnel actions, produce a newsletter, communicate regularly with faculty via email, maintain two websites, liaison with the administration, organize specific events, and so on. Our vision for the future: a union where every member was receiving these services as needed, and that every member *knew* a particular union representative who could help facilitate access to services.

Rep System

Most of our discussion focused on two primary areas of immediate need. First, to restore and revitalize the rep system. Despite a good deal of recent effort, many departments have no rep (or an inactive one). Since reps are closer to the issues in their department

Member Services, cont. pg. 4

NEW MSP RETIREE GROUP MEETS

Retired members of MSP met at the Retreat on Friday, February 20, and discussed the situation of those who have retired during the last contract and have not yet been given the salary increases owed them under that contract. Active in the discussion were George Cernada, Margo Culley, Peter d’Errico, Charlie Moran, John Nelson, and Nina Scott. As Jenny Spencer, MSP President, reminded us, she and other campus union leaders were promised that the contract would be fully funded as state funds became available. We talked at length with Jo Ann Fitzgerald, the Retired Members Service Specialist at MTA. She was cautiously optimistic, but said that given the state budget calendar this year, we would need to lobby our legislators, at very short notice, sometime in early April.

We decided that our first priority was to develop a list of MSP retirees whose raises had not yet been funded. Next was to get lists of similarly-affected Amherst-campus workers from USA (clerical workers), SEIU (professional staff), AFSCME (physical plant, etc.), and IBPO (police). With this list, we would be able to mobilize when we had to.

We decided as well that we needed to remind ourselves and our colleagues that we were not the only ones affected by the present situation. Everyone who retires from the University in the next three years will be affected, because the as-yet-unfunded retroactive pay will not be counted in the salaries that form the base for their pensions.

We agreed that four of us - Cernada, Culley, Moran, and Scott - would together be designated liaison with MTA. If you’d like to participate in this group, please contact Charles Moran (cmoran@english.umass.edu) or George Cernada (gcernada@schoolph.umass.edu).

LEGISLATIVE ACTION GROUP REPORT by John Brigham

Thanks to Mark Brenner’s post-its and Dan Clawson’s imagination and willingness to sign up for stuff, the legislative lobbying and action group was productive at the retreat. There was general consensus that we need to be visible at the legislature even if we aren’t asking for money. We discussed creating a Political Action Committee (PAC) that would help us to be present and give us funds to use in campaigns. We have begun to identify faculty relationships with legislators (beyond our golden locals) and use them as a vehicle for sending MSP updates and finding out what we can do for them. (The administration also has these people lined up, so we thought we could do it too.)

We affirmed the excitement of working with other unions on campus and with MTA, and we committed ourselves and our colleagues to going where others have been bored before, like the MTA convention. (To keep meetings like the MTA convention in May interesting, we may suggest free public higher education...using the K-12 model.) Two intrepid colleagues volunteered to gather a cadre to attend the MTA meeting. We committed our group’s economist to pulling together budget information to take to the legislature for spring lobbying. We discussed the usefulness of a spring lobby day, even if “low key.”

Finally, we considered the State Democratic convention at the Mullins Center May 8. Since legislators and delegates are coming to us, we thought we would have a little campus party (and maybe show them what needs to be done). A more detailed timeline of tasks and assignments appears on the new MSP webforum at www.umassmsp.org.

To the Editor,

The gay marriage issue is suddenly flooding our airwaves and watering holes with a torrent that submerges even nation building (or lack thereof.) In times of patriotic fervor like these it is so important to write discrimination into our state and federal constitutions?

There are many arguments, though none rational, for why marriage should be “protected” (from what?), and I could present many reasons why same-sex couples should share the right to marry. The focus of this appeal, however, is on the economic terms that married heterosexual couples count on as a result of their labors: social security, retirement savings, health insurance, family leave and pensions, just to name a few benefits. Gay couples don’t share these same entitlements without marriage, and civil unions do not offer the same rights and protections. Barring same-sex couples from marriage is a serious impediment to economic equality with their heterosexual brethren. These are important issues for many union members.

I urge you to learn more about the negative consequences of denying gays and lesbians the right to marry the people they love. We all suffer from these consequences. Visit the MassEquality web site (<http://www.massequality.org>) for a clear and excellent presentation of important facts. Contact your senator and legislator and urge them to vote against any constitutional amendment barring same-sex couples from marrying or offering anything less than marriage (contact information and prepared emails are available through the MassEquality site.)

Let us protect each other from hate and discrimination. Please act now to advance civil rights and make a statement about building stronger families in our communities.

Sincerely,
Christine Turner
Digital Services and Instruction Librarian

[Send letters to the editor to msp@external.umass.edu or post on the website at www.umassmsp.org. Editors reserve the right to edit for length or style.]

FAQ:**Does the University have a spousal hiring policy?**

MSP is in the final stages of negotiating such a policy with the administration. Indeed, a policy has become increasingly necessary to recruit and retain top faculty and librarians. The partner employment program states that “partners of candidates for faculty and librarian positions may be hired as faculty, librarians or administrative staff within the same administrative units, or across Department and College/Library lines, as part of this program. Waivers of search may be granted when partner employment is part of a hiring offer resulting from a national search, or is part of an attempt to retain a current academic employee. All participants hired under the Partner Employment Program must be fully qualified for their hiring status and must be approved by the host units.”

The policy was jointly written in an attempt to insure that departments would not be penalized (monetarily or in terms of future hiring) for participating. Currently, partner hiring is subject to available funding. For more information on how the program may be implemented, contact Jenny Spencer at MSP. The policy will be posted on the website as soon as it is signed.

Who is covered by the parental leave policy?

The current contract covers full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty and librarians on multi-year contracts who become biological or adoptive parents of a child under five years old.

The leave must be taken in the semester of the birth or adoption, or an adjacent semester. Members using this benefit must use their sick leave (or apply to the sick leave bank if they do not have enough sick days accumulated). The leave runs concurrent to the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and cannot be extended unless medically necessary. Members using this policy are required to return for at least one year of service upon completion of the leave.

The parental leave language is in Section 27.14 of our current contract.

Non-Tenure, from 2

A second, and related, task of the working group is to gain a better understanding of the NTT faculty and their existing circumstances. A survey developed subsequent to the fall meeting was recently administered, and the working group will analyze the data and begin to develop a more comprehensive picture of the NTT faculty in the unit.

A final task is outreach to other NTT faculty. Members who attended the retreat plan to call and meet with other NTT faculty to bring their attention to the tasks of the working group and encourage them to join and participate.

All NTT faculty are invited to a meeting scheduled for March 12 at 11:00 am in 101 Gordon Hall. Check the umassmsp.org site for updated information.

NEW FACES AT MSP

Heard a new voice on the phone lately? Nichole Hodges, a graduate student in the Labor Center, joined our staff as a part-time intern in December. In addition to helping out in the office, Nichole will be working with officers on a number of projects planned for the spring. We are extremely pleased to have her and welcome her to MSP.

Many of you may have already met Richard Sanders and

if you haven't, we hope you will. Richard was hired by MTA last fall to help us with the state-wide contract campaign, and we are thrilled that he will continue working with us this spring. Richard has worked as a union organizer for various organizations for almost 25 years and has been a lead organizer in many public and private sector organizing campaigns. He holds a bachelor's degree from Indiana University and graduate degrees from Stanford and Princeton. He uses and teaches a “union building” approach that identifies the natural leaders in the workplace and enables organizations to operate more effectively by tapping the resources of their own members. A labor educator for 15 years at the George Meany Center for Labor Studies, Richard is teaching this semester at the UMass Labor Center.

**Member Services, from 3**

and the problems members of their unit may face, this avenue of communication is hugely important. Suggestions included:

- drawing up a specific job description for union reps
- making reps more central to union activities
- enlisting the help of heads and chairs in recruiting reps
- asking personnel committees to recognize rep activity as an important university service
- considering alternatives for departments for whom the current system may not work
- sharing the experience of successful reps in writing and through rep orientations
- enlisting reps in the creation of a “survival guide” for incoming faculty and librarians

Newsletter

Second, the group identified maintaining and improving the newsletter as a major priority, making it a key communication tool. The new MSP website (www.umassmsp.org) may facilitate this effort by allowing members to post news articles and letters to the editor online, as well as to make requests to be covered in a story or an FAQ. The group encourages all faculty and librarians to help with this effort by posting ideas and brief notices that might be included in the newsletter under “articles” or “Q and A” on the new website. The newsletter will be produced once a month, and more often if members become more actively involved in “reporting.” Anyone interested in writing for the newsletter or sharing their opinions should use the website, or email current editors Mari Paredes (paredes@comm.umass.edu) or Doron Goldman (dorong@som.umass.edu).

