



# UNION WIRE

NEWSLETTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

APRIL

2021

## Negotiation Update: Members Can Observe Negotiations, Groundrules Set

We have agreed to ground rules with the University and have secured the opportunity for up to 18 UCPEA members in good standing [a dues paying member] to attend any given negotiation session as observers. Securing 18-member observer spots for each negotiation session is groundbreaking. Previously, negotiation sessions were behind closed doors with only members of the negotiating team present. There are very few Unions across the country who have union member observers present for contract negotiation sessions.

To be an observer, members must use accrued leave time approved by their supervisor and first manager outside of UCPEA, agree to the terms on the acknowledgment form, and submit their request to observe no later than three days prior to the session (by Wednesday for a Monday session and by Friday for a Wednesday session). Negotiation sessions are every Monday from 9 a.m. to noon and every Wednesday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. (to at least April 14, or until a tentative agreement is reached). Union release time is not available to observe sessions.

To register for a negotiation session and learn how to become an observer, go to the UCPEA website and complete the information form. This is the opening statement made by the UCPEA Negotiation Committee to the University administration: UCPEA Opening Contract Negotiation Statement to UConn.

This past year has provided us the opportunity to learn more about who we are as a community at the University and what we are capable of. We are grateful for the administration's consistently articulated commitment to changing the culture at UConn, through transparency, accountability and action, in ways that "[position us] as a national leader and a place where people of all identities feel they have a genuine opportunity for success and belonging." We are approaching negotiations in ways that are intended to support this commitment and do our part.

UCPEA members play unique and indispensable roles in the success of the University and this past year has certainly demonstrated this and our immense value to the University of Connecticut.

We know UConn is an outstanding institution of higher education AND that there is much room for improvement. The UCPEA represents close to 2k employees who take great pride in working at UConn.

Our recent membership survey, which was completed by 2/3 of the members, has produced a clear set of priorities and identified a number of concerns that need to be addressed in real and meaningful ways in these negotiations. These include, but are not limited to, the need for broad actions to address barriers to diversity, equity and inclusion, job security, fair wage increases, promotion and career advancement, flexibility in the ways work gets done,

addressing significant workload issues across campus, and fair and transparent processes. Since 2009 we have taken multiyear wage freezes, many furlough days, and made benefits related concessions. We have consistently demonstrated our commitment to working with the University to identify additional cost savings and solve significant challenges. Additionally, impact on the morale of our members due to the ongoing issues with, and lack of transparency around, the Career Paths classification system and process cannot be overstated.

Our members make enormous contributions to the University each and every day, and they are at their very best when they:

- feel valued and respected,
- have the opportunity to participate as equals,
- feel secure in their jobs,
- have real options to negotiate work-life challenges, and
- have working conditions support their professional development and advancement.

To put it simply, when employee morale is high, so is employee engagement. And when employee engagement is high, so is teamwork, continuous improvement, and better outcomes, all of which contribute to a healthier work environment.

We will seek to ensure a serious effort by management to jointly address the concerns of the employees we represent. We will aggressively explore options to improve the workplace environment in this round of collective bargaining.

As we approach the many challenges and changes that lie ahead, we believe it is essential that our Union and the University are on the same page and moving toward the same goals. We may not always agree on how to get there, but we must aspire to find common ground and mutual respect along the way.

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### Efforts Against Anti-Asian Violence

The UCPEA Executive Board asks our members to stand in solidarity with our colleagues in the Asian American Cultural Center, UConn's Association for Asian American Faculty and Staff (AAAFS), and the Asian and Asian American Studies Institute (AAASI) in supporting the Asian and Asian-American members of our community, following news reports of increased anti-Asian violence across the United States.

A link to a statement from AAAFS is posted on the UCPEA website.

## Negotiations, continued

We have the capacity, on both sides of this virtual table, to rise to the occasion— not just to reach a fair agreement but to advance the vision and long-term prospects of our state’s flagship public University. Furthermore, we see this as is an opportunity to challenge systemic injustices in our own university, and imagine new processes that support the dignity and well-being of all.

We have been encouraged by the University creating opportunities in this time of “unprecedented events” to reflect on, and rededicate ourselves to, being part of the solution. As was said by the President and the Provost back in May, “these events underscore the critical importance of our infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion in everything we do every single day. Not with mantra and platitudes, but with clearly articulated and tangible action that is supported by the University with budget and action.”

The proposals that we will present to you are intended to achieve these goals. We ask that you consider them in the spirit in which they are presented.

We are highly motivated to collectively making positive changes at the University, and we believe that those changes start today, and start here. In short, we want UConn to succeed and we want to be part of the solution. We are committed to working with you in good faith to achieve a mutually beneficial contract and it is our expectation will do the same.

## Annual Report of Activity and Achievement

While the past year was vastly different from any year in our working lives, all members should be aware that the annual evaluation process continues without delay or interruption. Even if evaluation forms and the process do not change, UCPEA members have an opportunity to approach their evaluations through a new lens.

UCPEA’s slogan is that “we don’t run the place, but we keep it running.” The pandemic has proven this statement to be as true as ever, if not more so. Without the diligence of UCPEA members, the University could not have made it through this last year. The annual report of activity and achievement is a tool that can help each UCPEA members explain their own slice of UCPEA’s massive collective achievements.

Our frontline members in the Residence Halls, Dining Halls, Student Health and Wellness, and across campuses who have sacrificed personal safety to carry out the mission of the University should absolutely characterize their work as exceptional. At no other time in the history of the University has the staff been asked for such a level of commitment and reflecting employees’ dedication on the evaluation is one way that the University can capture the significance of this work.

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## Career Progression Update

The Career Progression Working Group met with representatives from Human Resources on Feb. 24 to begin discussions on implementing the Career Progression (article 31.2 ) section of our contract. The group will meet on the third Wednesday of the month and will be advocating for our membership.

Under contract Article 31.2, career progression is a process for managers to nominate an employee for within-level progression due to increased job proficiency and/or relevant professional development.

The progression will include three ranks: proficient, advanced and mastery. All employees will start at the baseline of proficient to allow members to move up to the higher levels.

Career progression will allow you to grow as an employee and will provide a framework on how to reach each level. Managers will be able to evaluate an employee’s career progression based on the employee’s demonstration of various competencies. Competencies could include observable and measurable factors such as behaviors, capabilities, expertise, and/or understanding that contribute to growth within a classification.

In collaboration with managers, the Working Group will identify the competencies used to evaluate an employee’s progression and create upward job mobility for our members. Our previous outdated job descriptions have not benefited job growth for us at all. Career progression will provide the necessary framework to grow and move forward in your position as you complete all three ranks.

It is important to note that annual performance evaluations are not a career progression path, but can be a helpful tool to managers and members to identify current achievements and assist you in progressing within your career path.

### UCPEA at AFT-CT Convention

Ten of our members will represent UCPEA at the annual business convention of AFT-Connecticut, which will be conducted virtually on May 1.

UCPEA’s delegates were elected by Stewards according to our constitution. Members representing UCPEA are:

Don Babcock, Computer Support Technician, School of Law  
Marita Decozio-Wiley, Treasurer  
Fiona De Merell, Senior Educational Program Administrator, Waterbury campus  
Jason Escalera, Secretary  
Donna Hardaway, VP for Social Justice  
Nisha Hardnett, Educational Program Assisant, Dramatic Arts  
Rosemary Marcellino, Chief Union Steward  
Pete Morenus, VP for Political Action  
Kelly Ann Schneider, Administrative Program Support, Stamford campus  
Mike White, President

# Annual Report of Activity and Achievement, continued

Those UCPEA members working remotely have demonstrated adaptability, creativity and innovation in carrying out the missions and goals of their department and the University. While documenting activities and achievements over the last year, you should recognize the value of that flexibility and ingenuity.

Management requires some UCPEA members to provide an annual report. However, even if management has not made this a requirement, the Union strongly recommends that all members submit report that describes their activities and achievements over the last evaluation year. There is no set format for an annual report unless management requests specific categories or formatting. Some members choose to use the evaluation sections as a guide for their annual report. Others create their own sections that highlight growth and progress towards goals. In either case, be sure to highlight that work that was changed by the pandemic. Final reports are due by April 15 for consideration with the 2020-2021 evaluation. Some supervisors may request an earlier deadline but the supervisor must provide at least two weeks'

notice of that deadline.

The UCPEA contract says the evaluation is "for the purpose of promoting, maintaining, and enhancing excellence in job performance." In an evaluation year that coincidentally started right after we were all faced with a global pandemic, there is no doubt that excellence in job performance was demonstrated by all UCPEA members. The annual report is an opportunity to reflect on your achievements and remind management of how those achievements affected student lives, departmental goals, and the overall functioning of this University.

## Financial Planning Workshop

AFT-CT is sponsoring a virtual financial planning workshop for its union members on Tuesday, April 6 from 5 to 6 p.m.

To register online for this workshop go to <https://leadernet.aft.org/webform/financial-planning>.

## Dates, Deadlines, and Things To Do

All events and meetings are at noon, unless otherwise noted.

Apr. 1, Thurs., Executive Board Meeting, Zoom

Apr. 2, Fri., Good Friday – UCPEA Office Closed

Apr. 7, Wed., Union Steward Meeting, Zoom

Apr. 15, Thurs., Executive Board Meeting, Zoom

Apr. 29, Thurs., Executive Board Meeting, Zoom

May 5, Wed., Union Steward Meeting, Zoom

May 12 & 13, Wed., & Thurs. Women's Advance, Storrs - Virtual

- **Professional Development applications are reviewed at the beginning of each month**
- **Childcare Deadlines Jan. – Apr. (Due May 15); May – Aug. (Due Sept. 15); Sept. – Dec. (Due Jan. 15)**

### Dependent Tuition Waivers

The benefit applies to Fall & Spring semesters only

Deadlines: Fall Semester – June 1

Spring Semester – November 15

### Employee Tuition Waivers

The waiver applies to the Fall and Spring semesters only.

Deadlines: Fall Semester – October 15th

Spring Semester – February 28th

### Tuition Reimbursement

Reimbursements apply to summer, fall and spring course work

Summer: Sept. 15; Fall Semester: Jan. 15; Spring Semester: June 1

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