

Event: LWFT E-Board Meeting
Date: April 20, 2016
Time: 11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
Location: A106
Recorder: Wes Mantooth

Present: Seema Jain, Jerry Petersen, Wes Mantooth, Nolan Koreski, Barry Robinson, Jim Howe, Phil Snider, Priyanka Pant, Don Sutherland, Greg Weyer, Jo Nelson

Review of minutes: The meeting began with attendees reviewing minutes recorded at the March 2nd faculty meeting. In particular, these minutes noted that Scarlett Kendrick has agreed to take Joe Martorelli's place as union secretary. Those present today approved the minutes.

At the start of the meeting, Jim discussed potential problems with how LWTech uses state funds intended to cover employee unemployment. Any of the funds not used to pay for unemployment are converted into general funds for the college, so the administration may have an incentive to find causes to avoid paying unemployment compensation. It was suggested that these funds be used only for faculty compensation—for either unemployment or for funding pay increments. As Jim revealed, employees who have worked at least 680 hours in the past year are eligible for unemployment benefits if their position is terminated. He showed a 2012 document in which a former LWTech employee successfully filed against the school for withheld unemployment benefits.

Another problem related to compensation is that new employees must be hired at a wage that is competitive with what such employees could make in industry. As a notable example, new nursing hires must be hired at Step 15. As a result, the school's compensation funds tend to go toward funding expensive new hires, leaving little or nothing to fund increments for existing employees.

President's Report (Jim Howe):

Our union is involved in two major initiatives:

1. The first initiative is to convert more part-time faculty to full time. At the same time, the initiative wants to promote diversity in hiring and to make sure that new full-time hires don't take away jobs from part-time instructors. When full-time positions become open, employees who already work at a school must be given "priority consideration" for the position (they must be interviewed).
2. The second initiative is to gain more members and to increase member involvement. Union VP Barry Robinson has a list of full- and part-time faculty and will be involved in outreach. The group discussed a range of reasons why our union membership is so low. First, we've lost some long-time union members due to retirement. Some faculty may be reluctant to pay union dues. Some may not realize that we have a union. Others may assume that they are automatically in the union as a condition of employment. Still others may be anti-union.

Reiterating a point he made at the last meeting, Jim said that he stands 100% behind the formation of a faculty senate. However, he feels it needs to be driven by different people beyond those who are most active in the union.

Reporting for our absent Treasurer, Jim reported that our dues have been raised slightly. He hopes to have Joe Martorelli show him a report of how our budget situation has changed over the past several years.

Jim displayed a chart of publically available data showing the distribution of LWTech's full-time faculty among the various pay-increment steps. As noted, many faculty are actually several increment steps above where they are being paid. Jim also showed a comparable chart for part-time instructors. He pointed out that some long-time, committed PT faculty members are working at surprisingly low steps (such as 5-7).

As Jim reported, at yesterday's All-Staff meeting, President Goings announced a reduction in force (RIF). Some part-time instructors and possibly administrators will be laid off, and some vacant administrative positions may not be filled. Dr. Goings said that the affected people have been notified.

Bargaining Report (Phil Snider):

Phil explained that bargaining has currently come to a standstill over the contentious issue of syllabus standardization. An administrator on the bargaining team wants all syllabi to conform to an administration-approved template and has said that bargaining won't proceed until this issue is resolved. The faculty on the bargaining team are concerned that allowing the administration to standardize syllabi would set a precedent for the administration being able to exert control over other aspects of curriculum such as textbook selection or teaching methods. Phil believes the mandate that faculty must standardize syllabi would violate the LWFT Bargained Agreement, particularly two key sections:

Section 6.2: The Federation and administration agree that an atmosphere of academic freedom is a fundamental prerequisite to excellence in higher education. Faculty and students engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and truth must be free to grow intellectually, challenge conventional wisdom and explore all avenues of thought.

Academic freedom exists to protect the intellectual independence of faculty from interference in the pursuit of knowledge, and the expression of ideas. The College may not impose political, ideological or religious orthodoxy on faculty through the hiring, tenure or termination process, or through any other administrative means.

Section 6.3B: As professionals in their respective fields, faculty are free to determine the specific content, instructional techniques, methods and modes of instruction for their courses within the limits of course objectives, departmental and divisional standards, and reasonable financial constraints.

We have one month to come up with a new contract. Otherwise, our old contract will expire without our having a new one.

When Jim Howe has his next meeting with President Goings, he will clearly explain the nature of the current bargaining impasse.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.