

MU-AAUP
State of the Chapter
July 28, 2023

In my prior state of the chapter report of [1/27/22](#), I recounted the sequence of events that led us to reconstitute the AAUP chapter at the University of Missouri, Columbia in 2020 and 2021. What made those events particularly alarming was the pattern of policy that they seemed to portend: In quick succession, and without consultation, the administration had implemented a series of consequential changes in promotion and tenure procedures ([Scorecards and Academic Analytics](#)), and in faculty hiring methods (Mizzou Forward centralization), followed by selective reduction in individual School of Medicine faculty salaries ([Regulation of 5/4/20](#)). Taken together, these (and other) innovations suggested a concerted program to undermine fundamental faculty rights in ways that violated longstanding norms of shared governance that had been taken for granted for several decades and were formally encoded in MU's Collected Rules and Regulations ([CRRs](#)).

Our alarm was amplified by the recognition that these administrative decisions fit all too well with national trends towards the corporatization of higher education. From a different angle, they could be seen as congruent with a more overtly political backlash against the student mobilizations that had peaked in 2015. That backlash had first targeted faculty rights a year later, when one professor was singled out, and summarily fired without due process, which caused the national AAUP to place the MU administration under [formal censure](#). Here, on the ground, it seemed to us as MU faculty that it was imperative to reorganize our local AAUP chapter in order to defend our vision of what a public land-grant university must be.

As I indicated in my 2022 report our first year and a half was spent 1) In building up the organization, 2) In documenting and publicizing the abuses against shared governance, 3) In trying to build outreach and coalition with other university stakeholders – students, staff, other UM campus faculties, other AAUP chapters, and relevant groups within the local community. Finally, 4) We made a series of attempts to communicate with President Choi and others in the MU administration, to see our grievances redressed. We wanted to begin a dialogue with the administration in hopes of changing heavy-handed administrative practices, and, perhaps, aspirationally, even of getting the 2016 AAUP censure removed.

Initially, these efforts met with mixed success. The high points of early organizational accomplishment came in the fall of 2021 and the spring of 2022, when we 1) Mounted a [petition](#) to protest unilateral reduction in faculty salaries that drew 389 faculty signatures, 2) Introduced a [resolution](#) on the abuses in shared governance that we shepherded through Faculty Council and which led to an all-faculty vote that was passed by 94% of the voting faculty, 3) Held a series of well attended faculty forums, 4) Mounted a substantive (35 minute) [presentation](#) to a General Faculty Meeting (called by petition and attended by 350 faculty by Zoom) on the crisis in shared governance, and 5) Worked to motivate Faculty Council to institute a [review of MU administrators](#) that revealed pervasive mistrust and unhappiness with their approach to faculty relations that was articulated within every sector of the MU faculty. Since

that time over the course of 2022 and the first half of 2023 we have undertaken a series of further accomplishments of which I feel we can be proud:

Relations with Faculty Council

As an independent faculty advocacy organization, the AAUP needs to work in tandem with Faculty Council (FC), which is a statutory constituent of MU's governance structure. But FC stands to benefit from the AAUP's autonomy, which can serve as an antidote to the inertia that necessarily accompanies any dependence on an official institutional bureaucracy. Our roles, in other words, are complementary and mutually supporting. Working together, we can enable the faculty to exercise due influence as a check and balance against the overcentralizing power of the university administration. From the moment we reconstituted our chapter, it has been our goal to achieve this symbiotic relationship with the Council. Among our first acts was to elect Professor Chuck Munter (College of Education) as our non-voting FC representative. Then, when Chuck was elected as a regular (voting) Council member from his college, we replaced him as MU-AAUP rep with Professor Steve Karian (Department of English) and then with Professor Noah Heringman (Department of English) when Steve went on to other chapter duties. Several other MU-AAUP members have also been elected to Faculty Council, most notably Rabia Gregory who participates in Chapter leadership.

This growing presence in the MU Faculty Council has assisted that body in articulating an independent voice in relation to the MU administration, and therefore in providing the administration with authoritative guidance in working with the faculty as a shared governance partner. I have already mentioned the Shared Governance Resolution of 12/8/21, which has served to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both parties. But our AAUP representatives have contributed to many other FC initiatives over the past three years in codifying workload policy, in improving teaching evaluation, and in ensuring that the university develops robust policies for diversity, equity and inclusion at every level. In this we have been greatly assisted by Graham McCaulley, the FC Chair for 2022-3, who is not a member of our chapter, but who has made sure that the Council is well run, and that our voices have been heard.

Relations with the Administration

There is no domain that impinges more closely on our core purpose as an AAUP chapter than this one. It is a domain in which we have finally been able to make significant progress, although much remains to be done. Our direct engagement with President Choi began by focusing on the 2016 national AAUP censure, and on what it would take to get this censure removed. I am convinced that President Choi genuinely wants this to happen. However, the matter is difficult because the proximate cause of the 2016 censure was the decision of the (then) Board of Curators to fire Professor Melissa Click without going through proper procedures, as specified in the CRRs. Until the current Curators are able to convince the national AAUP Committee on College and University Governance that this type of action will not be repeated, the 2016 censure is likely to remain.

Nevertheless, we have tried to convince President Choi that there are things that he can do directly (short of censure removal) to improve the shared governance climate on campus. The most straightforward course would be to address the provisions in our Shared Governance Resolution, endorsed by 94% of the voting MU Faculty. These involve 1) Adhering to the provisions [CRR 300.010](#) in the Faculty Bylaws, by respecting faculty authority in those areas where it is specified as “direct and primary,” and in those areas where it is specified as “shared.” 2) Creating opportunities for faculty input into all relevant policy changes, and 3) Providing transparent archiving of all changes in the CRRs. In March, and again in July, of 2023, President Choi responded to our Resolution by agreeing to the first provision, and offering somewhat loosely worded assurances that he would comply with the spirit of the second and the letter of the third. We are pleased with this newly articulated attitude of accommodation on the part of the MU administration, and we look forward to working with President Choi and Faculty Council to ensure that both the letter and the spirit of the Faculty Bylaws are respected on matters of faculty shared governance in future. In these matters, the devil is always in the details of implementation, and we hope to continue to work with the administration to narrow our differences in other areas where our respective understandings of “shared governance” might still diverge.

Our sense of hope that this process of dialogue and convergence may continue has been greatly reinforced by the series of on-going conversations we have been having with Provost Ramchand and her staff during the 2022-23 academic year. These have centered mainly on getting a better understanding of the challenges to academic freedom that we face in today’s environment. Through a careful reading and analysis of Henry Reichman’s *Understanding Academic Freedom*, we have gained a much better grasp of exactly what academic freedom is, what it is not, why it is necessary, and why it is currently under serious threat in the US today. Our study of Reichman’s book has been enhanced and enlivened by a set of further conversations, which have addressed many of the practical challenges and threats to academic freedom that have been reported in the press on other campuses over the course of 2022-3. We are very grateful to Associate Provost Socarides for working to facilitate these informal discussions, and to Provost Ramchand for engaging in them with full seriousness and personal commitment. It is my hope that this work of mutual study and dialogue will help us in the future. I believe it will make it easier for us to find common ground if and when we have to address serious threats to academic freedom that may emerge within the context of our own campus and state.

Other Activities

Over the past two years we have engaged in a wide range of additional activities, ranging from presenting faculty forums, to social events, to the establishment of a small committee of distinguished full professors prepared to offer [advice](#) to faculty candidates in promotion and tenure cases. We continue to issue statements and resolutions on relevant campus issues, and we have begun to engage in dialogue with sympathetic local leaders and politicians. With a considerable degree of alarm and interest we are vigilantly tracking the attacks on academic freedom that have been erupting on other campuses across the United States. We have also organized a cross-campus coalition to exchange ideas and information with AAUP chapters on

the other UM campuses, which I was personally responsible for initiating, and which I will continue to coordinate now that my term as MU chapter president has expired.

Challenges for the Future

As of 2023 our chapter is in a generally healthy condition, with 48 MU faculty who are members of the national AAUP and 198 regular subscribers to our chapter listserv and newsletter. The large proportion of other MU faculty who have voted to support our resolution, to attend our forums, and to sign our petition, all indicate that the great majority of faculty across campus are in agreement with our positions on academic freedom and shared governance, and that they appreciate the leadership role that we provide. What remains true however, is that only a relatively modest proportion of these silently supportive faculty have openly joined our organization and actively participated in our work. Several factors likely contribute to the disparity between the large numbers who appreciate our efforts, and the smaller numbers who have actively joined in our advocacy efforts. Rightly or wrongly, many faculty members are fearful, and believe that open identification with AAUP activities would leave them vulnerable to retaliation. Other faculty are very busy, overcommitted, or otherwise focused.

Beyond that, one has only to look at the breakdown of faculty numbers to see that the MU faculty is extremely diverse, with different concerns prioritized in different disciplinary sectors, and different interests presented by those in a wide range of appointment categories, ranging from tenured full professors, to junior faculty, to ranked NTTs, to clinical and research faculty, and finally to *ad hoc* or part-time instructors. Moreover, statistics which we have obtained from the administration show how the composition of the MU faculty has been changing over time. Whereas only 44% of the entire faculty were off the tenure-track (TT) in 2013, 59% are outside the zone of TT protection today. To be sure this trend, (a national phenomenon) is not unique to MU. However, it is worrisome, insofar as it represents a steady erosion in the structural protections available to the professoriate on which the classic forms of shared governance were historically based.

It is probably no accident that the overwhelming bulk of our chapter members are tenured faculty, or at least individuals on the tenure-track. Our strength is concentrated in certain disciplinary sectors, while it is weak in others. We have frankly struggled in our efforts to recruit NTTs, which makes it difficult to represent their interests, as we are committed to doing. The one initiative that has stalled during my term as chapter president has been our “issue campaign” to elevate the cause of shared governance into a common denominator that could unite faculty from all ranks and sectors, and that could then form the basis for a more concerted and aggressive chapter recruitment drive. After several promising organizational meetings in the summer of 2022, we hit a wall in our efforts to come up with attractive slogans for branding. At the same time, we found ourselves stymied by the challenge of conducting laborious one-on-one conversations with many non-participating faculty, who sometimes articulated their fear of open AAUP allegiance, and who gave us mixed messages when asked how the AAUP could better represent their interests and concerns. This issue/organizing campaign remains on-going, and the new chapter leadership will be well advised to infuse it with fresh life.

Conclusion

I am proud of what we have accomplished in the four years that I have been involved in helping to revive the MU-AAUP chapter, and then in serving as chapter president. But there is no room for complacency. Higher education today is facing unprecedented challenges, and in states like Missouri these challenges are particularly acute. The political environment of the next few years is likely to be especially difficult. Our chapter will need to be supple, flexible and proactive. We will need to find ways of trying to work with the administration (especially on issues of academic freedom) to defend the core character of the university as an institution, while also remaining ready to engage in constructive and respectful disagreement with administrators when differences in our understanding of “shared governance” are at stake.

Fortunately, I can rest easy that I am leaving chapter leadership in excellent hands. The new officers are all seasoned veterans of the past four years’ endeavors, and the chapter executive committee consists of a felicitous mix of troupers from previous efforts, combined with fresh blood which brings in new energies and novel ideas. I am confident that our new leadership, elected to serve for 2023-24, will steer the organization in the right direction.

Respectfully submitted,

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