

Kim Emery, English, University of Florida

Candidate Biography

Education: Smith College, A.B., American Studies, 1986. University of Texas, M.A., Linguistics, 1989; M.A., English, 1990; Ph.D., English, 1994.

Appointments: University of Florida, Associate Professor, 2001-present; Assistant Professor, 1994-2001.

My sixteen years at UF have provided a rigorous political education, marked most emphatically in the faculty union's long struggle against a hostile legislature. An AFT/NEA affiliate, the United Faculty of Florida has only intermittently caught the attention of AAUP members nationally. However, our experiences here—of forced restructuring, fake “shared” governance, faculty layoffs, and political intrusion—can inform important contributions to the national dialogue.

Florida's dissolution of the statewide Board of Regents and subsequent refusal to recognize unions with which that Board had been obliged to bargain is merely the most dramatic example of the state's ongoing efforts to restructure higher education to serve private political and economic interests at the expense of the public good. Faculty have fought back: successfully defending our right to collective bargaining, overturning layoffs through grievance, staving off budget cuts, and anticipating *Garcetti* with broad academic freedom protections.

As co-chair of the union task force on academic freedom, a member of the

faculty senate steering committee, president of the UF faculty union, and a veteran of our bargaining team, I participated in these struggles and authored critical pieces of contract language. I have published on outcomes assessment, faculty governance, and academic freedom in venues including *Profession*, *Academe Online*, and *Thought & Action*, and last year won the NEA's Excellence in the Academy/Democracy in Higher Education award.

As a lesbian professor of queer theory, I recognize the necessity of academic freedom. I also understand that the greatest threat today comes not in the form of well-publicized political attacks on individuals, but in our own passive adaptation to the changing structures of academic employment, research, and instruction.

Candidate Statement

Protests from Palermo and London to Puerto Rico and California have registered the resistance of students, especially, to the increasing privatization of the public good and broad opportunity that higher ed has historically represented. Simultaneously, the new faculty majority of contingent employees has spearheaded a growing awareness of the fundamental incompatibility between precarious employment and the AAUP's bedrock tenets of academic freedom and faculty governance. The degradation of academic working conditions is degrading the quality of higher education. It is time for the AAUP to step up and defend the profession we purport to represent.

Our first priority must be improving the working conditions of contingent faculty: raising pay, expanding benefits, and providing a path to tenure.

Defending the principle of tenure does little good when all but a tiny fraction of the professoriate are structurally excluded from attaining its protections. Similarly, over-reliance on graduate-student labor must be stopped, so that those students will have a profession to enter when they obtain the terminal degree. Institutions that insist on exploitative labor practices that diminish academic freedom should be censured.

Although collective bargaining may not be the answer for every institution, often a legally enforceable union contract is the only real protection against political and economic predation. Collective bargaining has been used to shore up shared governance by writing procedures into a binding contract, to limit the expansion of appointments off the tenure track, and to protect the exercise of Constitutional rights against institutional discipline. Such victories empower faculty at unionized institutions and serve as a model with which non-union campuses are compared and must compete.

The devaluation of academic labor is caught up with a complex of related developments, including incentives-based budgeting systems that make faculty complicit in commercialization, the privation and privatization of public institutions, and standardization of course content in the name of “accountability” and economies of scale. Coming challenges will include intensified battles over deregulation, accreditation and extramural faculty speech. I believe the AAUP is poised to

play a crucial role in reclaiming higher education for the greater good. Certainly, we bear a particular responsibility to try.