

AAUP Legislative Priorities for the 111th Congress
AAUP Government Relations Committee
January 2009

The 111th Congress has inherited a troubled economy and an electorate that has become largely dissatisfied with the direction of the country. The issues facing our nation are not at all insurmountable, but they will require collective efforts by citizens and good stewardship by our elected officials. One asset that has not depreciated is an education, and we would do well not to shortchange our future for temporary solutions. Though it may sometimes seem difficult to make long-term investments in the face of immediate concerns, it is essential to continue to support and grow higher education as the best means and hope for our continued economic viability. We must protect our nation's investment in intellectual capital, and ensure that access to the benefits of this investment reach all sectors of our increasingly diverse population.

Affordability and Access

The AAUP stands behind students and advocates access for all who desire higher education. We realize that college costs are increasingly becoming an obstacle to the attainment of a degree. Therefore, we support:

- Shifting a significant proportion of student borrowing back to the federal government's Direct Loan program and eliminating or scaling back the FFELP. Doing away with expensive subsidies would help students by making more money available directly to them instead of to banks
- Providing the majority of financial assistance through grants, scholarships and tax credits rather than loans, to avoid encumbering students with unmanageable debt at the beginning of their careers
- Implementation of the recently passed "maintenance of effort" provision in the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) to protect state funding for higher education.
- Healthcare reform to help lower the costs of providing a college education, and to help students for whom the cost of insurance is increasingly prohibitive.
- Examining the relationships between textbook publishers, bookstores and colleges to combat excessive markup and price gouging on necessary course materials.
- The continued development of a diverse student body through scholarships, mentoring and similar programs that encourage educational attainment by members of traditionally underrepresented groups.

Employment Conditions and Employee Rights

The AAUP has repeatedly documented the wholesale transformation of the academic workforce over the course of the last three decades, in the context of broader threats to the welfare and security of workers generally. The erosion of tenure and the rapid expansion of contingent faculty appointments threaten academic freedom and undermine the ability of faculty members to provide students with the best possible educational experience. As measures that will help restore employee rights and protect the academic freedom of faculty members, we support the following legislative initiatives:

- Passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.
- Passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act (Ledbetter bill) and similar initiatives to correct wage inequity based on factors unrelated to an employee's ability to work effectively.

- The right of teaching and research assistants to bargain collectively over terms and conditions of their employment.
- Legislative solutions to redress the 1980 *NLRB v. Yeshiva University* decision, which deprives faculty at private-sector colleges and universities of their right to organize.

Academic Freedom and Free Expression

The AAUP unequivocally supports the First Amendment right to free speech and resists attempts to scale it back. We believe that learning, teaching and research must be unencumbered by political interference. The sciences particularly must be shielded from politically motivated attempts to change or influence research results. We support:

- Open access to government information, particularly that which has been re-classified or labeled “unclassified but sensitive” by the previous Administration
- Stronger protections for whistleblowers and enhanced penalties to deter attempts at retaliation.
- Protection from political interference for federally-employed scientists.
- Efforts to expose the deceptive rhetoric of “intellectual diversity” or “academic bill of rights” campaigns, which in reality have a chilling effect on the free exchange of ideas.

International Scholarship and National Security

The AAUP has always rejected the notion that security and liberty are at odds with one another, and continues to work to protect the freedom of speech, movement and association of scholars in the United States and throughout the world. To this end, we will:

- Petition in support of the free exchange of ideas and collaboration with foreign colleagues, and seek to be sure that no one is barred from working with American scholars solely due to ideological or political reasons.
- Advocate for appropriate “reasonable suspicion” standards and protocols to ensure that border searches of traveling scholars are well-founded and based upon genuine security concerns.

Funding for Research

The need to invest in technology is one of the most closely linked relationships between education and the economy. We continue to support enhanced federal funding of research in the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities through NIH, NSF, NEH and other agencies.