Challenges in a New Century

The issues for higher education in the twenty-first century have not been good. Growth in tuition, even across inflation and after over a decade of stagnant income, for the lowest paid students, has led to increased inequality and debt. Three-quarters of the instructional staff at US colleges and universities are serving on contingent appointments. State funding for public higher education is withdrawn during economic downturns and never restored. Business-oriented college and university leaders invest in facilities and administration at the expense of the core educational mission. Conservative state governments seek to undermine collective bargaining rights.

Today’s AAUP is fighting back against these threats in myriad ways: by issuing policy statements and reports; by training members and activists through workshops and webinars; by providing vehicles for collective faculty action at the local, state, and national levels; by filing amicus briefs in court cases that affect faculty members and higher education; by disseminating faculty perspectives through print and online publications; and by launching multifaceted campaigns around key issues like contingent faculty appointments. The 2013 legal restructuring of the AAUP into three distinct entities has opened further opportunities by creating the AAUP-CBC, a labor union of AAUP members, and the AAUP Foundation, a charitable organization dedicated to promoting the principles of academic freedom. The Association’s history over the last century has uniquely equipped today’s AAUP to confront the challenges facing higher education, and to do so effectively to secure the broad support of faculty members, students, and those who are concerned about the fate of higher education in the new century.

We are at a tipping point. Campuses that oversee contingent appointments show higher levels of disengagement and disaffection among faculty, even those with more secure positions. We see a steady shrinking minority, faculty with tenure, as increasingly unable to protect academic freedom, professional autonomy, and the faculty role in governance for themselves and others who care about the public mission of America’s colleges and universities to serve the public interest. The AAUP enters its centennial year. The AAUP launches the One Faculty—One Future campaign to unite the faculty around concrete improvements in working conditions, shared governance, economic security, and academic freedom for faculty members serving on contingent appointments.

The AAUP’s book-length report National Security in a Time of Crisis issues its report on the risks to academic freedom and free inquiry posed by the response to the September 11 attacks. The Association’s new office on Nineteenth Street NW in 2009 is opened.

Debra Hanible, the AAUP’s receptionist, in the AAUP’s reception area. (2010)

On September 11, terrorist events hijacked airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The US government responds to the attacks by passing the Patriot Act, a steep series of anti-terrorism laws and technology moves to implement them.

The report Challenges in a New Century documents those fears. Growth in tuition, even across inflation and after over a decade of stagnant income, for the lowest paid students, has led to increased inequality and debt. Three-quarters of the instructional staff at US colleges and universities are serving on contingent appointments. State funding for public higher education is withdrawn during economic downturns and never restored. Business-oriented college and university leaders invest in facilities and administration at the expense of the core educational mission. Conservative state governments seek to undermine collective bargaining rights.

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