MSCA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Getting Public Higher Education Back on Track

Senate Task Force Heats Testimony from Educators and Union Leaders

Patricia V. Markunas, MSCA President

Last month MSCA President Pat Markunas testified before the Massachusetts Senate Task Force on Public Higher Education, co-chaired by Stanley C. Rosenberg (D-Amherst) and Steven Panagiotakos (D-Lowell). She was one of several educators representing public colleges and universities, invited to present viewpoints on the state of public higher education, which has experienced deep cuts in operating funds, loss of faculty and librarians, unfunded contracts, and unresolved labor disputes. Markunas’ remarks ranged from stalled contract talks and loss pay to support for libraries and raising the minimum wage, which would make college more affordable for working students. Throughout, she linked the quality of higher education to the quality of faculty and librarians. Edited for length, her testimony follows:

On behalf of the state college faculty and librarians who provide quality education to the citizens of the Commonwealth, I thank Chairperson Panagiotakos, Chairperson Rosenberg, and members of the Senate Task Force on Public Higher Education for inviting me to testify today.

We are, frankly, thrilled to hear that members of the Senate are concerned about the status of our public institutions and interested in exploring long-term, stable funding and other legislative changes that would support our work on behalf of our students.

Members of the Task Force, the quality of any academic institution of higher learning and of the education provided to its students rests squarely on the quality and reputation of its faculty. Period.

Libraries and Funding

Related to the quality of our work with students is the quality and condition of the most important building on every higher education campus: the library. Yes, the construction and maintenance of all campus buildings — academic and non-academic — are important to all of us who work in them and to our students. But it is the library and its services that most directly support the work of the faculty in educating students. It is the quality of the library and its holdings that are a key component in the accreditation process and national rankings of institutional quality.

Yet the quality of the state college libraries has been severely impacted by the repeated and serious budget cuts that public higher education has endured over the past decade. The quality of the faculty cannot be maintained or improved given the same budget cuts that public higher education has endured over the past three to four years where the first-choice candidate declined the appointment of a faculty position at the state colleges because of the inadequacy of the salary offered, and the number of resignations of full-time faculty for financial reasons. Over 20 percent of first-choice candidates for faculty appointments decline the offer for financial reasons. Further, over five years there has been a nearly 50 percent turnover in librarian staff due to resignations.

The Council of Presidents has also conducted an analysis comparing state college faculty workload to that of faculty at peer institutions. Our teaching workload is identical to the workload of faculty at nearly all of our peers, and our responsibility for academic advising and continuing scholarship is often greater than those responsibilities are for faculty at peer institutions.

These factors create serious long-term negative consequences for the quality of the faculty as a whole and the quality of the services and resources offered by the campus libraries. These issues must be addressed in order to address the quality of the education provided to our students.

Constant Turmoil Hurts Quality

In addition to the issues that this Task Force has identified as of major importance to public higher education — economic growth, workforce development, accessibility, accountability, and funding — I would add four issues of concern to the Legislature as a whole that have impact on the quality of public higher education and that the Task Force should address in its final report.

The quality of any academic institution of higher learning and of the education provided to its students rests squarely on the quality and reputation of its faculty. Period.

State College Faculty Earn 15% Less

Members of the Legislature received from the state college Council of Presidents a copy of their faculty salary study, which used salary data from public comprehensive institutions provided by the College and University Personnel Association (CUPA). The MSCA, through its national parent organization, the National Education Association, contracted with JBL Associates, a research consulting firm in Bethesda, Maryland, to compare our salaries and benefits to those paid to faculty at our peer institutions as defined by the Board of Higher Education. The results of these separate analyses are remarkably similar. Here are a few highlights:

• State college faculty members and librarians do not earn $100,000 annually. Indeed, the average state college faculty and librarian salary is less than $60,000 a year.

• State college faculty salaries lag behind those of peers by 7 percent unadjusted and 15 percent when adjusted for the cost of living in Massachusetts.

The gap is smallest at the entry-level academic ranks and greatest for those faculty at the highest, best qualified and most senior academic ranks.

• State college faculty benefits lag behind those of peers by an additional 3 percent unadjusted for the cost of living.

MSCA chapter presidents Peter Hogan, Fitchburg State, and Gerald Tetrault, Westfield State, deliver their message to the Dec. 3 protest in Boston. Story on Page Four.

Recruitment, Retention and Workload

The Council of Presidents has gathered information on the number of faculty searches conducted over the past three to four years where the first-choice candidate declined the appointment of a faculty position at the state colleges because of the inadequacy of the salary offered, and the number of resignations of full-time faculty for financial reasons.

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What are the benefits and the risks in teaching controversial topics, or in using unconventional methods to teach important lessons? And how can we manage these risks? These questions were explored in the workshop presentations of three state college professors October 22 at the MSCA Workshop on Academic Freedom in North Adams. The workshop preceded a keynote address by Michael Simpson, NEA assistant general counsel, in which he delineated a trend in recent federal court decisions toward limiting academic freedom.

Challenging the Norms

Lori Dawson, a professor of psychology at Worcester State College, teaches in a discipline where sensitivity to students’ experience and background is crucial. As co-director of the Women’s Studies program, Dawson teaches courses such as Psychology of Human Sexuality, Psychological Foundations of Diversity, and a seminar on physical and sexual abuse.

“In the social and psychological disciplines, many of the courses are emotionally charged,” Dawson said in her presentation. “They deal with diversity, sexuality, class and race. You have students with multiple majority and minority identities.”

Many students relate to the subjects and issues in a personal way. But the path to understanding them, or how these issues affect them, their families and communities, is not always smooth.

“The danger is, you challenge norms,” Dawson said. For example, students may not be receptive to learning about white privilege or various forms of discrimination.

Because instructors deal with controversial subjects and viewpoints, they often experience negative reactions from students. They may also get negative reactions from their peers. “You can lose the respect or the friendship of colleagues,” Dawson said. “Many of the professors who teach these subjects are young, female and more professionally vulnerable.”

Dawson provided handouts of articles on teaching social justice issues, including a bibliography “for training in white privilege.”

Teaching How to Think

Biology Professor Steven Oliver deals with a different kind of controversy in his classes at Worcester State. Oliver teaches vertebrate evolution and a course on animal behavior. His research areas are animal behavior and communication, and evolution of mating systems.

Controversy arises when scientific views clash with religious, cultural or political views, he said. Evolution is one example. There are also topics and issues about which there is disagreement among both the experts and the public — for example, stem cell research, global warming, and whether homosexuality is learned or genetically determined.

“Students want to know what’s true,” Oliver said. “I tell my students that science is not the ‘be all’ but it is based on logical assumptions about the nature of the universe.”

Oliver said he deliberately obscures his own beliefs and opinions on issues, encouraging students to think for themselves. “Students don’t want to be told what to think, but to learn how to think,” he said. This includes studying primary sources. For example, his students must read Darwin, not just read about him. He appeals to logic and teaches students to recognize fallacies of argument like non-sequitur, false dichotomy, appeal to authority, and ridicule.

Oliver teaches his students how to check facts — about global warming and the environment, for example — so they can draw their own conclusions about highly politicized arguments.

This approach helps them develop their own beliefs, and to gain confidence in their own ability to think and resolve disputes.

Controversial Topics, Unconventional Methods

Three State College Professors Share Their Experience and Strategies

Ben Jacques

Creativity and Risks

Peter Hogan, a professor of psychology at Fitchburg State College, shared his perspective that an important obstacle to academic freedom is self-censorship, due to fear of repercussions from taking risks. An organizational psychologist and former department chair, Hogan has written on managing risk in college teaching and conducted workshops on the ethics of college teaching. In the MSCA workshop he focused on non-traditional methods in and outside the classroom.

“Be creative, but be aware of risks, and manage those risks,” Hogan advised.

While students can gain valuable lessons from unorthodox teaching activities — for example, a ropes course can teach trust, confidence and team-building skills — instructors should assess the risks as well as benefits. Risk of harm to students can be physical, psychological, social or economic, Hogan said.

“We have to distinguish between our intentions and what the student will ultimately experience,” he said. “We should ask, is this risk reasonable and the likely benefit significant.”

Hogan listed several ways to manage risk. First, instructors can ask themselves if there are less risky ways for students to learn the desired lesson. If alternatives are not feasible, instructors can develop the skills and knowledge necessary to safely facilitate the learning activities they initiate. Preparation can also be enhanced by anticipating problems and by preparing emergency procedures and identifying referral sources.

Oliver said the activity has been designed, the instructor is responsible for fully informing the students of what to expect and asking for their consent. Finally, he advised, it helps enormously to consult colleagues freely, so that you can benefit from their experience and sensitivities.

Peter Hogan

Lori Dawson

Steven Oliver

MSCA Perspective

A publication of the Massachusetts State College Association, the faculty and librarian union for the nine state colleges in Massachusetts.

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Getting Public Higher Education Back on Track continued from page 1

The constant turmoil associated with the collective bargaining process in Massachusetts has generated national and regional negative publicity over the past decade for our institutions and hampered our recruitment and retention efforts as well. Negotiation difficulties between Presidents nor the MSCA can gather information on the number of high quality faculty and librarians who wouldn’t even bother to consider coming to Massachus- setts because of the failings of the last four governors to support good faith bargaining efforts on behalf of our employer, the Board of Higher Education.

Streamlining of Bargaining Process Needed

The MSCA Board of Directors supports legislation to alter the collective bargaining process to eliminate the governor’s control of the ability of the BHE to negotiate contracts with employees.

We support our employer’s ability to negotiate with us and then submit the funding of the ratified agreement directly to the Legislature.

I have been told that at least one long-time state senator supports the addition of binding interest arbitriation to the state collective bargaining process where it does not now exist. If you would urge the Legis- lature to consider as well.

Part-Time Faculty Health Insurance a Must

A second issue for consideration relates to the legis- lative initiative to provide health insurance for all citi- zens. The MSCA represents nearly 800 part-time faculty members in the state’s public colleges and universities, who are not afforded even the option of benefits for health or life insurance through the Group Insurance Commission.

Many part-time faculty members have access to health insurance benefits through other employment, however, for those who do not have this benefit, its importance cannot be overstated.

It is irresponsible for the Legislature to consider any initiative to require or urge employers in Massa- chusetts to provide benefits to their part-time em- ployees, without the state’s taking responsibility for providing such benefits to the hundreds of part-time faculty who provide quality education for our students.

Minimum Wage and In-State Tuition

A third issue concerns increasing the minimum wage in Massachusetts. A colleague from Bridgewater State sent me an analysis that compared changes in the minimum wage to increases in tuition and fees for our students, many of whom depend on minimum wage jobs to pay for college.

In the 1970s, students working at a minimum wage job needed to work about 500 hours to pay tuition and fees. However, a student working today at a minimum wage job would need to work over 50 percent more hours to earn today’s tuition and fees.

A fourth item would allow graduates of Massachu- setts high schools, whose parents are undocumented aliens, to enroll in public colleges and universities at in-state tuition rates. The MSCA is on record in support of this legislation and I would urge the Task Force to take a similar position.

A Better Economy, a Better Society

The Boston Globe published a statistic worth repeat- ing as often as possible: for every dollar spent on higher education, five dollars are returned in economic growth. The public benefits of higher education are not just economic in terms of creating new knowledge, products and technologies, but also in terms of lower crime rates and less need for welfare and public assistance.

Educated citizens are more involved in volunteer activities, political life and cultural activities. They not only pay more in taxes, but also vote more often and live longer, healthier lives.

The best colleges and universities have the benefit of economic stability and political support. The con- tinual budget crises and uncertainties of the past de- cade — and therefore labor crises as well — demor- alize faculty and staff, harm productivity, prevent the recruitment and retention of the best faculty and the best students, and ultimately cost the state in economic and non-economic terms. There is no more important responsibility before the Legislature than to stabilize and support our institutions of higher education, for everyone’s benefit.

The MSCA Board of Directors supports legislation to alter the collective bargaining process to eliminate the governor’s control of the ability of the BHE to negotiate contracts with employees.
At Westfield Faculty Propose Expanded Women's Studies Program

Lou Caton with Vanessa Holford Diana

In a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort, the Westfield State College Women's Studies Program is proposing a women’s studies major, the first such program in the nine state colleges. Professor Vanessa Holford Diana, co-ordinator, says the major will create additional opportunities for students to understand women’s changing roles in society through course work, internships, and community service—and will strengthen women’s studies throughout the curriculum.

Diana hopes to obtain final campus approval of the major this spring and then send it to the Board of Higher Education for review and approval. “We are excited about the next step,” she says. “Student interest is so high.”

The major is designed around a base of about 25 courses, most already offered regularly by 33 core and advanced elective, which attracted students from all disciplines. The following semester I taught an independent study for 10 students who had taken the course and wanted to delve deeper into women's history. Women's history is so rich and exciting that a single course barely scratches the surface. U.S. Women's History and Dr. Young's Women and Revolution course, which addresses global women's history, both are offered annually.

A Global View

The Women's Studies faculty point to their own teaching and learning in the field as influential to professional and personal development. Professor Zacharias explains: “As a Ph.D. student in the U.S. who arrived from India and gained teaching experience through Women's Studies, I appreciated classroom interactions that worked on the feminist premise of non-hierarchical discussion and reading for social change.”

Professor Jane Mildred, sociology and social work, comments that “the women's studies courses I took told me that what they understood to be ‘natural’ was influenced by another that she didn't want the experience to end. The professors believe the book and the readings have changed the way that faculty and students use them. Looking ahead, both feel a sense of destiny about the book and the collaboration. They are already working on another translation, the second in a Catalan poets series.

—Susan Sturgeon is a librarian at Salem State College and a contributing editor.
IN THE ASSOCIATION

On a Cool, Sunny Day in Boston
From Buzzards Bay to North Adams, Faculty and Librarians Picketed at One Financial Center

Maynard Seider

On December 3 nearly 100 faculty and librarians from all nine state colleges, wearing academic robes and carrying picket signs, marched, sang and chanted in front of One Financial Center, the modern building housing the offices of Steve Tocco, the Board of Higher Education chairman. We’ve picketed Tocco before, but it’s always been at academic buildings where the BHE was meeting. This time we assembled at the heart of Boston’s financial district, where Tocco is president and CEO of ML Strategies, a business consulting firm that is part of one of Boston’s most powerful law firms, Mintz Levin.

Earlier in the week, when marking on the picketing he knew was coming, Tocco responded by hoping for heavy rain. On this count the union won, as the weather was sunny and brisk. At first we believed, having been informed by Tocco’s secretary, that he was not in the building. We later learned that he was in his office, and that a number of people who work there, responding to the flyers we passed out, called him Scrooge for the rest of the day.

Other executives who work at One Financial Center saw us, as did hundreds of lunch-time Bostonians, suburbanites and tourists walking in the area by South Station. They saw our signs, calling for fair wage “laws,” which noted our issues and reminded us of Tocco’s anti-union credentials.

The mood, this time, was festive, although the private security guards from One Financial Center viewed this onslaught of educators as a serious attack. When we first arrived, they told us we couldn’t picket on the public sidewalk in front of the building, a stance I don’t think even Attorney General John Ashcroft would take. We knew we could and had a city permit to back it up. Later, when a local television station arrived to film the demonstration and interview some of us, the Financial Center guards told them they couldn’t film the building itself. To their credit, the TV folks responded by slowly panning the entire building and then focusing on one of our hand-made signs, a drawing of Tocco wearing a dunce cap with a grade of F by his side.

Steve Tocco is a powerful man, not only in the private sector, but also in state government and the Republican Party. He has served in the administrations of all Republican governors since the election of Bill Weld in the early 90s. Before becoming chair of the BHE, Tocco was executive director and CEO of the Mass. Port Authority, the secretary of Economic Affairs and a special assistant to Weld and Governor Paul Cellucci. Prior to entering state government, Tocco founded a public-sector consulting firm and served as executive vice president of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC). As spokesman for the contractors’ trade association, Tocco first earned his anti-union credentials.

I was reminded of this when a construction worker came over and joined our picket line during our lunch hour. We got to talking and he told me how Tocco led the drive in 1998 to end the state’s “prevailing wage” law, a policy that guarantees construction workers union wages when they’re working on government projects, even if they’re employed by non-union firms. During the campaign, the construction unions stationed a man dressed up as a rat outside Tocco’s home. A strong coalition of unions defeated the ABC referendum and saved the prevailing wage law. The Romney-Tocco union-busting efforts are well-known among unionists in the state, and we have natural allies here, allies that we would do well to seek out. In fact, the construction worker, whose aunt had graduated from North Adams State College some 20 years earlier, wanted to know if we would be back picketing the next day.

While the private security guards saw us as a real danger, the three Boston police who were assigned to crowd control duty were pretty mellow. As you remember, they picketed their own employer, Mayor Tom Menino, wherever he went this past spring and summer, and ended up with a good contract. The sergeant in charge of the detail smiled a good deal of the time and when we chatted, he told me that he was a graduate of UMass/Boston and had a son at Plymouth State College in New Hampshire.

All in all, it was a good day. Of course, one event, one day of picketing, does not bring us a fair contract. But it adds to our campaign, to our visibility, and to our strength. It demonstrates to our employer that we are both serious and unified in our efforts.

Nominations Open for 2005 NEA Representative Assembly

The 2005 Representative Assembly of the National Education Association will be held July 1 – 6 in Los Angeles, California.

All MSCA members who are in good standing on January 15, 2005, and who pay their dues to the NEA through the appropriate MSCA Chapter, may seek election as MSCA local association delegates to the NEA-RA. Stipends may be available to assist those who seek election as a local association delegate only in that association’s election.

Only members who pay their dues to NEA through the appropriate MSCA Chapter will be entitled to vote in the election for MSCA delegates to the NEA-RA. Members who join the MSCA’s NEA-RA after January 15, 2005, will not be eligible to seek election as a delegate to the 2005 NEA-RA.

The specific number of delegates allocated to the MSCA will be established after January 15, 2005. The specific number of seats will be sent to all candidates and will appear on the ballot, if a run-off election is necessary. The election timetable follows:

• Nomination deadline: February 28, 5:00 p.m., regardless of postmark or indicated fax time.

• Ballots mailed: week of March 15.

• Ballots return due: April 1, 5:00 p.m.

Questions should be directed to:

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NEA NOMINATION FORM: DEADLINE - FEBRUARY 28, 2005

Name of Candidate (Please Print)

Institution Affiliation

I wish to place my name in nomination as a candidate for MSCA delegate to the 2005 NEA Representative Assembly.

Signature

Date

Please attach a biography statement (not to exceed 50 words)

Send completed form to:

Nancy George, MSCA Secretary
Salem State College
352 Lafayette Street
Salem, MA 01970

Professors Massoud Farahbakhsh and Paul McGee, chapter president, of Salem State College’s School of Business made a bold statement Dec. 3 at One Financial Center in Boston.

Maynard Seider, MLA chapter president, is a contributing editor.

2005 MSCA Board Meeting Schedule

Regular meetings of the MSCA Board of Directors begin at 10:00 am and usually adjourn around 3:00 pm. Meetings are open to all MSCA members in good standing — full-time, part-time and DGCE. Some time is set aside on the agenda each month for visiting speakers. If you are an MSCA member and wish to address the Board on an issue of concern, please contact the MSCA President’s Office <pmarunas@aol.com> to request a place on the agenda or with any other questions about Board meetings.

February 4 MTA – Auburn
Large Conference Room

March 4 MTA – Auburn
Large Conference Room

April 1 MTA – Auburn
Large Conference Room

April 29 Worcester State College
Foster Room, Student Center

April 30 Worcester State College
Delegate Assembly Auditorium, Science Center

May 13 – 14 MTA Annual Meeting
Hynes Auditorium/Boston

June 3 Westfield State College
Private Dining Room/ Dining Commons

2005 MSCA Board Meeting Schedule