

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA CHAPTER

2023-24 Officers

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University of Iowa

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Dear Colleagues:

Last fall, the Executive Committee of the University of Iowa chapter of The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) became concerned, and then alarmed, about the administration's proposed changes to the Manual of Policy and Procedure (MOPP) of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS). Briefly, we have two concerns. First, we worry that some of the proposed changes significantly endanger shared governance, a range of practices elaborated in AAUP policies and honored by long tradition at Iowa. Second, these changes are being rushed through without sufficient time for reflection and faculty consultation, and in violation of existing MOPP procedures. We detail those concerns below. Having brought AAUP concerns to the dean, we now share them directly with the Faculty Assembly (FA) and our CLAS colleagues, in the hope that you will consider them before voting.

For more than a century, AAUP has been the conscience of academia, its job thoughtful consideration of the standards by which academia carries out its mission and regulates itself. The need for communication, collaboration, respect, and appropriate deference undergirds virtually all AAUP policy. This need is reiterated throughout the AAUP POLICY DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS (AAUP Documents) which AAUP publishes and revises in print and on its website <https://www.aaup.org>. The twin polestars of AAUP's work are academic freedom and shared governance. Though the two are interrelated – and both drive our concerns about the proposed MOPP changes – the worries expressed here primarily relate to shared governance.

Shared governance is the structure by which the complex university system operates, the ways in which the governing board, the administration, the faculty, students, and others relate to each other and make decisions. Within CLAS, the FA is the most broadly representative of the college's shared governance bodies, the only one which all faculty members may attend and where they may speak; all voting faculty members may propose agenda items. The current MOPP states that the FA is "to speak for the faculty on matters of importance to the College, and to consider and act, or recommend action, as appropriate, on all matters affecting the academic and professional concerns of the faculty." One of the proposed changes drops that charge and substitutes more limited duties; that change would, we believe, impair the FA's effectiveness and independence. We cannot detail all the changes in this letter, but we offer comment on three specific proposals.

First, one proposed change emphasizes that all FA votes are advisory only. In a technical sense that is the case presently, not only for the FA, but for other shared governance bodies and even decanal and provostial decisions on tenure and promotion: all are advisory to the president or the Board of Regents. But in a practical sense, and given the overall gist of the changes, this emphasis gives cause for concern. AAUP policy and Iowa's traditions grant the faculty the primary role in making educational judgments. "The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process" (AAUP Documents, Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities). The same document states that faculty determinations in these areas should be reversed by the administration "only in exceptional circumstances." Yet the CLAS administration recently disregarded a FA vote on a curricular matter, the undergraduate language requirement. These changes signal a shift in educational decision-making from a broadly representative faculty body, the FA, to the administration.

A second proposed change would remove "policy" from the MOPP, rendering it a procedural manual only. Since only changes to the revised MOPP would require FA approval, this change would remove policy changes from the FA's purview, contrary to the FA's core purpose quoted above. Of course, policy and procedure are inextricably intertwined; the latter fine-tunes the former, giving it shape and determining its timing. So the attempt to sever the two is doomed to failure. But the attempt to accomplish that severance indicates a worrisome intent to deprive the FA of its vital role.

A third proposed change would make the CLAS dean co-chair of the FA. It is certainly important for faculty bodies to have collegial working relationships with deans. But to place the dean in a permanent co-chair role risks granting the administration undue influence in setting the FA's agenda and chilling the speech of faculty members, especially those unprotected by tenure. AAUP policy speaks directly to this issue. The policy "On Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Appointments" provides as follows: "Not surprisingly, the more cautious among them are likely to avoid controversy...with the deans and department heads on whose good will they are dependent for periodic reappointment." A similar chilling effect may be anticipated for pre-tenure faculty members and even tenured ones in need of administrative goodwill for various purposes. Even a dean making diligent efforts to be a fair and open-minded co-chair could not avoid the perception among faculty that comments made in FA debate may redound to their detriment.

Though this letter is focused primarily on threats to the FA's role and independence, several other proposed changes also concern us – making the only Instructional Track position on the collegiate Executive Committee a decanal appointment, and limiting the situations in which the faculty referendum is used, to name only two. We urge all faculty to review all the proposed changes carefully and consider their impact on shared governance before voting.

A separate concern is the manner and timing of placing these proposed changes before the faculty. Collegiate administration released the final version of the changes only in the closing days of the fall semester. Though some changes to an earlier version were made, presumably in response to FA concerns, there has been no opportunity for the FA to consider this final version. The administration

now intends to proceed directly to a referendum beginning on January 25 without waiting for any FA vote on the matter.

However, the relevant provisions of the existing MOPP require approval from the FA. Since a MOPP revision is concerned, this matter is governed by Section XVI.1, “Procedures for Revision of the Manual of Procedure.” The second paragraph provides that “[t]he revision shall be transmitted to the FA at least 10 days in advance of the scheduled vote....” Though the language is not a model of clarity, the third paragraph provides that any revision may take effect only if not vetoed by the president “within 60 days following its APPROVAL by the FA.” (Emphasis supplied.) By scheduling a full faculty vote without prior FA approval, the revision process is contrary to the existing MOPP as well as prior CLAS procedure. It’s hard to avoid the conclusion that an important faculty body, well placed to explore and debate how the proposed changes might work in practice, has been denied its designated role in these crucial institutional changes.

We thank our colleagues for their attention to these comments and offer any assistance we may provide in further exploration of these issues.

Collegially,

Ann Rhodes, RN, MA, JD, FAAN

Clinical Professor Emerita

President, University of Iowa chapter, AAUP

Writing on behalf of the chapter Executive Committee