

February 25, 2013

To: Distinguished Faculty Academy

I want to thank Dr. Jeffrey Segal, Distinguished Service Professor, Department of Political Science, State University of New York Center at Stony Brook

Dear Colleagues,

I happen to work at a unit that rewards development in all three areas required for professional advancement. At least 1/3 of my current salary almost 39 years following my initial appointment in September of 1975, is a function of merit award in recognition of times I hustled and produced some meaningful product (research, teaching initiative, service function or combination, thereof). I think I received about 25 merit raises to date. The “regular” accumulation of each of those, mostly small, permanent awards folded into my base helped me to accumulate significantly more in my pension, such as it is, and helped me support my family as a single parent. As a psychologist I know that such increments also add to the incentive for advancement. If there is only professional growth, with no potential to add to one’s capacity to support one’s family, only those who can support themselves on grant funding can supplement their salaries, and there is no permanent increase in the grant system. I can’t imagine being a Distinguished Service Professor today earning \$50,000 (if that) based on the paltry accumulation of our salaries from the almost non-existent “regular” salary increments. In total, with my rank increases, they don’t equal what I was able to build (trust me there is nothing to brag about here) with merit, because our pay system is inherently UNFAIR.

Those of us living downstate have suffered for years from very low incomes relative to our very high cost of living. A house in a lower-median income neighborhood carries a tax burden of ten thousand or more dollars a year. The state location pay of 1 1/2% of one’s salary (also accepted by the UUP) does not come close to allowing downstate faculty salary equity or security.

If SUNY faculty were paid respectable base wages perhaps permanent accumulation of merit wouldn’t matter that much, though I do believe that those who contribute beyond the basic expectation of the university and make lasting contributions to it have the right to a lasting salary increase from their toil. While base pay and merit should not be conflated for many of us they have to be. The system of striving for merit recognition has to replace relying on real pay increments because the state has REFUSED to allow university faculty regular stepwise and structured increments, thereby failing to acknowledge the value of experience and years of service faculty accumulate as we move through the ranks. The number of statewide base salary increments are few and far between and the 1, 2 or 3% amounts over a few years amounts to very little over time.

We don’t receive increments commensurate with our development or “SIGNIFICANT” raises commensurate with advancement through the ranks. After 39 years dedicated to SUNY my advances in salary as a function of my advancement through the system to its highest rank equal a grand total of \$5,750. The rewards for advancing through rank can’t explain why responsible faculty continue to strive to grow and add to the educational valence of the system, because they aren’t worth that much for so many of us. Removing merit reduces the motivation that much more.

As a single mother attempting to make it downstate those merit raises, which became permanent, helped me meet the needs of my family in a way I couldn't have without them. Our pay system orients many faculty to operate in a way that is in fact a "dark secret" of SUNY. MANY of my colleagues know that they are better off just getting tenure and then kissing the system of development goodbye. With a small but steady income and a two to three day a week job in the system, they can earn much more by working outside the college full or part-time, giving only the basics to the college and students. And who can blame them. Even more faculty may now follow suit with absolutely no way to benefit financially from their honest efforts to engage their professions or their work communities. More faculty than ever may choose to take the route of the "dark secret".

I came to teach in SUNY in 1975 because having been educated in the system, I incorrectly believed that the people of this state, state political leaders and SUNY administrators believed that SUNY, as Rockefeller publicized it, was an invaluable engine for excellence in education and for development for the state and its people.

In my day 1965-1969 and 1970-1977 a better percentage of students then were better-supported by the state and education was much more "public" because the amount of state-wide revenue going to SUNY was proportionally much, much greater, then 81%.

I thought that this meant that the people of the state and the leadership of the state were willing to pay for and to allocate tax revenue to a system that served it's youth, well; where they could receive a competitive education at an attainable cost. Wow, was I a fool! Over the years the state allocation has all but disappeared to a low of 18 or 19%. In other words, our students are now in a lower end "private system" for which they (or their parents) pay the majority of the burden while the private colleges and universities in NYS receive significant public funds (tens of millions) to make their programs more appealing by lowering the real burden for parents choosing private education through the BUNDY ACT. The wealthy folks driving the "no taxes" debacle are happy. Hey, they are relieved from the paternalistic obligation to make the state function.

IS SUNY faculty upset about this? I never hear any of this discussed at University Faculty Senate meetings. Has our pay structure reward system or the BUNDY Act risen to the top of issues we want to address in the Distinguished Faculty Academy?

UUP hasn't been successful at fighting this enormous degradation of State commitment. Perhaps it couldn't be successful in its recognition of this injustice without enough of us willing to go to the streets to struggle to maintain the state's obligation to its faculty, its students and its people. Perhaps we don't or won't because so many of us may not identify ourselves as we really are, ordinary workers and that we need to fight for our benefits and for the needs of our students and their loyalty? Well, if so I believe we are wrong; we do and we should.

How many of us are concerned about the new RAT for allocation of start money to units across the system? I know I am. RAT is, at least in part, based on accepting that the slim sum should be divided up among us based on metrics that disadvantage the more fragile students in the system; those who have to work full or part-time and the faculty and units that service them. I've watched as some of my peers at the "university centers" or privileged colleges seek favor from the "new metrics". SUNY System leadership has failed in demanding a greater share of public revenue, while state leaders from the governor on down refuse to teach about and to organize the public to

assume their obligation to support and then to benefit from public higher education as they covet their campaign chests and plan their re-election speeches while betraying their obligations to ensure available, competitive publically funded education.

If we are upset, we will need to get organized. We will need a Resolution from the University Faculty Senate, the body that is supposed to represent us professionally. That the very few and minimal fringe benefits we have are under attack, in this case a yearly 1% merit allocation made permanent to those who receive one, is distressing, but, it doesn't surprise me. The state is taking back and has been doing so for years. What little we have is because at some time or other, we demanded it. I have no idea how many of you will agree. I do know that little change occurs in systems without the concerted organized efforts of its members. And that it is often the case that the few who are willing to act, become the many. That this is so may be unpalatable to some or many of you who may not see the ways in which the state has minimized the value of public education for years. UUP is in a morass of a system, under siege from the state, in a system whose administrators don't defend its real interests and under pressure from our own lack of engagement in our own interests.

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