



Are We Keeping FIT?

By Nick Reeder

The officers of Sinclair’s AAUP chapter have written to Dr. Helen Grove, requesting minutes from recent meetings of the Faculty Issues Team (FIT) and access to future meetings. This article describes the rationale for their request.

The FIT discussions of Spring 2007 resulted in an agreement covering the subsequent three academic years. (A copy of the agreement is located at <http://sccaup.org/documents.html>.) In ordinary times, therefore, one might have expected little FIT activity during Spring 2009, since faculty and administration had already agreed on salary raises for 2009-10.

But these are not ordinary times. Economic hardships pose continuing challenges. The 2007 agreement did include the following escape clause: “this goal is a firm commitment that will be reached unless doing so proves to be either functionally impossible or substantially unhealthy for the successful continuing operation of Sinclair.” Have recent economic challenges been severe enough to justify voiding the 2007 agreement?

Presumably this question was foremost on the agenda of the Faculty Issues Team when it met several times during Spring 2009. And presumably the ensuing discussions led to the reduced raises that faculty received in September. I say “presumably” because I don’t know what took place at these meetings. Unlike past years, when the faculty representatives on FIT have kept Faculty Senate well-informed, this year Faculty Senate learned only that the FIT’s members were not at liberty to report on the FIT discussions.

In past years, details of the FIT’s recommendations have been shared with faculty. This spring, the only formal communication from the FIT was a June 2 e-mail assuring faculty that “as soon as concrete information is available, we will communicate directly to the Faculty Senate and to each faculty member.” And at its June 3 meeting, Senate was given assurances that the team’s recommendations would be shared with faculty before these recommendations were forwarded to Sinclair’s Board of Trustees.

Unfortunately, faculty heard nothing more until after the Board had approved the revised salary raises—and even then, we were told only what the Board had decided, not what the FIT had recommended. Thus we are left in the dark about the process by which the decision was made to disregard the Spring 2007 agreement. This decision could not have been made without faculty consent if we had a collective-bargaining contract rather than a FIT “agreement.”

Subsequently, the FIT met on several more occasions during 2009, but few details of these meetings have emerged. In speaking with some of the faculty who serve on FIT, I've heard differing explanations of why so little information has been shared during the past seven or eight months. Whatever the reasons, the Spring 2009 FIT discussions set a bad precedent, for they proceeded with no input from Faculty Senate or the Faculty Assembly.

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I greatly respect the faculty who represent us on FIT, and I thank them for their efforts. Having served on FIT, I know that their job is a difficult, thankless one. The current level of confidentiality only makes their job more difficult. They cannot effectively represent us if they don't regularly communicate with us.

Dissatisfied with the secrecy surrounding FIT, the officers of Sinclair's AAUP chapter wrote to Dr. Grove in November, requesting minutes from past FIT meetings and access to future meetings. Dr. Grove has not yet responded to this request, which invokes Ohio's Open Meetings Act and Open Records Act.

While some may try to characterize this request as confrontational, the goal is simply to re-establish free and open communication between faculty and their representatives on FIT. The current level of secrecy is unhealthy, because fair representation requires communication. Without it, the FIT process is badly broken. Let's either fix the process or abandon it. ☺

Are Students Our CUSTOMERS?

by Susan Harris

When I was in school, both as a child and in college, I always had a healthy respect for my teachers. It was understood that they were the experts in their fields. And while I did not always enjoy writing the papers, working the problems, completing the labs, I always believed that they would not ask me to do something unless they felt that it would be a valuable experience for me. Of course teachers are not infallible, but my point is that a shift has occurred in our ability as educators to have control over the quality of education that our students receive.

Case in point: Learning mathematics is hard for most students. It takes organization, responsibility, lots of time to practice, and most of all, persistence on the part of the student. Students taking a mathematics class online are very likely to do worse than they would in a face-to-face class. Regular interaction with the instructor is generally critical for a student's success in a math course, and most online math students just do not take advantage of the opportunities to do so (even when such communication is encouraged or required as a part of the course). Nor do they conscientiously work through the content so carefully designed for the course on Angel. So this begs the question, why are we allowing so many students to take our math classes online when they are far more likely to be successful in a face-to-face class? We are told that the students are demanding online math classes because it is more convenient for them to take classes this way. I do not believe that we are serving our math students' best interests. And don't get me started on the push from Distance Learning for our department to put unproctored math tests online for the convenience of the student. Convenience should never be the driving force for education.

Do not misunderstand me. Online classes are appropriate for some courses, but they are not appropriate for most of our students in math. My point here is that YOU are the one who knows what is best for your students in your content area. Nobody else should be in the position of dictating how you offer your classes.

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SCC AAUP Chapter Officers

Jim Shimko	—	President
Lynn Seery	—	Vice President
Bill Lejeune	—	Secretary
Susan Harris	—	Treasurer

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The convenience of students is not the only thing on our “customers” minds. When I started teaching at Sinclair 14 years ago, it was a rare thing for a student to go straight to the dean, provost, or president when he or she thought a course was too demanding, or had a beef with an instructor. The chair was the one to get an earful (and they still do). Students seem to have more of a feeling of entitlement than ever. I do not mean to imply that complaints from students are always without merit, but merely wish to point out that the “student as customer” model that we are heading toward only goes to foster this sense of entitlement for our students. Are not we, as educators and experts in our field, best qualified and equipped to determine what our students need to learn?

No, our students are not our customers. It is, at best, misguided to run a college using a business model.

And has anyone else noticed that our own president has been referring to himself as President and CEO? ☺

Check out our website <http://sccaaup.org> !! You will find up-to-date information on upcoming AAUP campus events and meetings. Also included are past issues of our newsletter, minutes from past meetings, and links to useful and interesting information about issues such as academic freedom and shared governance.



When: Friday, February 19th 3-6 PM

Where: 131 S. Wilkinson St, Dayton

**Where? Democratic Headquarters,
behind Bldg 9**

**What: Beer, wine, snacks, dancing bears
and the insufferable posturing and bragging
of fellow academicians**

What? Free

**Why? Free beer, wine, snacks and
dancing bears. What more do you need to
know!!**

Frequently asked questions

***Why the Democratic Headquarters, home of the huggers
of terrorists and trees alike?***

Because it is free, we can drink there and Sinclair parking is close. Find us a similar location at the same price and we will go there next time.

What is this “beer” you speak of?

Beer is food.

What if I, um, you know, “eat” too much?

We will drive you home.

***Beer? Wine?? Dancing bears??? Are there no depths to
which you will not sink to promote SCCAAUP?***

So far, no!

**Please join us! We are interested in your thoughts
and concerns. Meetings are held every other Friday
from 2:00 to 3:30 in Room 4211. Next meeting is Friday,
February 12. Hope to see you there!!**



by Steve Whiting

While I was glancing over The President's Bulletin some years ago, a particular item caught my eye. There was what I would consider an advertisement for Microsoft. I questioned whether the Bulletin was accepting ads and was told that the Microsoft submission was not considered an ad, but something of value for the Sinclair community.

Later as I thought about what had happened, the placement of the questionable ad seemed analogous to the way the corporate world is extending its influence into the very fabric of our culture. This extension of influence is nowhere better illustrated than with the intrusion of corporate advertising into our public high schools. Media presentations such as Channel One inundate schools with advertisements. A San Francisco Bay company provides free computers and Internet access to schools, but the required company software contains carefully targeted advertisements aimed specifically at teenagers. This trend also seems to be occurring at community colleges and universities. As Jeffery Williams states in his piece in the July, 1999, issue of College English, these "partnerships . . . reflect(s) the looming shift from public funding to the university to corporate sponsorship and dependence on other private sources." In the same article, Gary Rhodes and Sheila Slaughter call this shift "academic capitalism." They observe that "Not for profit institutions in the academy are taking on the characteristics and activities of profit-making organizations."

Thinking locally, how does this trend affect us at Sinclair? One of our mentors is the League of Innovation. We were influenced by the philosophy of the League as we began to "transform" into a "learning college." The League states that it joins "with its partners to assist community colleges." Just who are these partners? The list is lengthy: Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Dell, IBM, Apple, Cisco Systems, Plato, Comp USA, Adobe Systems, and Sun Microsystems among others. I counted at least 98 "partners." If the League ever were autonomous, these partnerships would seem to leave little doubt that it is no longer an independent entity. The following question now begs to be asked. If Sinclair is so closely aligned with the League, has it also lost its sovereignty, whether real or imagined? Have we, as educators, at any point ever questioned the value or effectiveness of technology-based education, process education, or even the Learning College concept? Cary Nelson addresses corporate intrusion in an article in the April 16, 1999, issue of The Chronicle. According to Nelson, "Profitable corporate partnerships can be negotiated without concern for their social or political impact." I might add "their educational impact."

One of the strengths that colleges and universities have is their independence, whether it involves the freedom from political or corporate influences in designing curriculum, or the freedom to discuss and evaluate unpopular or even seditious ideas in the classroom. Will the day arrive when mega-corporations determine what is taught and how it is taught, or has it already arrived? A colleague mentioned in the Williams' article only half jokingly suggests that "we streamline the process and simply stop say every half hour during class and give a pitch for the nearby McDonald's, Wendy's, or Burger-King."

It seems that we are at a crossroads in education. As we venture into this new era, we are being faced with choices that will determine the direction that educational institutions will take for some time to come. Do we choose to surrender our independence and accept educational philosophies and methodologies that have not yet been proven worthy? Do we, as Neil Postman suggests, become a "technopoly," "a culture which is willing to submit all of its social institutions to the control of technology?" Or do we challenge, question, and evaluate new theory, technology, and "partnerships" in the same way that we ask our students in the classroom to challenge and evaluate new ideas? As educators, the choice is ours. 