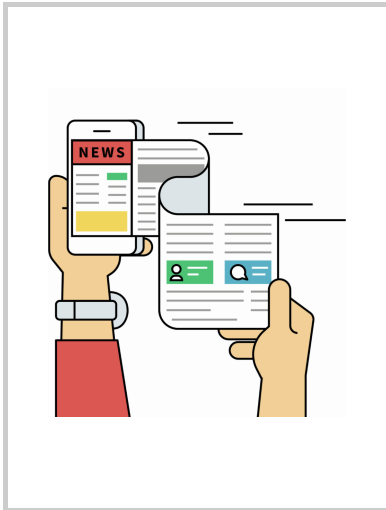




UNAC Connection - November 2023



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A Health Insurance Debacle, Resolved with UNAC's Help



By Cameron Young

I was Term Faculty at UAA until May 13, 2023, and had a contract extension until July 15. I contacted HR to make sure my health insurance would cover me until the end of July, as has been the policy when an employee's last day falls mid-month, their health insurance covers them until the end of that month. I was assured by HR that I was indeed covered through July 31. My husband is faculty at UAS and we both paid for the Premium Plan with Premera, so we both would receive maximum coverage.

I scheduled multiple health appointments in late July, and then I started receiving medical bills that indicated nothing was covered by insurance. It turns out there had been a clerical error with my husband's insurance plan and he was no longer in the system. For my own insurance plan, the University claimed they had a new policy as

of July 1, 2023, where the last day of an employee's contract is the last day they receive health insurance benefits. They denied all of my medical bills after July 15, even though I had an email from an HR representative that said I was covered through July 31.

Getting anyone from HR to respond to my inquiries was a frustrating experience. There was no one to call, only a generic email to write an inquiry, and several weeks before a response. We contacted Dr. Jill Dumesnil, President of United Academics and Dr. Melanie Arthur, Contract Manager of United Academics to explain the situation and they agreed to advocate on our behalf.

A few weeks later, I received a personal phone call from Jill reporting that the University had agreed to cover my medical bills through July 31. I cried tears of relief as there were multiple stressors in our lives and over \$10,000 in out-of-pocket medical bills on the line.

Three months later, we are still struggling to reconcile medical bills. We've spent dozens of hours on this issue, including many early mornings and lunch hours on the phone with doctor offices and medical billing specialists explaining the situation and requesting resubmission of bills to our insurance company. Even with a positive outcome, the amount of stress incurred is considerable. We have no doubt the advocacy from United Academics made the difference in the outcome of our situation.

On the Topic of Health Insurance: A JHCC Update

The University of Alaska health plan is self-insured. This means that all covered health care costs must be paid directly from a pool, 82% of which is funded by the employer and 18% of which is paid by employees in the form of payroll deductions. As you are probably aware, health care costs have been rising faster than inflation for many decades, and health insurance plans - including UA's - have seen declining benefits and rising premiums. Unfortunately, UA's health plan will be significantly impacted again in the next fiscal year.

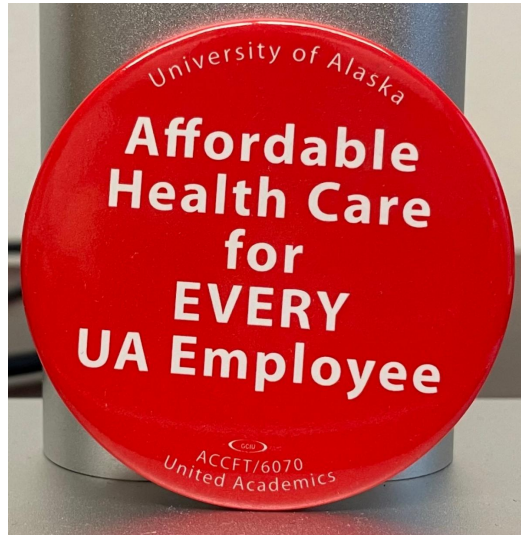
The Joint Health Care Committee (JHCC) advises the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) on any proposed health plan changes, and in their most recent meeting were informed that the health plan is expected to begin running a deficit in FY25 unless significant changes are made. The JHCC was asked to vote on several options for increasing deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums. Their recommendation to the CHRO was to make the smallest possible increases to deductibles (including a federally mandated increase to the HDHP deductibles) and not to increase out of pocket maximums. The CHRO must respond to these recommendations by December 13, and she must explain her reasons if she chooses not to accept the committee's recommendations.

UNAC supported the JHCC's recommendations because increasing deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums is a direct cost shift onto employees, and particularly those employees who need to use their healthcare benefits. However, this will leave only one option to keep the health plan from running a deficit - increasing the premiums that employees pay through payroll deductions. This is unavoidable and non-negotiable

because employees are contractually obligated through our CBA to pay 18% of plan costs. The JHCC will consider these increases in their February meeting.

UNAC is not happy to see health insurance costs continue to rise, particularly when our members have received so few pay increases in the past ten years. However, we'd rather see an increase to premiums, 82% of which will be covered by the university, than a direct cost shift to employees in the form of substantially higher deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums.

If you agree with the JHCC's recommendation, please consider reaching out to Memry Dahl and encouraging her not to overrule the will of the committee.



Faculty Control Curriculum and Unit Criteria

Shared governance is a foundational principle for universities and colleges in the United States. It means different stakeholders - faculty, staff, students, and administrators - hold primary responsibility for different aspects of UA operations.

Faculty - not deans, directors, or other supervisors - hold primary responsibility and control over their curriculum and unit criteria. This does not mean that individual faculty can ignore Faculty Senate approved unit criteria, syllabi requirements, or curriculum-related requirements. It does mean *your supervisor can't dictate how or what you teach on a day-to-day basis, the grades you give, or what's required to be a successful faculty member in your unit.*

Your faculty colleagues and you have primary responsibility over course content, teaching methods, grading methods, student learning outcomes, and unit criteria.



Update on UNAC Leadership Opportunities

Negotiation Team Selection

Nominations for our next negotiation team closed on November 15, 2023. Our Collective Bargaining Committee (CBC) is currently reviewing nominees. We had a wide slate of nominees from around the state, serving in different roles and disciplines. We are pleased to see so many people eager to participate in this important and vital UNAC role. Thank you to everyone who nominated themselves or agreed to let others nominate them. This is how democracy thrives.

Our CBC is scheduled to meet on November 28 to discuss nominees and make recommendations to the Executive Board. The Executive Board will then meet to discuss the CBC's recommendations and determine the official composition of our next negotiation team. We hope to be able to announce the new team members before winter break or shortly after.

Organizational Vice

Presidents and

Representative Assembly

Elections

While the CBC reviews nominees for the next negotiation team, our Elections Committee is preparing to solicit nominees for the upcoming Organizational Vice President and Representative Assembly elections.

Timeline:

- Nominations open on December 3, 2023
- Voting will open January 21 - February 5, 2024

The Org VP and RA positions are detailed in our [bylaws](#) and in [this video](#) as well as [this video](#).

We hope to have a healthy slate of candidates in this election cycle. Now is a great time to step up to union leadership!

A Discussion of UNAC dues

It's been five years since the 2018 U.S. Supreme Court's [Janus vs. AFSCME](#) decision determined that public sector unions such as United Academics could no longer collect a reduced 'agency fee' from bargaining unit members who chose not to be full dues paying union members. Those bargaining unit members who don't pay for any union services or contract protections are still legally entitled to those union services and protections, according to the Supreme Court's Janus decision.

A few years before the Janus decision, our RA voted to lower our dues from 1.25% dues deductions to the current 1.05% dues deductions. Just after the loss of fee

payers, the UA BOR declared financial exigency in 2019 and then 'compromised' on unprecedented budget cuts over three years. Chaos and panicked downsizing ensued.

The University presumed that tenured faculty could be non-retained for budgetary reasons. However, UNAC maintained that this would erode the meaning of tenure and we enlisted our legal counsel to fight this and other contract violations. Two grievances went all the way to arbitration and were ultimately settled in our favor. We settled other serious grievances in ways that protected our contract and benefited our members. While we are mostly over this particular "hump" we are seeing an uptick in contract violations because of high vacancy and turnover rates among crucial UA staff and administrative positions.

You will also remember that our last round of bargaining lasted over fourteen months and required prolonged negotiation team member buy-outs as well as extensive legal consultations. We managed to win increased raises over the life of the contract instead of management's stubborn insistence of 2% raises per year over the three-year contract period. We also staunchly and successfully defended the continued endorsement of AAUP documents on tenure, academic freedom, and collegiality. These wins required extensive financial investment of UNAC funds, including the filing of an Unfair Labor Practice against UA. We're due to again start bargaining to protect your rights and improve your compensation in August 2024.

With a not-insignificant minority of members choosing to be non-dues payers, our [Budget, Finance, and Audit Committee](#) has recommended to the RA that the body consider a return to our previous dues rate of 1.25%. While this is still below the national average of 1.5-2.0% for union dues, we do not take this change lightly. Protecting the provisions in our contract is costly and necessary.

This change will require a bylaws revision and a vote of the RA. Our Finance Committee will officially propose the dues increase to the RA at its February 2024 meeting, and the RA will vote on the increase after a second reading of the bylaws revisions during its April 2024 meeting.

Between now and then, we hope our non-dues payers will decide to join their colleagues in paying dues by completing our [membership form](#) and returning it to kate.quick@unac4996ak.com. We're all in this together, and the protections a union guarantees are not free.



Reminders

Title IX Training Reminder

UA requires all employees to complete Title IX training annually. If employees fail to complete the required [Title IX training](#), it will negatively impact UA's ability to attain federal funding ranging from student loans and Pell grants to faculty grants and contracts and more. Completion of required trainings is part of the [CBA \(article 17.3\)](#), and this mandatory annual training was to be completed by October 31,

2023.

If you have not yet completed the [Title IX training](#), please do so ASAP. It's required, overdue, and short and easy.

To request release from this course:

- [Click here for the UAA Opt-out request](#)
- [Click here for the UAF Opt-out request](#)
- [Click here for the UAS Opt-out request](#)

If you have questions about the training, contact your university's Title IX Coordinator:

University of Alaska Anchorage Sara Childress, Director & Title IX Coordinator uaa_titleix@uaa.alaska.edu (907) 786-6086	University of Alaska Fairbanks Kaydee VanFlein, Executive Director & Title IX Coordinator uaf-tix@alaska.edu 907-474-7300	University of Alaska Southeast Mitzi Bolanos Anderson uas.titleix@alaska.edu 907-796-6371
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UNAC Professional Development Funds

All UNAC bargaining unit members of every rank and title are eligible to apply for UNAC Professional Development Funds. These funds are described in Article 15.9 of our [CBA](#) and are to be used as monetary assistance for professional development opportunities. Each University follows slightly different application processes. Each provosts' office can help members work through the application process for their University.

UNAC Sick Leave Bank

The Sick Leave Bank application can be found under 'forms and guidelines' on this [UA Labor and Employee Relations](#) webpage.

The UNAC sick leave bank was formerly the UAFT sick leave bank; when the two unions merged into UNAC in 2018, the sick leave bank became the UNAC sick leave bank. It was incorporated into our most recent CBA (article 16.8). It replaces the leave-share program, which was eliminated over the summer.

Current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

Our CBA is available on our United Academics website:

<http://unitedacademicsak.org/resources/collective-bargaining-agreement-1>

United Academics on Social Media

- Like or follow our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.
- Like, share, or retweet our content!
- Use our [profile pictures and Zoom backgrounds](#) on your social media and Zoom accounts, especially during University Zoom meetings.
- Visit our [YouTube channel](#).

New UNAC Website

Check out our new, improved website: unitedacademicsak.org

Our new domain name adds clarity to which United Academics local we are - there are several around the country. It also resolves some internal domain registry issues

with our former URL.

Meeting Notices

UNAC General Membership Meetings

- Regularly scheduled meetings: every second Tuesday of the month from 5:30-7:00 p.m.
- Separate emails with meeting information, including the Zoom link, will be sent to all bargaining unit members before each meeting.
- **Next General Membership Meeting: Tuesday, December 12, 2023, 5:30-7:00 p.m. AKT.**

Next UNAC Representative Assembly Meeting*

Saturday, February 17, 2024, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. AKT via Zoom

UNAC Executive Board Meetings*

First and third Wednesday of each month, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. AKT

**Dues paying members are welcome to attend the RA and Executive Board meetings. Contact your Org VP and/or office staff for the Zoom link.*



Executive Board and Staff Contacts

President - Jill Dumesnil, Ph.D.
jill.dumesnil@unac4996ak.com

Treasurer - Nelta Edwards, Ph.D.
nelta.edwards@unac4996ak.com

Secretary - Abel Bult-Ito, Ph.D.
abel.bult.ito@unac4996ak.com

UAA Organizational VP - Tara Palmer
tara.palmer@unac4996ak.com

UAS Organizational VP - Kathy DiLorenzo, D.A.

kathy.dilorenzo@unac4996ak.com

UAF Organizational VP - Doug Cost, Ph.D.

doug.cost@unac4996ak.com

Extended Sites Organizational VP - Cindy Trussell, Ph.D.

cindy.trussell@unac4996ak.com

Contract Manager - Melanie Arthur, Ph.D.

melanie.arthur@unac4996ak.com

Organizing Manager - Kate Quick

kate.quick@unac4996ak.com

United Academics Local #4996 (UNAC) is the bargaining unit that represents post doctoral fellows, non-tenure track (term), tenure track, and tenured faculty at the University of Alaska. UNAC is an affiliate of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

www.unitedacademics.net

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