



UNAC Connection - June 2024



In this issue:

AAUP Biennial Convention Report
Member Spotlight
Benefits Arrears and Summer Deductions
Wellness Program Update
Weingarten Rights
Reminders

From the President: A Recap of AAUP's Biennial Convention by Jill Dumesnil

Earlier this month, UAF Organizational Vice President, Douglas Cost, and I attended the 2024 AAUP Conference and Biennial Meeting in Arlington, VA. The conference included informational sessions, presentations on pressing issues in higher education, AAUP awards, and plenary sessions. The Biennial Association Meeting is the business component of the larger AAUP Conference and Biennial Meeting. Doug and I both represented UNAC as voting delegates at the meeting.

For three days (June 13-15), I attended sessions on academic freedom and civil discourse, legislative interference in higher education, organizing and bargaining. I also networked with union activists from across the country and got reacquainted with friends and colleagues from previous AAUP events. In one session, I made new contacts with staff from the AFT benefits division who will present information on the amazing benefits available to UNAC members at a fall general membership meeting. Stay tuned for details to come.

The Biennial Meeting of the AAUP was divided into three sessions. In Session I, we heard a variety of committee reports and candidate statements from those running for President, Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, and national at-large Council seats. Session II consisted of officer and council elections and more committee

reports. Of particular interest was the report from Afshan Jafar (Connecticut College), Chair of the Committee on College and University Governance. She reported that the committee had received pressure from both AFT and from the AAUP Executive Council on their investigations not being in line with leadership priorities. She eloquently pushed back on the unprecedented and unsanctioned interference in the committee's work.

In Session III, the election results were announced with The Faculty for the Common Good slate winning four-year terms. I have contacted the newly elected leaders offering my congratulations and UNAC assistance with their work. A warm welcome to these incoming elected leaders! They join six returning members of the national council whose terms continue for two more years.

- President: Todd Wolfson, Rutgers University
- Vice President: Rotua Lumbantobing, Connecticut State University
- Secretary-Treasurer: Danielle Aubert, Wayne State University
- At-Large Members of Council: Paul Davis, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College
- (not a member of the slate) and Chenjerai Kumanyika, New York University

Also in Session III, delegates considered and approved constitutional amendments allowing Council members to be paid the equivalent of one course per semester at their buyout rate. Previously, only officers could receive compensation in the form of a one-course buyout. Council members were prohibited from receiving any compensation or release time. Under the amendment to Article IV, Section 5, council members can receive release time or compensation at an equivalent rate, up to a limit of one course per semester, for extraordinary participation in Association matters. Also previously, except for certain compensation for officers who are part-time faculty, an officer could only receive compensation through release time from the officer's institution and could not receive payment directly, even if the institution declined to grant release time. Under the amendment to Article III, Section 7, an officer, whether part-time or full-time faculty, can be paid compensation directly by AAUP at a rate equivalent to the release time rate. Finally, the amendment to Article IV, Section 2, provides the Council with the authority to approve any release time or equivalent compensation for Officers and Council Members.

In Session III delegates also approved a proposal calling for the AAUP to divest all fossil fuel investments and to urge pension boards, college and university committees and administrators managing the retirement funds of its members, and the boards of Vanguard, Fidelity, and TIAA, and the AAUP Foundation to enact a moratorium on new direct investments in fossil fuels, to develop and execute a plan to divest fully, and to reinvest funds in renewable energy projects.

You can find more information at [AAUP Biennial Meeting](#). In July, Organizing Manager, Kate Quick, and I will be attending the [2024 AFT Convention](#) in Houston, TX. You can expect a report on that in the July newsletter!



Jill Dumesnil (UNAC president and UAS professor) and Doug Cost (UAF Org VP and associate professor) attend a session during the AAUP biennial meeting and conference. (photo courtesy of AAUP)



Jill Dumesnil sits with our AAUP National Organizer, Malori Musselman, during the biennial meeting. (photo courtesy of AAUP)

Member Spotlight

TouchCare: Five Stars, Highly Recommend

By Barbara Brown



I may be an expert at helping college students succeed, but I am frequently confounded when it comes to understanding the details of my healthcare insurance plan including what is covered, how to access certain benefits, how to plan for upcoming expenses, and how close I am to meeting my deductible or out of pocket maximum for the coverage period. I used to reach out to UA Human Resources staff with my questions but this has become increasingly difficult since HR was centralized to UA Statewide some years ago.

Fortunately, UA offers [TouchCare](#), a healthcare concierge service that helps UA employees with their questions about healthcare and health insurance benefits. I have used TouchCare quite a few times since 2022 and have always been very satisfied with the service. TouchCare staff respond almost immediately to my questions and follow through by doing research that saves me a lot of time and effort. Some examples of questions they have helped me answer include how to use my HSA to plan for future expenses, how to claim a travel reimbursement for health care outside of my community in Kodiak, how to estimate how much allergy shots will cost over five years, if I need insurance coverage for emergency medical transportation, and how much is covered if I chose to use an out-of-network provider.

The TouchCare staff are accessible by phone, email, or online and they communicate frequently and conveniently through email and the TouchCare portal where all our conversations are documented for future reference. Healthcare insurance is designed to be unintelligible to the masses: TouchCare staff offer free guidance so you can make the best decisions for you and your family based on your specific circumstances. In short, TouchCare is a UA benefit worth using!

Benefits Deductions: Arrears and Summer Deductions

On July 1, 2023, UA human resources changed their deductions and accounting practices and no longer deducts benefits on a 19 pay-period schedule, as was their practice for many years. As a result of this change, benefits for all UA employees are deducted on a 26 pay-period schedule, whether or not an employee is on paid-status for all 26 pay periods. A person teaching summer classes will see paycheck deductions for benefits, unlike in past summer course assignments.

For UA employees in unpaid status, arrears for benefits deductions during the \$0 pay periods now accumulate and must be paid off. UNAC fought this change but human resources insisted past practice was no longer possible. What this means is that – after a summer without pay – UA employees will see significant additional deductions from their paychecks until their arrears balance is zero. The arrears balance will be deducted from paychecks at a rate of 40% of the total arrears balance and 100% of FSA deductions. This will be a hardship for our bargaining unit members returning to work in August after a summer without pay.

An obvious solution is to give employees who work fewer than 12 months per year the option of spreading out paychecks over 12 months per year. UA has long insisted that this is impossible although other universities do it and Alaska's K-12 districts do it. Fortunately, we learned this spring that UA may be now interested in pursuing this option with the Banner 9 upgrade. It won't solve the financial problems the arrears will cause people this year, but it would solve the problem for the future.

Wellness Rebate Update

UNAC's Representative Assembly passed the following resolution on April 2, 2022 ([meeting minutes](#)):

“United Academics supports the elimination of the UA wellness program in its current form, where there is a monetary incentive for participation in the program.”

This resolution was passed after two RA meetings and a deep discussion of the research versus the enticement of a rebate. A plethora of research (for example, [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#),) illustrates that wellness programs such as UA's don't work to improve health and wellness or reduce costs. Free access to the campus gym and a healthy work-life balance would be much more effective than BMI measurements and extra doctor visits at improving overall health and wellness among UA employees. UNAC's representatives to the Joint Health Care Committee (JHCC) then brought this resolution to UA administration in February 2024, where it was adopted by a majority of the committee.

In response to negative feedback from participants in UA's Wellness Program, UA has overridden the JHCC's recommendation to end the program. Instead, they have selected a new vendor to administer it and have adjusted the mechanism through which the rebates are paid, such that they are now following article 16.1 of our CBA such that 82% will be paid by UA and 18% paid by employees. Previously, employees' premium payments were shouldering 100% of the cost of the wellness rebates, resulting in inflated premiums, especially for those who chose not to participate.

Healthcare plan premium increases are due to take effect July 1, 2024. Thanks to efforts from members of the Joint Health Care Committee (JHCC), these increases will be smaller than UA originally proposed to the JHCC a few months ago but will be slightly higher than if the Wellness Program had been eliminated.

If you have opinions on this topic, we encourage you to contact UNAC's JHCC members: Jill Dumesnil (JHCC chair), Abel Bult Ito, Melanie Arthur, and Tim Hinterberger (alternate).

Weingarten Rights

Being part of a bargaining unit comes with many benefits. Weingarten Rights, or the right to union representation during a meeting that could result in discipline, is one of the most important union benefits we have. Weingarten Rights ensure that bargaining unit members are not unfairly or unjustly disciplined.

Watch our short video below for a good summary of how to use your Weingarten Rights.



Reminders

First day of AY25 Contract is August 11, 2024

Work assigned to be performed between May 11 and August 10, 2024, should be detailed on a separate workload with a summer appointment letter or a contract extension.

Member Highlights Corner

Take five minutes or less to submit content for our highlights corner by filling out [this form](#). We want to highlight your recent publications, presentations, performances, community service, and other professional achievements in a sidebar on our website (<http://unitedacademicsak.org/>).

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).

Current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

Our CBA is available on our United Academics website:
<http://unitedacademics.net/collective-bargaining-agreement-cba/>

YouTube Channel

Our [YouTube channel](#) (@United Academics_4996_AK) has various training videos. Contact us if you have additional training requests.

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, July 9, 2024, 5:30-7:00 p.m. AKT

Next UNAC Representative Assembly Meeting*

Saturday, August 17, 2024, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. AKT

UNAC Executive Board Meetings*

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 Contacts

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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).

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