

UNAC Connection - January 2026



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UNAC State Legislative Priorities

Our Legislative Relations Committee stays on top of state legislation and federal government actions related to higher education. Each year, the committee sends a small group of faculty to Juneau to meet with legislators and participate in a state union conference held by Alaska AFL-CIO.

This year, a group of seven faculty members will attend the union conference and meet with key legislators to discuss our priorities, which include adding a faculty regent to the UA Board of Regents, returning the public employee and teachers retirement systems (PRS and TRS) to a defined benefit plan, and fully funding our raises and academic programs. To get involved in this important committee, contact chair [Mary Wegner](#).

Below is the handout they will leave with legislators after their appointments.

United Academics AAUP/ AFT local 4996



Legislative Priorities

- ✱ **Full funding for our contractual compensation:** Our CBA requires legislative appropriation for our negotiated annual salary increases.
- ✱ **Passage of HB78/SB28: Relating to PRS/TRS and Defined Benefit opportunities**
 - Alaska's current defined contribution system has contributed to the collapse of recruitment and retention efforts across public sector jobs, including UA.
 - Working age Alaskans continue to leave the state for jobs with higher salaries and better retirement benefits in other states, creating workforce challenges.
 - A defined benefit system will make Alaska's public sector more competitive.
- ✱ **Passage of HB10: Relating to the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska**
 - Would add depth and understanding to BOR discussions and decisions
 - The faculty regent should be chosen through a process that parallels the student regent selection process; the faculty alliance would submit a list of full time faculty for consideration.
- ✱ **Full funding for UA's academic programs in the BOR budget request**
 - Unfilled faculty and staff vacancies shrink Alaska's workforce and overburden those who remain, putting Alaska's diverse workforce needs at risk.
 - Student success suffers and Alaska's workforce needs are put at risk without optimal allocation of full time faculty and fully funded programs.
 - The socioeconomic vibrancy of Alaskan communities will be negatively impacted if opportunities at UA shrink.
- ✱ **Re-Activate the UA Caucus in response to extreme lapses in federal funding**
 - Federal grant funding has contributed to Alaska's economy and benefits Alaska; cancelled research and title III funding will negatively impact Alaska without added state support.
 - An unstable future for student loans and Pell grants will limit student enrollment and vision about the role that higher education can play in career opportunities and trajectory

Update on NOAA, NASA, NSF Budgets & Indirect Cost Recovery

The U.S. House and Senate recently [passed budgets for three agencies](#) that provide many millions of dollars in funding to UA and other universities: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the National Science Foundation (NSF). The newly passed budgets include only a 3% spending reduction for these three agencies, despite the President's original budget calling for approximately 50% cuts to them. This is great news for UA's researchers and the UA community!

In further good news, the budgets also lock in the current "indirect cost recovery" percentages and reject the President's court-challenged Executive Order (14332) that called to cap these payments at 15%. This money pays for electricity, building maintenance, lab space, and support staff, among other things, and is more great

news for UA's bottom line. The budgets now await President Trump's signature. While he could veto these budgets, White House sources claim he is likely to sign them into law.

The House and Senate will now take up bills to fund other federal agencies, some of which have helped to fund UA's health-related programs, libraries, arts, and humanities, to name a few.

Non-UA Contact Information

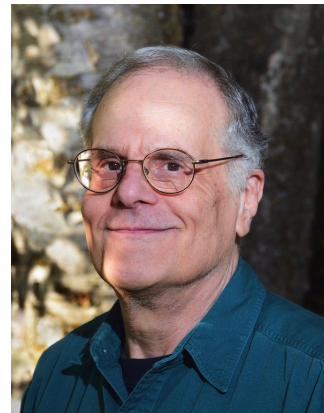
If you have already updated your personal email and cell phone address recently, please disregard this section.

Help UNAC and our national affiliate, AAUP, contact you without using your @alaska.edu email address. Fill out [this brief form](#) to help us update our records of your personal contact information. This will ensure that you don't miss important information from UNAC or AAUP that can't be distributed to @alaska.edu addresses.

Faculty Spotlight: Ron Spatz

Professor Spatz first joined UAA's English faculty in 1980, before nearly 400 of our current bargaining unit members were born! Spatz is our longest-serving faculty member and a founding member of UNAC.

When he arrived at UAA in 1980, he founded—and still edits—the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, an acclaimed literary publication that *The Washington Post* deemed “one of the nation's best,” *The New York Review of Books* called “one of our best, and most imaginative,” and *The New York Times* described as a “fresh treasure.” In 2020, UAA cut ties with the journal due to financial constraints and a de-prioritization of the creative arts, but Spatz continues to keep it thriving outside of the university.



A former National Endowment for the Arts Fellow, he has also had an illustrious career teaching at UAA, working with graduate students until 2006 in UAA's original MFA residential creative writing program, and continuing to teach and mentor undergraduate students. He also founded UAA's Honors College and the Office of Undergraduate Research and was a recipient of the Edith Bullock Prize for Excellence.

Spatz's long history in the arts and humanities was recognized with the 2024 Alaska Governor's Award for a Lifetime of Achievement in the Arts and, earlier, with a 2010 Alaska Governor's Award in the Humanities.

Ron's longstanding dedication to UAA, the literary arts and humanities, and our union is greatly appreciated.

UNAC Leadership Opportunities: Update

2027-28 Negotiation Team

Team nominations closed on January 15, 2026, and UNAC's

Statewide Officer Elections

The outcome of our statewide officer nominations was

Collective Bargaining Committee (CBC) is busy interviewing 8 nominees. The interviews will wrap up before the end of January. Then the CBC will meet to compare notes on the interviews before making team recommendations to the Executive Board.

The Executive Board has a meeting scheduled for February 18, 2026, during which they will review the CBC's recommendations and make a final decision.

The new Negotiation Team will begin meeting in July of 2026, with our next round of negotiations beginning mid-2027. This timeframe gives them plenty of time to prepare and strategize. They will be counting on each of YOU to help them determine priorities through upcoming surveys and member meetings.

announced on Thursday, January 22, 2026. Each officer position received only one nominee. Our election rules are based on guidance from our national affiliate and charter holder, American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and state that when each open seat has only one candidate, those candidates should be declared the de facto winner of the election.

Thus, we announced that our continuing president will be Jill Dumesnil, professor of Mathematics at UAS. Our continuing treasurer will be Sharon Chamard, professor of Justice at UAA. Our continuing Secretary will be Richie Berndt, associate professor of EMT, Paramedicine, and Paramedic Academy.

Their new term begins on July 1, 2026, and concludes on June 30, 2029.

Higher Education in the News

- NIH has re-approved 100s of grants that were previously frozen or denied. ([more here](#))
- U.S. Education Department finalized their new 'earnings test' related to providing student loans and Pell Grants to students enrolled in programs with low post-graduate earnings. ([more here](#))
- New rules on federal loans for graduate and professional degrees will negatively impact some graduate and professional degree students at UA. ([more here](#))

Strike Solidarity Corner

Unionized workers from varied occupations have been going on strike against their employers. Their occupations vary, but one thing remains the same. They are all demanding respect in the form of improved working conditions, competitive benefits, and inflation-aware pay increases.

- 40,000 academic and research employees in the University of California system and represented by United Auto Workers (UAW) will take a strike authorization vote in mid-February. These workers are demanding better job security, opportunities for career advancement, and protections for international workers. ([more here](#))
- 3,700 graduate student workers at the University of Pennsylvania, and represented by UAW, have announced that they will go on strike on February 17, 2026, if their demands for better pay, benefits, and protections for international students are not honored. ([more here](#))

- 15,000 nurses in New York City went on strike starting on January 11, 2026, in response to stalled contract negotiations. The nurses are striking for safe nurse/patient ratios, better security in hospitals, and fair pay. ([more here](#))
 - Minnesota labor unions and faith organizations call for a statewide, daylong strike on January 23, 2026, in response to escalations in ICE activity in the state. ([more here](#))
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Meeting Notices

UNAC General Membership Meetings

Regularly scheduled meetings: every second Tuesday of the month from 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Next General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, February 10, 2026, from 5:30-7:00 p.m. AKST

Next UNAC Representative Assembly Meeting*

Saturday, February 21, 2026, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. AKST

UNAC Executive Board Meetings*

First and third Wednesday of each month, 8:30 a.m.-10:00 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.*

Reminders

UNAC Website

Please visit our United Academics website: unitedacademicsak.org for helpful resources including:

- Executive Board officer contact info & Representative Assembly roster
- A pdf version of our current CBA
- An archive of our monthly newsletters
- E-Board and RA meeting minutes
- Our union by-laws and constitution
- Union member benefits
- And more

Social Media

- Follow us at our new [BlueSky](#) account
- Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- Like and share our posts, and tag us in your own posts

YouTube Channel

Our [YouTube channel](#) (@United Academics_4996_AK) has short member-to-member video messages, videos explaining union rights, training videos for promotion and workloads, and other informational content. Contact us if you have additional training or other video requests.

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:

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

UNAC Swag Store

Looking for something new to wear to work? Need a new coffee mug or a new canvas bag? Shop at our [new United Academics store](#) on Bonfire to find the perfect item for you. A small portion of the proceeds goes back to UNAC, and we'll use the proceeds to purchase more free swag for our members. You can select from items with our classic logo or our new, updated logo.



Executive Board Contacts

President - Jill Dumesnil, PhD

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Secretary - Richie Berndt, MSML

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

unitedacademicsak.org

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