We are learning that COVID-19 has changed everything for now, from our teaching online, even when not everyone is ready or willing, to whether we can keep our doors open next year.

This is, of course, on top of a looming recession and failing university budget that has been underwater for the last four years.

However, this doesn’t mean that we cannot forget that the America Association of University Professors (AAUP) has two main concerns, academic freedom and shared governance. It takes all of us to ensure that in good and bad times, we maintain the “eyes on the prize.”

Academic freedom
The AAUP national office has recently sent out guidelines critical of administrators nationwide monitoring faculty classes online. It also notes that online teaching evaluations, as we have seen at UCO, often have a lower response rate than in the classroom.

Will the stress faculty have gone through to accommodate students online penalize them? If students can get a “P” or “NP” as their choice for our classes, can we not have a comparative safeguard for us?

Online response rates are already often too low to incorporate in our averages; does this raise questions about whether we do too many

Faculty, staff express concerns over medical costs, coverage in AAUP survey

Results from a survey conducted by the AAUP on health and dental insurance for UCO faculty and staff show serious deficiencies in regard to the coverage of the plans, their costs and UCO’s explanation of these plans.

In the fall of 2019, the AAUP conducted an online survey on UCO health and dental insurance for faculty and staff that received 318 responses.

The survey had a quantitative section with multiple-choice questions, and a qualitative section for written comments. Dr. Leeda Copley administered the survey with the Qualtrix application, developed many of the survey questions and summarized the results.

Dr. Elizabeth Overman contributed questions and valuable advice about the survey. What follows is a summary of the findings.

• Costs
  Bottom line: A plurality of respondents were not satisfied with the cost of UCO medical and dental insurance.
  Medical insurance: 46% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 22% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 32% very satisfied or satisfied.
  Dental insurance: 43% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 19% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 52% very satisfied and satisfied.
  Dental insurance: 30% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 16% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 54% very satisfied or satisfied.
  • Plan information provided by UCO
  Bottom line: A plurality of respondents were not satisfied with UCO’s explanation of the medical and insurance plans.
  Medical insurance: 30% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 22% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 48% very satisfied or satisfied.

Results from a survey conducted by the AAUP on health and dental insurance for UCO faculty and staff show serious deficiencies in regard to the coverage of the plans, their costs and UCO’s explanation of these plans.
As an instructor this has been an “interesting” time to say the least. I’ve never personally taught an online/alternative instruction course before, but I’ve tried to create the best experience I can, all things considered.

I am also keeping in mind that many students are in survival mode and facing disappointment and fear in these uncertain times. I am extremely extroverted as well, so this time has been a difficult adjustment for me.

I have, however, enjoyed finally getting to do more reading for pleasure. I have been getting into mysteries and even writing a little poetry. It’s my hope that we can learn from this experience how to create an even stronger and more supportive community.

I have been so impressed by how our faculty have worked diligently to create the most positive experience they can for our students.

Meet Lindsey Churchill:
Associate Professor of History, Director Women’s Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center

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Faculty, staff express concerns over medical costs, coverage in AAUP survey

Dental insurance: 27% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 29% neither satisfied or dissatisfied and 39% very satisfied of satisfied.

In their written comments, some people had horror stories about denial of coverage, but they were mostly unhappy with the costs, the general direction UCO seems to be heading on benefits (shifting costs to faculty and staff in monthly premiums) and the drastic changes every year making it difficult to plan/know what is covered.

One written comment expresses many respondents’ frustrations with Blue Cross/Blue Shield, the company UCO contracted to provide medical and dental insurance: “Blue Cross is EVIL. I do not believe in god. I believe in EVIL: BLUE CROSS. Please end this pain.”

Main point: UCO faculty and staff do not deserve deficient medical and dental insurance that costs too much, lacks adequate coverage and is not clearly explained. We want to work with the administration to do more, to do it better, for the UCO community.

As AAUP leaders often say we are only as strong as our faculty handbook! It is hard to know what the ultimate impact of COVID-19 will be at UCO.

However, we advocate for greater transparency on financial issues regarding our current revenue shortfall and COVID-19’s effects on enrollments, revenues, and hiring and renewals. We will continue to monitor this situation.

UCO’s AAUP is small but mighty. While we are not a union, we are an advocacy chapter and we need your energy and/or membership to better fight for you!!

For our administration to listen to us, we need more faculty members like yourself to speak up. If you want to join, please, email me if you are interested: jwood41@uco.edu.
UCO’s chapter of AAUP works with Oklahomans for Business and Property Owner’s Rights to help keep track of activity in the legislature involving guns on campus. There are two bills currently under consideration.

One bill (SJR 16) is a proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate all restrictions on weapon possession (except for convicted criminals and the “mentally incompetent”). This bill also forbids any registration or taxation on gun or ammunition possession or sales.

This bill was sent to committee last year and was carried over and passed the Rules committee this year. It is unlikely that it will pass through the remaining required votes by the April 17th and April 23rd deadlines.

The other bill (HB 2336) has made more progress: it has passed both House and Senate, and is currently being engrossed (i.e. reconciling changes between chambers). This bill allows for licensed handgun owners to have guns on campus, but only (a) in locked cars and hidden from view.

It also allows for schools to adopt policies to allow their own personnel to carry weapons on campus. The bill otherwise reaffirms that it is unlawful to have guns on campus. It is possible that this bill will be passed, but there is no vote currently scheduled.

Guns on Campus: AAUP keeping track of SJR 16, HB 2336

Continued on page 4

Commentary: Are teaching evaluations fair?

By Elizabeth S. Overman, Ph.D.
Sergeant-at-Arms

Numerous professional academic associations are calling for an end to the reliance on student teaching evaluations in determining tenure and promotion of college teachers.

The AAUP, the American Sociological Association (ASA), the American Historical Association (AHA) and 15 other academic associations are in favor of more holistic processes that truly reflect the complexities of college instruction.

An increasing body of research demonstrates that student evaluations are weakly related to student learning. These evaluations do exhibit overriding biases against marginalized groups, such as women and faculty of color.

Some of the other biases include:
• White instructors of either gender are rated higher by students.
• Online instructors receive higher evaluations if their students assume they are male or physically attractive.

Student feedback is important, but the ASA recommends that it not be determinative, especially since studies reveal there are improved methods of evaluation, which include portfolio development, peer review and self-evaluation. Faculty deserve a “fair, accurate and balanced evaluation process” (ASA 2019).

The AHA argues that student evaluations do not correspond to other measures of teaching effectiveness and student learning, which makes their use questionable. Other factors not related to teaching also come into play: time of day, subject, class size, required course vs. an elective course.

The AHA points out that teaching evaluations are used in “statistically problematic ways…categorical measures are treated as interval, response rates are ignored, small differences are given undue weight and distributions are not reported” (AHA 2019).

Is it not time for UCO faculty, working collectively in departments and with faculty senate representatives, AAUP and the Center for Transformative Learning, to develop processes that are “fair, accurate and balanced” to evaluate teaching?
As a full-time lecturer at UCO I am required to teach five classes and to provide service to my field of study and to the University.

An overwhelming aspect as a lecturer is time management. Juggling five classes can be a monumental task without the ability to manage one's time. In this column I want share a couple of tips for time efficiency that might benefit all UCO faculty.

You can be creative in how you write things you need to remember in your date book, calendar, etc. Because I teach several sections each semester, one of the things I do is use different colored markers for each section/course I teach on my wall calendar.

I write down the due dates for every assignment I give throughout the semester.

A monthly block of different colors is a quick visual cue so I don’t forget which assignment is due for which class. Moreover, I continue this color scheme as it pertains to the management of my classes. I select a color for each class.

For instance, for my 2 p.m. Monday/Wednesday class I have chosen blue. Accordingly, the blue pocket folder and blue file folders are designated for that class.

Therefore, when I get extremely busy with grading and such, and looking for materials related to that class, I can quickly notice blue from the other colors rather than viewing a sea of manilla folders.

I hope these time management ideas will be of service to you. As they say, “Work smarter, not harder.”

UCO’s American Association of University Professors is not a union but is a professional organization. All professions have similar organizations, and the main goal of any of these organizations is to advocate for its members and the professions they represent.

While UCO’s AAUP chapter is not a union, the chapter is an advocacy chapter, and like President John Wood said, “we need your energy and/or membership to better fight for you!!”

Below this article is an associate membership form that provides you with chapter benefits, and dues are very reasonable.

Or please consider joining the national organization, which will include chapter dues. Dues are higher but national and local benefits are included.

More information about national membership can be found online: https://www.aaup.org/membership/join

UCO AAUP Associate Membership Application Form

Date: ___________________

Name: ____________________________ Title: ____________________________

Department________________________ Office Phone: ____________________________

Cell Phone: __________________________ Email: ____________________________

Membership Status: [ ] Associate ($20 annual) [ ] Adjunct/Instructor ($10 annual)

I am interested in (check all that apply):

[ ] Committee work [ ] Attending chapter meetings [ ] Attending regional and national AAUP events

[ ] Running for chapter board positions (requires national membership)

Please return this form with payment to: Leeda Copley, Treasurer
Campus mail: LAN 206, Box 167 • Email: lcopley@uco.edu