

The State of AAUP Principles at the University of Northern Iowa  
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The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), since its inception, has articulated certain fundamental principles necessary for a university to embrace in order to better the society in which it operates. Among these fundamental principles are (1) tenure, (2) academic freedom, (3) shared governance, and (4) due process. Most American universities have wholeheartedly embraced these principles, and as a consequence, have become the envy of the world. AAUP and its various campus chapters vigorously defend these principles when they come under overt attack and when they slowly erode. The purpose of this document is to present an assessment of the state of these principles at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) in 2008.

Currently, UNI-United Faculty/AAUP (UF/AAUP) sees no ongoing overt attack on the fundamental AAUP principles at UNI. Assessing the extent of any erosion of these principles at UNI is a more daunting task. Certainly, the officers and members of UF/AAUP constantly watch for any sort of decay in these principles. But, occasionally, casual observation is not enough. To this end, UF/AAUP has conducted a survey of faculty opinions regarding the fundamental AAUP principles at UNI. This document summarized the findings of this survey along with the observations of UF/AAUP officers and members.

#### **Tenure**

The University has made no attempt to dismiss for cause a tenured faculty member at UNI in the recent past. No faculty members have filed grievances with UF/AAUP for denial of tenure in the recent past. Faculty members seem to be well aware of the standards in their discipline that must be achieved to earn tenure. But, some improvements in the process could be made, especially in keeping probationary faculty well informed of what is expected of them to earn tenure and promotion.

#### **Academic Freedom**

The UF/AAUP survey of the amount of autonomy in research, teaching, and service at UNI varies substantially by college. Overall, about 88 percent of the faculty at UNI report that the university values and fosters the academic freedom of faculty. But, faculty in some colleges report problems. For example, faculty members in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences report a much higher degree of dissatisfaction with their autonomy in making curriculum decisions (24.4 percent) and PAC decisions (17.1 percent). On the bright side, faculty members in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts report very low degrees of dissatisfaction with their autonomy in research (0 percent), service (0 percent), and curriculum decisions (0 percent). Based on the survey findings, if UF/AAUP were to give an award to the UNI college that values and fosters academic freedom better than any other college, this award would be awarded to the College of Humanities and Fine Arts.

#### **Shared Governance**

Overall, 34.1 percent of the faculty report dissatisfaction with shared governance at UNI. This finding suggests that shared governance is an area that would benefit from more careful attention. The greatest problem in this area appears to be the gradual marginalization of faculty input in administrative decision making. Sharing governance with faculty takes time and effort. The faculty shared governance system (University Senate, College Senates, faculty committees) looks like most such systems. However, many faculty members report that their contributions to shared governance are not valued or appreciated by many academic administrators. As a consequence, the strongest faculty leaders are hesitant in participating in shared governance bodies. Only the Chair of the University Faculty Senate receives (a single) course release time. All other faculty leaders receive no release time, the University Faculty Senate has no home office or staff, and the University Faculty Senate has virtually no budget. UNI has evolved to include a complex system of faculty committees, some of which are created by and report to the University Faculty Senate or the various college senates, while some are created by UNI administrators. Many of the later are ad hoc committees doing the work that a standing senate committee

could perform. Curriculum seems to be the only area in which the various senates and their committees play a meaningful role.

Shared governance occurs at multiple levels within any university. For example, faculty members report increasing stronger dissatisfaction with shared governance from the departmental level (22.1 percent) to the college level (30.3 percent) to the provost level (47.7 percent). Faculty members in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences report the strongest degree of dissatisfaction with shared governance at every level (29.3, 39, 58.5 percent), while faculty in the College of Natural Sciences report the lowest degree of dissatisfaction in this area (15, 20, 33). Opportunities for shared governance tend to be more prevalent at the departmental and college level than the university (Provost) level. Nonetheless, UF/AAUP strongly believes that an improvement in shared governance at the Provost level would help set the tone for improved shared governance at every level and benefit UNI significantly.

Finally, shared governance also includes consulting with faculty before academic administrative candidates are hired. Overall, 29.5 percent of the faculty are dissatisfied with their opportunities to meet and comment on short-listed, academic administrative candidates before hiring decision are made. This dissatisfaction is highest in the College of Social and Behavioral Science (41.5 percent) and lowest in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts (16.7 percent).

Overall, of the fundamental AAUP principles, UNI would benefit considerable if academic administrators and faculty would devote more attention and time to the existing shared governance structure on campus and make more use of this structure rather than create substitute, ad-hoc committees to seek faculty input into decision making. To this end, UF/AAUP recommends that the University Faculty Senate create a committee consisting of the strongest faculty leaders on campus to investigate ways to improve shared governance at UNI (including switching to the appointment of department chairs instead of heads), and report the findings of this committee to the Senate and Provost for consideration and implementation.

#### **Due Process**

Overall, UNI faculty members find that UNI provides faculty ample due process procedures for airing grievances. But, there are differences among the colleges. Nearly 20 percent of the faculty members in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences disagreed with the survey statement that the university provides faculty ample due process procedures. On the other hand, only 9.3 percent of the faculty in the College of Natural Sciences disagreed with the statement on due process. UF/AAUP observations reveal that the single most prevalent grievance among faculty centers on the poor management practices of academic administrators. Unfortunately, grievances of this sort do not lend themselves to the faculty grievance procedures. But, they are related to shared governance. As noted above, UNI would benefit from an improvement in shared governance, especially at the Provost and dean levels.

#### **Overall Assessment**

With only a few exceptions (shared governance), faculty are satisfied with the support they find for AAUP principles at UNI. However, the differences among colleges are striking. For example, faculty in the College of Social and Behavioral Science tend to be more dissatisfied than their colleagues in the other colleges, while faculty in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts tend to be the most satisfied with the support provide to AAUP principles in their respective colleges. Faculty in the College of Natural Science are second only to CHFA in their degree of satisfaction. Based on this survey, United Faculty/AAUP recognizes the exceptional support for AAUP principles provided to faculty in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts and the College of Natural Science.

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