

Board of Trustees update—Monday, August 13, 2007

The Board of Trustees and the United Faculty of Florida negotiating teams moved close to agreement on articles relating to parental leave and UFF release time in a bargaining session on Friday, August 10. Discussions also continued on discipline and faculty appointments.

At the July 27 meeting, the UFF presented a proposal on Article 17—Leaves that attempted to clarify what both parties agreed was a confusing policy on parental leave. The BOT proposal presented Friday adopted much of the UFF proposal's language and expanded the policy to allow either parent to take leave, not just for health or medical needs, but also for personal needs, safety or transportation or to provide psychological support. The proposed article would also provide increased flexibility for employees with instructional assignments to work with their supervisors in structuring the timing of leave. The UFF will review the article, but both parties anticipate being able to reach tentative agreement at the next bargaining session.

On the subject of release time for UFF negotiators, the BOT team expressed frustration regarding the limited times that the UFF team was available for bargaining in spite of being given release time for that purpose and noted that, in some instances, bargaining team members had given their release time to non-bargaining team members. The BOT team presented a proposal for Article 3—UFF Privileges, that would require release time be used by the UFF chief negotiator and at least two other bargaining team members when contract negotiations are occurring. The UFF acknowledged the problem but pointed out that, even with release time, bargaining team members still have teaching and departmental responsibilities. Because teaching assignments vary widely among team members, it is difficult to find times when everyone is available.

The BOT suggested that a possible solution would be to set aside one day for bargaining and for the parties to work together to reconcile teaching schedules during bargaining periods. At the end of the discussion, the BOT proposed aspirational language expressing the intent of both parties to work more closely to facilitate the negotiating process. UFF agreed to the language, and both parties anticipate coming to final agreement at the next negotiating session.

The parties continued discussion on Article 16—Disciplinary Action and Job Abandonment. Although much progress has been made, the two sides remain apart on the issue of pay during the time a faculty member is being investigated for misconduct that could lead to termination and the length of time the university has to render a final decision. The UFF expressed concern that by simply being investigated for misconduct, employees suffer “reputational harm” that may also have economic repercussions. The union contends that the longer a final decision is delayed, the greater the potential harm becomes. While waiting for a decision, faculty are essentially in limbo, not knowing whether they need to look for a new job and make other decisions about their future, the UFF stated. The BOT team recognized the UFF's concerns but stated that it is in the faculty member's best interest for the deliberations to be complete and thoughtful. A rush

to judgment could be more damaging to the faculty member than a speedy, but possibly incorrect, decision. The parties agreed to continue discussions on the subject at the next meeting.

The final discussion centered on Article 8—Appointment. The parties remain far apart on this article. The UFF wishes to incorporate into the contract a uniform rotation policy for determining summer teaching assignments and assignments to “planned out of load” programs such as the EMBA and PMBA. The BOT resists incorporating a uniform policy into the contract, citing the need for colleges to have flexibility in assigning supplemental appointments, especially during tight budget times.

The next negotiating session is scheduled for August 28, 2007, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in Communications Rm. 213.