

Disability Rights and Concerns Committee Meeting
September 30, 2006

In attendance: David Dubois, Ken Kallio, Diane McFarland, Rod Patterson, Paul Zarembka (for Monica Moshenko), Don Pisani, Pam Wolfskill, Steve Abraham, Gail Landsman, Gina Keel (for V.N. Shastri), Barbara Silverstone, and Ruth Meyerowitz.

Members and guests attending the committee meeting introduced themselves.

In response to the discussion at the DA about SUNY establishing an Office of Diversity, Dave Dubois raised the idea of pushing SUNY to establish an Office of Disability Rights. This idea is one that we can look at down the road.

Our primary agenda item was to make a recommendation to the Negotiations Committee on items that should be included in UUP's proposal pertaining to disability issues. A copy of the recommendation from the committee for the previous round of negotiations was distributed. During the introductions, the question of temporary disability coverage was raised. As it was presented to the Committee, the specific problem raised concerned individuals who experience a temporary disability. Apparently some individuals do not have the accumulated sick leave to carry them through the period of disability. Many UUP members have difficulty accessing sick leave banks because 10 month employees cannot contribute vacation days to a sick bank. Campus presidents do have the right to grant additional paid up sick leave within the contract. There is evidence that the provision of additional paid sick leave has not been uniformly granted. On one campus, a member who had just delivered a baby was granted additional paid sick leave, but a member who had cancer was not granted any additional paid sick leave. It was noted that the Family Leave committee also has an interest in this issue; we should work with them on it. At Stony Brook, it has gotten more difficult to obtain presidential sick leave because of funding issues. It used to be routinely granted, but not any more.

A second, but related issue that was identified concerned the difficulties faced by individuals who go on long term disability. These individuals have access to health insurance through COBRA, but frequently find that they cannot afford the coverage.

Ultimately, the committee identified four issues that could form the basis of a recommendation to the Negotiations Committee.

1. Uniform application of presidential sick leave needs to be established for individuals who experience temporary disability.
2. People who exhaust their accumulated sick leave face a problem of maintaining their health insurance coverage when they are no longer on the payroll and not yet eligible for long term disability.
3. People who go on long term disability face difficulties with paying for health insurance through COBRA.
4. Uniform application of granting accommodations for employees with disabilities must be established. Individuals who find themselves with a gradually deteriorating condition have difficulty obtaining the increasing accommodations they need.

Running in parallel with the discussion of possible contractual recommendations, was a discussion of a variety of other issues. One of these concerned a possible resolution for the committee to consider that was shared by Paul Zarembka on behalf of Monica Moshenko.

Given that the resolution does not immediately address contractual recommendations, discussion of it was limited. The proposed resolution also has an impact on the charge of the Committee. By way of background, the Disability Rights Committee has attempted to obtain documents asked for in the resolution. The Committee has asked local chapter leaders to ask for these documents from their campuses, and previous Committee chairs have asked for these documents from SUNY's 504 compliance officer.

The committee meeting ended with the plan of circulating notes of the meeting to its members and a request that members review the contract, and specifically article 23 of the contract, with the purpose of identifying language in it that could be changed in order to improve disability rights for UUP members.