



A Wake Up Call

By Maryann Fallek, Chapter Delegate

What happened at Virginia Tech could have happened anywhere. Such tragedies can not be totally prevented. But their number and severity can and should be reduced. Learning from experience is easier said than done. Think about how many times in your life, you have repeated mistakes. At the end of August, an external report about the April 16 massacre at Virginia Tech was released. This independent report was the work of an eight member panel established by Democratic Virginia Governor, Timothy M. Kaine. After four months of investigative work, the Virginia Tech Review Panel concluded that

serious failures in campus communications and its mental health program, particularly misunderstandings about privacy laws, contributed to the 33 deaths at the University. For example, according to the report, federal and state privacy legislation gives “ample leeway to share information in potentially dangerous situations” and the University’s failure to legally share information, definitely was one of many factors that contributed to the campus massacre. The panel offered over 90 recommendations in their report.

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The Strength of Our Union: UUP

By Glenn McNitt, Chapter President

As you know, the United University Professions (UUP) is currently negotiating with the Governor’s Office of Employee Relations (GOER) for a successor contract with SUNY. While we are in negotiations, the last contract in most cases remains in effect. That means, contributions by the state for our health insurance, retirement package, accumulated vacation and sick leave days, and many other benefits will continue as they were defined in the past contract until the new contract agreement is reached.

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photo by Susan Lehrer

Retiree Arthur Hack with Abigail Robin at the Executive Committee Recognition Dinner.

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Not all benefits that were in the last contract, however, remain in effect during this transition period between contractual agreements. For example, monies to support the Nuala Drescher Leave program, the 1% of professional services salaries used annually by the campus President for Discretionary Salary Increases, and the Individual Professional Development awards will not be available until a new agreement is reached. Honestly, there is no guarantee that any of these benefits will be assured in the next contract. However, it is my belief that these programs that

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benefit our academic and professional membership are as important to GOER and SUNY as they are for us. All I can tell you about negotiations with New York State (NYS) is that they are proceeding amiably. As soon as an agreement is reached, I will present the proposal to the New Paltz membership for its consideration and approval.

Some of our new faculty may not realize the politics of budgeting for SUNY in New York State or the influence of our union in the budgetary process. Largely working outside the 64 campuses of the University and the 32 campuses of SUNY represented by the union, UUP has been the primary voice urging increased funding for more tenure track faculty, more support for SUNY libraries, informational technologies, research facilities—frankly more resources for the State University. In the last couple of years, UUP has made some enormous gains in providing additional funding to SUNY above what Governors have recommended. Last year, for example, two pieces of legislation revealed UUP’s political clout in Albany. First, the Optional Retirement System (ORP) used for most of our membership is TIAA-CREF. All retirement systems in NYS require that employees contribute 3% of their salary for their personal retirement accounts for the first 10 years

of service. With the start of the 11th year, state employees in some retirement systems (e.g., TRS and ERS), cease making this contribution, with NYS assuming the complete cost. This was not the case for members of the State University in ORP’s, since they were required to continue to pay this cost. Many bills, over 100 actually, were presented to the legislature in 2007 to modify and improve various retirement programs; only one was successful. UUP’s proposal became law August 15, 2007. Over the next three years, NYS will pick up the costs—1% each year—for employee retirement. The net effect will be a 1% take home salary increase for eligible members for each of the next three years, beginning in April 2008.

The other major issue facing SUNY last year was the plan of the Berger Commission to privatize one of the 3 SUNY teaching hospitals. The Berger Commission’s recommendations became law by a strange procedure last December 31, and many hospitals across NYS were required to downsize bed capacity, eliminate “duplicative” services, modify high cost specialized programs, and

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become efficient at the expense of public service to the indigent. SUNY teaching hospitals are the only public hospitals training doctors, nurses, and other medical technicians. It was believed that privatizing Upstate Medical University Hospital at Syracuse was only the initial step to close the other two SUNY hospitals at Stony Brook and Brooklyn. None of the recommended hospital and nursing home closures, down sizing, and mergers throughout NYS were reversed except at UUP. UUP used its resources and its political/legal cache of goodwill and credit to stop the privatizing/downsizing of this SUNY hospital.

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Reviewing this report (available at <http://chronicle.com/free/2007/08/2007083101n.htm>) and using the findings to influence campus safety policies and procedures seem essential. Also, the findings should be considered when the UUP Chapters prepare their agendas for Labor-Management communications on all of the 32 SUNY campuses. The Virginia Tech Report raises many concerns that should be addressed on every campus and this UUP Chapter does assume responsibility for asking, the sometimes tough, questions. For example:

What is the emergency response plan to acts or threatened acts of violence? On the New Paltz website, there is a list of telephone numbers, including two (911 and x2222) to call in an emergency. Do we have a response plan for a shooting incident similar to the one that occurred at Virginia Tech? Does everyone on campus know what to do if there is a shooting incident on campus? What are our emergency communications? Have the emergency responses to acts or threatened acts of violence been communicated to the campus community? Are we prepared for such an emergency? Should we have

“Serious failures in campus communications and its mental health program contributed to the 33 deaths at Virginia Tech.”

practice drills for locking down the campus? Does everyone know what happens if such an incident were to occur?

Have the procedures for referring individuals who appear to need help been communicated to the campus community? Where are we, in terms of scheduling the safety workshops mentioned by President Poskanzer at the end of last semester? *Workshops about identifying and referring troubled individuals; preventing violence or escalation of classroom/workplace conflict;

responding to classroom/workplace emergencies definitely are needed. Do we know how to respond to troubled individuals? Are there ample campus resources to help troubled persons and to protect everyone?

Are there trained and experienced people to assess the threat in the emergency response chain of command? What is the chain of command for the emergency response? What are the Campus arrangements with the local police, fire, and EMS groups?

Are the privacy laws accurately interpreted and reflected in the policies and procedures for referring troubled individuals for support services? Are the privacy laws accurately interpreted and reflected when support services are provided and received on Campus? Do these policies and procedures protect the community without sacrificing the rights of the individual? When should public safety prevail over individual rights? Is the information about troubled individuals that can be shared legally given to the appropriate persons? For example, when appropriate, is a student’s mental health information shared with his/her parents? Do we have clear policies about the applications of the privacy laws, including the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act? Are these policies and procedures communicated to the campus community? Are available support services communicated to the campus community? Are they provided to those in need? Are resources adequate? Are complete records maintained?

Is there a campus video monitoring system? How is emergency information provided campus-wide? Does everyone know that s/he can sign up to receive emergency text messages on his/her cell phone (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/txtme/>)? How many members of the campus community have registered their cell phones for emergency text messaging? Is the text messaging system in place?

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Just as we were the only retiree group to attain significant retirement benefits for our members, we were also the only group to stop the imposition of the Berger Commission's merger and downsizing plans.

At the beginning of this academic year, we are joined by 37 new academic and 33 professional colleagues. Frankly, many are unfamiliar with the role that UUP plays in obtaining funding for SUNY, protecting members' procedural rights and academic freedoms, ensuring access to high quality health benefits, and facilitating professional development of university employees. UUP is both an advocate for our members and for SUNY itself. Most know that any union struggles to protect its membership from arbitrary treatment by its supervisors/managers, but many are unaware of the off-campus advocacy by UUP in promotion and protection of SUNY, often when SUNY managers are unable or unwilling to act. Over the decades, UUP has developed relationships and earned respect of members of the NYS Legislature. This union has become the information base for many elected officials who lack intimate knowledge of the State University. Given the budget process, and the legislative procedures as well, SUNY managers are reluctant or denied discretion to

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criticize directives from the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor, and the Governor. The Governor's budget proposal starts a process, and SUNY managers are required to “fall in line” publicly. It has been UUP, for two decades or more, that has questioned the under funding and low level of support for New York's public university, and it is we who have argued effectively with the Legislature to rectify these proposals. With a Democratic Governor, it is

believed that SUNY will experience brighter times in the near future. Maybe not. But in any event, UUP will be advocating for more full time faculty, more funds and other resources for research, better health benefits, equitable treatment for all of SUNY's multifaceted staff, and full protections of academic freedom and intellectual property.

So we do it all—stand with members when contract procedures are not followed, ensure that the contractual rights of members are vigorously defended, communicate with elected officials regarding support for increased access by NYS citizens to SUNY, and defending and supporting SUNY in public forums and political arenas. We are professional union with a great mission.

UUP represents some 35000 academic and professional faculty in SUNY, and is the largest higher education union in America. Its strength is in its unified membership and the commitment that UUP members make to the collective good. We have been successful and will continue to be as long as we have the benefit of member support. We are a union of higher education professional employees, academic and professional. Join us, and help us be stronger one by one.



photo by Susan Lehrer

Former Chapter President Susan Poretz & husband Phil McDonald at the Executive Committee Recognition Dinner.

Administration Breaks Adjuncts' Contracts and Agreement

Opinion By Peter D.G. Brown, Vice President for Academics

In a surprise move over the summer, the College administration informed adjuncts who had received signed one-year contracts to teach three courses each semester during the 2007-08 academic year that they would only be allowed to teach two courses in the spring 2008 semester. This move marks a sharp break with the past practice, where for many years some part-timers have regularly taught three courses per semester. It also abrogates the December 2005 understanding between our UUP chapter and the SUNY New Paltz administration to lift the previous two-course limit for adjuncts, in return for capping the overall percentage of courses taught by part-timers at the College. At a Labor-Management meeting that took place on December 8, 2005, the College

administration agreed to lift the two-course limit for adjuncts and gave assurances that it would make every effort not to increase the percentage of courses taught by part-timers. The administration agreed to promptly inform the deans and chairs of this new situation.

Our UUP chapter President, Glenn McNitt, and I were present at this meeting, which he described in an extensive article that appeared in the February 2006 issue of the Bullhorn.

Headlined "Administration Agrees to Permanent Limit on Adjunct Positions: Two Course Cap Lifted," President McNitt began his article as follows:

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Bless Me, Ultima: The Book Lives in New Paltz

By Maryann Fallek, UUP Chapter Delegate

According to a recent Associated Press-Ipsos poll, 27% of Americans did not read one book last year. The median number of books read by those who did read last year was four. Someone asked William Gibson, the author of the best seller, *Neuromancer* and the recently published *Spook Country*, about the death of the book. He argued that the book lives because it is a "magical thing." As Gibson said: "I make black marks on a white surface and someone else in another location looks at them and interprets them and sees a spaceship or whatever. It's *magic*. It's a magical thing. It's very old magic, but it's very thorough. The book is very well worked out, somewhat in the way that the wheel is very well worked out."

Well, UUP agrees with William Gibson about the magic of books. This year the volunteer One Book/One New Paltz committee, chaired by Dean Benjamin, has selected Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* for a shared community reading experience.

This is the Committee's (made of community and campus representatives) third annual effort to encourage people to discover the pleasure and

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power of reading and discussing a single book with others. They have been hard at work since the start of the year organizing a fall program of events.

Bless Me, Ultima is the story of a young boy living in New Mexico after World War II who faces varied and sometimes conflicting influences from family and community. In a review in *Nation*, Ray Gonzalez stated that the book is a Latin American classic because..."it clearly defines Chicano culture founded on family, tradition and power of myth."

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Adjuncts' Contracts

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“On December 8, 2005, at a Labor Management meeting with the Campus Administration, UUP announced that the UUP Executive Committee had voted to rescind its support of the two-course cap for adjunct faculty. After due deliberation, the UUP Executive Committee recommended that this per semester cap on the number of courses taught by an individual adjunct be removed, contingent upon the Administration agreeing to limit the total number of courses offered by part-time teachers to its current level. The administration agreed, thus placing a permanent ceiling on the college's reliance on adjuncts while allowing individual adjunct faculty members to teach more than two

“Adjuncts represent cheap academic labor, yet they constitute the backbone of our College.”

courses in any given semester. This policy ensures that New Paltz will always rely primarily on full time tenure track faculty to offer our curriculum. At the same time, we will be able to attract and retain a limited number of high quality adjunct faculty members who, through their more stable ties to the college, will be better able to serve our students and the college community.”

(see www.uuphost.org/newpaltz/pdf/Bullhorn-February%202006entire.pdf)

In a stunning reversal, the College administration is now attempting to claim that no such agreement was ever made. The preposterous rationale offered by the administration for re-imposing the two-course cap is that if adjuncts taught a “full” load of three courses, they might start demanding to be paid the same as a full-time, tenure-track faculty member. The administration is fully aware of the paltry wages it chooses to pay its adjunct faculty and has stated that these teachers should not expect to receive a living wage from the College.

The UUP represents both full-time and part-time faculty. The union has worked hard over the years to improve the dire situation for adjunct teachers throughout SUNY. At a time like this, it is vital that tenure-track faculty show their solidarity and support for their part-time colleagues. Four years ago, the UUP and the College Faculty overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for adjuncts to be paid \$3,000 per three-credit course, a modest target which the College is still years away from achieving. It is outrageous that our 400 part-time teachers are treated with less recognition, security and compensation than any other group of employees on campus.

The UUP has continually advocated for more full-time faculty and strengthening the tenure system. Adjuncts represent cheap academic labor, yet they constitute the backbone of our College, teaching a vast number of the most labor-intensive General Education courses in departments such as Art, Education, English, Foreign Languages, Math and Music. For those adjuncts without full-time jobs, being able to teach more than two courses is a matter of economic survival. The re-imposition of the two-course cap means that they would have to seek additional courses at other institutions, while our department chairs would be forced to waste valuable time hiring, training and supervising ever more adjuncts.

SUNY New Paltz could not function without these dedicated faculty members. They have become absolutely crucial to our academic mission. They are often the first and foremost faculty encountered by our students. Many have been teaching at New Paltz for well over five years and have become integral members of their departments. To treat them as if they were some kind of expendable subclass harkens back to the worst days of exploitative labor practices and demeans the entire College community.

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Is there a designated gathering space in the case of an emergency? Where are we with purchasing the enhanced 911 communication system mentioned by President Poskanzer last May? What have we learned and decided about the other notification systems that he also mentioned (“...intercom systems in buildings, remote, wireless radio transmission to such systems and other ways of broadcasting to the campus in times of crisis.”)?

These and other questions will give rise to important conversations between UUP and the Administration, conversations that will help us to work together to better protect the 9000 members of our campus community. UUP, like the Campus Administration, is committed to nurturing a campus culture where everyone, as President Poskanzer has said, receives support, help and kindness.

** Since this article was written, the Psychological Counseling Center (PCC) scheduled an informational session (offered on two dates: September 25 [unfortunately the time for the session conflicts with the UUP’s semester Chapter meeting] and November 7) “regarding assistance and access to mental health services on campus.” Announcement of the session was made in an attachment to an email from the Director of the PCC to the faculty and staff. In this attachment, important information (telephone number for the PCC—257 2920 and eight behavioral descriptions of students that would merit “consultation” with the PCC) also was provided.*

Campus Equity Week coming up!

October 29 – November 4

CEW seeks to “promote fair employment conditions, quality education, and the adoption of equitable labor policies and standards that encourage fairness and dignity for all members of the campus community. It takes issue with declining labor standards and increasing use of temporary and part-time labor for all campus work.” (CEW Call to Action web page).

The organizers of CEW agree with Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, that “by condoning labor exploitation, moreover, we relinquish the moral credibility with which we speak to students or to the public about issues of social justice, past and present.”

For more information on upcoming activities and actions, visit the web site: <http://www.campusequityweek.org/2007>

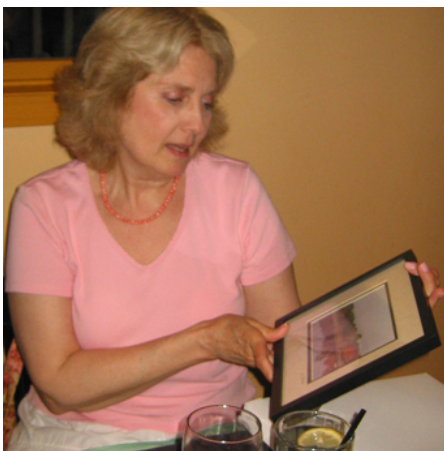


photo by Susan Lehrer

Retiree Gretchen Brassard at the Executive Committee Recognition Dinner in April 2007.

Bless Me, Ultima

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With partial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (The Big Read), a more extensive and varied One Book program will be offered this fall. Everyone values the recognition that this award evidences. But most of all, the opportunity to strengthen community with this support is exciting.

The cornerstone of the project will be book discussions (some conducted in Spanish this year) scheduled throughout the New Paltz area in libraries, coffee houses, religious centers, college dormitories, local prisons and the public schools.

The One Book keynote presentation by

“Kick off events on November 2”

Margarite Fernandez Olmos, the author of *Rudolfo A. Anaya: A Critical Companion* is scheduled for Thursday, November 8 at SUNY New Paltz. Other activities include storytelling workshops for children and adults; film screenings (*My Family* and *Like Water For Chocolate*); art exhibits throughout the community, including one of Miguel Gandert’s photographs of New Mexico at the Dorsky Art Museum; a puppet show (*La Cosecha*); musical/dance performances and academic presentations.

UUP supports this project and urges your participation. UUP encourages you to share in the 2007 One Book/Big Read experience. Perhaps you will join one of the book discussions in the community or on campus. Your attendance would be most welcome at the kick-off events on November 2 for One Book/Big Read: a Day of the Dead celebration with a slide presentation/discussion and altar/ofrenda at Elting Library and the opening reception for the Gandert exhibit at the Dorsky Art Museum.

UUP hopes that you and your family not only will read *Bless Me, Ultima* but also will participate actively in the program. For more information, please visit the Big Read One Book website: <http://www.onebookonenewpaltz.org>.

The Bullhorn

The opinions expressed in the *Bullhorn* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the United University Professions.

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