

The Mills AAUP Newsletter

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The Mills AAUP Chapter:

"The American Association of University Professors has guarded academic freedom, tenure, the faculty share in academic governance, and the economic interests of the profession for over eighty-five years. In the current era, when our institutions are being restructured so as to make faculty less autonomous and our work more 'disposable,' we faculty need to help one another more urgently than ever."

—Mary Burgan, AAUP General Secretary

The Mills College Chapter of the AAUP is a grassroots network of faculty which has regional and national affiliations.

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Special Meeting:

All Mills Faculty are invited to a Special Meeting on Thursday January 30th, 2:30-4pm in 101 Lucie Stern Hall. Mary Burgan, AAUP General Secretary, visiting from the Washington front office, will discuss AAUP activities. She will be joined by Marcus Harvey, AAUP California Regional Representative.

Join the AAUP:

In order to be effective, especially now as the College moves forward on budgetary and strategic planning issues, the Mills College Chapter of the AAUP needs your membership and support! All full-time and part-time Mills faculty members are invited to join our active group of thirty current members in addressing some of the most pressing issues of concern to Mills faculty, including faculty governance, compensation, fair practice in tenure and promotion, academic freedom, and educational excellence. Non-tenured faculty joining the AAUP for the first time can do so at a special reduced rate of \$68 for up to 4 years of membership (entrant category); the membership fee for part-time faculty is only \$34 per year. Regular full-time membership is \$135 per year. It may seem like a lot of money, but the membership dues support the valuable services of a powerful national organization devoted to defending the quality and integrity of higher education in our country. Please join the AAUP or reactivate your lapsed membership. You can join online at: <http://www.aaup.org/membership/index.htm>

We need your voice to help our growing Chapter speak for the needs of the Mills College faculty.

Shared Governance Today

In a recent article that appeared in *Academe* (July/August 2002), Joan Wallach Scott, Professor of Social Sciences at the Institute for Advanced Studies, presents a history and assessment of shared governance today. The article, entitled "The Critical State of Shared Governance," is available online at <http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/02/a/02/asco.htm>. The following is a summary of Professor Scott's findings.

The founders of the AAUP recognized that faculty must take part in decisions relating to their areas of expertise. Shared governance constitutes the formally recognized role that faculty play in decisions relating to the academic functions of a college or university. It depends upon a careful balance between institutional authority and faculty autonomy; faculty should have power over educational matters; by contrast, administrators and governing boards should have the final word on issues concerned with management, finance, and general administration.

Scott points to the threat that the so-called corporate model for administration has increasingly begun to replace shared governance in colleges and universities around the country (an ironic situation in the post-Enron era). The corporate approach posits the ultimate institutional authority of the governing board, making it possible for a board to make decisions outside of its areas of expertise. In the corporate model, administrators and faculty are no longer partners equally committed to an educational mission. Educational institutions become more like businesses, employing managerial techniques devoted to profit making. In addition, along with a diminishing role in a college's or university's decision-making processes, faculty are often portrayed negatively, as obstacles to institutional progress.

Scott's essay provides several instances of recent attacks on shared governance. She observes, for

example, that although the University of California has for a long time been considered a model for successful shared governance, the University Regents' decision in 1995 to abolish affirmative action was initiated without the essential exchange of information, consultation, and compromise. Questioned about the lack of shared governance in the decision-making process, Ward Connerly, the regent who led the campaign against affirmative action, stated: "We share too damn much with them now . . . I'm sick and tired of the faculty thinking we're supposed to roll over and play dead."

Scott also discusses the case of Bennington College. In 1994, Bennington's Board and President decided to fire twenty-seven faculty members, citing a 2.5 million dollar budget deficit, and declaring a financial exigency. At the same time, there existed plans for new programs, new administrative positions, new faculty hires, and a successful capital campaign. AAUP investigators concluded that rather than simply addressing Bennington's financial problems, the Board's actions were aimed at a major re-organization of the College's academic programs, a radical structural transformation without sufficient faculty input. Bennington was placed on the AAUP's list of censured institutions in 1995; a lawsuit filed in 1996 resulted in a settlement in favor of the dismissed faculty.

For some, shared governance may appear far less rewarding than teaching and scholarship, a situation resulting in part from our own sense of powerlessness. As faculty members, however, it remains our responsibility to protect and advance the system of shared governance, both in the best interests of our profession and for the protection and cultivation of the institution we serve. Shared governance is especially crucial today at Mills, where we presently face severe budget cuts to our academic programs and a resultant re-structuring of our curriculum.

Message to the Mills Faculty from the AAUP Washington, D.C. Office

As the economy slumps along, we are seeing more and more universities and colleges struggling to remain solvent. Administrations that blithely overspent during the euphoric 1990s are waking to find their institutions in serious financial straits, and must now engage in the thankless task of cutting costs. In some cases, administrators have shown a willingness to pass this work on to their faculty, but seldom do they give faculty either sufficient information, or sufficient authority, to review all aspects of their institution's operations. Thus, the onus is put on faculty to balance the books on the back of their institution's educational mission. This is especially risky at tuition-driven schools where any savings must be balanced against the attrition experienced when students whose courses have been cut take their money elsewhere, or when prospective students decline offers of admission. Too often, faculty comply with their administration's requests because they fear that to not do so would mean relinquishing what little control they have over these processes. From the reports that I have been receiving, something of this sort may be happening at Mills.

It is, however, precisely at moments of institutional crisis that the faculty can reasonably hope to wrest some authority back from their administration. A coordinated faculty, acting collectively, has tremendous power to shape and control events at their institution. Consider: The College is entirely reliant on the faculty to perform its mission, the faculty are the primary point of contact between the institution and the students, and it is the administration—not the faculty—that will be on the hot seat when it comes time to account for the previous management of the Institution's finances. The key to realizing faculty power is, of course, organizing. The faculty at Mills already has a strong AAUP chapter and is—whether individuals realize it yet, or not—well positioned to seize the initiative at the College.

The AAUP's General Secretary, Mary Burgan, is

scheduled to participate in a conference at Mills College towards the end of this week. We've arranged for Mary to come out a day early so that she can meet with you and your colleagues to discuss the situation at Mills. Working with our chapter leaders, we've scheduled a meeting on Thursday January 30th (from 2:30pm to 4:00pm in Lucie Stern 101) to which all faculty—tenured and contract, alike—are invited. I've asked our West Coast representative, Marcus Harvey, to attend this meeting and lay out some strategies that the faculty might pursue in organizing around the current crisis.

From my perspective in the national office, Mills College looks to be at another crossroads. In the past, you folks organized to keep the College from going co-ed. You are a faculty with first-hand knowledge that concerted action can be effective. If you—the faculty at Mills—decide that this is a moment when you again need to take matters firmly into its own hands, be assured that the AAUP will be there to help.

—Patrick B. Shaw, Esq. Acting Director of
Organizing and Services, American Association
of University Professors (800) 424-2973

