

8/31/2020 [Allunit] MSP Statement on Staff Layoffs

The MSP is horrified by the UMass administration's decision to indefinitely furlough more than 1,200 employees. We stand in solidarity with our fellow employees in USA, PSU, AFSCME, and UAW, and we join them in the fight for fair and equitable treatment for all.

Leaders of our unions have been meeting almost every day for five months, and we all feel strongly that layoffs (or long-term furloughs) are not necessary at this time. We have done our research and proposed many alternatives that would keep everyone employed during this crisis. Instead of consulting with faculty and staff, the administration started by laying off the lowest-paid and least powerful workers on our campus. This is discriminatory and unfair. Balancing the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable workers on campus is unconscionable.

We urge the administration to reconsider its decision before these furloughs take effect. The staff unions have signed agreements that require the administration to negotiate voluntary solutions before imposing furloughs or layoffs. To threaten employees with losing their health insurance and pension credit unless they accept "voluntary" furloughs is not bargaining in good faith. What is the urgency? Why start with the hatchet before considering the staff unions' ideas to do things differently?

The unions all agree on several principles:

- The university must exhaust campus and system-wide reserves of more than \$1 billion, and delay or restructure debt payments, before furloughing or laying off staff.
- President Meehan and the Board of Trustees are making unnecessarily harmful decisions. There is no reason to require our campus to balance the annual budget in the midst of so much uncertainty. UMass used to be on a 3-year or 5-year budget cycle, which would allow for planning and eliminate the need for immediate layoffs.
- The state legislature has passed a level-funded budget for the next three months. The administration's projected ten percent cut in state funds is pure fiction. Without that imaginary cut, there is **no** need for any layoffs.
- No cuts should be made until the federal government finalizes its plan for the next round of stimulus funds, which are intended to offset exactly the type of loss our campus faces.
- Full employment is best for the economy and the university. There is plenty of work to be done, including retrofitting empty buildings to improve sustainability, reducing carbon emissions, and saving money in the long run.
- If layoffs or furloughs are necessary, the university must begin with voluntary measures. We have heard from faculty and staff who would happily accept temporary reductions in

time or temporary furloughs. Why has the administration refused to start with voluntary cuts? No one should be forced.

- Any cuts should be as equitable as possible; the most vulnerable workers should not be disproportionately affected.

We have heard administrators blaming “coddled” faculty for the current cuts. Nothing could be further from the truth. MSP was neither notified nor consulted about furloughs or layoffs, and since the spring we have been vocal in our opposition to any cuts to staff positions or pay. The pandemic and administrative decisions have had differential impacts on groups of employees – while revenue and work has disappeared in some parts of Auxiliary Services, Residential Life, and Athletics -- faculty and librarians have experienced a speed-up alongside the staff in our departments. Student enrollments are high, and the VSIP and hiring freeze have created larger classes and more students to advise, at a time when our students need more support and attention than ever before. Faculty and librarians accepted increased workloads without increased pay over the summer and continuing this fall because we believed that our work was essential to the university’s ability to retain students and survive this pandemic. Many of our non-tenure-track faculty members were already “non-reappointed” – a round of invisible layoffs – in the spring.

We have heard from some MSP members asking if we can make changes to our contract in order to ease the burden on the staff. The administration has not expressed any interest in a faculty furlough at this time, but we are always willing to talk if there is a plan. We would never ask our members to sacrifice pay unless we know exactly where the money is going, and what jobs would be saved. If we’re going to make sure things are done equitably and fairly, it has to be negotiated, and the administration has to open the books and be transparent about its decision-making and the impact of our sacrifices.

We also have heard from many MSP members who are panicked about possible furloughs or cuts. MSP has an economically diverse membership – we represent many employees who make \$7,000/year (with no benefits at all) and we also represent some of the highest-paid employees on campus. We would oppose any across-the-board cuts that don’t take into account the diverse needs and circumstances of UMass employees.

In the coming weeks, we’re going to be asking faculty to take action to demonstrate our solidarity with staff and to protect jobs on our campus. We all need to fight President Meehan’s unnecessary cuts, and persuade the state legislature and our congressional delegation that stimulus funds are essential to prevent economic collapse. Start by signing a petition to our campus leadership [here](#) as well as the petition to President Meehan and the trustees [here](#).

Finally, we have a specific request. If this is truly an economic disaster that threatens the livelihoods of 1,200 community members, we all should be called upon to do our part. In that

spirit, the MSP Executive Committee has decided to create a Mutual Aid Solidarity Fund. We ask all MSP members to contribute what you can. One hundred percent of these funds will directly support laid off or furloughed UMass employees and their families. If the administration is not taking care of the members of our community, our community will come together to do it ourselves. More information about how to contribute to this fund is coming soon.

In solidarity,
MSP Executive Committee

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