

Your Union

Union of Nontenure-Track Faculty
at Michigan State University
Local 1855 AFT, AFL-CIO

Updated

Partial Month Pay Procedures

For many fixed-term faculty, MSU is attempting to make changes to the way your pay is calculated in August and May (i.e., months that contain only part of a pay period). Whereas the current system uses the number of work days in the month as a standard to determine how many days an individual should be paid for, the new system would calculate these paychecks based on the number of *calendar* days in the month.

While the change may seem minor, it means some employees might be disadvantaged – particularly those who are here on fall-only appointments.

In 2013, UNTF asked MSU if there were any changes to this system pending. At that time, Employee Relations assured us that no changes were forthcoming. However, UNTF learned in January of this year that changes to the policy would be finalized by mid-February.

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MSU and UNTF continue to square off over Lecturer Policy

MSU and UNTF continue to disagree over impending changes to the policy that grants titles to fixed-term faculty. Last fall, MSU presented UNTF with a draft policy stating that first-time teaching faculty on fixed-term contracts would be hired as Lecturers. Currently only a few dozen faculty and academic staff at MSU use the title Lecturer, which requires no minimum degree (not even a Bachelor's). Most teaching faculty are hired as Instructors or as Assistant, Associate or Full Professors.

Terry Curry, Associate Vice President of Academic Human Resources and Associate Provost, maintains that the sole reason for MSU pursuing these changes is so that fixed-term teaching faculty would be excluded from national salary surveys and MSU would appear to pay more at the rank of Assistant Professor than it currently does. Mr. Curry also stated that since Union faculty at the University of Michigan use the title Lecturer, MSU faculty should be willing to use the same title. UNTF staff members ran the salary numbers and projected that even if all current fixed-term teaching faculty were switched to Lecturer status, MSU's place in the rankings would move from twelfth out of 12 to eleventh. UNTF believes that the real issue is that MSU simply pays less than its peers in the Big Ten/CIC, both on and off the tenure track.

See page 3 for more information, including a timeline of actions and a list of objections raised by UNTF. For a very different policy at the University of Denver, see page 2.



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RIGHT: UNTF members at the MSU memorial march honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

What's the big deal about our grievance procedure?

When new members ask what difference a union makes in their working conditions, we often answer, “the grievance procedure.” But since there's already a faculty grievance process in place at MSU, you might wonder, why is the grievance procedure in our contract so important?

Binding Third-Party Arbitration

Each grievance procedure consists of three steps. Whereas the University President is the final decision-maker in the MSU grievance process, the UNTF grievance procedure described in Article 11 of our contract relies on a third-party arbitrator. Having recourse to a party outside the university guarantees due process and helps to eliminate conflict of interest in final grievance decisions.

Protection from Changes

Currently, the University Committee on Faculty Affairs is considering changes to the MSU grievance process. Based on the Faculty Grievance Officer's recommendations to the Provost, these changes would allow the FGO to “vet” appeals and deny them before they go before the President. They would also eliminate the option to appeal the Provost's decision based on evidence – only procedural appeals would be allowed.

On the other hand, UNTF's grievance procedure is protected in our collective bargaining agreement. Both parties have agreed to abide by this system for everything covered in our contract. **Neither UNTF nor MSU can change the grievance process (or anything else in the contract) unless both parties agree to it.**

If you think that your department or supervisor is violating the terms of the contract, you should contact the office at (517) 203-0880 or office@untf.org as soon as possible for a confidential discussion with one of our staff.

U Denver reforms increase job security and respect for teaching faculty

While MSU seeks to hire fewer faculty with ranked titles, another university tries a radically different plan. Inside Higher Ed (www.insidehighered.com) reports that more than 85% of the University of Denver faculty (including tenure-track) supported new policies that establish career tracks with ranked titles for long-term faculty on fixed-term contracts.

After five years on one-year contracts, instructors are either released or promoted to a three-year contract with a guaranteed ranked title: Assistant Teaching Professor, Assistant Clinical Professor, or Assistant Professor of Practice. The last is reserved for “nontraditional academics.” Opportunities for promotion to Associate and Full Professor are also built into the process. As for existing faculty who are currently on fixed-term appointments, the University plans to transition them to new ranked titles by this fall.

The tenured chair of the faculty committee which came up with the new process said, “Lecturers and adjuncts – that just didn't seem sufficient. We value their role here, and think they're highly skilled, great teachers...So the world needed to know that they had the right status, if that's the right word – that they're valued.” And the chair of U Denver's Board of Trustees added that the risk of making long-term commitments to faculty “is dramatically outweighed by the benefits of engaged faculty and our ability to attract great teachers.”

MSU has continuously maintained that their plan to discontinue the use of ranked titles for fixed-term teaching faculty is simply a response to national trends, a necessity if MSU is to keep up with its peers in the short term. The University of Denver, on the other hand, is demonstrating its commitment to teachers and students alike.

Source: “New faculty model at U. Denver could be prototype for reform,” Colleen Flaherty. 17 February 2015. www.insidehighered.com

MSU's Lecturer Policy: More information

Timeline of Actions:

Oct. 23, 2014: MSU informs UNTF that they intend to implement title change policy by Fall 2015. UNTF surveys members about change.

Nov. 11: UNTF and MSU meet for a Special Conference. Provost Curry says he will survey MSU's CIC peers for their hiring practices.

Dec. 1: MSU presents UNTF with draft policy and results of CIC surveys (available on our website)

Dec. 2: MSU presents draft policy to Council of Deans and University Council on Faculty Affairs, including presentation on how fixed-term faculty bring down average salaries on nationwide surveys. UNTF was not given notice or the opportunity to send representation to this meeting.

Dec. 10: MSU and UNTF meet; members present objections (see right). UNTF calculates low impact of potential changes in terms of salary surveys. UNTF attempts to set another meeting and files information request and demand to bargain. MSU continues to claim that this issue is not a mandatory subject of bargaining.

Dec. 19: MSU fulfills information request; UNTF confirms its own projections as identical to MSU's.

Jan. 22, 2015: During a meeting about another issue, staff from the Provost's office tell UNTF that work on the policy has "slowed down" due to UNTF's objections but that it is still going forward.

Jan 30: UNTF sends MSU a letter detailing UNTF's position that the change is a mandatory subject of bargaining. UNTF meets with lawyer, who sends MSU a letter supporting UNTF's position.

Feb 5: MSU responds with letter disagreeing that they must bargain but inviting UNTF to submit a proposal.

Feb. 16: UNTF and MSU meet and UNTF makes a proposal to maintain the status quo on titles but work together to find ways to move MSU up the rankings on salary surveys. MSU emphasizes that the Provost's office has not yet issued any directive to Colleges about hiring.

Feb. 26: Next scheduled MSU and UNTF meeting; UNTF awaits MSU's counterproposal.

See the electronic version of this newsletter for further updates. To download the documents referenced above, go to www.untf.org/Lecturer.

UNTF's objections to the policy:

- Our faculty have worked hard to earn their titles. If they have a terminal degree (including JDs, PhDs, and MFAs), they should not be denied the titles that are granted to their tenure-stream peers. This is a respect issue.
- Morale would decrease, and MSU would not be able to recruit and retain top candidates in their fields. Many current members reported that they never would have applied for their positions if they had been labeled "Lecturer".
- Ranked titles make it easier for fixed-term faculty to get published, present at conferences, and apply for grants.
- Lecturers have to jump through extra hoops to be considered for Principal Investigator status on grant applications at MSU.
- While Assistant Professor requires a terminal degree in the field, Lecturer requires no degree at all – not even a Bachelor's. Maintaining quality of teaching faculty should be a priority for MSU.
- Lecturers are considered Academic Staff, not Faculty.
- Many faculty would be locked out of their departmental governance processes with the Lecturer title. MSU appears to be pushing through this change without allowing time for departments to revise bylaws if they choose.
- About half of the schools in the CIC and Big Ten use ranked titles for fixed-term faculty. See page 2 for an article about an institution that is granting better titles to adjuncts, not taking them away.
- In 2013 MSU finally passed a policy explicitly allowing for promotion from Assistant to Associate Professor and from Associate to Full Professor. We know very little about promotion opportunities that would be available to Lecturers.
- The minimum salary level for Lecturer is lower than for Assistant Professor. MSU told UNTF that departments may give Lecturers with terminal degrees the equivalent of Assistant Professor pay but it has not put this in writing. Equity and transparency in pay is important to all faculty.
- Only fixed-term teaching faculty have been targeted. No other population on campus faces the threat of loss of title, including fixed-term ranked faculty who perform research and clinical work.
- This change encourages the deprofessionalization of teaching as just another semi-skilled trade that can be performed by anyone with minimal qualifications.
- This change will have no long-term impact on national salary surveys like AAUP and IPEDS. MSU will remain at the bottom of these surveys for Assistant Professor pay whether or not they make this change.
- Lecturers have a 2 year waiting period for the MSU 403 (b) contribution. There is no waiting period for ranked fixed term teaching faculty.

UPDATE: UNTF and MSU reach agreement on partial pay issue

After several meetings between UNTF and representatives from Employee Relations, the two parties reached agreement late last week.

UNTF's objection to the proposed policy change (see page 1 and below) is that it would disadvantage fixed-term employees who work only in the fall (although employees who work only in the spring semester would actually come out slightly ahead during most years). To make up for this negative impact, MSU has agreed to **include fall-only employees in the merit pool for consideration for raises each year**. This group was previously excluded from the raise process.

To be considered for a raise as a "fall-only" employee, the individual must have an appointment for fall semester only for at least two consecutive years. We believe that consideration for merit raises will more than make up for any financial disadvantage imposed by the partial pay policy, which will go into effect August 1.

UPDATE: Appointment letter deadline is April 15 for most employees

The UNTF contract specifies that departments must notify current employees about whether or not their appointment will be renewed one month before the end of their appointment expiration date. For many fixed-term faculty, this means that they should receive EITHER a new offer of employment OR a notice of non-renewal including an explanation for why the appointment was not renewed.

UNTF is working with MSU to make these notices as meaningful as possible. If any of the following apply, please notify the office. Some individuals who do not receive notification could be eligible for two weeks' pay.

- No notification received either way
- Everyone in department receives a blanket nonrenewal letter
- Nonrenewal letter does not contain a real reason for nonrenewal (i.e. – "employee's appointment is ending" is not a logical reason for nonrenewal)

Constitutional Amendments Passed

At the February General Membership Meeting, members approved revisions to the UNTF Constitution, including the following:

- A way for members to keep up their full member status if they are not teaching during a particular semester but wish to retain voting rights and the right to hold office
- Officer elections will be held every three years
- Clarified procedures for all union elections
- Revision of the current Stewards Council into a body of Local Representatives

The updated Constitution is available at www.untf.org.

Partial Month Pay cont.

Continued from page 1

Any changes to pay or pay procedures constitute a **mandatory subject of bargaining**, meaning that MSU is legally required to negotiate with UNTF before implementing any changes. We have requested that MSU immediately withdraw the new policy and enter into formal negotiations with the Union.

The larger issue at stake seems to be that the policy was discussed and developed only with the input of tenure-track faculty. The justification for changing the way pay is calculated during these periods is that over a long span of time – say, five years – the amount over- or under-paid will even out. Of course this assumes a long-term trajectory at the university; currently less than 40% of the faculty and academic staff at MSU are on the tenure track.

UNTF continues to await a response from MSU on this issue.

UPDATED: see above