

01/21/2025 [ALLUnit] Welcome back from MSP!

Welcome back, everyone!

We are looking forward to an exciting and productive spring semester, and we write with updates on several topics. Feel free to scroll down to the ones that interest you most or peruse the attached newsletter!

- Bargaining
- Travel policy and procedures
- Concur
- GPO/WEP repeal (return of Social Security benefits)
- Title IX in flux
- Upcoming events and actions

Thanks for reading, and don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you have questions or comments!

Bargaining

All of the campus unions are still at the bargaining table, and all of the big issues still have to be settled. MSP has been making progress on some items -- we have come to tentative agreements on important proposals related to librarians and clinical faculty, and we are very close on other issues related to fellowships, updates to the salary equity review process, and teaching evaluations. We have made our positions clear on our members' priorities, especially improvements to wages and working conditions, salary floors, and child care. Many faculty and librarians brought powerful testimony to the bargaining table on three separate occasions last semester, and many participated in multi-union actions around childcare and wages. These actions had an impact and brought us closer to winning a good contract.

We have resumed bargaining and we have sessions scheduled through March. We hope that the administration will demonstrate their commitment to reaching agreement on proposals essential to our members' livelihoods and ability to do their jobs. If not, we are ready to mobilize again, to convince the administration that it is in everyone's interest to invest in our excellent faculty and librarians, and in all UMass workers!

We are working with the other unions across campus on actions supporting our collective proposals for living wages and full staffing. On January 28th, as students are moving back into their dorms, our multi-union coalition will be leafleting and talking with students and their families about the need to better support the labor that undergirds the excellent educational and residential experiences on our campus. If you'd like to learn more or get involved, contact Kristen in the MSP office (kstrehle@umass.edu).

Travel policy and procedures

The implementation of the new travel policy last year – especially restrictions on travel to 87 (!) countries defined as risky – has been a hot topic in the MSP inbox. Many faculty members have written to us with concerns about the burdensome nature and xenophobic implications of the new travel authorization form; the possibility of being locked out of university systems while traveling abroad; and excessive university monitoring of personal travel.

Last week, MSP leaders met with representatives of the Provost's Office, the Office of Global Affairs (formerly IPO), Vice Chancellor of IT Chris Misra, and others to discuss these concerns. The meeting was positive and productive. In short, the administration recognized that the communications last semester were not always clear, and that the implementation of the policy had been overzealous. The authorization form has already been revised as a result of members' feedback, and the **MSP International Faculty Working Group** will be providing another round of recommendations for revision following our February 12 meeting (if you're interested in joining this or future MSP International meetings, please [sign up here](#)).

VC Chris Misra and his staff were responsive and indicated that going forward, no one will be locked out of University systems solely for traveling abroad. They are also working to reduce the number and scope of destinations considered to be at elevated cybersecurity risk. VC Misra volunteered to be a direct contact for faculty members with technological access concerns related to travel to destinations with elevated cybersecurity risk. OGA is working to reduce the scope of "high-risk" travel destinations by focusing on specific regions within countries on that list. They anticipate this will reduce the number of people required to complete the review process by about one-half. The VC and the Provost's Office will send a communication shortly, clarifying these and other details of the policy. We hope that their response will address our -- and your! -- questions and concerns. If not, please let us know, and we'll be happy to keep pressing.

Concur

We continue to hear concerns regarding increases to faculty workload caused by the adoption of Concur for tracking expenses and requesting reimbursement. We have raised this issue multiple times with the administration, and the Provost's office has consistently responded that faculty workload should **not** increase under the new system. They say that MSP members should not be spending any significant time on Concur, and that such work – initiating expense reports, uploading receipts, inputting detailed items in the report, and so on – is appropriately handled by a department or college staff person. (In some departments and colleges, this is in fact happening!) If you are being told otherwise, whether by your department chair/head or by a member of college or department staff, we're happy to help you get them the right information. Please forward to misp@umass.edu a copy of the message where they detail the staff work they are asking faculty to do. If this happens in a conversation, please memorialize that conversation in an email to the administrator in question and forward us that email along with their response. We'll seek clarification with the Provost's Office on your behalf.

GPO/WEP repeal (return of Social Security benefits)

Amazing news! After years of union advocacy and a focused campaign by MTA/NEA affiliates and others this year, we were thrilled when President Joe Biden signed into law the Social Security Fairness Act with a full repeal of the federal GPO and WEP laws. If you or your spouse are eligible for Social Security, the GPO and WEP would have reduced or eliminated the benefits those programs would have provided to you upon retirement. With the repeal of these laws, full Social Security benefits will now be available to you and your spouse, retroactive for one year to January 1, 2024. The MTA has more details about this change

here: <https://massteacher.org/current-initiatives/legislative-action/gpo-wep>

Title IX in flux

After the administration unilaterally changed the campus Title IX policy in August, the MSP filed legal charges. Last week, the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations (DLR) agreed with us that the administration has a legal duty to negotiate any changes to faculty and librarian working conditions, and a formal hearing will be scheduled. In the meantime, we expect the Trump administration to rescind the new Title IX regulations and revert to the 2020 rules, and if that happens, we expect the UMass administration to revert to our negotiated 2020 policies. On our campus, only faculty with administrative or leadership positions were “responsible employees” or mandatory reporters. We will let you know as soon as we have more information.

Upcoming events and actions

Jan 28

We will share leaflets and speak with students and parents during move-in day. Our primary message is that students’ education and college experience are directly related to the working conditions and quality of life of faculty and staff. The leaflet includes a QR code that prompts parents/guardians to send a pre-written message to the Chancellor. Please meet outside the Campus Center at noon, on the side nearer to Worcester DC and the ILC (**NOT the side facing the garage**). We will split into groups from that point.

Feb 7: Scientists and Engineers for Peace, Justice, and Planet

MSP is cosponsoring this event, organized by Western Mass Science for the People. It will feature a short film documenting efforts by unionized engineers at Lucas Aerospace in the 1970s to convert their factory from weapons manufacturing to green energy and other socially beneficial technologies. For more information or to register, click [here](#).

Feb 10-14: Defense of Freedom of Speech Week

The Sociology Department is organizing an initiative to defend free speech. UMass instructors who want to participate will speak with their students during the week of February 10-14 about democratic rights to free speech and free assembly. MSP underscores the academic freedom of our members in choosing whether and how to participate (see [Article Eight of the MSP contract](#)).

Materials recommended by the organizers can be found at this [link](#). A related forum, “Free Speech on Campus,” will be held on Tuesday, February 11, 3:00-4:30 p.m., in the Cape Cod Lounge. Please fill out this [form](#) for more information.

February 12: MSP International Working Group meeting

This MSP working group has been meeting for about a year to discuss and organize on issues facing international faculty and librarians, and all of our members who engage internationally. Recent topics include visa and immigration support, proposed revisions to UMass travel policy, and raising awareness about the dangers of xenophobia at the national level. Our next meeting is February 12, 12:30-2:00 (with dessert and coffee). To register for the meeting and/or join the email listserv, please click [here](#).