

## 8/05/21 Allunit: Salary parameters and COVID-19 vaccines/health and safety issues

Dear colleagues,

It has been a busy summer and we want to provide an update on two major issues we're discussing with the administration: salary parameters, and COVID-19 vaccines/health and safety issues.

### 1. Salary parameters

Massachusetts has a convoluted collective bargaining law that gives the Governor an inordinate amount of power. Rather than unions negotiating salaries directly with our employer the way most state universities do, in Massachusetts the Governor can "set the parameters" and dictate the raises that the administration may offer. The Governor recently set the following parameters for salaries statewide:

- 2.5 percent raises in the first year (FY21)
- 2 percent raises in the second year (FY22)
- 2 percent raises in the third year (FY23)
- 1.5 percent bonus or \$1,000, whichever is greater, in the first year – not on base pay

We were surprised to see the Chancellor lay out these parameters in an email before bringing them to the bargaining table to negotiate with the unions, as has always been the practice. We expect the administration to bring a salary proposal soon.

We have heard from many MSP members who are surprised and disappointed at these parameters. Given the fact that inflation is over five percent this year, it is unlikely that the proposed raises will meet the increase in the cost of living. Moreover, these parameters would not leave any funds for merit pay, to cover the last four years with no merit raises. MSP and the staff unions on campus – USA, PSU, and AFSCME – jointly crafted a salary proposal that we felt was fair for faculty, staff, and librarians, beginning with raises of four percent each year. We will continue to work with the staff unions to advocate for equity and for raises to fairly recognize our work. We expect our campus administration to improve significantly upon the state parameters, by adding merit raises as well as pay equity funds and other resources.

In addition to salary increases, MSP has put forward a series of proposals on our priority issues, including:

- Gender and race equity

- Non-tenure-track faculty rights and equity
- Full staffing (including full-time faculty, staff, and librarians)
- Online and flexible learning
- Climate and environmental justice
- Improved benefits and increased salary floors

MSP board members and department representatives are reaching out to members over the next few weeks, to hear what your priorities are. Please reach out to your department rep or contact the MSP office directly ([mSP@umass.edu](mailto:mSP@umass.edu)) and we will put you in touch with a board member. We look forward to having conversations about what matters to you and what you'd be willing to do to win the rights and benefits we deserve.

## 2. Health and safety

We have heard from many MSP members with concerns about COVID-19 and the increased prevalence of the Delta variant. MSP is continuing to push the administration for more transparency and better communication about plans for the fall. We are very close to an agreement for vaccines to be mandatory for faculty, librarians, and staff, with exemptions for medical or religious reasons, and mandatory weekly COVID testing for anyone with exemptions. (The *Gazette* article was misleading; MSP, PSU, and MSP support vaccination for everyone as the best way to keep us all safe.) In addition, we are asking for:

- Improved ventilation and air quality in all campus buildings – including updated information about air filtration in every building.
- Policies for masking and social distancing. Given the Delta variant's spread among vaccinated people, masking while indoors is a simple and reasonable precaution. MSP's position is that faculty and librarians must have the right to require students to wear masks, especially in large classes. (The campus is considering an indoor mask mandate but is waiting for CDC and DPH guidance.)
- Appropriate PPE to be provided to faculty to give to all students – including transparent masks in language classes, face shields for labs, and whatever protection is necessary for pedagogical or health reasons.
- Mandatory COVID testing (with accountability and enforcement mechanisms) for anyone who is not vaccinated, including students and employees with medical or religious exemptions, with optional testing available for everyone. Anyone with signs of illness must be required to stay home, with options for faculty and librarians to work remotely if they must quarantine for a period of time.
- Flexibility for faculty and librarians with household members in vulnerable groups, including immunocompromised people and small children who cannot be vaccinated. Flexible work arrangements are essential if daycare and schools are not fully open or if periodic quarantines become necessary.

- Faculty teaching large classes in particular should have the option to hold lectures online, with smaller discussion sections on campus. It is not worth the risk of large lectures becoming super-spreader events with hundreds of students packed closely in a classroom.

We understand that the university's policies are changing as CDC and Massachusetts public health guidelines evolve. Please know that the MSP is here to support our members, and our contract guarantees your right to a safe and healthy workplace.

If you are in need of accommodations for the fall – because you have a health condition that makes it unsafe for you to be in the classroom, or because you have an unvaccinated child or vulnerable person in your household who would be in danger if exposed to COVID – you should be entitled to flexible work arrangements. Please contact the MSP and we will be happy to help you navigate the process.

We always want to hear from you. We're always looking for more department reps, Faculty Advocates, committee members, and activists. If you are able to become more involved in the MSP, let us know now!

In solidarity,  
MSP Executive Committee