



Pittsburg State  
University

# Newsletter

August 2017



Kansas National  
Education Association

## Pittsburg State University – Kansas National Education Association

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### Q & A with 2017-18 PSU/KNEA President Laura Washburn

#### **What are your top priorities for PSU/KNEA during this academic year?**

Recruiting new members. We represent all tenure track and tenured faculty whether they join or not. I'd like to hear more of their voices. I'd like for faculty who've been here awhile and not been members, or who used to be members, to consider joining. In these times, having more members will be more important than ever.

#### **How does PSU/KNEA benefit faculty and the university as a whole?**

Our first purpose according to our bylaws and in practice is "to promote better educational opportunities for all students and to elevate the quality of instruction." We also "work to advance that instruction by improving salaries and fringe benefits." Over the decades, we have done better with salary increases than faculty elsewhere in the state who don't have bargaining units. We negotiate many personnel policies to ensure faculty safety and beneficial working conditions. For instance, our grievance procedure has helped good faculty stay on staff and receive tenure. We help mediate issues between faculty and administration to solve problems before they become bigger problems. We fought in the courts and won the right for faculty to maintain their intellectual property rights.

#### **The 2014-2017 faculty contract expires this year, and PSU/KNEA recently completed negotiations for a new faculty contract. What was achieved?**

On August 2, the KNEA and PSU administration negotiation teams came to a consensus on the contract and an agreement for a salary percentage increase to faculty base pay. We have agreed (pending ratification by faculty) on a 1.5% increase starting in January for unit faculty who will not receive a state-mandated 2.5% increase this fall.

The contract has several areas where we "cleaned up" language and potentially confusing statements, and we made significant changes to the processes for promotion & tenure and for performance appraisal. Beginning in April, faculty eligible for tenure in the next year will create one document for both promotion and tenure, rather than two separate documents. We shortened the time between eligibility for promotion, meaning faculty can achieve applicable salary increases sooner. The performance appraisal process now aligns better with the university, college, and department/school goals and clearly ties faculty goals and objectives to the appraisal process. Faculty should read the contract thoroughly and be aware of the changes that could affect them, particularly with regards to tenure and promotion timelines.

We also recognized some significant concerns and agreed to form task forces (including PSU/KNEA-appointed representatives) to look at summer school, safety issues, and the creation of a new student evaluation instrument on campus. Finally, the grievance process is clarified, and we have agreed to a more timely schedule for grievances so that they can come to conclusions more rapidly. Overall, the bargaining process led us to many positive changes in the interests of both faculty and administration.

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### **Can you explain the details of the proposed faculty salary increase?**

At the end of the most recent legislative session, the Kansas State Legislature approved a budget with the best of intentions, knowing that some state employees had not received a salary increase in nine years. The legislature mandated a 2.5% increase for state employees who have been employed less than five years, and Pitt State faculty eligible for this increase will receive it beginning in the fall semester. Additionally, during this year's meet and confer process, the PSU/KNEA Bargaining Council successfully negotiated a 1.5% salary increase, beginning in January, for faculty who aren't eligible for the state-mandated 2.5%. The Kansas legislature also mandated a 5% increase for employees who have been employed more than five years without an increase in the past five years, but this applies to no one at PSU.

### **How does the process of contract negotiation work?**

We start with our bargaining council hosting focus groups, held throughout the academic year, to find out what issues our members care about. We want to find out both individual and common interests. The next step is for our bargaining team to begin the "meet and confer" process with the administration's team. Both teams met on March 7th for IBB (Interest Based Bargaining) training with a federal mediator and IBB trainer. Meet and confer began soon after. The teams worked steadily throughout the spring semester and into the summer. Using the Interest-Based Bargaining process, we start by recognizing which issues are in our mutual interest to discuss. We meet weekly to read, write, rewrite, and edit the contract, addressing issues we see to be in our best mutual interest. The administration has a responsibility to make us a salary offer during the process. Because the legislature has been extending its sessions into the summer before finalizing a state budget, our negotiation timeline has been increasingly extended as well. I very much appreciate the work of our bargaining council and bargaining team, especially Amy Hite, who served as spokesperson for the bargaining team this year.

### **What challenges do faculty and PSU/KNEA face in the coming year?**

The budgetary concerns are real. The number of faculty lines that are not being opened will affect departments. We'll need to carefully think and rethink how we can best meet our students' needs in this environment. The impact of the campus no longer being gun-free has yet to be seen. Our bylaws list one of our purposes as helping "educators develop an awareness of their privileges and responsibilities as citizens," and regarding both finances and safety, there are some things that we can only impact or change at the polls.

### **What's going on with policies regarding summer teaching? Should faculty be concerned?**

This summer the administration made an unprecedented change regarding summer school, cancelling contracts of faculty whose classes had low or zero enrollment. We have long regarded the assignment of summer teaching, once made public on the class schedule, as a promise to the faculty member of a summer salary. In the past when classes had no students, faculty were given options of other ways to earn that salary, or could choose to opt out. But this year, the administration simply cancelled contracts. Many of us might think "well, of course you don't pay someone when there are no students," but it's not that simple. Faculty who have an expectation of salary make choices with that in mind. They might turn down grants or other summer employment opportunities. This year the administration withheld summer contracts for longer than in the past, then withdrew offers for a few faculty. Again, this was unprecedented. We don't want to see it happen again. At the same time, we recognize that in the current economic environment and with current enrollment levels, summer school needs some adjustments. Many longtime PSU/KNEA members believe it is time to take the summer school funding money currently in the contract and add it to faculty members' base salaries. This is a complex issue, but such a change certainly would significantly benefit every unit member. This is one idea of many that the task force will be considering. As the contract situation was developing this summer, I and outgoing unit president Khamis Siam met with Provost Lynette Olsen. We agreed to establish the task force to explore solutions that will be in the best interests of faculty, the Pitt State administration, and especially the students we serve.



Laura Washburn is University Professor of English, director of Pitt State's creative writing program, and coordinator of the Distinguished Visiting Writers Series. She is the author of two books of poetry, *Watching the Contortionists* and *This Good Warm Place*, as well as poems published in numerous national literary magazines. Active in the Pittsburg community, she is one of the founders of the charitable organization SEK Women Helping Women. She will serve as PSU/KNEA President for 2017-18.

## Contract News

A faculty contract has been agreed upon following negotiations between the PSU/KNEA bargaining team and the Pitt State administration's bargaining team. If ratified by PSU faculty and approved by the Kansas Board of Regents, the contract will be in effect from 2017-2020. Possible salary increases will continue to be negotiated annually. Prior to voting on whether to ratify the new contract, each member of the faculty should take the time to review the full contract carefully, but a summary of important changes appears below.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROPOSED 2017-2020 FACULTY CONTRACT:

- All tenured and tenure-track faculty will receive salary increases, added to their base pay, during the 2017-18 academic year. Faculty employed less than five years will receive a 2.5% salary increase beginning in the fall semester, as mandated by the Kansas State Legislature for all eligible state employees. Faculty not eligible for that increase will receive a 1.5% increase beginning in January 2018.
- Tenure and promotion will be combined into a single process, following a single timeline and requiring faculty to submit only one application dossier rather than submitting separate dossiers for tenure and for promotion. Additionally, faculty who have already achieved tenure will be eligible to apply for promotion to a higher faculty rank sooner than in the past, allowing for the quicker achievement of promotion and applicable salary increases.
- The faculty performance appraisal process was modified to align better with university, college, and department/school goals. Individual faculty goals and objectives will now be integrated more directly into the annual performance appraisal, and the process will achieve better continuity between the goals of each faculty member and their chair/director.
- In keeping with standard usage, the section on "sick leave" will now refer to "medical and parental leave." In this section, certain policies already in place have been clarified: for example, faculty who have not accrued enough leave to donate to the medical and parental leave pool are still eligible to use hours from that pool. Contract language has been modified to include proper medical terminology where applicable and to remove phrasing that implied that childbirth is an illness.
- Revisions that clarify the grievance process and establish a suitable timeline so that grievances can be resolved in a more timely manner.
- Routine editing and updating of contract language to clarify current policies and eliminate unclear or confusing language.
- Establishes task forces, which will include PSU/KNEA representatives, to address three issues: summer teaching/scheduling policies; campus safety; and the creation of a new instrument for student evaluations of faculty.

### **Annual PSU/KNEA Dinner: You're Invited!**

Open to all current and retired faculty and their families, the annual KNEA dinner and social is coming up soon:

Thursday, August 31, 2017  
6:00 PM – Wilkinson Alumni Center



## What is PSU/KNEA?

Affiliated with the Kansas National Education Association and the National Education Association, PSU/KNEA is the official bargaining unit of Pittsburg State University's tenured and tenure-track faculty. Comprised of PSU faculty, the bargaining unit is responsible for negotiating faculty salary increases and faculty contracts that establish policies regarding tenure and promotion, medical and parental leave, working hours, summer employment, grievance procedures, workplace safety, retirement, non-discrimination, intellectual property rights, and other important workplace issues.

For more information about PSU/KNEA, its goals, and how it benefits faculty, contact any member of the Executive Committee or visit our web page at <https://www.pittstate.edu/audiences/faculty-staff/knea/>

### HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER

Pitt State faculty: PSU/KNEA is your organization, consisting entirely of PSU faculty members. Please become an official member! Faculty are not required to join the organization, but we represent all faculty, even nonmembers, and it's important that everyone's voice be heard regarding workplace policies that affect us every day.

For membership information, contact President Laura Washburn, Membership Committee chair Ronny Galloway, or Treasurer Susan Johns-Smith. You may also visit Susan in her office, Axe Library room 22, to fill out a brief member application and a Human Resources payroll deduction form. Dues are approximately \$625

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

(officers, delegates, alternates)

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