

KFT THE VOICE

Spring 2022 edition

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KEAN'S TRANSITION TO R2 CARNEGIE STATUS: TOWARDS AN EXPANSIVE/HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CHANGING STANDARDS

James Castiglione

Kean University's current strategic plan established the achievement of R2 Carnegie classification for research university status as one of our central goals for the current planning cycle. By some measures, we are practically there and the Provost admits as much: the main metrics are ~\$5 million or more in reported total research expenditures and awarding a minimum number of doctorates each year (~20-30) over multiple years. The University wishes to have an increased level of research activity, which it believes will be more reflective of its increased prominence associated with R2 status.

Kean University faculty remain the most productive in the state: we teach more classes, have more office hours, advise more students, etc. than the other state university faculty in New Jersey. In addition, Kean faculty remain committed scholars who work hard to publish, write grants, present at conferences, involve students in research projects, and so on. To move forward effectively, it is important that the administration fully understands the scope of the work that faculty currently do, and comprehend the herculean efforts exerted by faculty over the past two decades to keep the University solvent, both financially and academically, often at great personal and professional costs to individual faculty.

The KFT Executive Council, recognizing the vast well of experience of our faculty, commissioned a survey of faculty to capture the full spectrum of perspectives and concerns that faculty have regarding Kean's new direction. Some of that feedback is included here.

Process Matters for Achieving "Faculty buy-in"

Recently, the Provost embarked on a speaking tour in which he met with the faculty of each of the colleges separately to convey his thoughts on criteria for tenure and promotion. Many have noted that the Provost assembled his ideas without first meeting with faculty to gain an understanding of the facts on the ground within the colleges, to understand the needs of the faculty.

Just as importantly, any major academic initiative can only succeed if there is broad faculty buy-in. But faculty buy-in is not achieved by telling faculty what to do. Rather it is achieved by – first – reaching out to faculty, asking probing questions, listening, and working hard to achieve consensus on a course of action and an implementation strategy. It turns out that many Kean faculty – veterans as well as new hires – have experience at R1 and R2 institutions. These colleagues should have a seat at the table in helping to formulate our transition to R2. Further, some of our junior colleagues come from institutions that have recently undergone this transition. It would be a lost opportunity if the University were not to utilize their experience.

Interestingly, the phrase "faculty buy-in" appears repeatedly throughout "The Empowered University", the book by University of Maryland, Baltimore County President Freeman A. Hrabowski. That was President Repollet's "book club" selection for administrators his first year. Given UMBC's success under Hrabowski, Kean would be well advised to heed his advice.

Q1 Research Requires Q1 Resources

The KFT survey on the transition to R2 status produced a wealth of ideas from faculty on how to structure the University to best pursue R2 status. While a detailed analysis of all of the feedback will take some time, the key over-arching concern is the lack of the resources necessary to support cutting-edge research work.

The most important resource of all is time. No university with a standard 4/4 teaching course load can support substantial research efforts. The university will have to provide very substantial amounts of release time for research. The recently signed agreement redesigning the RTR program represents a big step in the right direction, but more needs to be done. In addition, it must dramatically increase funds available for conference travel and streamline the approval process to facilitate such travel.

The lack of facilities and infrastructure was a constant refrain among the survey respondents. Major impediments to research include: the lack of startup funds, lack of holdings in the library, lack of modern and/or specialized research facilities, lack of research equipment including software, lack of staff for supporting research, lack of graduate students in most programs, lack of fast and efficient procurement protocols, lack of publishing support, etc. The lack of these supports is especially problematic in the sciences but extends at various degrees to all disciplines.

Another problem with the Q1 rubric that was flagged by faculty is that it is an unworkable framework in which to judge large swaths of scholarship in numerous disciplines across campus. In the visual and performing arts, humanities, liberal arts, applied, professional and clinical fields, some specialized sub-disciplines, or relatively young disciplines, there is a complete or near-complete lack of Q1 publication venues, leaving those colleagues in a disadvantaged position.

One common refrain was the inapplicability of the Q1 standard as a criterion for tenure and promotion at Kean even upon achieving R2 status. A cursory review of standards at our sister institutions finds that none of them – including the already R2-designated Montclair and Rowan – have such high-level requirements. In fact, faculty reported in the survey that Q1 publication is associated with R1 institutions and not R2 universities.

Unintended Consequences?

Further, faculty noted a series of potential pitfalls and unintended consequences associated with a rapid move to vastly increased standards without commensurate supports. If talented, up-and-coming junior faculty see that they are being denied the supports that their colleagues at other institutions receive, they will leave to take better opportunities elsewhere. Additionally, given that work with undergraduate students infrequently results in Q1 publications, faculty are unlikely to take on such student research projects in order to pursue higher- level research.

The Q1 requirement appears to leave little room to reward faculty who excel in classroom teaching and pedagogical innovation or who take on mission-critical service or leadership roles. Mid-career faculty who would normally take departmental positions, such as academic program coordinator, will drop them or decline to do them to focus on research. Who will then do this incredibly important work that ensures our students are getting the supports that they need and deserve? The absence of quality academic leadership in the departments will impede the very research activity that the University is keen to enable.

KFT Recommendations

Based on member feedback and a review of best practices at our sister institutions and similarly situated R2 colleges and universities, our Union offers these general recommendations:

- **Fairness:** Existing faculty should be judged based on the criteria under which they were hired, consistent with the resources and supports (or lack thereof) that they were provided.
- **A transition period:** Any changes in criteria for tenure and promotion should be phased in over an appropriate transition period and should be linked to the actual implementation of necessary supports. Further, Kean should align any new standards with those at our sister institutions and other comparable R2, not R1, institutions.
- **3/3 course load for all faculty who want it:** Most of our sister institutions moved to the 3/3 course load years ago. Kean must make the resources available for the 3/3 load for all faculty who want it.
- **Guaranteed Sabbaticals:** The University should guarantee the provision of sabbaticals every 7 years for those faculty interested.
- **Guaranteed Annual Travel Funds:** We suggest guaranteeing at least \$3000 in unrestricted travel funds for each faculty member per year.
- **Invest in the Library:** Kean must invest in both holdings and personnel to create a library that can support high-level research.
- **Streamline Purchasing:** The current procurement processes are a sluggish, bureaucratic nightmare. They must be reworked immediately.
- **Investing in Modern Facilities:** The University must invest in the conversion of inadequate existing research space to modern, functional facilities, but only after consulting with faculty to understand their research needs.
- **Support Staff & Graduate Students:** Support staff for enabling research must be hired, but again only after consulting with the departments on their needs. The University should be creative in identifying ways to bring on graduate students for research work, as well.

The over-arching concern is that these new supports must be put in place FIRST before expectations can be raised. Then faculty must be given the TIME necessary to convert the resources into research output before being held to these new expectations. Finally, the University must commit to SUSTAIN these supports permanently. If the University cannot financially sustain necessary supports, then expectations will have to be modified to comport with the level of resources that are actually provided. Lastly, through all this investment, Kean must maintain its student-centric approach. In all that we do, our students' needs must continue to come first.

FACULTY PROMOTIONS

On behalf of the entire membership, I congratulate all of these colleagues receiving promotion and I ask them to join with the KFT Executive Council in advocating for increased promotional opportunities for our professional staff, librarian, lecturer and faculty colleagues. - KFT President James Castiglione

Promotion to Full Professor

- 1) Nazih Richani
- 2) Brid Nicholson
- 3) Mia Zamora
- 4) David Joiner
- 5) Frank Argote-Freyre
- 6) Daniela Shebitz*
- 7) Feng Qi
- 8) Yixin Yang*

Promotion to Associate Professor

- 1) Norma Bowe
- 2) Rachel Evans
- 3) Julie Harris
- 4) Brian Oakes
- 5) Jennifer Gardner
- 6) Shanggeun Rhee*
- 7) Shweta Singh
- 8) Dongyan Mu

- 9) Salvatore Coniglio
- 10) JoAnne Cascia
- 11) Kai Wang
- 12) Keri Giordano
- 13) Bok Gyo Jeong
- 14) Kihwan Kim
- 15) Maria Shumskaya
- 16) Min-Chung Han

*Denotes administrator with faculty rank

COPE UPDATE

Walter Mack

COPE is an acronym for the Committee on Political Education. It is our union's voluntary bi-partisan Political Action Committee used for political and legislative activities. This fund helps our union build the political power to win strong contracts, better benefits, pass laws to protect our jobs, and support quality public higher education in New Jersey. Our Union does not use our Union dues for political contributions or activities. COPE contributions were established for this purpose. This last elections cycle in November of 2021, we are proud to state that we supported the following candidates for election.

Dr. Dennis Klein, a KFT local member, was successful in his bid to win a seat on the Teaneck board of education. Congratulations Dr. Klein!

State Senator Joe Cryan of the 20th District, a steadfast supporter of the KFT, was successfully reelected to his Senate seat. Congratulations Senator Cryan! A side note- Senator Cryan and his staff helped many KFT members successfully obtain their unemployment benefits due to them when they were furloughed. Some members of our Kean community attended Senator Cryan's annual fundraiser (photo included below).

State Senator Nicholas Scutari, a Kean University graduate, was successfully re-elected to his District 22 senate seat. Senator Scutari was also elected by the state senate to be the NJ State Senate President. Congratulations on both accomplishments Senator Scutari! Kean Cougars do indeed fly higher.

In closing, please support our local C.O.P.E. fund. It allows us to meet and support elected officials at the state and local levels who are supportive of our issues. A C.O.P.E contribution card is available on the KFT website.



KFT President James Castiglione attended the annual fundraiser for State Senator Joe Cryan in April representing members with KFT Vice President-elect Ana Wetzel, at right. They are joined here by CWA Kean Local (far left) President Dawn Worley and (left center) Assemblyman Reginald Atkins.

LOAN DEBT CLINIC

David Joiner

Chris Goff (Assistant Director, AFT Higher Education) presented a student loan debt clinic for KFT members on Monday, April 11, at 3:30 pm in Hutchinson Hall. The purpose of this clinic was to help our members understand and navigate issues related to both student loan forgiveness programs and income-based repayment plans available through the federal government. One item of particular note to our members is the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program (PSLF), which allows for forgiveness of student loans based on years of service in public service either through employment by state or federal government, or by working in the non-profit sector. Details on eligibility were presented, both in terms of employment type and also the student loan type for which the PSLF applies.

An issue surrounding both loan forgiveness and income-based repayment is that each of the different federal programs involved has slightly different requirements with regard to the types of loans to which they apply. This is particularly true with the PSLF which normally applies only to federal Direct Loans, however, there is a short-term program allowing the types of loans allowed to be expanded until September 30, 2022. The expansion of the PSLF program, additional loan types, and the process for applying for this program before it expires was discussed.

Members present expressed positive feedback on the clinic, in particular information about the PSLF and the impact on many members' timelines for student loan repayment.

Online tools to assist in loan forgiveness and income-based repayment were shown, and participants were told how to access these tools through AFT National.

AFT National will repeat the clinic one more time before the September 30th deadline for the PSLF expansion.



David Joiner (left) and Chris Goff (right) at the debt clinic located in Hutchinson J-100

A TRANSITION OF VICE PRESIDENTS

Christina Mastroeni

During the course of the year, there has been a transition of VPs from Walter Mack to Ana Wetzel.

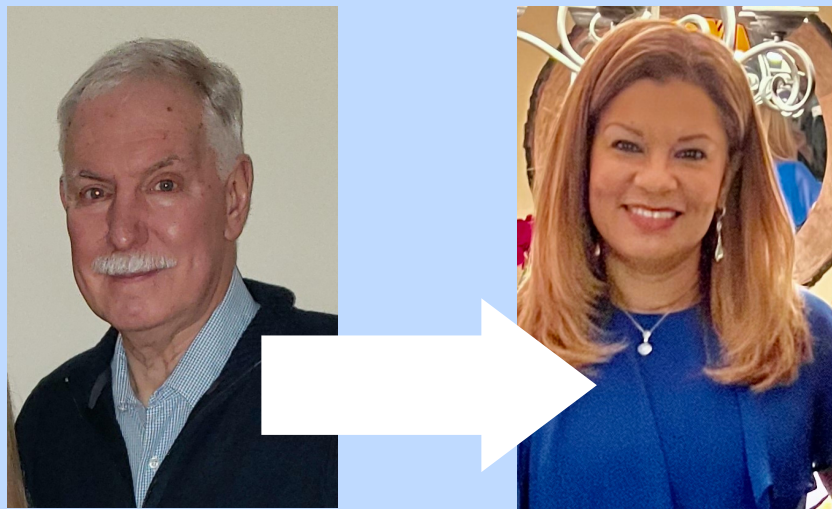
Walter has been a professional staff employee in the office of the registrar for 22 years. During this time, he's had the opportunity to interact with just about every constituent group on campus. For the past seven years, he's had the role of Vice President for the KFT.

Initially, Walter was the COPE chair for several years, enabling the KFT to establish political contacts with local Union Township political leadership as well as State Senator Joe Cryan on the statewide level.

When Walter became Vice President he was frustrated with the way professional staff were treated by the university. He believed that professional staff are the greatest untapped resource within the university. His goal was to have more input within the KFT and to make a difference for his professional staff colleagues. Additionally, he has provided counsel to the KFT Executive Council regarding professional staff matters, listens to and acts on professional staff concerns, and took a part in the KFT team that negotiated the master contract. Walter also attends Union County Central Labor Council meetings, establishing a working dialogue with other unions within Union county.

One of Walter's favorite moments in this role was when the KFT was able to improve the work-life balance of members by extending benefits or improving the contract, which is always difficult to do.

Walter would like to include some final words as he leaves his role. "Before I leave as vice-president, while I am encouraged by actions of the new university administration, I believe that it is important as members to support each other and the contract. Only by being unified, will we be able to fend off onerous challenges to our working conditions, salary, and benefits. United we stand, divided we fall not just from internal Kean threats, but also from the political world we live in, in New Jersey."



Ana Wetzel, a professional staff employee in the Office of Financial Aid, looks forward to her new role as Vice President for the KFT. She is a Kean alumna for her Bachelor's and Master's degrees and worked with the university for about a decade.

Ana has a similar mindset to Walter. She felt the professional staff have been under-represented and treated unfairly. One of her goals is to have professional staff engaged and included in decision-making in their offices. When asked what initially made her want to take this position, Ana said, "Professional staff contribute a great deal to the University; we are the hands-on workers ensuring that students are serviced, and streamlining processes."

Ana is most excited about the opportunity to represent professional staff. She looks forward to meeting with new and existing members, encouraging them to get more involved in the KFT, and working with KFT President Castiglione, along with other cabinet members, to have more opportunities to get better working conditions for professional staff.

MEET A MEMBER AT LARGE: ANISAH ABDUL-BAASIT



Christina Mastroeni

Another semester has come and gone, and another introduction is in order. The Kean Federation of Teachers would like to introduce a Member-at-Large to our executive council. Please give a warm hello to Anisah Abdul-Baasit!

Anisah is quite familiar with the Kean community. She is a Kean alumna and achieved a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication and Graphic Design. During her time as a student, she was also a student worker and worked in this position throughout achieving her degree.

Once her academic journey as an undergraduate at Kean ended, another opportunity presented itself. Anisah's supervisor contacted her about an academic specialist position. She worked in this role for about a year's time. Since then, she's worked a full-time role in the processing unit, as an admissions counselor for both undergraduate and graduate students. Totalling her time at Kean at 14 years!

When asked about her experience at Kean during these 14 years, Anisah said she worked closely with Dr. Steven Kubow, and he became a mentor to her. She also said that being a student and an employee at Kean University helped her learn more about the initial stages, and their journey from beginning to end.

But what attracted Anisah to Kean? As a freshman coming here from high school, Anisah applied to six different schools and was accepted to all of them. What attracted her to Kean was the sense of home. Not necessarily in the literal sense, as a New Jersey resident. It was the diverse, friendly, safe place, and the overall environment that made it feel like home. Even as a commuter to campus, Anisah still has friends from her classes that she remains in contact with today. As a Kean employee, she finds home in her work family too.

When she's not traveling around the world, trying new foods, painting, and experiencing new cultures, Anisah is dealing with many of our potential students. Her current role allows her to deal with a lot of the back-end processes of graduate applications and outreach to students.

Most recently, she's added the title Member-at-Large to her portfolio. After discussing the nature of the position with KFT President Castiglione, she decided to run. She wants to be part of the union, and more importantly, become part of the process. She believes it's another great opportunity to become a part of higher education. While she's still learning in this role, Anisah is taking an opportunity to learn what goes on behind the scenes. After completing her first membership "blitz" week, she is actively talking to colleagues about the importance of joining our union and what our union has done for her.

Anisah recently bought a home. She's looking forward to settling in and building herself an art studio. We can't wait to see what she does next!

KFT Social Justice Committee



Left to right: Quincy Galliard, Dr. Norma Bowe (event organizer), Ms. Maris Henson, Ms. Gwen Carr (Eric Garner's mother), Dr. Lamont Repollet (President Kean University), Ms. Valerie Bell (Sean Bells' mother), Dr. Consuelo Bonillas, Mr. Ron Dowdell (Social Justice Committee member)

A special thank you to all those who attended our Spring party at the end of the semester. The KFT wishes all its members a wonderful and safe summer!



Connect with us!



Kean Federation of Teachers

local 2187 - executive council directory 2021-2022

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