

March 7, 2005

Good afternoon members of the Kean University community and members of the Board of Trustees:

KFT Grievance Officer, Dr. Irwin Nesoff, is on sabbatical this semester, and the KFT Executive Council has appointed me to take his place in his absence. Dr. Charles Kelly is taking my place as KFT Local Negotiations Chair. Like most faculty and students, Dr. Kelly could not be here because this meeting is being held over spring break.

The number of violations of the AFT statewide collective bargaining agreement has skyrocketed in recent years. Many grievances are awaiting scheduling of a Step-One Hearing, but many more are already moving forward to arbitration. At its most recent meeting, the Grievance Committee of the State Council voted to send 11 grievances to arbitration, fully 10 of which were from Kean University. *In all but one of the several cases going to arbitration, Kean University failed and refused to hold any Step-One Hearing whatsoever.* This disrespect for constructive engagement and due process is unprofessional and advances neither the interests of our members nor that of the administration.

The grievances of the full-time unit cover a range of issues. Of particular concern is the administration's attempt to unilaterally change the evaluations for professional staff, especially the troubling requirement that managers may only include negative comments on the written evaluations. It is the KFT's position that all employees should be evaluated with similar standards of fairness and professionalism. Administrative actions such as this, even if later reversed, serve to create a hostile working environment, which is prominent among the many factors that have created a negative reputation for the university in Trenton.

Further grievances involve the fairness and equity with which promotion and reappointment decisions were made by the administration. When faculty and staff perceive that their efforts are not fairly rewarded, when junior faculty perceive that their contributions are not appreciated, there is a disincentive to be productive or to stay at the university. Evidence abounds that an exodus of talented faculty is under way. For example, one former faculty member deemed not good enough for Kean by the administration was immediately hired by Seton Hall University, calling into question the whole reappointment decision-making process employed by this administration.

In general, large numbers of grievances at a particular university is a sign that something is seriously wrong at that institution, a sign of an administration in over its head, a sign that the Board needs to exert increased oversight. Beyond impeding the smooth functioning of the university and undermining productivity, this needless confrontation drains the time, effort, and resources of the university away from our students, away from the classroom where it belongs.

Undergraduate education is the core mission of the university, and that is where our efforts and resources need to be focused.

Thank you,

James A. Castiglione,
KFT Grievance Committee Co-Chair