

KFT President James A. Castiglione - Welcome Back Address

September 8, 2014

Colleagues and distinguished guests:

Welcome back for fall semester 2014 to “Kean USA”! There is much to discuss but I’ll start with some acknowledgements and introductions.

First, let me acknowledge the retirements in the past year of two Members-at-Large of the KFT Executive Council, Susan MacLaury from Phys Ed, Recreation & Health and Tony Velez from Fine Arts. Susan’s wise counsel and Tony’s talents and passion for unionism contributed greatly to our leadership team. Both stepped forward to serve our membership with distinction and integrity and we thank them for their stewardship these past several years. Also, as most of you by now know, our long-time Office Manager, Norma Hall McFadden, retired from her position after 18 years of dedicated service. Norma was not only expert at keeping the office functioning smoothly. She was a tremendous resource not just to myself and past KFT Presidents, but to the thousands of KFT members that she served, aided, advised and interacted with over her nearly two decades in the office. We miss her and we thank her for her dedication and support.

After Norma notified us of her intent to retire, the Executive Council opened a search for a replacement and it is my pleasure to introduce our new Office Manager here today. Ms. Kiona Daniels comes to us with nearly a decade of administrative, secretarial, and office managerial experience as well as a familiarity with unionized work environments. She has an ebullient personality and is fitting right in smoothly. Kiona please stand up. Please join me in welcoming Kiona to the KFT.

Now our KFT officers - please hold your applause:

- Vice President Linda Bradbury from the EEO/EOC office
- Vice President Bryan Lees from Chemistry-Physics
- Vice President Pat McManimon from Criminal Justice
- Secretary Eleanor McKnight from the Library
- Treasurer Billie Bailey from the EEO/EOC office

And our elected At-Large Members:

- Jon Erickson from Public Administration
- Sharon Foushee from EEO/EOC
- Dan Gover from English
- Matt Halper from Music

- Richard Katz from English
- Jacqui Keil from Political Science
- Cathy Londino from Media & Film

Special thanks to Billie Bailey – Social Committee Chair who organized today’s events.

From the State Council, we are joined by Staff Representative, Bennett Muraskin. Also, IFPTE 195 local president Steve Pinto is with us. Steve please stand up.

I see many here today who have served with unwavering dedication. The faculty, professional staff and librarians here today have given years, some, decades of their lives in service to a set of ideals, to an educational calling. Even as university leadership may denigrate, disdain and make more difficult your service to our students and our university, our Union values your expertise and the work that you do. Our Union leadership upholds the time-honored academic values of integrity, professionalism, accountability, and shared, democratic governance. It is this last value that I wish to focus on for a minute as I believe it has tremendous resonance at this moment in history both locally and from a national perspective.

Teacher’s unions – all unions – are, at their heart, among the most pure, intrinsically democratic institutions in America, both in their structure and in how they are run. And our Union, the American Federation of Teachers, is known in particular for its commitment to ‘small d’ democracy via the practice of local autonomy, the practice that each local has maximal control over its own governance. This allows the Union leadership to be more quickly responsive to and representative of members concerns and distinguishes the AFT from our sister union, the National Education Association, which takes a more top-down approach.

Opportunities for direct democratic participation via our Union present themselves regularly. For example, we just conducted an election of KFT officers this past spring. When was the last time you got to vote on the continued service of the university’s officers, including President Farahi? Probably, it was the vote of no confidence in the president after the revelations of his resume fraud. The 92% no confidence vote for the President was eclipsed only by the 96% vote of no confidence in VPAA Jeff Toney last fall. One might say that here at Kean University, our votes of no confidence truly are “world class”.

What is true for other unions is true for the AFT and for us locally. Ratification of a new Master Contract is not a handshake in a smoke-filled back room, it is a direct vote

to approve or reject by the full membership. We will have just such a vote about a year from now, as we will be entering into negotiations on a new Master Contract this spring.

The AFT's commitment to democracy was highlighted in an August 31st article in The New York Times titled "The Original Charter School Vision". The article points out, and I quote, "...the original vision for charter schools came from Albert Shanker, the President of the American Federation of Teachers from 1974 to 1997." The article continues:

Mr. Shanker believed deeply that unions played a critical role in democratic societies and wanted charter schools to be unionized. But he also wanted to take democratic values to an even higher level: Students would see workplace democracy in action firsthand in charter schools because they would see teachers who were active participants in decision making. Likewise, students in economically and racially integrated schools would learn on a daily basis that we all deserve a seat at democracy's table.

While the article goes on to relate how the modern charter school movement has deviated, dramatically and harmfully, from Shanker's vision, it points out that his ideas were based on sound science and pedagogy. Again, I quote:

There is considerable research to back up [Shanker's] vision. Richard M. Ingersoll, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, has found that where teachers have more say in how their school is run, the school climate improves and teachers stay longer — trends that have been independently associated with increased student learning.

Surely this correlation between increased shared governance and increased student learning extends into post-secondary education as well, even much more strongly. Similar arguments can be made for our values of integrity, professionalism and accountability. We - our Union, all of us - embody these values not simply because they are the right thing to do, but because they are the effective, proven values, without which there can be no truly world-class education.

What happens when university leadership deviates from these bedrock values of academia? Recent experience shows that the reputational damage can be severe, with long-standing impacts on faculty recruitment and retention and especially enrollment in the aftermath of a litany of scandals: academic fraud, NCAA probation, plagiarism in the

Office of Academic Affairs, and of course Middle States accreditation warning and probation.

While faculty and staff may know that Middle States reaffirmed our accreditation two years ago, you may not know that at their June meeting they took the unusual step of demanding the university document progress on specific shortcomings in its 5-year Periodic Review Report due June 2017. Not surprisingly, all three Standards cited stem from administrative shortcomings. Middle States' action says the university must:

- 1) Document evidence of continued enhancement of communication among all constituent groups (Standard 6 – Integrity);
- 2) Document evidence of implementation of clear and consistent expectations for direct measures across all non-academic units (Standard 7 – Institutional Assessment);
- 3) Document evidence of review of the learning outcomes for general education and consideration of a reduction in the number of outcomes (Standard 12 – General Education).

Faculty and staff come in for no criticisms from Middle States. In this way, Middle States indirectly acknowledges what we all know to be the case: the faculty and the professional staff are doing an outstanding job under very difficult circumstances.

This professionalism of our membership is an asset that AFT National is looking to leverage more and more in a campaign to reorient the way its locals operate and organize. The goal is to shift AFT locals from a “transactional” service model to an “transformational” organizing model by focusing more on issues, making organizing an on-going activity that reinforces Union solidarity and strength. There is one example of this approach that we have already incorporated in our communications. You may have noticed that I reference “our Union” rather than “the Union” or “the KFT”. This distinction is important. “The Union” implies a third-party, an entity separate, disconnected from its membership, whereas “our Union” connotes solidarity and shared purpose, that the entity is us and cannot exist separate from “us”.

The broader transformation that AFT envisions is to move from passivity to activism, to move from members simply joining our union to members taking a stand, to move from the view that our union is protection to view that our union is power, to move from being simply a member to being a unionist.

This model of unionism has proven very successful in recent years within the AFT. This was the model employed by Karen Lewis, the President of AFT Local # 1, the Chicago Teachers' Union, in their very successful strike two years ago. That strike and

the tactics and strategy employed have led to other large, successful strikes by teachers unions elsewhere around the country. The Chicago Teachers' Union was so successful because it was able to mobilize support across the community by focusing on issues of importance to a broad constituency.

Our Union leadership has regularly taken the lead in advocating for policies that focus university resources into the classroom where they most benefit our students. To the contrary, we have seen this administration pursue a path that removes us further and further from Kean University's traditional mission and from the crucial role that Kean has played as a foothold for our first-generation college students pursuing their American Dream.

We have seen that our sister institutions have been and are continuing to increase the size of their tenured and tenure-track faculty while ours shrinks, with the result that Kean has the worst ratio of students to full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty of our sister institutions, by far. Our ratio is almost 50 to 1, while the rest of our sister institutions have ratios less than 30 to 1.

Specifically, we see New Jersey City University's move to cut administrative bloat and increase the size of the tenured faculty. As Kean has slipped into the fourth and lowest tier in the US News & World Report college rankings, NJCU sees an opportunity to replace us as the go-to school for first generation college students seeking a quality education. Further, President Farahi compounds the problem by directing resources away from the large academic programs that students want, as measured by their large student enrollments, to small, specialized programs with little demand.

The most disturbing example of this is the new school of architecture. It is now clear that the decision to create this program at Kean University is being driven by the desires of the communist Chinese government. This arrangement raises a number of questions. First, there is the specter of the Chinese government determining what academic programs the taxpayers of the State of New Jersey will be forced to support and what programs we will be offering our students here. Faculty control over the curriculum, a bedrock principle underpinning academic integrity at all colleges and universities, is compromised when foreign governments drive decision making for their own economic and political interests. And, what effect will the huge costs associated with the major undertaking of creating an architecture program have on existing academic programs offered to our New Jersey students? Given that architecture has had a weak employment picture for years, and that New Jersey already has two prominent programs at Princeton and NJIT, there is no proven demand for this program, other than that of the Chinese government. Reports in the Chinese media that the goal is to make

Wenzhou-Kean an international center for architecture make clear that the primary beneficiary is to be the China campus and not “Kean USA”. The academic tail is wagging the dog.

All of this points to an on-going theme that we identified long ago: Kean USA students are paying more and getting less. With one exception. Kean USA students, like their peers around the country, are “getting” ever more student-loan debt. The KFT Executive Council believes that this is an educational policy issue about which KFT members are deeply concerned. So I am pleased to announce the development of a faculty-student campaign to address the pernicious issue of excessive student-loan debt centered around Senator Elizabeth Warren’s “Bank on Students” movement.

Senator Warren introduced legislation earlier this year in the US Senate to allow anyone with student-loan debt to refinance that debt at current low interest rates. There is enormous opposition to this proposal by special interest groups even though this has the potential to save working families millions of dollars per year. There are a number of local events and activities under consideration and anyone interested in participating should talk to me or any other member of the KFT Executive Council. We hope to create a broad-based coalition including AFT-NJ and NJ United Students and other student and community groups.

More broadly, if we are serious about serving the needs of our students, there is really only one tried and true approach: offer a quality education at an affordable price. There are numerous examples where our terms and conditions of employment support the broader goals of academia and the university. When faculty, staff and librarians are protected via safeguards negotiated into our Master Contract and local Letters of Agreement, they are empowered to serve our students with integrity, and to exercise their academic freedom and professional expertise to make a real difference in students’ lives.

We will need the strength that flows from collective action if we are to defend and advance our terms and conditions of employment in our next round of Master Contract negotiations starting this spring. If you recall, the State’s proposed revisions to our last Master Contract represented the most comprehensive and direct attack on professionalism and unionism in the history of public higher education in New Jersey. While we were able to beat back almost all of the State’s regressive proposals, we must be prepared for difficult negotiations again.

It is true that we live in a time in which working families and the labor movement, generally, are under constant attack. While it may seem at times that faculty and staff are losing ground, the fact is that we have had a great deal of success in beating back some of

the worst of the Farahi administration's initiatives. These victories are real, they come as the result of collective action, and it serves us well to recall them:

1. **Restored Course Limitations on Enrollment:** In every case that has been brought to our attention, we have been successful in restoring the course caps to their proper levels for courses across campus.
2. **Expanded Tuition Waiver Program for Children of Deceased Members**
3. **Restored summer compensation for program coordinators**
4. **Negotiated a LOA for Lecturers:** It took two years of tough negotiations, but this agreement provides for fair compensation, promotional opportunities, the option for two-year contracts, Lecturer participation in their evaluation process and other benefits. Lecturers are non-tenure track positions that make them more vulnerable to abuse, so it will be up to tenured faculty to reach out to them in solidarity and help make sure they get the support they need.
5. **Restored Travel Funding for Faculty who Grieved**
6. **Achieved the rehiring of three laid-off Professional Staff:**
7. **Stopped the "World Class" 5-day teaching schedule:** Especially devastating for our junior faculty who are in the midst of developing their instructional approaches and research agendas and who need maximum flexibility for those activities.
8. **Eliminated the unprofessional and embarrassing timesheets for faculty:**
9. **Restored 3 holidays to academic calendar:**
10. **Settled ULP on retaliation against KFT VP Charlie Kelly on our terms:** This settlement is important in two key ways. One, we stopped the criminalization of the grievance process. Intimidating faculty by falsely accusing them of criminal behavior is a tactic that President Farahi has used in the past. We stood firmly against this abuse of power and succeeded in disarming the administration of this tactic, preserving our rights. Secondly, we stopped President Farahi from retaliating against union activists and union activism. Members can take heart from this victory that it is possible to fight the retaliation of the Farahi administration, and win, and that Union involvement is the best defense.

11. Won ULP over failure to negotiate faculty office hours: We have forced the university back to the bargaining table where it is currently under negotiation.

Our leadership team is proud to represent faculty and staff and proud of the work you do and the impact you have on our students' lives. Our union respects your expertise, your professionalism and your right and responsibility to oversee the academic well-being of Kean University. These are our shared values. With your support, we will defend the terms and conditions of employment under which you exercise these responsibilities for the betterment of all. With your support, we will continue to articulate and advocate for a coherent vision for quality education for our students and our university. And working together, our Union will remain committed to, and continue to model for our students, the democratic values articulated by former AFT President Albert Shanker and that we all hold so dear. Thank you.