

**Election & party**

On Thursday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> we will hold our election for FA officers—and enjoy some food and drink, and honor FA activist retirees Aldo Migone and Rachel Stocking—at Pagliai's Pizza from 4:30-6:30.

Faculty who would like to vote by mail, or have a colleague bring their vote to the gathering at Pagliai's, [please email me](#) for instructions.

Here is the slate of candidates we've got lined up right now. Write-ins are of course also possible. It is heavy in incumbents, but many have only been in office for a term or less.

**Officers:**

President: Dave Johnson

Vice President: Segun Ojewuyi

Secretary: Debbie Bruns

Treasurer: Joe Shapiro

**College Representatives:**

Agriculture: Paul Henry

CASA: Sam Pavel

COEHS: Patrick Dilley

CoLA: Open seat (nominations, including self-nominations, welcome)

Engineering: Open seat (nominations, including self-nominations, welcome)

Library: Jonathan Nabe

MCMA: Rob Spahr

Science: Randy Hughes

**IEA Regional Representative:** Randy Hughes

(Anyone listed as a candidate above who would not like to serve should please get in touch, though I've tried to confirm that people are willing to run.)

**Alumni o% adjuncts**

I spoke today with St. Louis Public Radio about the o% alumni adjuncts proposal: the conversation, which runs a bit more than ten minutes, can be found [here](#).

Below you'll find another effort to explain my take on this situation. I say "my take" because I wanted to get this newsletter out with news about elections, and so while I've spoken with FA colleagues about this issue, I haven't run this full statement by them.

This week we learned of an administrative "pilot program" which encourages department chairs to work with faculty to identify alumni with terminal degrees who would be interested in serving as volunteer (0%) adjuncts. The proposal [lit up social media](#), and then generated a [great deal](#) of [press coverage](#), most of it critical in tone. One commentator went as far as to call it "[the death knell of public higher ed.](#)" Campus administrators, on the other hand, have argued that "[the project simply makes what we are already doing more intentional](#)" while giving alumni a way to strengthen ties to the university. In their view there is no story here, and the negative reaction is entirely due to a misunderstanding.

In my view the truth, as is usually the case, lies somewhere in the middle. The proposal to increase the use of unpaid adjunct faculty, and to make their role more formal, could result in outsourcing of faculty work to unpaid adjuncts. It is entirely reasonable to worry about situations that start with departments that lack expertise in a given area but can identify outside experts (alumni or not) who would be willing to pitch in on an ad hoc basis. All universities do this from time to time, and are right to do so. But if a department chair is encouraged to formalize a relationship with an expert alum in a given area—to have that alum give a lecture every now and then, say, and perhaps sit on a thesis or dissertation committee once or twice a year—the department may well be told that they don't need a regular SIUC faculty member in that area, as they have the volunteer alumnus or alumna to help out. At some point, then, the outside volunteer could end up filling a position that should be filled by a faculty member.

On the other hand, there are numerous precedents for the informal, case by case use of outside experts—perfectly good precedents that do enhance university life. And the administration has assured us that new volunteer adjuncts will not teach courses, that they will be limited to the sorts of roles already played by outside experts, and that faculty in units will have the final say over faculty appointments in their units. We will hold them to these promises, and we know that a number of units on campus have already made it clear that they are uninterested in adding volunteer adjuncts. If faculty remain vigilant, we can avoid tumbling down the slippery slope from responsible collaboration with outside experts to displacement of paid faculty work to unpaid volunteers.

Thus I am hopeful that this proposal will not undermine the role of SIUC faculty. But it has already done this campus some real harm, through the negative publicity it generated. And while the administration has silently corrected some of the more troubling aspects of the initial announcement about their program, they have not copped to the obvious truth that this has been another self-inflicted wound for SIUC. In our regularly scheduled communications committee yesterday with Chancellor Montemagno and Associate Provost DiLalla, we suggested that SIUC table this pilot

program until the administration could assure faculty that it would not result in displacement of faculty work onto unpaid volunteers. This would reassure faculty and put an end to the negative publicity. But the chancellor flatly rejected this suggestion. On some very basic level our administrators don't get it: on this issue, as on others, they believe that their critics simply misunderstand them.

What our administrators misunderstand in this case is how any suggestion that faculty work can be done on a volunteer basis plays into the larger narrative about public higher education. In that narrative funding for public higher education is a low priority that hard-pressed state governments can responsibly choose to cut. State spending for SIUC has dropped by at least 40% since 1990 in real terms. Many other public universities have suffered similarly. In this context administrators endeavor to do more with less. And while our administrators have claimed that the increased use of volunteer adjuncts had nothing to do with finances, it would be naïve to believe that the possibility of getting more free help was not one motivation for this plan.

Public university leaders have a motivation not to criticize legislators for cutting their funding—as this might lead to still more cuts. And they also have a motivation to claim that they can manage their universities well despite budget cuts. So they have reacted by raising tuition, increasing the use of underpaid adjuncts, putting more demands on tenure-stream faculty, and increasing class sizes—by cutting quality while increasing the costs for students. Public education is increasingly privatized, and privatized on the cheap. Administrators making these decisions may have good intentions, but they are focussed on the short-term goal of making due and neglecting the longer-term interest of public higher education. When administrators of public universities suggest that they can provide high-quality education to the public without adequate public funding, they undermine the case for public funding. (On this point I am entirely in agreement with the [column by John Warner](#) in Inside Higher Ed.)

In retrospect, then, the blow-up about this fairly limited proposal to increase the use of unpaid adjuncts is not only understandable but absolutely vital and healthy. We must all awaken, and continue to awaken others, to the damage done to our universities, our students, and our future when we cut investment in public higher education and devalue the work done by faculty.

In solidarity,

Dave Johnson

President, SIUC-FA