AFT Local 1904 President's statement to the Board Of Trustees
Thursday July 23rd, 2015

I'd like to start this morning by thanking you for keeping the tuition increases to a reasonable 2.0% and even reducing the Summer Session tuition. That said, a close look at the budget shows a 3.1 % increase in tuition revenues and a 6.6% increase in fee revenues, which suggests not only will there be even more students on campus this coming year, but that they will be paying new and higher fees. This, on top of increased housing and food costs, makes this next academic year the most costly for students in our history. And, of course, there are also increased costs to our employees for food, parking, and other necessities.

As I have said before, the budget as presented here and on the University's website makes it impossible to figure out details as to where the costs and expenses are, making it difficult for me to make meaningful comments on specifics. In this budget, the projected State appropriations is reduced by 2.7 million, which we can all agree is an abomination, and its shortfall sits squarely on the backs of our students. I would call it a tax on our students but I am sure that our Governor would think otherwise.

It seems that there has been a recent explosion of administrators, without a corresponding increase in faculty or support staff. How is this impacting our budget, and is there any data that suggests that increasing administrators enhances the academic mission? Let's be sure to keep our eye on the ball in that it should be the academic mission driving decision processes. We should be asking how each and every decision ties back to our academic mission, and put in place evaluative procedures to ascertain their effectiveness. Our students deserve nothing less.

I also see that our debt-service costs are going up what looks like a whopping 26%, to 16.7 million dollars, bringing it to a full 4.5% of our operating budget. And this is after your recent debt restructuring to reduce costs. At what point should we be concerned that these costs are approaching a critical juncture?

I know you also only see general budget numbers presented by the administration to approve in your public sessions. Knowing many of you for years now, I assume you posed questions in your closed sessions, perhaps even similar to the ones I ask. But those questions, and their answers, never see the light of day in your public meetings, and I ask you to reconsider pro forma voting on the budget without a public discussion of assumptions and underlying principles. That said, I thank you for your continued oversight of the fiscal health of the University. I only wish the assumptions that underlie these increases and the decision processes leading to them were more transparent.

As you may be aware, all of the public workers' union contracts expired June 30th, and the State is taking the position that the colleges and universities in our sector are not required to pay increments, fund Career Development, or provide funds for our vision-care benefits — which, by the way, are just $80 per employee.

Last year Dr. Cole's base pay was increased 3.5% ($13,650) to $403,650 from $390,000, plus a $60,547 (15%) performance bonus *and* a $25,000 retention bonus for a $489,197 total package. At that time, you alluded to some unreleased "performance review," which we've never seen, that drives the performance bonus. I understand that this year Dr. Cole will not be getting any raise to her base pay, but will be getting the $25,000 retention bonus. And, it is unclear whether she will be getting any of the 10-20% performance bonus she is entitled to as per your 2013 resolution on her pay package as there is no mention of Dr. Coles compensation package on today's agenda.

You typically take this opportunity to let Dr. Cole know what a wonderful job you think she is doing and how her bonuses are absolutely warranted. Contrast this with no raises or bonuses for any other employees on campus, many of whom regularly undergo a rigorous peer-reviewed performance assessment. I'm not seeing any more money this year, and neither is any other faculty member, professional staff, librarians, specialists, managers, vice-presidents, or deans. NO ONE but Dr. Cole is getting a bonus this year. No increments. No cost-of-living increases. Do you think that's fair? Were you aware that no other employees will be seeing any increases, or do you simply think it is out of your control? I maintain that it is not out of your control, and that if you wanted to, you could do something about it.

Clearly you value President Cole's work. But you are silent when it comes to valuing the work of any of the many other employees on campus—many of whom make less than 5% of what Dr. Cole receives—and that's not even considering her housing costs. The rest of us pay our own housing costs, on lower salaries and increased health care costs that are not being incremented.

Restore our increments as you raise Dr. Cole's compensation. You can do it if you want to. Please enjoy the rest of the summer and I'll see you in September.

Thank you.

Rich Wolfson, President
AFT Local 1904—Montclair State University