



February 3, 2016

AAUP/AFT-Wisconsin Joint Statement on the Proposed Regent Policies

Since 2011, the governor and the legislature of the state of Wisconsin have been engaged in an attack on the University of Wisconsin System as a public good that exists for the benefit of all citizens of the state. This vision of higher education has shaped the UW System since the formulation of the Wisconsin Idea in 1904. The attack began with the assault on collective bargaining in the state through Act 10, and continued with legislative changes to tenure, due process, and shared governance, changes that threaten to undermine academic freedom. This attack jeopardizes the working conditions of faculty and academic staff as well as the learning conditions of students in the UW System.

This past July, the AAUP and AFT-Wisconsin called on the Wisconsin Board of Regents to move swiftly to put in place policies that follow AAUP policies and standards and enshrine fundamental academic freedoms in UW System policy. We further called on campus administrations to work through the appropriate faculty and academic staff governance bodies to promulgate these policies at the campus level. The regents have now published draft regent policy documents on tenure.

We are pleased to see that, over the course of the development of the draft regent policies on tenure, a number of central elements of the AAUP's Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure have been incorporated. The AAUP's provisions on academic freedom and tenure are widely recognized as standards for sound academic practice and have been adopted by a large number of institutions of higher education. We remain concerned, however, that some of the provisions in the draft regent policy documents fall far short of those standards. Particularly alarming is the inclusion of a provision for program prioritization based primarily on financial considerations for the purpose of discontinuing academic programs and laying off faculty. Actions taken by administrations at several universities in the name of program prioritization have led to investigations of violations of academic freedom and tenure as well as the imposition of censure by the AAUP.

We remain concerned about the primary purpose of the legislative changes to tenure, due process, and shared governance, and we will have to reserve judgment as to the adequacy of the proposed policies to safeguard these bedrocks of US higher education until we see how they will be applied within the UW System.