

Contract changes being opposed by UC librarians

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University of California librarians are upset about proposals to eliminate their salary step scale and reconfigure a peer review committee that evaluates job performance and makes pay raise decisions.

The UC-American Federation of Teachers, a union representing about 400 librarians in the UC system including 43 at UC Davis, opposed these proposed changes in a news release this week.

The union began negotiating for a new contract at the beginning of December, but face-to-face talks started Wednesday. The current two-year contract expires in March. UC-AFT also represents lecturers, but they have a separate contract.

Librarians said they were surprised by the university administration's initial proposal for their new contract.

"The UC administration has proposed movement in a negative direction. The administration proposals threaten to undermine the excellent service that librarians provide while delivering critical support to students, faculty and the public," Miki Goral, UC-AFT council member and a UCLA librarian, said in a news release.

Axel Borg, a UCD librarian and president of the AFT Local 2023, shares those concerns.

"I'm very disappointed by the way that the university is treating us and seems to devalue us," Borg said.

Borg oversees UCD's world-class Viticulture and Enology Collection in Shields Library — 30,000 volumes in 42 languages — and serves on the executive council of the UCD Academic Federation. He has worked as a UC librarian for almost 25 years, mostly on the Davis campus.

"When they (UC administration) came out with this proposal, we were stunned that they wanted to take away the things that seemed to be working," Borg said. "We were profoundly disappointed."

Nicole Savickas, UC human relations communications coordinator, said these opening proposals are only a first step in negotiations with the union.

"We will discuss them with the union at the bargaining table, and proceed through the bargaining process in good faith in order to reach agreement on a new contract for university librarians," Savickas said.

One proposal is to reconfigure the committee that conducts reviews for pay increases and

promotions. A UC official would choose committee members from the union's nominations, rather than leaving the committee's composition to local campus procedures, Savickas said. And rather than being composed of a majority of people in the same job classification, at least half the committee members would be from the same classification. Borg opposes this idea.

"By taking away peer review, the university is deprofessionalizing us," Borg said. "It seems they want to turn us into clerks."

Borg said librarians have academic responsibilities like others on campus, publishing books and articles on a variety of topics, as a way to advance in their jobs. For example, Borg co-authored a chapter on early books about chocolate, to be included in a book about Mars candy research.

And he wrote a book with Maynard Amerine, a world-renowned authority on wine, before Amerine died in 1998. The extensive bibliography of U.S. books and pamphlets on grapes and wine was published by UC Press. Another UCD librarian authored a book titled "The Culture and Control of Expertise: Toward Sociological Understanding of Librarians."

In addition to changing the review committee, UC also proposes moving away from the step salary system to a salary range, Savickas said. She explained that a step structure has pre-determined salary steps that employees progress through based on seniority (and possibly other factors, as outlined in the contract). A range structure sets a salary range (minimum, median and maximum) for a job title.

The union claims that "by eliminating the salary scale, the administration is replacing a predictable schedule of salary increases, with a system controlled by the whims of management with little or no accountability."

Borg said he's against this change too. He believes the "step system is a very good system" that prevents possible abuse and favoritism in determining raises.

On the issue of salary, Borg said librarians earn barely enough to get by.

He noted a recent study by the California Budget Project, a nonprofit policy research group. The October report found an average family of four in California must earn \$72,343 per year to cover costs of housing, utilities, child care, medical care, transportation, food, taxes and other necessities.

Borg said the average librarian salary at UCD is \$69,000 per year. Most of the librarians don't own their own homes, he added.

For comparison, Borg said CSU librarians have faculty status and earn significantly more than UC librarians. Community college librarians earn even more, he said.

"There's an inverse relationship to prestige," Borg said.

Further, Borg said UCD is highly ranked in several categories, but its library has dropped from 23rd to 60th in the nation in the last 20 years, based on total expenditures, as ranked by the Association of Research Libraries.

Within the UC system, UCD ranked first for years of librarian experience (about 19.5 years each) in 2005-06, according to ARL. Yet, the library ranked fifth for average salary and seventh in staffing.

"That's showing that there isn't an investment going on in the library," Borg said.