



## **UNAC Connection - March 2023**

**\* HONOR OUR DIFFERENCES \* PRIORITIZE THE ACADEMIC MISSION**

**\* EDUCATE FOR THE COMMON GOOD \* BUILD FOR THE FUTURE**



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## **Primary Investigator (P.I.) Roles and Responsibilities**

Each University has its own policy that lays out the expectations and rights of P.I.s:

- [UAF's P.I. policy](#)
- [UAA's P.I. policy](#)
- [UAS's P.I. policy](#)

All Primary Investigators should review their University's P.I. policy.

Although we have three distinct P.I. policies in the UA system, each policy shares the same main message: Primary Investigators are faculty members who are responsible for securing funding, as well as implementing and managing the project as specified in funding-agency agreements.

In exchange for the money and prestige these grants bring into the UA system,

P.I.s are to be given workload credit and professional autonomy to complete the project's work. UA cannot decide, mid-project, to take away workload credits or change the project's P.I., except in rare circumstances such as P.I. illness, death, or arrest.

Many of our P.I.s work off the tenure track, and these research faculty work hard to write grants that will fund their future employment at UA. For research faculty working on year-to-year contracts, securing funding from external agencies (NASA, NSF, NIH, USDA, etc) is their job security.

Supervisors cannot nonchalantly take away someone's P.I.ship without violating funding-agency rules and endangering future grants and contracts from those agencies. The same rules apply to our P.I.s who are tenure track or tenured. All of our P.I.s work hard to bring in money and conduct their work to the benefit of the UA system. Thank you to our Primary Investigators for all your work!

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## **Health Insurance Changes**

### **Deductions for Summer Health Care**

After we sent out our message regarding HR's plan to begin double-charging members for health-care premiums each fall, UNAC members wrote to the CHRO and Director of Labor Relations to tell them the double-deductions would cause unnecessary financial harm to themselves and/or their families. Prior to our members sending emails concerned about the plan, HR had told UNAC leadership that the double-deduction plan was the only option available going forward.

However, after receiving multiple employee emails from across the system, they found a new accounting solution and will continue to evenly deduct 12 months of healthcare over the 9 month contract period—nice work UNAC members!

*You did what UNAC leadership could not accomplish alone, proving that our union is our members, and our members'*

### **Changes to End-Date of Coverage for Departing Faculty**

One unfortunate consequence of HR's new accounting mechanism for health care deductions is that faculty will now be 'catching up' with summer benefits deductions from August to May instead of 'paying ahead' for summer benefits, as has been the practice for decades.

The only time this will matter for a person is in their final year of employment with UA. Members who leave mid-year will have their previous summer's remaining healthcare deductions taken as a lump sum from their final paycheck.

Of further concern, members who retire or resign at the end of future contract periods will lose their health benefits at the end of May instead of at the end of the summer, unless the departing member has a summer contract extension or is teaching a summer class.

*actions create our strength.*

### **Rate Increases**

Unfortunately, the UA administration feels that in order to keep UA's self-funded insurance plan solvent, rates for many of the plan options must be increased for the next fiscal year.

Average increases (averaged across the employee tiers) will be 8.5% for the 750 plan, 23.1% for the HDHP plan, and 32.9% for the CDHP plan.

UNAC does not control healthcare rates, and we're disappointed that these hikes coincide with the first raise UA employees have seen in recent years.

The system office should be sending out detailed information about the rate changes in the coming days, before open enrollment begins.

### **Decoupling Vision and Dental from Health and Pharmacy**

This is another change to health care insurance that UA management solely controls.

Regardless, UNAC leadership wants to make sure our members are aware that vision and dental coverage will be decoupled from health and pharmacy coverage beginning July 1, 2023.

Pay attention to messages from the system office regarding impending changes to healthcare and notification of open enrollment (4/17/23-5/5/23). Failure to participate in open enrollment this spring will result in employees being moved to a basic plan, with their dependents and partners/spouses dropped from coverage.

### **Open Enrollment**

All employees - *new and returning* - are required to participate in open enrollment this spring due to the changes described above.

According to the [UA Benefits page](#), **employees who do not complete a new open enrollment form will be enrolled in the basic health/basic dental/vision plan and their dependents and partner/spouse *will be dropped from coverage.***

Visit the [UA Benefits page](#) for more information (some links are not yet functional on this page).

**Dates of open enrollment are April 17-May 5.**



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## **Faculty Engagement with Legislators**



UAS faculty member Andrea Dewees (left) with UAA faculty members Maria Williams (middle) and Ian Hartman (right) attended a March 4, 2023, Legislative Town Hall with Anchorage legislators. Also in attendance but not pictured: UAA faculty members Nelta Edwards and Gokhan Karahan.

Events like this recent Anchorage Legislative Town Hall are a great opportunity to make sure legislators hear from faculty about our concerns, hopes, and aspirations for the UA system.

We can share our on-the-ground reality to show legislators why the UA system deserves their financial support. Our presence at this type of event shows them that faculty are committed to our students, the UA system, and our community. It illustrates our general civic engagement as community members.

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## **Legislative Updates**

### **Board of Regents Appointees' Confirmation Hearings**

Governor Dunleavy recently [appointed four new regents](#), as well as returning-regent, Scott Jepsen, to serve 8-year terms on the BOR. UNAC leadership doesn't object to the majority of this year's appointees.

However, we have real concerns about the damage Bethany Marcum could do

to the UA system if the legislature confirms her appointment. She [supported Governor Dunleavy's 2019 proposed \\$130M cut to the UA system](#), out of which the crippling \$70M Compact was born.

Of further concern, Marcum is the CEO for the [Alaska Policy Forum](#), a think-tank with a large focus on defunding public education, including public higher education systems like UA. She also served on the redistricting board that was recently [accused of gerrymandering](#) for partisan gain.

The Senate and House Education Committees will be interviewing Bethany Marcum and all new BOR appointees this Friday, March 24. After Friday's hearings, there will be one final step of approval with the entire legislative body. Before Friday, send a short note to members of these committees regarding your opinions on the new BOR appointees:

- [House Education Committee members](#) (hearing is at 8:00 a.m.)
- [Senate Education Committee members](#) (hearing is at 3:30 p.m.)

Legislators have already voiced serious concerns regarding Marcum's appointment to the BOR, but they need to hear from faculty members who share those concerns before they vote whether to approve her appointment.

### **House Bill 9: Adding a Faculty Regent to the Board of Regents (BOR)**

On March 8, 2023, the House Education Committee heard public testimony in support of [HB9](#) to add a faculty regent on the BOR. Testifiers all gave excellent, moving testimony. They took up the entire meeting and included:

- in person
  - Four current and former members of our Faculty Alliance
- on the telephone
  - Five faculty members from around the state
  - three alumni - including one former student regent
  - one current student
  - one member of the public

On March 17, Representative Allard successfully introduced an amendment with two changes:

- any faculty member (adjunct, term, tenure track, tenured, full) may submit their name for consideration, rather than only allowing tenured faculty to apply.
- Interested faculty will apply directly through the governor's office rather than including the faculty senates in the selection process, as is done with the student regents and student governance.

The amended bill now moves to its next step: the House Judiciary Committee.

The bill has picked up six co-sponsors in the House: Representatives Armstrong, Mina, McCormick, Groh, Fields, and Story. If one of these is your local representative, tell them thank you!

### **Senate Bill 13/House Bill 10: Textbook Price Transparency**

These bills ([SB13](#) & [HB10](#)) had their first hearings on Tuesday, March 13, 2023, in the Senate and House Education Committees. While United Academics does not have an official position on these bills, we've heard from members who are concerned that they will increase the workload on faculty

members and that the bills ignore important work already being done on the ground to ensure that classes offer the cheapest, high-quality textbook available for their subject matter.

Textbook companies gouge students wherever they can, and faculty already do what we can to protect our students from excessively expensive textbooks.

One important way legislators can ensure that students don't get priced out of public higher education in Alaska is to fully fund the UA system to help stabilize or even decrease each University's classroom, studio, and laboratory fees and tuition. These are the costs to students that Alaska's legislators can directly help UA control through increased funding to the system.

### **Senate Bill 88: Returning to a Defined Benefit Retirement System**

In 2006, Alaska's public employee and teacher retirement systems (PERS and TRS) were switched from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan for all new enrollees. The result has been lower returns for retirees and increased retention problems for Alaska's public employers.

Under the plan laid out in [SB88](#), all workers who joined Alaska's PERS or TRS since 2006 would have the option to convert from defined contribution to defined benefits, and all new employees would automatically be enrolled in defined benefits if they choose TRS instead ORP for their retirement plan. Members on ORP would be unaffected by this change.

**HB21: Adding School District Employees, UA Employees, and other Public Employees to AlaskaCare Health Plan**  
[HB 21](#) would enable UA to join the [AlaskaCare health plan](#) that currently insures other public employee groups in Alaska. The AlaskaCare plans have lower deductibles and seemingly more cost-effective coverage for employees, plus it's still in-network at Fred Meyer pharmacies. Current state statute prohibits UA from taking part in this plan. HB21 would change that. The bill had its first hearing in the House Education Committee on March 13, 2023.





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## **Reminders**

### **United Academics Four Tenets**

Honor Our Differences  
Prioritize the Academic Mission  
Educate for the Common Good  
Build for the Future

### **Faculty Time Off - Claiming and Cashing In Your Days Off**

#### **To be eligible to cash-in up to five days of FTO**

All UNAC bargaining unit members must first claim at least five days of FTO as time off.

Three of those claimed days must be over winter break's hard closure: December 27, 28, 29 (see exceptions below).

These days can be claimed retroactively on the appropriate timesheet for members who were unaware of this requirement.

#### **Important message regarding FTO for employees who had to work during hard closure**

UA system administration has assured us that *these members are eligible for FTO cash-in if they claimed any three days of time off over the winter break.*

These days can also be claimed retroactively on the appropriate timesheet.

### **Complete the FTO Cash-In Form After Claiming the Required Days Off**

The [FTO cash-in form](#) is linked here and is available on UA's payroll website. Submission directions are available on the cash-in page linked above.

### **Weingarten Rights**

If you find yourself called into a meeting with your direct supervisor that you believe could result in discipline, you have the right to request union representation at that

meeting. Contact your Organizational Vice President for guidance. From the [National Labor Relations Board](#) website:

Any meeting may be an “investigatory interview” provided that the following occur:

- A manager, representative of management, or supervisor is seeking to question an employee.
- The questioning is part of an investigation into the employee’s performance or work conduct. During an investigatory interview, a representative of management may require an employee to defend, explain, or admit misconduct or work performance issues that may form the basis for discipline or discharge.
- The employee reasonably believes that the investigation may result in discharge, discipline, demotion, or other adverse consequence to their job status or working conditions.
- The employee requests a union representative. Employers are not required to advise employees of their right to representation and third parties (including union representatives) may not make the request on behalf of the employee.

### **Follow United Academics on Social Media**

- Like or follow our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.
- Like, share, or retweet our content!

### **Meeting Notices**

#### **UNAC General Membership Meetings**

- Regularly scheduled meetings: every second Tuesday from 5:30-7:00 p.m.
- Additional meetings scheduled as needed.
- Separate emails with meeting information, including the Zoom link, will be sent to all bargaining unit members before each meeting.
- Next General Membership Meeting (*date change due to spring break*): Tuesday, March 21, 2023, 5:30-7:00 p.m. AKDT

#### **Next UNAC Representative Assembly Meeting\***

Saturday, April 1, 2023, 10:00am - 2:00p.m. AKDT via Zoom

#### **UNAC Executive Board Meetings\***

Second and Fourth Wednesdays of each month, 9:30-11:30a.m. AKDT

*\*Dues paying members are welcome to attend the RA and Executive Board meetings. Contact your Org VP and/or office staff for the Zoom link.*





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**United Academics Local #4996 (UNAC)** is the bargaining unit that represents all non-tenure track (term), tenure track, and tenured faculty at the University of Alaska. UNAC is an affiliate of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

[www.unitedacademics.net](http://www.unitedacademics.net)

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