



A Union of Professionals

Metropolitan State Faculty Federation

Newsletter

MSUDENVERFF.ORG

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Put the Union on the Handbook Committee!

MSFF plays an important role in establishing faculty contract language as a non-voting member of the Faculty Employment Handbook Committee. We have used our influence in this committee to engage independent legal counsel to ensure that new Handbook language does not infringe on the hard-won legal rights of faculty, including

tenure, academic freedom, and due process during disciplinary procedures.

Last year, the Handbook Committee recommended that the Union role be instantiated as a voting seat. This is an important step forward in our ongoing efforts toward Union recognition.

let UPAC know that you value an independent voice determining your contract obligations, please follow this link (https://msudenver.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3UEXGXQOMCHZTdc).

Hurry - make your voice heard.

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Enjoying Your TENURE?

MSFF and AFT restored faculty tenure rights in 2004 by winning a lawsuit against MSCD.

You're Welcome

This policy proposal is now open for community comment. Anti-Union forces have already begun to flood UPAC. If this policy is to go forward to the Board of Trustees, we all need to submit comments TODAY. To weigh in and

Student Retention Crisis & Strategy

The MSFF Steering Committee is launching an effort to contribute to, and shape, the current campaign to improve student retention, and we want you to be involved!

Retention is a pressing issue at MSU Denver. As educators, this is personal. It is heartbreaking to watch our students drop-out of school, and we work overtime to provide extra support and encouragement in the hope of keeping more of our students in our classes. While funding pressures have brought renewed institutional attention to retention, it has been a faculty priority for years.

We therefore wish to do everything we can to help improve retention, and are glad that this pressing issue is being aggressively addressed. We are profoundly concerned, however, by

the current strategies being put forward by the administration.

Our most immediate concern is that current administration plans put virtually all onus, and therefore blame, on the faculty. Given the structural nature of the retention crisis, it is obvious that low retention is not the result of individual faculty members across the institution all collectively failing to implement effective classroom strategies. A structural problem requires a structural solution. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most students drop out of school because of expensive tuition, skyrocketing costs of living, or family commitments. The vast majority of our students work, sometimes more than forty hours a week, while taking a full course load, and are under intense pressure beyond that faced by any previous

generation of college students. In other words, the causes of our retention crisis overwhelmingly lie outside of the classroom. Students are also grappling with many bureaucratic failures, which make it difficult to register for classes, pay tuition, and physically get to class. Retention plans that focus entirely on faculty will therefore fail to address the root of the problem. We are further concerned that proposals focused on individual faculty could create toxic incentives. For instance, students will sometimes make the decision, based on cost-benefit analysis, to drop a more rigorous, and therefore time-consuming course in favor of one that takes less time, even if they believe that this will be detrimental to their learning. Blaming individual faculty members based on oversimplified data could undermine the educational mission of the institution. Diploma mills have excellent retention numbers. We do not want to be caught in the trap of sacrificing quality in the name of retention.

Second, the disproportionate focus on the faculty reflects a lack of understanding of the problem. We are concerned that ambitious goals and sweeping plans to improve retention have been announced without a

More Work, Less Support

More Work

- More mandated tasks
- More inefficient systems
- More student accommodations
- More students per class
- More committees, taskforces, working groups, etc.

Less Support

- Less sabbaticals
- Less scholarship support
- Less usable computers and equipment
- Less departmental summer revenues
- Less replacement for faculty lines

No wonder faculty morale is at record low!

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History of the Metropolitan State Faculty Federation

MSU Denver faculty have been organizing for decades. We gained national attention in 2003, when former fossil fuel executive and then-President of the Board of Trustees Bruce Benson re-wrote the Employee Handbook in order to eliminate tenure. MSFF coordinated with AFT and AAUP to defend tenure in the courts, taking the suit all the way to the Colorado Supreme Court and winning in 2008. The case is the reason we have tenure rights at MSU Denver and, and has become a significant legal precedent in the fight for academic freedom. You can read more about it here. We have launched many efforts in the years since, some successful and some still ongoing, from fighting for healthcare for non-tenured faculty to defending individual union members in many grievance cases. We have also fought for labor rights at the state level.



DID YOU KNOW: THE UNION ADVOCATES FOR MSU STUDENTS?

Through our AFT Lobbyists and Member Testimony at Statehouse, the Federation weighs in on proposed legislation. For example, we have long lobbied for an equal share of state Higher Education dollars, in tandem with the efforts of MSU president and Board of Trustees. The MSFF also plays a role in amplifying the faculty perspective on policy and budget decisions at the institutional level that affect students.

MSU Denver Faculty are invited to

MSFF HAPPY HOURS!

Hear about what your union is doing, provide input and feedback, and learn how to get involved!

5 PM | TIVOLI
WEDNESDAY 18 OCTOBER
THURSDAY 9 NOVEMBER
TUESDAY 5 DECEMBER

For more information, visit us at
<https://msudenverff.org/>



Learn About the MSFF Steering Committee

The MSFF Steering Committee meets every other Friday to discuss the everyday workings at MSU Denver, specifically the operations that impact faculty, staff, and students. We also discuss legislative issues relating to higher education and

collective bargaining, as well as topics-of-concern before the AAUP and AFT-Colorado.

Recent topics of discussion have included:

- 1) High number of sabbatical rejections
- 2) Divestment in faculty & academic programs
- 3) Breach of process surrounding the dissolution of academic programs (Sustainable Engineering)
- 4) Community Hour proposal
- 5) MSU Denver budget data updates
- 6) Provost Search process versus other searches
- 7) New Faculty Trustee as guest
- 8) Development of a newsletter to better communicate with our members
- 9) Credit Banking Policy petition
- 10) Local election endorsements
- 11) Changes to the Employment Handbook
- 12) New topics for MSFF Townhalls
- 13) Website, email updates to members

The steering committee meetings always end with reports from the Treasurer (fiscal health of MSFF), Membership Organizing Committee (we need more members to achieve formalized collective bargaining), and updates from the Grievance Committee (members who seek help and representation in conflicts with the administration). Everyone involved with MSFF is a hard-working volunteer.



**WHAT WORKS?
FACULTY WORKS**
Faculty Get Shit Done

MSFF FALL 2023 COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Steering Committee

- Friday, Sept. 8, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Friday, Sept. 22, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Friday, Oct. 6, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Friday, Oct. 20, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Friday, Nov. 3, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Friday, Nov. 17, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Friday, Dec. 1, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Friday, Dec. 15, 3-4 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))

Membership Committee

- Thursday, Oct. 19, 5-6 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Thursday, Nov. 16, 5-6 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))
- Thursday, Dec. 7, 5-6 pm MST ([Zoom link](#))

Grievance Committee

As needed, and private. These are confidential meetings to protect members seeking counsel.

Student Retention Crisis & Strategy

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clear understanding of why our retention numbers are so low. Are our students disproportionately disadvantaged because of an underfunded K-12 education system? Are the combined pressures of high cost of living and rising tuition particularly intense in Denver? What broader structural issues are contributing to the retention crisis? We do not seem to have answers to these questions, or to have any detailed understanding of why students drop out of MSU Denver. We need data from our students, not just from peer institutions. Putting forward ambitious plans and goals without understanding the nature of the problem puts the cart before the horse, and is a recipe for ineffectual, or even counterproductive efforts.

Third, the faculty need to be substantively involved in every level of decision-making. We want to be involved, and if we really want to address retention, we have to be involved. We are also, however, overworked. We appreciate statements, including from Dean Masserini, that workload and retention are inextricable, and that burned-out and exhausted faculty cannot be expected to do additional work on retention. We also appreciate that the administration has requested feedback on its proposals. But selected faculty need to be involved in these decisions from the start, and they need time in order to do so. Some changes in the classroom will be necessary. And in order to make changes, faculty need capacity. This is particularly true of our adjunct faculty. It will also be harder because of a series of botched administrative efforts, from the Workload Reduction and Mandatory Non-Participation Reporting policies to bureaucratic issues with registration and Workday.

Finally, we want to underline the injustice of the yardstick by which we are being measured. At an institution where over 80% of our students work, and many work over forty hours a week, graduating in four years is often not an achievable goal. Many students need a second or third chance in order to succeed, and providing those opportu-

nities is, of course, fundamental to our mission. These efforts, however, are penalized by funding models that systematically neglect the needs of non-traditional students. We understand that the administration is as frustrated by these discriminatory policies as we are. In the past, President Davidson has forcefully critiqued the inequities built into state funding of higher education. MSFF has appreciated and supported these efforts, which have helped win an invaluable increase in our budget. We hope that the administration continues to advance these arguments with regards to retention, and will do everything we can to help. To address retention, we need to push up - to legislators and policymakers - not just down onto faculty.

The MSFF Steering Committee therefore endorses the following series of principles to guide our efforts to improve retention:

- A clear, detailed, data-informed study of why students are dropping out
- An institution-wide approach that does not put all the onus, and the blame, on faculty
- A collaborative approach to decision-making

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Student Retention Crisis & Strategy

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that not only substantively includes faculty and staff, but gives us the necessary capacity to do so

- An integrated approach that recognizes that retention is inextricable from broader structural questions of workload, affordability, and preparedness that extend beyond the classroom and the university

GET INVOLVED

We need all the support we can get in these efforts. First, please visit our website and contribute to our [Solution Web : Student Retention](#). We are structuring the discussion around several questions:

- What suggestions do you have to improve retention?
- What ideas do you have for the process in improving retention?

- What concerns do you have about current proposals?
- Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?

Second, if you are not a member, **JOIN THE UNION**. Our capacity to be heard, and to make an impact, is directly proportional to the size, and engagement, of our membership. Joining the union is a way to address the broader structural issues and injustices that affect our teaching, but that we cannot address individually in the classroom.

Third, if you are a member, **GET INVOLVED!** Our ability to make change depends on active members. To learn more about our committees and to get more involved, visit our Committee page at <https://msudenverff.org/msff-committees/>.

Wishing You a Restful Fall Break

