

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE CHAPTER  
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

February 28, 2008

To: Montgomery College Full-time Faculty

From: Rose Sachs, President, AAUP Chapter

Yesterday evening, we, the Executive Committee, were invited by the Montgomery County Public Employee Council to join with them in the first of what promises to be a series of discussions between the County unions and the County Leadership regarding the evolving economic situation and revenue forecasts. The primary objective of this meeting was to establish an on-going, collaborative dialogue that would ensure an exchange of information and perspectives and work towards the best possible outcome for all. Seven of the eight Council members attended (one had a prior commitment) during three half-hour sessions, as well as the County Executive in a separate session. The willingness of all to come to the table together demonstrates, at the very least, a good faith effort from both the County and the unions. Because the County's role in funding our contracts is indirect, our decision to join the County unions and participate in this and in follow-up events is not based on an intention to negotiate with the County in any manner, but rather is generated by a desire to gain accurate and current information to pass on to our constituents.

As of now, the projected *shortfall* for next year is estimated at \$296 million, which is down from the \$400 million estimated previously. Clearly this is still a substantial amount and one that creates many challenges during the budget cycle. Each Council member was asked his/her perception on the county's fiscal outlook and the level of expected cuts in the upcoming budget; in terms of outcome - the responses varied. That which did not vary among each and every County leader was a strong commitment to establishing an inclusive decision-making process, a process characterized by: open, honest, and ongoing communication, sharing of information as it becomes available, and perhaps most importantly, working collectively to generate solutions. Our County Executive was clear in his intention to work with the unions as *full partners in solutions*. Given the collegial approach taken by the County and our own history with Interest-Based Bargaining, we are certainly troubled that fully-formed decisions regarding budget reduction strategies have been developed and handed down from our administration without the benefit of faculty input and/or discussion. We have been provided no context in terms of a possible array of options or specific dollar figures and no projection in terms of how these measures might impact students. Moreover, as of this writing, we have received no response from the administration to our questions or our concerns.

A second resounding and repeated theme throughout the discussions was a commitment to revise the budget, to the extent possible, in ways that will not affect services – to make every effort to determine solutions that will allow for a continuation of services -- to make cuts in the area of management, if need be, rather than reduce the provision and/or

level of services. Again, we question how the decisions being made at our institution fit into the County's stated priorities. Reducing summer ESH (the first action taken, not the action of last resort) has already caused chairs to cancel courses/sections from the summer schedule and may very well impact the quality of education available to our students. Moreover, in striking contrast to diminishing services to students is the administration's apparent refusal to delay the costly searches and installations of three vice presidents. We cannot predict the outcome, the ultimate decisions, at the County level, but we came away from the meeting hopeful that the process outlined will lead to relatively sound solutions. We are somewhat confused and certainly disheartened, however, by the obvious disconnect between the position taken by the College and the priorities established by the County.