

April 16, 2025 Session Recap

Day Contract Negotiations

MSCA's counters and discussion of chair proposals

At this session, the MSCA Day Bargaining Team presented a counterproposal regarding department chairs and their workload concerns. As Co-Chair Katie Riel emphasized, chairs should not be taking on increasing administrative duties, rather they should be recognized primarily as advocates for their departments. Thus we rejected language changes that expanded the administrative role of chairs and proposed revised language to clarify chairs' responsibilities. A major theme was the urgent need for workload relief and increased release time, as chairs across departments consistently report being overburdened. We accepted some language regarding consultation with Deans about student complaints, and proposed a task force to look at the issues raised by management.

Another key disagreement centered on the process for chair removal, with the union arguing that due process is necessary, while management claimed that existing language already satisfies due process through written notification. We maintained that the contract is unclear and that removal of chairs should not be made unilaterally by the university presidents. Our proposal calls for just cause protections.

Additional language was discussed regarding sabbatical quorum rules and program area chairs with the union also rejecting proposals related to chair evaluations and pending updates to Appendix D4.

To speak to the realities and problems that faculty chairs face, several MSCA members shared their experiences as chairs of their department.

Bridgewater State Psychology faculty member, Joe Schwab, spoke about the difficulties serving as a chair for the largest department in our system (nearly 1000 psychology majors) and the burnout that ensues due to lack of administrative support. No one in the department wants to do this job, and it is completely unmanageable for one person. Under the current conditions, the students' experience suffers too. The MSCA's proposal to create an Assistant Chair position would reduce the work burden, allowing for true department leadership and providing future chair mentorship.

Salem State faculty member, Dan Mulcare, who is the chair of a small department (Politics, Policy and International Relations), demonstrated that workload issues are not limited to large departments. Over his eight years as chair, he's witnessed the role expand well beyond contractual expectations as the Chair must deal with problems and issues as they arise, and this was exacerbated by the COVID crisis and ongoing budget cuts. Dan emphasized that chairs are not managers but elected leaders who build consensus, support faculty and students, and perform vital care work in times of crisis. He argued that our chair's proposal for a minimum

six-credit course release per semester would prevent burnout, support students, and maintain academic quality.

Finally, Charlotte Haller, a chair of a mid-sized department (History and Political Science), highlighted the overwhelming and multifaceted workload they face, particularly when managing multiple majors and minors. On top of all the bureaucratic work that needs to get done (procurement, scheduling, etc) and hiring and evaluation faculty, as Chair, Charlotte advises unassigned students, students with minors, and helps students throughout the summers. While stressing that program assessment and review are essential, the workload required—especially at Worcester State where only one assessment staff supports the entire university—is not manageable without support. Their department alone requires separate evaluations for eight programs. Charlotte emphasized our proposals for additional departmental leadership (supported by departmental APRs) would help divide responsibilities more equitably.

Management's counters regarding use of the sick leave bank

Management presented a revised counterproposal about the sick leave bank that included several key changes and clarifications. First, they reaffirmed that the purpose of the sick leave bank is to support full-time and salaried part-time employees in returning to work after serious illness or injury, emphasizing that it is not meant for short-term or intermittent use, such as a single day of illness. Management agreed to include a provision allowing employees to voluntarily donate an additional 7.5 hours of leave annually by October 31, clarifying that this donation is optional and not a substitute in the event the bank runs low. Notification deadlines were also adjusted, with the president now required to report bank balances by November 1 to account for the new donation window.

Management's counter proposal reaffirmed the duration limits: two years on the sick leave bank for full-time employees, and one year for part-time employees. Updated medical documentation with a reasonable prognosis for return would be required to continue using the bank.

For librarians, management agreed to reinstate language that exempts them from needing to exhaust vacation leave before accessing the sick leave bank and confirmed the cap on use at 375 hours.

The most contentious change, however, was the reintroduction of a second independent medical examination (IME) in the appeals process. Management proposed that the university select both the initial and second IME, arguing the examiners are independent and chosen via procurement processes. The union strongly objected, expressing concerns over impartiality, lack of member input, and instances where the university's IMEs could override a member's doctor's recommendations. We seek greater transparency in the IME selection process, including access to university contracts with those providers. This disagreement over control and fairness in the appeals process continues to be a sticking point in the discussion.