

Open Letter

to HUCTW Members and the Harvard Community



May 8, 2009

In the past few months, amid a global economic downturn, there has been a great deal of change and uncertainty in our Harvard working environment. The University's efforts to cope with a downsized endowment and a prolonged recession are still unfolding. HUCTW leaders and members are meeting, listening, and continuing to develop new ideas for improving our working lives in a challenging environment.

In recent letters, HUCTW has argued for honoring the valuable contributions of staff by giving priority to non-personnel budget cuts. In this communication, we will address questions about the possibility of involuntary layoffs and the negotiated programs and ongoing efforts that will support HUCTW members facing displacement.

Where We Stand Now: Budget Plans, Cost Reduction, Urgent Goals

All of Harvard's schools, departments, centers, and programs are putting the finishing touches on budget plans for the new fiscal year that will begin July 1. In nearly every case, those plans reflect efforts to cut spending significantly. Most sections of the University have cut budgets for supplies, travel, catering, training, and consulting. Many units have saved money by delaying or scaling back construction and renovation plans. Some Harvard schools have begun cutting labor costs by reviewing open jobs carefully, eliminating some vacant positions, and reducing overtime. In a number of areas, HUCTW members and activists have helped to identify and implement these measures.

At the University level, administrative leaders are also taking steps to reduce expenses. Construction on the first major building of the new Allston campus, a major science research building, is being suspended. An early retirement incentive offering has gone out to hundreds of longer-term staff, and a significant number have accepted it.

Even after those constructive cost-cutting efforts, very probably some schools and departments will conclude that they need to reduce staffing further by involuntary layoffs. In this challenging situation, HUCTW leaders have focused on two important and complementary goals:

- Minimize staff reductions and disruption to programs or services in order to continue excellence in education and research
- Support laid-off staff strongly and creatively, with particular emphasis on placement into open Harvard jobs

Negotiation at the University Level

In the current climate, there is an increasing need for transparency and accountability in financial decision-making. Harvard is facing harder constraints and tougher choices than at any other moment in our working lifetimes. It is a new day across our Harvard workplace, with unfamiliar and uncomfortable issues of scarcity. In this environment, it is more important than ever to foster open, inclusive, and informed participation for all of the concerned constituencies.

In conversations with University-level administrators, we are continuing to press for involvement in large-scale cost saving measures such as:

- Rethinking plans for the Allston campus and other major construction projects
- Using the SIF (Strategic Infrastructure Fund) and other flexible endowment sources for appropriate and timely investments
- Reducing the use of agency temporary employees
- Reducing the use of consultants
- Conserving energy through sustainability efforts
- Reducing health care costs through wellness programs

Negotiation at the Unit Level

At the school and department level, HUCTW leaders are continuing to meet and discuss budgeting issues with key financial managers. HUCTW members can join the financial conversation, and Union leaders are committed to supporting that participation in any way necessary. Here are some questions that Union members might consider raising in Town Hall forums, staff meetings, informal conversations, or email exchanges with managers:

- What does the department's budget for next year look like? What are the big changes or hard choices?
- How are we doing on cutting non-personnel expenses (supplies, catering, travel)?
- What are the possibilities for saving money by reducing the use of consultants and agency temps?
- How could we get staff members in our school more involved in discussing and resolving some of these ongoing issues, using our expertise to balance cost-cutting efforts with continued excellence?

Our Highest Priority:

Avoiding Layoffs and Taking Care of Co-Workers Facing Layoff

HUCTW leaders and members will need to be a supportive network for each other through this challenging time. If you would like to talk about any of the following information or have questions in general, please call or write to HUCTW at huctw.info@huctw.org or 617-661-8289.

We will also be setting up lunchtime union meetings throughout the campus in the next few weeks. There will be an announcement about a meeting in your area soon.

There is a great deal that we do not yet know about the shape of the University and our jobs in the new economic era. At the same time, we have a solid foundation of negotiated understandings and union-management efforts going back 20 years to help us minimize the impact of layoffs and support everyone in HUCTW.

“Consultation When Considering”: Our Right to Be Involved

As described in our Agreement, local administrators are obliged to consult with HUCTW and affected employees if they are considering changes that would result in job eliminations for HUCTW members. The purpose of these discussions is to give the Union and affected members the opportunity to understand fully the reasons for a proposed job elimination and to offer alternative ways of accomplishing the unit’s cost-saving or restructuring goals. HUCTW leaders will work with affected staff to make sure all important questions are raised and answered, and all alternative ideas are carefully explored in an earnest effort to avoid layoffs.

Work Security: Making Sure Everyone Has a Job

If, after the consultation described above, an HUCTW member is officially notified that she or he will be laid off, the following policies apply under our Work Security program:

- An HUCTW employee is entitled to 60 days written notice of layoff. During this notice period, the employee continues to work and is given flexibility in order to use time for job search preparation and interviews.
- An employee facing layoff will be assigned two case managers. One will usually be a Human Resources professional and the other will be an HUCTW organizer. The case managers will work with the employee to develop and implement job search strategies. They will also make advocacy calls on behalf of the candidate for appropriate positions.
- Once the 60-day notice period has ended, the affected employee will remain a Harvard employee with full salary and benefits for up to three months, provided that s/he is carrying out a vigorous search for a new job both inside and outside of Harvard.
- If an employee has not found a job within the three-month work security period, s/he can apply to the Joint Union-Management Work Security Committee for a further month-by-month extension of salary and benefits for up to three additional months.
- During the entire Work Security period, in the words of the Agreement, “displaced staff members will be given hiring preference over outside candidates, including from temporary agencies, for any vacant job for which they are suitably qualified.”

The goal of the Work Security program is to make every effort to place laid off staff members into comparable open jobs at Harvard or outside the University. Serious union-management conversations are currently underway to explore new avenues for placement of Work Security candidates, further strengthening the program.

Conclusion:

What We Do Know

Our Union has made good progress already in discussions and creative efforts to avoid layoffs or reduce the number. We have also negotiated strong and flexible programs which have a powerful effect of protecting and supporting HUCTW members who may find themselves facing layoff. As a result, we continue to be optimistic about minimizing layoff activity, and Harvard staff members who are displaced will have a rich pool of resources and an enormous amount of support. We also know that the members and leaders of HUCTW represent a strong network and

a supportive community that will continue working hard and creatively to take care of each other. We know that everyone in HUCTW will continue striving for the strongest safety net we can create, and for the innovations we need to have good working lives in the changing Harvard workplace.

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