

HUCTW Update on the Economy and Layoffs

to HUCTW Members and the Harvard Community



August 24, 2009

It was an unusually stressful spring and early summer on the Harvard campus. After months of concern about the effect of difficult economic circumstances on the University, staff members started to feel the impact more directly in June and July. As Harvard departments began implementing budget cuts, layoffs affected nearly every section of Harvard, although in smaller numbers than many had initially expected or feared.

As late summer now turns toward the fall, there are some positive developments to report, as the pace of Harvard job creation picks up and union members facing layoff start to be placed into the University's open jobs. This letter will review HUCTW's efforts to deal with the financial crisis and its Harvard implications, and point to some ongoing efforts and future issues.

Since the economic downturn first emerged nearly a year ago, our Union's leaders and members have been hard at work listening, analyzing, educating, organizing, and negotiating to put ourselves in the strongest position possible:

- Throughout the first half of 2009, we met with administrative leaders at every level and campaigned publicly for preserving people and programs by focusing cost reduction efforts on non-personnel costs. Organizing on a theme of "Staff, Not Stuff," hundreds of HUCTW members got involved in an effective campaign to raise awareness about the importance of cutting extravagances rather than jobs and the basic fairness of avoiding layoffs wherever possible.
- In May and June, Union officers and organizers engaged in a process of consultation, required under our Agreement, with more than 30 different Harvard units where staff layoffs were under consideration. In each of those negotiations, HUCTW leaders examined departmental plans and engaged in a creative search for alternative approaches that would save jobs. All of those processes were substantive and meaningful; some resulted in more meeting of the minds than others. In all, out of 132 proposed layoffs, 35 were prevented during the union-management meetings. Most of the jobs saved were the result of either reassignment into positions vacated in the early retirement program, the rearrangement of work formerly done by "Less than Half-Time (LHT)" or temporary agency workers into regular jobs, or successful requests for volunteers to be laid off.
- In July and August, our Union has made it our priority to help members facing layoff to be placed into open jobs at the University. HUCTW and University case managers are working together to support and advocate for preference in hiring qualified work security candidates. They are advising all laid-off staff on strategies for job targets, interviewing and resume-writing, facilitating the members' enrollment in training programs at the Center for Workplace Development, and supporting their applications for open Harvard jobs. The number of posted HUCTW job openings is surprisingly high, greatly aiding those placement efforts—at this writing there are 190 Union jobs on HIRE (the online Harvard job posting site). So far 24 HUCTW members have been placed into new Harvard jobs, and many others are currently in the interviewing stage for promising opportunities.

All HUCTW Members Can Help

The effort to make sure that laid-off Harvard staff are preferred and placed into open jobs at the University should be a community-based effort. All members of HUCTW are urged to join in that effort by watching and advocating for hiring departments and supervisors to give Work Security applicants the top priority they deserve. If your school or department has a job posted at present, please consider talking with your colleagues involved in the hiring process to let them know you care about the important goal of placing all laid-off co-workers into open Harvard jobs. If you have any questions about the status of postings in your area, please feel free to call HUCTW at 617-661-8289.

Meanwhile, another set of concerns and issues is arising across the University, as many departments and centers begin adjusting to new staffing levels. As a result of early retirements, unfilled vacancies, layoffs, reduced use of LHTs and temps, or limits on overtime, staff members in many sections of Harvard are trying to figure out how to carry out the same functions at a high level of quality with reduced staffing. As a result, in some areas issues have arisen concerning workloads, job descriptions, and pay grade classifications. Some members have already engaged with managers and co-workers to work on these kinds of issues. For those who would like more advice or support, HUCTW staff and leaders are working to develop workshops and information sessions which can help individuals or groups of union members develop the skills and strategies needed to negotiate within their departments on issues coming out of staffing changes.

Finally, in the weeks since our last communication we have seen some significant improvements in the financial markets and other economic indicators. These positive developments give some hope for gradual improvement in the University's financial situation. HUCTW leaders will continue to listen to members, negotiate with administrators, and develop creative ideas as our Harvard community adjusts to new economic realities.

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