

WSU faculty union to file strike notice

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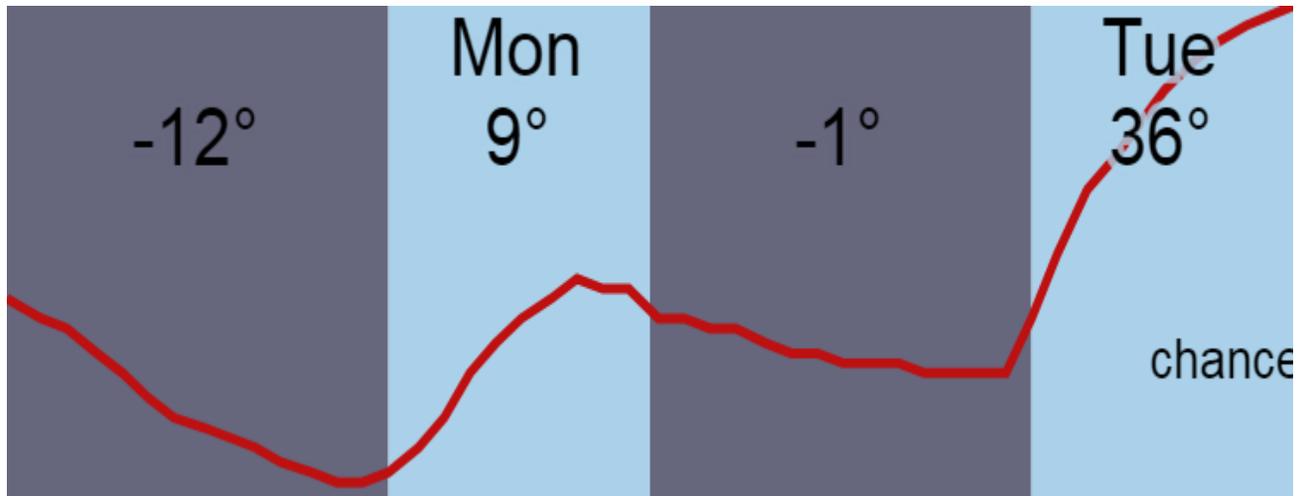
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Monday, January 7th, 2019

No date set for walkout

By Daily Standard Staff

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DAYTON -Wright State University's union faculty members plan to file a strike notice today after prolonged contract negotiations with university board of trustees have broken down.

Trustees on Friday night made what they called their "last best" contract offer that union members later rejected after reviewing it for six hours, Martin Kich, president of the American Association of University professors, WSU chapter, and a Wright State University-Lake Campus professor, told the newspaper.

Union members, he said, can go on strike no earlier than 10 days after filing a notice with the Ohio State Employment Relations Board.

Kich said no actual strike date has been set but noted he expects it to occur before the end of the month. When members go on strike, Kich said he is not sure who will teach their classes. University administrators likely would make adjustments, he said.

"I'm assuming they will try to get adjunct faculty to do it, have grad students cover classes," he told the newspaper. "People at other institutions might come in."

WSU President Cheryl Schrader called the union's plan to strike "disappointing," saying, "Certainly, faculty members and their union understand the massive financial challenges the university has confronted in recent years."

"The university cannot continue on the path to financial sustainability by maintaining the status quo. Our other Wright State employees understand this, and have accepted reasonable concessions. We are asking the faculty to do the same," Schrader said in a news release.

Trustees had made an offer to AAUP-WSU that they claim would have maintained faculty salaries at current levels, which are higher than those at similar state universities.

University officials said faculty salaries are above the average for university professors, earning on average \$119,600 over the nine-month academic year with the ability to supplement over the summer. Full professors at comparable Ohio public universities earn an average salary of \$117,322, according to a WSU news release.

The offer also would have placed faculty "in a competitive, unified health care plan with all university administrators and other employees," according to the news release.

Union officials, though, insist the contract would have eliminated their members' right to negotiate over health care, according to a AAUP-WSU news release.

"It would immediately result in Wright State faculty having the worst healthcare plans among Ohio's state universities and provide the administration with unlimited authority to further slash coverage at their whim," the news release stated. "Many other articles in their imposed contract diminish the faculty voice in university decisions."

AAUP-WSU officials also asserted the board's contract offer would "seriously damage the quality of education we provide our students, as well as the academic reputation of the university."

The AAUP WSU and the university' board of trustees have been in contract negotiations for the last two years.

On Oct. 29, the parties received a fact-finder's report - a compromise proposal to help settle the contract dispute. Trustees voted unanimously to approve the report as the next contract. AAUP-WSU members, however, rejected it, meaning the parties could not bring the matter to a close.

Throughout the negotiation process, union members have said they have had the best interest of the students in mind. Kich said the contract offer is a sign the board "clearly intends to have fewer faculty teaching more and larger classes."

"The faculty feel compelled to stand up for the quality of the education we provide our students - individualized attention and a rich variety of academic offerings - and the value of the degrees our alumni have earned," he said.

Board chairman Doug Fecher said trustees have been focused on the fiscal sustainability of the university now and in the future while navigating significant financial recovery.

"We want to ensure that Wright State remains what its more than 15,000 students and the region need it to be," he said in a news release.

He pointed out the trustees' priorities in this process have focused on short and long-term financial sustainability for the university, while also "honoring the university's excellent faculty members and their dedication and commitment to Wright State students."

Since 2016, Wright State has been navigating a financial crisis in which the university was required to address a \$30 million structural budget deficit caused by years of un-budgeted and uncontrolled spending that used \$130 million in reserves, university officials asserted.

Officials said the financial recovery included three rounds of staff layoffs and sweeping budget controls and cuts across the university. Those efforts have provided some short-term relief to the university's financial situation, they claim.

AAUP-WSU officials, though, claim trustees have used the "board-created financial crisis as an excuse to undermine fundamental principles of higher education adhered to at virtually all American universities."