

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Appropriations Committee**

**By Albert Nekimken**

**HB 275**

**State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate  
Assistants**

**February 14, 2023**

**FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. My name is Karen Angeline. I have been a Professional Track Faculty member at the U. of Maryland College Park for 14 years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to SB 247. The state already grants this right to nearly every other state employee, as well as the faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our 4 year institutions. I believe that this right should be extended to the rest of higher education in Maryland.

**My teaching workload**

Over the past eight years, I have designed and taught a fully online course in business writing. I teach juniors from all majors—1,368 so far—to be strong workplace writers who then go out and positively represent the University of Maryland.

Every semester, I have 4 sections, totaling 76 students. We have 51 assignments, so I assess 2,360 submissions. Some are simple. My main work is that each of the 76 students create original semester-long writing projects. That adds up to 304 papers that require me to provide in-depth guidance on ideas, research, writing, and editing. We also have six graded peer edits, a cover letter/resume, and an e-portfolio. The course is rigorous for both the students and for me. Still, every semester, I get feedback from many students who say that the course was one of the most valuable they've taken at UMD because of the skills they will carry to their careers.

I also contribute to my department by designing faculty workshops, writing observations for promotion dossiers, serving on committees, and attending meetings.

Given all the good work that is reflected in both student feedback and enrollment numbers, one might think that I have salary parity and job security. Unfortunately, I have job security in name only; an easily manipulated contract shows that I may be valuable, but I'm still vulnerable.

**Why I support this bill: existing paths to conflict resolution are unsuccessful**

Fifteen months ago, the cohort of Professional Track Faculty who have taught online since 2015 faced a threat to our jobs because of a complaint from anonymous colleagues. After teaching for two semesters online during covid, these colleagues said that it was unfair for the online cohort to continue receiving our usual teaching assignments, because they now wanted to teach online too.

However, there is nothing unfair about the current system. When we started the program, the online cohort participated in University-sponsored training in online course development and delivery. Many of us created and continue to refine our courses on personal time and took graduate-level courses to build skills. Some of the courses we designed were used as templates by typically in-person faculty when everyone switched to online learning during covid, and contributed to their success and ease with online teaching.

The cohort was told that we must commit to teaching only online. So, many of us made significant life decisions based on that expected career path, like moving out-of-state to care for family members while teaching full-time. The department administration fully supported these life changes, partially because they saw them as offsets to the challenge of teaching online, which, at the time, no one wanted to do.

Despite prior approval and support from the department, we weren't defended in the face of these complaints. Instead, a 15-month long process of determining "equity in scheduling" (as labeled by the administration) began.

It was unclear whether the online cohort would continue to be given the online course assignments we earned the right to teach. In response, members of the cohort made a good faith effort to advocate, problem solve, and negotiate. We proposed potentially more "equitable" solutions that allowed us to keep our livelihoods. Administrators distributed surveys on the issue, but never shared the results. We attended meetings, wrote emails, sought advice on effective self-governance, and talked about strategy amongst ourselves.

In response, during a town hall meeting, administrators said our contracts didn't specify or guarantee a mode of course delivery. That meant that courses could be assigned per the contract terms, but administration was free to change, for example, past online assignments to in-person. So online courses (that had been created by the original online cohort) might be distributed to graduate students and other faculty at random. We were not reassured with a firm commitment to how seniority, course content authorship, or special training would factor into how online courses might be distributed.

To this day, administrators have not shown any recognition to the online cohort for our part in the success of the online program. A solution or decision is still pending 15 months later.

### **Secure, properly trained and supported teaching faculty do better work for students**

During covid, when all courses went online, most students felt that their learning outcomes suffered because the quality of teaching went down. And yet, for years before and after covid, the Professional Writing Program online courses have had waitlists longer than the number of the available seats.

The quality provided by those of us who were specially trained and honed our craft turned something that most students hated into a sought-after course modality. And yet, because of the

fragmented, precarious nature of professional-track jobs, the same PTK faculty that provide significant value to the University feel powerless and unheard about the fate of their own work.

And students suffer the consequences. They pay to, and deserve to, receive online writing instruction from the most qualified and experienced faculty. Significant policy-based research shows that they lose out when faculty are seen as interchangeable and our expertise is discounted for the administration's convenience.

### **How your constituents pay for dysfunctional problem solving**

My situation is just one example of the systemic issues caused by the caste system of PTK faculty vs tenured administrators. But similar stories are likely playing out across the University—the faculty that teach the courses that students are required to take, the foundational courses that teach the skills that students bring to their advanced classes taught by tenured professors, are often seen as disposable and interchangeable.

In a student's freshman year, they will likely see more professional-track than tenure-track faculty. When they take required, general-education courses in other majors than their own, they are likely being taught by professional-track faculty. We represent the University in the crucial times when students and their parents are determining whether or not college holds value for them.

### **Why you should support SB 427**

Today, legislators like yourself are increasingly held accountable for the cost/benefit ratios of a college education. You're often asked to ensure that students and their tuition-paying parents are getting consistent value for their money.

The best way to achieve this is by allowing the main providers of that value the ability to advocate for ourselves. By voting in favor of collective bargaining, you can help assure that professional-track faculty will gain security, stability, and the ability to influence our careers and student outcomes for the positive. Afford us the same right that is given to other state employees and faculty: to come to the table as equals whose contributions to the University help keep the tuition payments coming in and the rankings high.

Every graduate of the University of Maryland who is a strong writer—and thanks to professional-track faculty, many are indeed—reflects our work. We are the ones teaching these required, vital, outward-facing courses, and we provide the most bang for your constituents' bucks. I again ask you to give a favorable report to SB 427 and give us a system to negotiate with the best interests of the many, rather than the select, privileged, and usually tenured few.