

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland Senate Finance Committee  
By Susannah Paletz, Associate Professor  
SB0823**

**State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate Assistants  
March 7, 2024  
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Susannah Paletz, and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Maryland,

College Park, where I have worked since 2013 as both a tenured professor and a professional track professor and research scientist. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill. The state already grants this right towards nearly every other state employee, as well as the faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our 4-year institutions. It is clear that this right should be extended to the rest of higher education in Maryland.

I received my doctorate in 2003 and have had a variety of occupational positions in government, at university affiliated research centers, and now at the College of Information Studies. Through a series of fortunate events, I became a tenured associate professor in 2021 after being an untenured, professional track research professor. While tenured faculty have enviable job stability-as I personally well know-there are difficulties, inequities, and precariousness in academia at all levels. Others will focus on additional problems, but I have four major issues I wish to have on the record: 1) the intense workload of faculty, 2) the lack of ability to take sick time due to the unique (rare) inflexibility of faculty jobs; 3) the disempowerment of faculty with regards to public health strategy, and 4) the inequities regarding graduate students.

Workload: I love my job, and my colleagues are wonderful to work with; each of these tasks noted below individually is a joy. However, as someone who has studied, taught, and practiced organizational psychology and management, and who has worked outside of academia, the sheer number of tasks and constant task switching are overwhelming.

Teaching is more time consuming than officially budgeted. Two courses, the typical number for tenured/tenure-track faculty, is considered by the university to take 40% of a 40-hour work week (16 hours/week). However, this is a massive underestimate for every semester I have taught since restarting teaching in spring 2019. Personally, I have taught anywhere from 11 to over 300 students a semester; while the latter large courses come with support by graders and undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants, I note that the percent of my time spent on teaching has never been what it is supposed to be. Teaching includes organizing, teaching, mentoring, and leading my instructional team (if I have one); answering student emails and questions on a discussion board; preparing lectures and section activities; creating assignments and exams, relevant rubrics for grading them, and instruction/prep materials for students; grading and calibrating grading for my instructional team; and more. As an example, for each new 50-minute lecture, it typically takes me 5-8 hours to research the topic, prepare what I will say, find and assess appropriate images/figures, and create slides. Even updating these slides takes me 2-3 hours each lecture. Speaking with colleagues, this amount of time is typical. As our majors have become more popular and grown, so have our classes. This growth is a good thing for the financial health of our College and University, and for the training and education of

our students. But, it also highlights some of the weaknesses of the system.

Administrative and project management roles: One of the essential tasks of University tenured/tenure-track, and research professional track faculty is conducting research. I lead

complex multidisciplinary research projects without formal project management support. We have (often understaffed/overworked) financial specialists at the department level who are invaluable in helping us prepare and track budgets, but we lack the other project management support found in other workplaces (e.g., for creating agendas, reminding people of tasks, watching time and budget, other administrative work). Some faculty offload these administrative tasks to graduate students; others have sufficient funds and sponsor/funder permission to hire administrative staff. But, such solutions are not always possible (e.g., hiring staff is not always allowed under all grants, nor do all faculty have grants) or ideal (i.e., having graduate students do some such work is acceptable, but having primarily administrative roles conflicts with their education and training).

Nature of academic research includes rejection, requiring working extra to meet minimum standards. Of vital importance to people in our roles, I attempt to publish in journals, submit papers for conferences, write book chapters, and so on. Many of these end in rejection, and unlike with how most people consider publications, journals do not pay us to publish--and some, even quite legitimate journals, charge us fees of almost \$4,000. I also apply for and write grant proposals, which typically takes 30-50 hours for a brief white paper proposal and 80-120 for a full proposal where I am to be a principal investigator, not including my co-writers' efforts. The nature of academic research having a high rate of rejection often means we have to submit, submit, and submit for potentially little result, working nights and weekends whenever a deadline arises.

Service time varies and is poorly tracked. As with all faculty, I also do "service," which includes: mentoring colleagues and students (undergraduate and graduate), including serving on or chairing thesis and dissertation committees, speaking with students, and writing letters of recommendation; attending faculty meetings such as appointment, promotion, and tenure meetings; directing/organizing a research interest group and soliciting/organizing speakers for it; and engaging in committee work which ranges from developing curricula to evaluating other faculty, among other tasks. I have been on committees that required 20 hours a week for a month, and others that required one hour a month. Research and anecdotes suggests that women and people of color are overburdened with formal and informal service commitments (Babcock, Peyser, Vesterlund and Weingart, 2022), and that saying 'no' can result in formal and informal punishments more than others (e.g., being seen as not a team player to not being granted promotions). This work can also take from 2-20 hours a week, depending on the week.

We are fortunate to have such varied and interesting tasks, but as I tell friends, there is 'too much job'. Gone are the days where faculty were supported by many administrative assistants, and the requirements for obtaining an academic job require more and more publications and grants. The issues of workload I noted are not specific to me but are systematic. And while I am writing about myself, I have been non-tenured for most of my career. I have observed the toll that the current system takes not only on professional track faculty, but on graduate students and staff, as well as student learning. Should we be able to collectively bargain, we could argue for ways to right-size our workload, including giving more realistic time estimates of specific tasks.

The Actual Inflexibility of Faculty Jobs and Sick Time: There is a joke about academia: "you are free to work whatever 12 hours a day you choose." Academia is thought to be flexible, but one cannot simply reschedule classes or meetings with other tightly-scheduled faculty. You also can't simply skip out on most work. What this inflexibility means is that most faculty have poor work-life balance to the point of it making handling normal health issues even more

challenging. A series of health issues struck my family in 2023 and have continued in different forms. These experiences made me notice that although we have sick time, faculty do not have 'backfill' in the way other jobs do, and so can only take sick time effectively during school breaks unless incapacitated. Even taking small amounts of 'sick time' results not in a release from work, but in putting that work back into late nights and early mornings. Specifically, my husband was ill in February 2023 and has required surgery at a few points in the past year. I could not take off time to care for him. The United States is infamous for having many jobs with poor sick time rules and realities. I am noting that, despite the other benefits of the position, faculty here similarly do not have true sick time, unless they are on sabbatical or officially not teaching. The actual inflexibility of the job and its workload make a mockery of the ostensible policies regarding sick time. Collective bargaining would enable us to raise these as real problems and threats to labor regulations and enable us to have a voice in solving them.

**Faculty Disempowerment Regarding Public Health:** I have a specific physical vulnerability to COVID, and the university decided without conferring with the staff or faculty (via the faculty senate or not) to simply lift the mask mandate, rather than changing it depending on the current COVID rates or allowing faculty control over their individual classes. The university has now lifted the vaccine mandate as well. The first decision prompted me to seek a reasonable accommodation (which I received) to teach online, but my doctor made it clear: if masking and vaccination were mandated, I could return to in-person teaching, which I (and I suspect, my students) would prefer. While my particular College has been supportive and understanding, they are limited by what is allowed at the University level.

By being unable to collectively bargain, I and other faculty have not been able to make our voices heard. Other universities, at least, allow for individual faculty requirements regarding classroom masking and vaccination. Even that decentralized option has not been granted to us. This point is even more concerning given that the University of Maryland College Park has national experts on public health and misinformation. Collective bargaining would enable us to more effectively bring faculty public health expertise to bear in solving these grand challenges.

**Inequities Regarding Graduate Students:**

The education apprenticeship model has been exploited for inexpensive workers with little consistent labor protections. This system obviously is most problematic for graduate students themselves, and others will write more eloquently than I about the inequities that our graduate students have suffered. I wish to add how these inequities are also problematic for faculty, faculty-driven research, and the university as a whole. As part of my job, I am judged on how and whether I mentor graduate students, and I delight in the idea of training the next generation of scholars and scientists. However, our current pay rates are simply not competitive with other universities. I understand that my specific College is one of the best paid at the University. Nevertheless, of the three potential doctoral students offered admissions last year to work with and be mentored with me, including one who was offered an impressive Presidential Fellowship, all chose to go elsewhere. At least one of them explicitly said it was because of the University of Maryland's poor pay for graduate students, such that they could not afford to live in College Park. This sentiment is shared by multiple current graduate students with whom I have spoken. While increasing the salaries for graduate students would require me to obtain larger grants (or pay fewer students), the status quo has resulted in fewer doctoral students in general. There are research grants I have not been able to apply for, and science I have not been able to do, because of the lack of students. Graduate students in our program go to a range of careers in industry, government, and academia, so throttling our ability to have doctoral students is not due

to market forces on the number of potential professors. Accomplished science and obtained grants are vital to the university's financial health and reputation, as well as, of course, benefitting the country more generally. Collective bargaining would enable us, including

doctoral students, to achieve a fair, living wage, benefitting not just them but the entire university.

Members of the committee, the right to collective bargaining has been a fundamental human right, and in this state in other domains has been seen as an excellent method for ensuring employee voices play a role in our workplaces. It is a right granted to many other public higher ed institutions in the nation, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt four-year public higher ed institutions from this path make no sense. I again therefore call for a favorable report to this Bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Reference:

Babcock, L., Peyser, B., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2022). The no club: Putting a stop to women's dead-end work. Simon and Schuster.

Sincerely,

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*This testimony has been submitted on behalf of this individual by the University of Maryland Graduate Labor Union (GLU) and the Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (UMD AAUP).  
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