

PRESIDENT: Miriam Reumann  
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NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Erik Loomis, History

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by Miriam Reumann

### Banned by Trump

In early April, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth ordered that books dealing with "DEI" topics be removed from the research library at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Like many of you, I read about the purging, recognized some of the books and authors mentioned in initial coverage, and added it to the growing list of anti-democratic and authoritarian actions that we have been seeing in the United States in 2025. Over 300 books had vanished from the library, and as one headline phrased it, "An order by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's office resulted in a purge of books critical of racism but preserved volumes defending white power" (New York Times, April 11). One book featured in the initial coverage is by a friend and colleague who writes in my field. I reached out to express my anger on her behalf, but it didn't occur to me to read the entire list of affected titles. So, I was unaware that my book *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* was on the banned list until a friend texted me a screenshot listing it as #187 with the accompanying message "Uh . . . congrats?"

My book was published almost twenty years ago, and isn't something I think about often, but having it silently purged along with many others provided a direct reminder of the importance of our academic freedom in teaching and research. As if to emphasize the point, just a week later, while updating a lecture on the AIDS epidemic, I went to consult a federal government website's useful timeline of medical treatments and discovered that it no longer exists, except in my memory and a few traces through the Wayback Machine. The Trump administration disappearing knowledge, again.

A few random politicians, or offended parents, or even students, should not have the power to dictate what kinds of information should or should not be available. Vanishing books are obviously far less pressing than the disappearance of billions of dollars already awarded to vital research and other higher ed initiatives, and – even more – the vanishing of actual people, deported and incarcerated in secret. But these processes are not unconnected. What we do matters. Research and free inquiry

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## SOLIDARITY AND URI FACULTY

by Erik Loomis, History and Newsletter Editor

A couple of years ago, a press asked me to provide a blurb for the English translation of Nicolas Delalande's *Struggle and Mutual Aid: The Age of Worker Solidarity*. The whole time I read it, I thought about what it could mean for faculty unionism here at URI. Delalande noted that while the term has many roots, the functional beginning of it in the working class struggle came from the First International in the 1860s. That is when intellectuals and organizers put together the political framework to help workers in their struggle against employers, no matter where they lived or what their employment. They decided that solidarity would be based on mutual aid, on helping one another in times of need.

We don't often act on these principles in our daily lives as faculty. We are trained that only our research program matters. We divide ourselves. So often, we don't treat each other like fellow workers. We have our rivalries, our disagreements, and our histories with each other. We all know the old stories about colleagues becoming enemies because of something that happened twenty years ago. That's....maybe not the best thing about academia.

Without solidarity, work tends to divide us more than unite us. That's true enough here at URI too. We divide ourselves all the time! We have faculty on the research track and faculty on the teaching track. We have faculty who think that the only legitimate research is that receiving outside funding from corporations or the state and we have faculty who believe that research funded by outside capital or the state is inherently politicized and problematic. We have faculty who work quantitatively and we have faculty who work qualitatively. We have faculty who are American citizens and we have international faculty who

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

by Jay Walsh

As you are all aware, the collective bargaining agreement between URI/AAUP and the Board of Trustees expires on June 30, 2025. You and your co-workers began contributing your suggestions and ideas through the All-University Collective Bargaining Committee in the Spring 2024 semester. More than 60 percent of you responded to the survey which identified your priorities in September. Your negotiations team has been bargaining weekly since January. Despite clarity about your goals and priorities, we are not yet close to reaching an agreement with the Board.

Writing a newsletter column about the bargaining process is hard. In fact, this newsletter could have been sent weeks ago, but every negotiation session changed what I could write. Negotiations are currently difficult, but they are not abnormally contentious. Negotiations are currently slow but there is minor progress each week. Negotiations have the potential to get much more contentious in the coming weeks.

To be fair, the Board of Trustees bargaining team members who work in Human Resources, the Provost's Office, or as Deans appear willing to engage in dialogue aimed at solving problems and reaching an agreement. On the other hand, the external attorney hired by the Board to represent the Board's interests is less interested in dialogue and problem solving than he is in extending the power of the employer over employees. He even went so far as to claim that it was the Board's position that faculty do not need offices, computers, or phones to do their job. As an outsider, he doesn't understand the operations at URI, nor does he have experience with a public research institution, and that hinders negotiations.

The Board's bargaining team has demands on the table that are unacceptable to you. URI/AAUP has made good progress in the last two contracts to make the review system less onerous and less frequent, now the Board wants every one of you to be reviewed every single year regardless of rank and time in service. The Board wants your wages to be determined by these annual reviews. The Board has refused to offer any wage increases, even though we've been bargaining for more than three months. Not only is their bargaining team refusing to discuss wage increases, but they have also refused to discuss proposals that will establish investments in teaching, scholarship, and travel funds. URI/AAUP, based on your input and ranked priorities, has proposed salary increases similar to state employees and adjustments to put us more in line with R1 institutions. The Board has also rejected URI/AAUP's proposals to demonstrate a mutual commitment to shared governance, improve workload balance, expand sabbaticals, immediately remedy health and safety hazards, and other issues which you identified as priorities.

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## SOLIDARITY AND URI FACULTY

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are very scared to visit their home countries. Even within our own departments, we have faculty whose work lives are radically different than other faculty. How do we overcome these differences to support each other?

The initial articulators of solidarity wanted to break down those differences by claiming that we all have rights and duties toward each other that create interdependence and a network of people to rely on in our own struggles. That's what solidarity is for. Solidarity is not charity and it is not something to demand from others without active reciprocation. To quote Delalande, solidarity is, "above all, a lived experience" that "demands engagement, struggle, and practice" that transforms all involved into a mass of united workers ready to stand and fight for each other.

These principles are the best tools we have to fight the ravages of Donald Trump and his henchmen on the American university system. Doing so helps us overcome our differences. As a historian, I don't know many faculty in GSO and I doubt many faculty in the College of Engineering know many faculty in Gender and Women's Studies. But I do know that we are all in this fight to save the American university system together. I know that the more we come together in a genuine spirit of solidarity through the AAUP, the more power we can show the administration, the state legislature, the governor, and even the federal government.

We are all busy of course and this is the end of the semester. So how can we engage in actions of solidarity now and as we prepare for the next academic year?

First, get involved in the union! We have so much work to do and the more people who participate, the more we can do get done! You can join a committee. You can volunteer to be the union liaison in your department, making sure that at every department meeting, news from the union gets to your colleagues.

Second, when you have a problem with your fellow faculty members, don't throw them under the bus by siding with administration! I cannot tell you how many stories I have heard over the years from faculty who have told administrators they want this or that because it suits them, even though by volunteering to give power to the administration, they undermine what a faculty union can do. Remember that while your research and teaching matters a lot, everyone else's research and teaching also matters a lot. Each of the 800 or so faculty add substantially to the URI experience. There are ways to solve problems other than running to the administration so you get your way. Every time faculty runs to the administration to complain about their colleagues, they plunge a knife into the heart of solidarity. Don't wield that knife, no matter how annoyed you are at your colleagues.

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

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The existing contract was settled and ratified by the Union and Board just prior to the expiration of the previous contract in June 2022. Your bargaining team's goal is to reach a tentative agreement that you can vote to accept or reject prior to the end of June. The time is running short, and the academic year ends with commencement. Future communications will be sent to URI/AAUP members through normal email processes.

You have built an institution that a record number of students apply to. You have created the conditions that pushed URI's retention and graduation rates well beyond state and national averages. You have made URI Wall Street Journal's #1 Public University in New England. You have elevated URI to R1 status. Stick together and stay strong. Your bargaining team is negotiating the best possible contract for you.

## SOLIDARITY AND URI FACULTY

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Fourth, show up! For a lot of people, the union is an office in Roosevelt Hall. But the union is you and your colleagues. Only you, working with the rest of us, can set the agenda for what this organization will do in the next year. We have two general membership meetings a year, a holiday party, a spring social, and other events throughout the year. We have exciting plans for a big national labor event for the fall too that we will share more about soon. Come on out, meet your colleagues, and learn about what they are about.

Finally, remember what you are to the administration—a worker and nothing else! That's it. We are all employees of a system that seek to pay us as little as possible and force us to do as much work as they can. The administration has goals to make you work ever harder, to fill out more forms, to bother you with more assessment, more annual reviews, more of everything so they can keep tabs on you. It was our work as faculty that got URI to R-1 status. The administration needs to respect that and remember that the university exists because of faculty and students, not administrators.

Who can tell what struggles we will face in the coming years. Or the coming days in this administration. But what I do know is that the only way we can face them is to embrace the concept of solidarity and fight together.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send us your concerns, opinions, and ideas

*Letters to the Editor* should be sent to Erik Loomis at [eloomis@uri.edu](mailto:eloomis@uri.edu)

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— in archives, labs, and our own brains — is important, not just for the specific things it can show us, but for the possibilities it allows us to dream and the questions we can form. And fighting in favor of academic freedom and free speech nationally requires that we work together, refuse to be compliant, and explain simply and clearly — not just to each other, but to our neighbors, legislators, and fellow citizens — just why ideas are precious and should be protected and kept on the shelves where they can be available to all.

## A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE URI/AAUP ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

*by Matthew Hodler, Communication Studies; Natalie Pifer, Criminology & Criminal Justice; Christie Ward-Ritacco, Kinesiology*

In October 2024, a handful of your coworkers began working with Executive Director Jay Walsh and the National AAUP to develop skills and strategies to organize URI/AAUP to prepare for the many challenges facing higher education in this country and to strengthen our union community. In January, twelve additional coworkers joined the group to receive training, help identify campus leaders, and develop actions to put pressure on decision makers about important issues during weekly meetings. On February 13, 2025, sixty URI/AAUP members gathered to share concerns, brainstorm solutions, and build community. This meeting was special for many reasons, including that it was the first URI/AAUP meeting in memory that a faculty member from each of URI's colleges attended.

The Organizing Committee has harnessed that meeting's energy by working with those sixty people to create a campus-wide network to build union power, protect academic freedom, and defend universities as central to strong and vibrant democracies. We have started working groups centered around creating mutual aid, strengthening relationships with local organizations and workers at other universities and colleges, media campaigns, and more internal organizing and events.

Multiple contemporaneous efforts are occurring: updating every member's contact information, building a list of members who want to be involved, collecting narratives of how URI faculty use academic freedom to contribute to the local, state, and national good.

This work has already coalesced into action. For example, over a dozen of your coworkers represented URI/AAUP at the Rhode Island State House on April 1 to connect with state leaders and begin collaborating with them on how URI/AAUP can use its power to uplift and protect core values like democracy and academic freedom. Additionally, AAUP National called for a National Day of Action on April 17. Thanks to everyone who joined Sunshine



Menezes from Natural Resources Science on April 17th for a workshop to support faculty in efforts to write compelling op-eds and how to pitch them to your news outlet of choice. Work to continue this momentum through the summer and into the next academic year is unfolding.

At February's meeting, Jay Walsh likened URI/AAUP to a marathon runner just getting back off the couch after a long layoff. The Organizing Committee has gotten off the couch, done some stretching, and taken a warm-up lap and is ready to bring us all into the work. Expect your colleagues to reach out to you and ask you to get involved in one or more of these areas of work.

And, in the meantime, please contact us if you want to get involved in any of the working groups, if you want to be (or know someone who should be) the department/area point person for your academic unit, or to be directly involved in this committee's labor. Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something. Standing together is how we fight to win.

Here are some individual actions you can take in support of your campus, and more broadly, of higher education:

**1. Sign the petition!** We've been collecting physical signatures from members to demonstrate support for the Bargaining team's contract negotiations - and we are well past a majority of Union members who signed the petition supporting our bargaining team! If you have not yet signed, contact the AAUP Organizing Committee at [uri-aaup-organizers@googlegroups.com](mailto:uri-aaup-organizers@googlegroups.com) as soon as possible.

**2. Be on the lookout for actions and activities this summer!** Our bargaining team will be negotiating until the end of June and attacks on higher education will continue over the summer. We will continue the work in defense of academic freedom and everyone can do something!

**3. Reach out to your lawmakers!**

Email your state lawmakers - Go [here](#) to identify your local Representatives and Senators

**Contact your Senator in the US Senate by phone and email**

[Jack Reed](#) (202) 224-4642

[Sheldon Whitehouse](#) (202) 224-2921

**Contact your Representative in the US House of Representatives**

Go [here](#) to identify the US Representative from your Congressional District

Here's an example script you can use but please feel free to individualize your call to action...

Dear Representative/Senator,

I am writing to you today as a constituent deeply concerned about the importance of academic freedom. As [Your Title/Position, e.g., student, teacher, professor, citizen], I believe the ability of individuals to freely explore

ideas, engage in open inquiry, and express diverse perspectives is essential for a thriving society and a robust democracy. I'm calling/writing to ask what you're going to do to protect academic freedom?

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and support in upholding academic freedom.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your City, State, Zip Code]

[Your Email Address]

[Your Phone Number (Optional)]

#### **4. Talk with your off-campus friends and neighbors!**

Tell them how crucial the work of your URI colleagues is to the culture and economy of Rhode Island. Start conversations at the grocery store or on the bus to let people know how the university contributes to our collective quality of life.

In solidarity, AAUP Organizing Committee ([uri-aaup-organizers@googlegroups.com](mailto:uri-aaup-organizers@googlegroups.com))

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