

# THE CATALYST

(kat'-list) n., an agent that provokes change

VOLUME 19, # 4

BCEJ/ PULSE

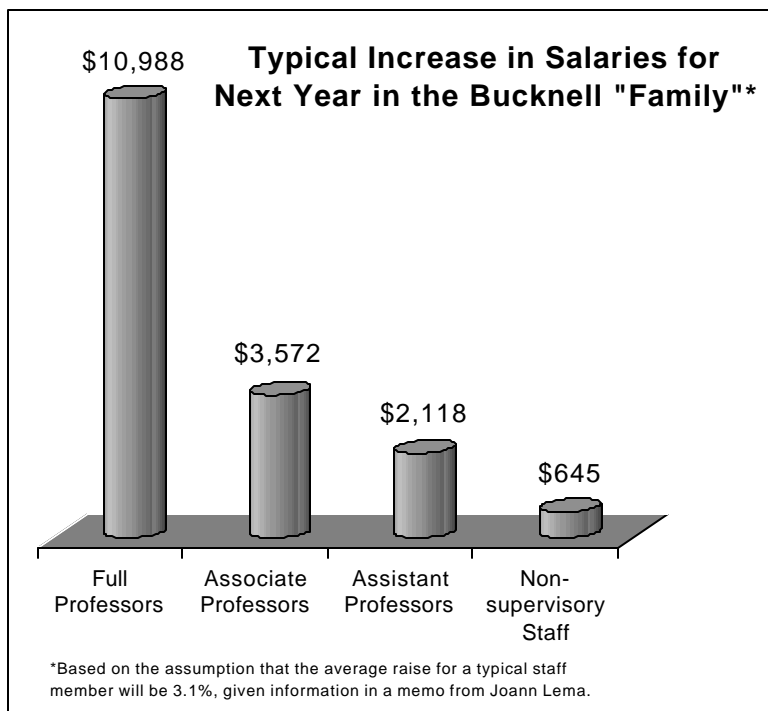
MARCH 2002

## Bucknell's Mission Statement Declares:

*"Bucknell's residential character provides a matrix within which institutional programs and practices that exemplify compassion, civility, and a sense of justice form an aspect of the educational experience."*

## BUCKNELL'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH INEQUALITY

As most of the campus now knows, at its January meetings Bucknell trustees increased the salaries of professors so that the faculty would be making roughly the average salary of professors at similar schools, like Colgate, Lehigh, and Middlebury. **The average raise given Bucknell faculty was 7.3%, with the largest raises (about 13%) going to full professors** on the grounds that their salaries had lagged the furthest behind those at the other schools. The associate and assistant professors will get raises of 5.6% and 4.1%, respectively. The trustees also decided to raise wages of the support staff by an average of 4.5% on the basis of recommendations by the administration. The actual range for support staff workers will be from about 1% for those whose supervisors and the Personnel Office believe are barely doing their work, to over 4.2% for those few judged to be doing "extraordinary" work. **The most common rate increase for support staff workers will be about 3.1%.** (Can there be better evidence than these different raises for faculty and staff that Bucknell needs a Fair Labor Committee to represent the interests of its support staff?) In any case, as a consequence of these decisions by the trustees, increases in salaries next year for people working at Bucknell will be changed approximately as described in the chart below.



### How Did This Happen?

It's a long story, and we've reported some of it here. Briefly, in 1996 the University adopted a Five Year Plan, and by this year all the central goals of the plan had been implemented except for bringing faculty salaries more in line with those at similar institutions. Both the faculty and the administration had consistently urged the trustees to implement this part of the 1996 plan. The BCEJ/PULSE proposal for a living wage, now under consideration by the University Committee on Planning Budget (UCPB), had not been put before the committee until the big faculty raise was already, as they say, "in the pipeline." To put the living wage issue first, would have required Stef Rogers to intervene -- as we asked him to do eighteen months ago -- but for his own reasons he decided not to do so.

## **Does This New Wage Policy Mean That Bucknell Has Effectively Abandoned Its Own Mission Statement?**

*Yes, it means exactly that.* Atop the salary hierarchy at Bucknell are the president (about \$200,000 a year) and his top five administrators (on average, about \$150,000 a year). Whatever raises the trustees gave these six people, they will continue, in terms of income and benefits, to be at the top of the heap. That leaves about 280 faculty members and about 600 staff members. Rather than ensure that all Bucknell employees receive a living wage, the amount necessary to live without public or private assistance, the trustees chose a path that generated considerably more inequality. And, as the chart demonstrates, the structure of income distribution among the four large groups of the rest of us *will get more unequal at every level.*

In contrast to the words of the Mission Statement that promise “programs and practices that exemplify compassion, civility, and a sense of justice,” this new distribution lacks *compassion* to say the very least. It is lacking in *civility*, for instead of bringing us together, the new greater inequality further separates the haves and the have-nots at Bucknell. The new distribution is grossly *un-just*. The highest-paid workers at Bucknell will receive the maximum raise next year, and over 200 Bucknell staff workers, particularly concentrated in Dining Services, will continue to make less than a living wage. In our view, giving the higher paid people bigger rate increases than the lower paid is simply wrong.

### **A VERY SMALL MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF MORE FAIRNESS**

#### **Benefits for Full-Time Casuals On The Way...Eventually**

According to minutes of the March 4th faculty meeting, Stef Rogers commented that “The staff salary methodology is being revised and a strategy is under development to provide benefits to all full-time employees.” This category would thus include those employees who are “casual,” full-time workers. We checked with VP Jo-Anne Lema about this move, and she told us that the administration has definitely decided to change its benefits policy to include such full-time workers, and she is working with Personnel to develop the new plan. However, she made it clear that the planning is in its initial stages, and that it could be two or three years before it becomes effective for all employees. We are glad to hear about this small move in the right direction, and urge the administration to make the change in a timely manner.

## **IS ALL NEWS ABOUT INCOME DISTRIBUTION BAD? NOT EXACTLY, AND HERE’S WHY**

### **The UCPB**

#### **\*\*\* Will it Recommend a Living Wage? \*\*\***

We don’t know yet. In February, four members of BCEJ/PULSE met with the UCPB and explained how we had arrived at a living wage of \$10.54 for this area and urged its members to recommend it. We also pressed for an increase in the entire staff wage structure in order to avoid wage compression. The UCPB will report to Stef Rogers on the living wage proposal sometime this spring. And, next November, when the administration submits its budget to the trustees for 2003-2004 (the fiscal year starts in July 2003), it will include a recommendation for salary increases across the campus. Next January, the trustees will decide on what the rates

ultimately will be. **We anxiously await the UCPB report, which could be the first step toward a living wage at Bucknell.**

## **What Do the Trustees Want?**

No matter the intentions of the UCPB, or its eventual recommendation, what happens will finally depend upon the trustees. In its January 25<sup>th</sup> report to the faculty on these matters, the trustees wrote this explanation of how they had arrived at a 4.5% average increase for the staff for next year:

*This salary increase is recommended based on a review of data from the College and University Personnel Association and based on the advice of the University's Personnel Office which gathers salary indicators for both local, regional and national markets. Further, we understand that the University will develop a methodology for allowing the Board of Trustees to determine salary increases for both Professional/Administrative Staff and Support Staff and will present this committee with that methodology for our consideration no later than November 2002.*

**In other words, the administration will devise a new plan for staff salary increases by next November, one importantly shaped by current UCPB deliberations.** The key phrase in the trustees' comments above is that Personnel Services has based past rate increases on indicators from "local, regional and national indicators." It matters, of course, whether the data on which it bases its recommendations for raises are local, regional, or national, and what it considers valid "indicators." Considering, for example, local data, will Bucknell's wage structure be based on local textile sweatshops, Wal-Mart, Geisinger Medical Center, or a calculation for a genuine living wage for this area?

## **Who Will Pay For Living Wage if One is Enacted?**

We believe the right question to ask is this: Given all the choices about fund raising targets and how to spend money, what keeps Bucknell from committing itself to paying at least a living wage to every worker? What we do know is that annual expenditures at Bucknell are over \$140 million, and that for at least the past decade each year the university has run a surplus in its operating budget. Last year, for example, because Bucknell changed the company that holds support staff retirement benefits, the university ran a surplus of over \$1 million in unrestricted funds. The year before that, it was about \$627,000 in such surpluses. Also, for next year, Bucknell somehow dug up \$400,000 to add to faculty salaries to make sure that faculty members weren't "falling behind." And, for next year, the university somehow dug up the funds to hire a new VP for marketing and a new aide to the president, both of whom will be paid handsomely compared to the average salary at Bucknell. Any assumption about how Bucknell might pay for a living wage – such as that it will be funded out of higher tuition, or that it will be taken out of other budget lines at the university – is merely guesswork. But, as the UCPB, the president, and the Board of Trustees have demonstrated on many occasions, where there is a will there is a way to find funds to meet important needs. We look forward to such a decision and continue encouraging support for it.

# **The Good News: Some Stirrings Toward More Democracy at Bucknell**

BCEJ/PULSE has called for the creation of a Fair Labor Committee. As we have reported, many staff members are fearful of the repercussions of bringing grievances through the existing system. A Fair Labor Committee would offer an alternative route for people to bring any work-related complaints. It would also report to the university on the state of working conditions, an important means of keeping us all informed about such

conditions and how we might improve them. We are happy to report that Stef Rogers has been listening to us, or to someone, about the problems with Bucknell's current work practices, including its grievances procedures. The minutes of the March 4<sup>th</sup> faculty meeting reported that "In the area of staff planning, President Rogers reported an upcoming survey of staff by an independent firm regarding benefits and other work environment issues." Apparently, Rogers has asked VP Lema to arrange for an outside assessment of staff work at Bucknell. We certainly applaud this decision, and look forward to a **public announcement** of how the outside evaluators will gather a full and fair sample of views, including those from people receiving the lowest wages at Bucknell.

## **VP Jo-Anne Lema and the Budget Administrator Roundtable**

We know from Jo-Anne Lema that on February 13<sup>th</sup> she met with the "Budget Administrators Roundtable," the heads of the major divisions at Bucknell. The group discussed our proposal for a Fair Labor Committee. VP Lema summarized the meeting for us by email, saying that the group discussed our claims that many staff members fear bringing grievances to immediate and more distant supervisors. She reported that the division heads see the grievance system as imperfect, but not needing fundamental change. For her part, VP Lema said she saw our claims as anecdotal, and that she would need more systematic information to make a judgment. Further, in a personal interview with VP Lema, a student BCEJ/PULSE member asked her what procedures would be taken if, indeed, the division heads saw nothing wrong with the grievance system. VP Lema said at that time that in such a case, she would need to gather information from the next lower positions in the hierarchy to determine the viewpoints from there. We presume that her decision to seek such additional information was one of the factors that led Stef Rogers to decide to hire an outside evaluator, and we very much appreciate her efforts.

## **Do We Know Anything Else?**

Yes. At a March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the College of Arts & Sciences Chairpersons, four different people described their observations and conversations with support staff people confirming that many of these workers are afraid to bring grievances to their immediate supervisors for fear that they might be perceived as "whiners," and would thus get a lower raise for the next year. Nobody at this meeting, including the Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences, contested this claim about fearfulness and support staff. We do not find it surprising that only the members of the Budgetary Roundtable appear not to perceive that such widespread fear exists.

## **What are We Going to Do Now?**

We have asked VP Lema to let us know the name of the outside evaluation team when the administration chooses it. It is imperative that such a firm have a history of fairness in its assessments and a method for gathering its data confidentially. We will certainly pass on in our future issues any information we get. Meanwhile, of course, we will continue to work strenuously for the enactment of a living wage at Bucknell.

## **What Can You Do?**

**Join us (we meet Thursdays at noon, Coleman 151)! Submit information about job practices at Bucknell (we rigorously protect anonymity) by e-mail, or through campus mail at Box C-3925! Endorse the Campaign! Already, over 800 Bucknellians have done so. Send us an email if you want to add your name. For the names of our endorsers, or any of our previous issues, check out our web site, [www.orgs.bucknell.edu/catalyst](http://www.orgs.bucknell.edu/catalyst)**

**The BCEJ/P.U.L.S.E. Steering Committee:** Lori Adamczyk, Meredith Clayton, Kristen Erickson, Josh Fisher, Lizz Fiedler, Janet Knoedler, Dawn Lonsinger, Mike McCaffrey, Emily Park, Sandra Morris, Beth Oesterling, Karl Patten, Cindy Peltier, Charles Sackrey, Geoff Schneider, Doug Sturm, Paul Susman, Hilbourne Watson, Nicole Wiederspiel, Carol Wayne White, Aaron Young