

THE CATALYST

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

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Bucknell University'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."

A LIVING WAGE – NEEDED THIS YEAR

**WHY? BECAUSE ABOUT 40% OF ALL BUCKNELL
SUPPORT STAFF WORKERS MAKE BELOW A
“SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD” -- THAT IS,
LESS THAN A LIVING WAGE!**

READ ON FOR DETAILS

A NEW MAINSTREAM REPORT CONFIRMS OUR LIVING WAGE FIGURES. In 1999, two Bucknell classes studied the cost of living in this area, basing their research on a review of existing studies, especially the *1999 Self-Sufficiency Standard for Pennsylvania*, published by the Women's Association for Women's Alternatives (WAWA). The students' research led them to advocate a living wage at Bucknell of \$9.00 plus subsidized benefits as the minimum income that would allow a family to pay its bills. Now WAWA has published the 2001 version of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, endorsed by many mainstream groups, including the United Way (see other endorsers, below). The "Standard" is simply another term for a living wage. The report's conclusions confirm that last year's \$10 figure (\$9 plus benefits) was on target, or even a bit low. WAWA describes its version of a living wage as follows:

The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures how much income is needed, for a family of a given composition in a given place, to adequately meet its basic needs – *without public or private assistance. . . . [It] assumes that all adults (whether married or single) work full-time, and therefore, includes costs associated with employment, specifically, transportation, taxes, and for families with young children, child care. . . . [It] means maintaining a decent standard of living and not having to choose between basic necessities – whether to meet one's need for child care but not for nutrition, or housing but not health care. Self-sufficiency Wages are family sustaining wages.*

The key phrases here are "all adults work full-time" and "not having to choose between basic necessities." Many, many Bucknell workers in low-wage jobs have told us that trying to live off of hourly wages of \$6, or \$7, or \$8 often means they must indeed choose between "whether to meet one's need for child care but not for nutrition, or housing but not health care." In short, these wages don't pay the bills, and that is why WAWA, supported by a number of widely respected groups, has produced its figures.

WHAT'S THE NEW LIVING WAGE FOR OUR AREA? *Using data from WAWA's latest report, which constructs living wages for every county in PA, we*

*calculated that for the three counties where most Bucknell employees live -- Union, Northumberland, and Snyder -- the typical employee would need an hourly wage of **\$10.54**. This would be the minimum amount necessary for people to pay their basic bills, their taxes, and their share of a subsidized health care plan.*

DO PEOPLE HAVE TO PAY TAXES OUT OF THIS \$10.54? Yes, and a lot of them. Families of two, three, or four, with breadwinners making \$10.54 an hour -- or \$421 per week -- pay roughly 20% in income, social security, and sales taxes. That means that the take-home pay would be about \$8.43 an hour, or \$337 per week.

HOW MANY BUCKNELL STAFF WORKERS CURRENTLY MAKE LESS THAN THIS LIVING WAGE? The news is grim. Using Bucknell administration data from 1999, earlier this year we calculated that in 2000, about 230 members of the hourly-wage support staff were making less than the \$9, plus \$1 for benefits, figures for a living wage. If we assume that, on average, staff members got a 5% raise last year, and using this year's \$10.54 figure, we estimate that about 260, **or about 40%**, make less than a living wage.

IS THIS \$10.54 AN HOUR UNREALISTICALLY HIGH? No. In fact, it is easy to explain how modest it actually is. In the early 1960s, low-income people spent about 33% of their budget on food, so the federal government defined the poverty level as equal to three times the food expenditure. However, today, low-income people spend only about 16% on food. Yet, the Poverty Line is still defined as three times the food budget. If you multiply the amount spent on food (16% of low-income expenditures) by three, you only account for about 48% (or less than half) the total money needed to support a family at the poverty level. Admitting the problem, the US government generally allows people within 130% of the poverty line to receive food stamps, so that an adult with two children could make up to **\$9.51** an hour and still be eligible for food stamps! "Being eligible for food stamps" hardly defines someone making a living wage. The discrepancy here explains why WAWA calls for "self-sufficient" wages, and why we join many others across the country is using them as measures of a living

wage. **If people here don't make wages in line with such a modest living wage figure, it's because Bucknell -- which, we remind our readers, is now building a \$35 million sports complex and spent over \$250,000 to spiff up its President's already luxurious house -- is too stingy to pay them enough to get by.**

IS THE \$10.54 FIGURE THE SAME FOR THE THREE COUNTIES WHERE MOST BUCKNELL EMPLOYEES LIVE? No. The table below explains how the figures differ for different counties, and how we came up with an average of \$10.54.

Hourly Wages Per Adult Working Full Time*

	1 adult + 1 preschooler	2 adults + infant + pre-schooler	Average
Union County (60% Bucknell staff employees)	12.78	9.68	11.23
Northumberland (34% Bucknell staff employees)	10.31	8.66	9.49
Snyder (6% Bucknell staff employees)	10.37	8.80	9.59
Weighted Average Value**	11.80	9.28	10.54

*The numbers in this table assume that all adults are working full time, and take into consideration actual expenses,

such as county taxes, the Earned Income Tax credit, and health co-payments for employment-covered insurance.

**Union County figures are given the most weight because most staff members live in that county.

IF YOU FEEL THAT THIS \$10.54 FIGURE SEEMS TOO HIGH, WHERE CAN YOU GO TO CHECK ON IT? You can get a copy of the inexpensive 2001 WAWA study by calling (610) 543-5022, or by contacting BCEJ/PULSE to borrow one of the half dozen copies we have. In its work, WAWA is supported, among others, by the United Way, the U.S. Department of Labor, First Union Bank, PA. Dept. of Community Economic Development, and the following foundations: Rockefeller, Ms., William Penn, Samuel S. Fels, Barra and Cassett.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN? Like everyone, we are presently waiting for the **living wage feasibility** study to be made by the University Committee on Planning and Budget. Now that staff members have been elected and added to the UCPB, they plan to act upon our request to investigate how Bucknell might implement a living wage. We have shared with its members considerable information, including the 2001 WAWA report. Once the UCPB finishes its study, we presume the Committee will pass on its recommendation to Pres. Rogers and us. Then, we shall all go from there. For your part, you can join our group if you haven't already. You can also e-mail us with your endorsement or sign up when we table outside the Bison, and join in with approximately 800 other Bucknellians (individuals and organizations) who are behind our Campaign. **WE ARE STILL GATHERING NAMES, AND HAVE ADDED ABOUT ONE HUNDRED SINCE THE ENDORSEMENT LIST WAS LAST PUBLISHED IN *THE CATALYST*.**

Congratulations! To Dennis Hopple, Jeffrey Reed, and Lynda Smith, support staff members elected to be voting members on the University Committee on Planning Budget. These three will begin meeting with the Committee within the next week or so, and will thus be part of its consideration of the living wage. Their voices cannot help but benefit that conversation.

BCEJ/PULSE MEMBERS MEET WITH NEW VPFA, JOANNE LEMA TO DISCUSS THE "FAIR LABOR

COMMITTEE”

At the suggestion of Stef Rogers, on October 30, about a dozen members of BCEJ/PULSE met with Joanne Lema, Bucknell’s new Vice President for Administration and Finance, to discuss the establishment of a *Fair Labor Committee* at Bucknell and to provide her with information about the Living Wage. Our readers will remember that one of the three planks of our Fair Labor Campaign is a standing committee of four support staff, two students, and a faculty member, all elected by their own constituencies, that would act as a grievance committee for staff workers and would issue an annual report on **The State of Working Conditions at Bucknell**. Establishment of such a committee is an important step in Fair Labor Campaigns across the nation because it provides workers with an additional and less-threatening way to address problems with their working conditions and structures. Pres. Rogers wanted us talk to VP Lema as the officer who oversees the Personnel Department and a new administrator involved in budget decisions. The meeting was mostly informational. We provided VP Lema with data about the living wage in this area, and made our cases for both the Fair Labor Committee and the Living Wage at Bucknell. She was receptive to our concerns, and said that she would consider our proposals and get back with us in late November. We will provide an update on this matter as soon as we have further information to pass on.

“DON’T TALK TO EACH OTHER AND DON’T CONGREGATE!”

Last week, as custodians from around the campus were drafted into the task of raking leaves, they were told by their supervisors that as they did the raking they should avoid talking to each other and congregating. Along with the fact that it is only in recent years that custodians have been forced to work on the grounds, this kind of supervisory order can only be resented deeply by many of them. Some of these custodians have worked together for 5, 10, 15 years and more. Imagine how it might feel to be ordered not to talk to your own friends!

And imagine how faculty and administrators would react to their own bosses saying, *Be sure not to waste time congregating and talking to one another!* Of course, the custodians' only recourse is to complain to their supervisors (some of whom presumably issued the warning) or to Personnel, choices that many avoid at all costs. **THIS IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF WHY BUCKNELL NEEDS A FAIR LABOR COMMITTEE.**

WANT TO CONTACT OR JOIN US? If you would like to join BCEJ (Bucknell Caucus for Economic Justice)/PULSE (Partnership for Unveiling Labor and Sweatshop Exploitation), submit information to us about job practices at Bucknell (we rigorously protect anonymity), or add your name as an endorser of the Campaign, you can contact one of us by e-mail, or through campus mail, at Box C-3925.

ODD JOBS

The BCEJ emerged over two years ago in response to a coercively-worded letter sent to dining service workers by then VPFA Peggy Plympton when these workers were approached by a union organizer. Shortly after Pres. Rogers arrived, we contacted him, and he decided to stop the letter. Since then, we have mentioned other job concerns, giving special attention to Dining Services because of the particularly low wages and other poor working conditions there. Problems, however, are widespread, as we are finding from those of you who continue to contact us. In a new column, "Odd Jobs," we will focus on other kinds of jobs, typically outside dining services, for which the conditions of work are "oddly" unfair in various ways. As background, the Bucknell Personnel Services web page defines its support staff to include "office, laboratory, physical plant (custodial, labor and trades), food service, public safety, and library and computer services positions." Also, sometimes Bucknell "hires temporary, casual staff for limited periods of time, or to cover special service needs. Casual positions carry no benefits." The justification offered for these Temporary-Casual positions is that "The University has an ongoing need for qualified clerical casuals who can fill-in for regular staff members who are absent due to

illness or to cover during vacations. While every effort is made to schedule work in advance, clerical casuals work on an as-needed basis, and may be called upon to report to work with short notice.” In other words, this small “industrial reserve army” of casuals must be available on call or the university simply can’t function properly. Yet, though some of these jobs go on for months, they pay no benefits. Here are two job notices recently run in Notes and Notices:

Temporary, 9-month (non-benefits eligible) Recruiting Assistant for the Career Development Center - *Schedule will correspond with the academic calendar. Responsibilities are to monitor the web-based software system eRecruiting.com, which is utilized in the on-campus and off-campus-recruiting program, as well as serve as point of contact for students and employers with regards to the recruiting program. Previous office experience in a business or college setting preferred as well as familiarity with Microsoft Word, Excel, and Filemaker-pro. Good organizational skills, attention to detail, ability to prioritize tasks, and excellent interpersonal and public relations skills required. The ability to make independent decisions, exercise good judgment and work well under pressure also required.*

Casual (non-benefits eligible) temporary clerical/secretarial pool - *Interested applicants should have the flexibility to be available on short notice to fill-in for regular office staff during illness or emergency situations and/or the ability to work assignments of several days to several weeks. Previous office and secretarial experience required as well as word-processing and spreadsheet skills using an IBM or Macintosh computer.*

What’s going on here? The Administration’s explains these kinds of jobs as a result of the freeze on benefits-eligible positions dictated by the 1996 Five Year Plan Strategic. In other words, in areas where there’s too much work for too few people, more people are being hired as temps in unfair ways. One supervisor, whose office was besieged with too much new work, told us that when he asked ex-VPFA Plympton for another slot with benefits, he in turn was asked, “Whom are you going to fire?” So, here we are again, the big rich, expanding university refusing to give a fair payback to employees without whose services it can’t function properly. This is a principal reason we are calling for a “living wage” for all Bucknell employees, an inclusiveness that would eliminate this embarrassing practice unworthy of an institution committed to “practices that exemplify compassion, civility and a sense of justice,” and for a Fair Labor Committee that could call attention to such problems. There are many other “odd

jobs” at Bucknell, and future issues will take them up. If you happen to know about any of these semi-genuine jobs, or other troubling job circumstances, feel free to inform us at our address on the previous page.

BCEJ/PULSE INDEX

THE CASTE SYSTEM AT BUCKNELL, 2001*

Average Hourly Wage of the President: \$92.

Average Hourly Wage of Next Four Top Administrators: \$68.

Average Hourly Wage of Faculty Members: \$33.

**Average Hourly Wage of Non-Professional Support Staff members:
\$10.01**

WAWA (And Our) Estimate of Living Wage for Our Area: \$10.54

**Ratio of President’s Wage to that of Non-Professional Support Staff: 9.2
to 1**

Ratio of President’s Wage to that of Average Faculty Member: 2.8 to 1

**Phrase Oft-Used by President Rogers to Describe the Campus
Community:**

“The Bucknell Family”

*These hourly wage levels assume employees are paid for 40 hours of work for 52 weeks and are estimates based on information taken from Bucknell administrative data, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and AAUP, *Academe*.

BCEJ/PULSE Steering Committee: Lori Adamczyk, Meredith Clayton, Kristen Erickson, Lizz Fiedler, Janet Jones,

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