

AAUP

American
Association
of University Professors

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Chapter

Fall 2025 Newsletter



A Critical Moment for Higher Education

Higher education faces an unprecedented crisis, with threats to academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance intensifying. Proposals to eliminate the Department of Education, federal investigations pressuring settlements that undermine academic autonomy, plans to condition grants on political viewpoint, state efforts to dismantle academic senates, and attempts to control curricula and accreditation standards jeopardize institutional independence. Funding cuts, visa barriers for international students, attacks on research into controversial topics and scientific method, and crackdowns on campus protests and free speech further erode the vibrant academic communities that make U.S. higher education a global leader.

This moment demands that, more than ever before, we defend our values, organize strategically, and engage stakeholders—policymakers, students, and the public. The UIUC AAUP chapter leads this charge, advocating for faculty and innovating responses to emerging

challenges. By joining the AAUP, you can shape these responses, protect your academic freedom, participate in a vibrant network, and strengthen our collective voice. We invite you, our faculty members, to join us. We at UIUC have always been better than the sum of our parts, because we can draw on such breadth and depth of expertise and experience in you all. So please, participate in our events, share your expertise, and help ensure higher education remains a beacon of inquiry and public good. Learn more at our [chapter website](#) and see our call for new members below.

AAUP: Who We Are

The national American Association of University Professors (AAUP), founded in 1915, champions academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance to serve the public good. Though we share these core values, our UIUC chapter, established in the 1920s, is autonomous and focused on how best to promote these values in our UIUC context. As one of the nation's largest universities, UIUC is a land-grant institution in the American heartland, pursuing excellence at scale while serving diverse communities from our bustling cities and towns and from the South Side of Chicago to rural Central Illinois. Our geography, size, public mission, diverse student body, affordability, and accessibility empower us to develop novel and consequential approaches to current challenges to higher education. Your membership fuels our ability to innovate and defend the values that define UIUC, empowering you to shape our university's future.

For the last century, [our chapter](#) has defended faculty against challenges to core academic values, offering resources for concerns about tenure, academic freedom, and faculty rights. Below, we highlight our main events and activities from the past year, including three workshops and ongoing organization and communication with administration and stakeholders, showcasing our commitment to UIUC faculty. We also highlight key activities from the national AAUP, complementing our local efforts.

Panel on Threats to Higher Education on the Road to Authoritarianism



On April 25, 2025, we hosted a webinar examining how authoritarian regimes undermine universities. Speakers included **Peter Fritzsche** (W. D. and Sara E. Trowbridge Professor of History), who analyzed Nazi Germany's assault on academia, and **Maxim Krupskiy** (Russian human rights attorney and Visiting Scholar), who discussed contemporary Russia's suppression of academic freedom.

The panel provided historical insights into why authoritarian regimes view higher education with academic freedom as threats, using tools like censorship, purges, and propaganda to reshape universities into instruments for their political purposes. Moderated by President Robin Kar, the event featured 20-minute talks and a robust Q&A. You can watch the [recording](#) of the panel.



A key insight was how these regimes try to turn public opinion against higher education and academic freedom. This insight prompted our subsequent...

Panel on Communicating Academic Values in Complex and Polarized Times



Given the need for enhanced communications strategies in the current climate, as shown in our first panel, our chapter hosted a second webinar on May 15, 2025, to strengthen public support for universities. From 2015 to 2024, high confidence levels in higher education have dropped from nearly 60% to 36%, and views of higher education have increasingly polarized (Gallup, 2024), underscoring the need for academics to strengthen our public relations skills and sensitivities.

Moderated by AAUP Vice President Carol Symes, the speakers included **Adrienne Nazon** (Vice President of External Relations and Communications, University of Illinois System), who addressed the challenge of cutting through today's media noise and the importance of understanding audience concerns to tie stories to what they care about, and **Jan Erkert** (Director, University of Illinois OpEd Alumni Project), who highlighted the power of storytelling to convey the “why” behind what inspires our academic work. You can view the recording [here](#).



Promotion and Tenure Panel

On April 18, 2025, our chapter continued its annual tradition of hosting a well-attended panel, “Achieving Promotion and Tenure: Policies and Procedures at UIUC,” via Zoom. Designed not just for faculty seeking promotion but also for their mentors and evaluators, the event drew a large audience who found it highly helpful in demystifying the promotion and tenure process. Experts included William T. Bernhard (Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs), Curtis Perry (Chair, Campus P&T Committee), Rosa Milagros Santos (Associate Provost for Faculty Development), and Carol Tilley (Chair, Faculty Advisory Committee). Moderated by chapter President Robin Kar, the P&T panel recording is available for [viewing](#).

Creation of the Illinois Informal Leadership Council

Major new challenges to higher education demand creative solutions for organization and communication. To meet this need, **our chapter launched the Illinois Informal Leadership Council** in spring 2025, which continues to meet, including over the summer. The Council includes leaders from critical campus organizations—including the Academic Senate, University Statutes and Senate Procedures Committee (USC), Non-Tenure Faculty Coalition (NTFC), Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), Council of Academic Professionals (CAP), Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure (CAFT), and Illinois Student Government (ISG)—who meet regularly via Zoom to establish a safe, confidential space to collect and discuss emerging concerns in the current difficult climate.

The council's activities serve as a supplementary mechanism for organization and communication, which does not interfere with the independent activities of any member organization. We meet every other week to collect concerns, share notes, and provide updates, recognizing that member groups may not always be aligned. After our confidential discussions, we agree on key bullet points to share with administrators, ensuring they are aware of holistic concerns as they evolve in this challenging climate. This initiative enables nimble, dynamic, and well-informed responses to emerging issues, reflecting our commitment to proactive, collaborative advocacy.

Meetings with Upper Administration

The UIUC AAUP chapter maintains a longstanding tradition of annual meetings with top university administrators to advance our mission and ensure faculty voices are heard. In the 2024-2025 academic year, chapter President Robin Kar and Vice President Carol Symes met early in the academic year with UI President Tim Killeen and Executive Vice President Nick Jones to identify areas of shared concern and potential collaboration, while candidly expressing concerns from our faculty constituents.

In late spring, our entire Policy Committee met with President Tim Killeen, Vice President Nick Jones, and Board of Trustees chair Jesse H. Ruiz to discuss a structured set of questions related to academic freedom, tenure, shared governance, current threats to higher education, administrative responses, and constructive ideas for collaboration and joint effort. These ongoing dialogues strengthen our advocacy and help shape university policies in alignment with our core values.

Monthly Policy Committee Meetings

To address the rapidly evolving challenges facing higher education, our Policy Committee holds regular meetings, often with invited campus visitors, to discuss emerging issues and develop proactive responses. These meetings provide a vital forum for strategizing on topics like academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance, ensuring our chapter remains responsive to faculty needs. Joining the AAAUP connects you to this vibrant network of

faculty and campus leaders working to protect our shared values. Agendas and minutes are available at our [chapter website](#).

Private Consultations with Faculty

Individual faculty members frequently turn to our chapter as a vital resource. Please know that we offer confidential consultation on concerns about tenure, academic freedom, relations with departmental and campus administration, and emerging threats to higher education. Our role as a conduit of information and as an advocacy group makes it critical for us to understand faculty concerns. So, if you have a need, please contact President Robin Kar or Vice President Carol Symes to discuss. We're here to support you.

National AAUP Activities



As the UIUC chapter, we amplify our local advocacy through the national AAUP's unique ability to drive collective action that safeguards shared values without exposing specific individuals or institutions to targeted retaliation. Members may want to explore its recent efforts addressing these critical challenges.

In 2024-2025, the national AAUP has actively defended academic freedom, shared governance, and higher education as a public good against escalating attacks from federal and state governments. Key actions included lawsuits challenging executive orders that target diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs or specific academic units, ideologically based deportations of noncitizen students and faculty for protected speech, politically motivated funding restrictions and grant terminations at institutions like the NIH, and attempts to dismantle the Department of Education.

The national AAUP has developed valuable resources including the [Academic Freedom Field Guide](#), fact sheets on immigration and DEI, and guidance for institutions to provide legal aid and housing for students under visa threats. These efforts are detailed at the AAUP website on [political attacks](#) on higher education alongside resources like [Academe](#) magazine and

chapter support tools, complementing our local advocacy by fostering collective action and protecting higher education's mission.

The national AAUP depends on our membership to sustain this work — making this a critical time for you to consider [joining the national organization](#). Membership dues can be paid with scholarly funds, since the AAUP is a professional organization.

New Members Welcome



We thank current members for their steadfast support and encourage sharing this newsletter with colleagues interested in joining. We have recently experienced a sharp increase in membership and expect that many more of your colleagues may want to learn more about the AAUP and join or participate in our events in the current climate. To help make that possible, we are temporarily waiving local chapter dues, making now an ideal time to get involved.

To join the national AAUP, go to their [website](#) and click “Join Now.” Faculty members can use scholarly funds to cover membership dues, since the AAUP is a professional organization. Note: our chapter focuses on tenure-stream faculty. Specialized faculty are affiliated with the AAUP through the Non-Tenure Faculty Coalition (NTFC).

We'd Love to Talk with More UIUC Faculty

This year, we engaged faculty through the new faculty orientation, our workshops, listservs, and department visits. In the coming year, we aim to expand our membership across UIUC's fourteen colleges and schools to address the growing and specialized threats we all face. Has your department met with us? Invite us to introduce the AAUP's mission and resources. Contact your department leadership or reach out to us directly (see below).

How to Reach Us

Please join us in advocating for academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance. To learn more about membership or our chapter and activities, please feel free to contact chapter **President Robin Kar** (Law & Philosophy), at rkr@illinois.edu, or **Vice President Carol Symes** (History), at symes@illinois.edu for more information. Visit our [chapter website](#) for local events and updates, and the [national website](#) for national AAUP resources.