

Thomas Bontly, Philosophy, University of Connecticut

Candidate Biography

I am currently an associate professor in the Philosophy Department at the University of Connecticut, where I have taught since completing my PhD in 1998. My research is concerned with the nature of action and its relation to thought and motivation, and I have published articles in the philosophy of mind, language, and science. I teach courses on these subjects and also on ethics.

Since joining the faculty, I have been an active member of the UConn chapter of the AAUP, serving on the Executive Committee for several years and as president in 2008-09. As chapter president, I oversaw the operation of a large collective bargaining organization serving some two thousand members, including tenured and tenure-track faculty, contingent faculty, academic assistants, and coaches. As president, I gained considerable experience in bargaining while negotiating a contract extension for our members in the face of the economic collapse of 2008-09 and the ensuing fiscal crisis in Connecticut. I was involved with early stages of the effort to organize the faculty of the UConn Health Center, which recently voted to unionize as part of the AAUP. Our efforts there continue. I have worked with other state employee unions through our coalition to protect jobs and benefits. And I have experience lobbying state government on issues of importance to faculty and to the university as a whole.

Education:

A.B., Stanford University, 1990

M.A., University of Wisconsin, 1995

Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, 1998

University of Connecticut:

Assistant Professor, 1998-2004

Associate Professor, 2004-present

Director, Cognitive Science Program, 2006-present

University Senate, 2008-present

University Budget Committee, 2008-present

Senate Nominating Committee, 2010-present

And various departmental and college level committees, both standing and ad hoc

AAUP:

Member since 1998

UConn Chapter Executive Committee, 2006-10

Chapter Vice President, 2007-08

Chapter President, 2008-09

Candidate Statement

The work of the AAUP has profound value: to faculty members, obviously, but also to students, parents, academic administrators, legislators, business owners, even CEOs. For whether they know it or not, all benefit from an excellent system of higher education, and excellence is impossible without someone to guard the core principles of academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance.

Unfortunately, these principles are threatened like never before. The current economic climate has given many institutions new excuses to ignore or abandon AAUP principles. Shared governance is rapidly eroding as administrators at public and private institutions usurp greater power in the name of "flexibility"; tenured appointments are being replaced by

contingent; salary freezes, benefit cuts, furlough days, and layoffs are becoming the norm. Meanwhile, state governments are undoing what progress has been made in collective bargaining, some seeking even to revoke the right of public sector workers to unionize.

As terrible as these developments are, they present an opportunity for the AAUP to reassert itself as the leading voice for the profession and higher education in general. The National needs to move aggressively on legislative issues at both state and federal levels. It needs actively to assist chapters facing crises in their institutions and states. And it needs to be more effective in organizing faculty and defending collective bargaining around the country. The recent successful organizing effort at the UConn Health Center is a model of what can and should be achieved in the right environment.

The AAUP's strength comes from its members, but membership has stagnated for years. Now we need to engage a new and diverse generation of faculty and show them through words but especially deeds what the AAUP means for them. More effective organizing is required, but so is an ongoing campaign of engagement with current members to emphasize the good work that the organization does. Having recently survived a near-death experience stemming largely from mismanagement, the organization must now run efficiently, effectively, and openly in defense of academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance. If elected, these will be my priorities.