

Union News

• FROM THE FACULTY STAFF UNION •



Education is Free at Occupy Boston

Heike Schotten, Political Science,
FSU Executive committee

Many of us teach and work here at UMass Boston because of our commitment to its urban mission—because of our belief that everyone, regardless of income or class, background or preparation, race or nationality, age or experience, is entitled to an affordable, accessible, high quality college education.—Heike Schotten

It is in part due to my own commitment to the urban mission that I have been actively involved in the popular education taking place at Occupy Boston. Occurring under the auspices of both the Free School University and the Howard Zinn Memorial Lectures, this overlooked component of the organizing activity underway at Occupy Boston is crucial to its identity and activist work. Anyone with knowledge to share can schedule themselves to lecture, teach, or facilitate a workshop in order to expand the minds and improve the critical thinking of those who attend.

We live in an era when higher education is increasingly expensive and thus out of reach—even for students at public universities—and student debt has officially passed the \$1 trillion mark.

- Conditions are not ideal for this kind of learning. Teach-ins at Occupy Boston happen outside, even if it is windy or rainy or cold, and acoustics are consequently poor.
- The “soapbox” where teach-ins happen is not a separate space from either the encampment at Dewey Square (itself a hub of activity) or the sidewalk, which police insist on keeping clear for passersby. There often aren’t places for “students” to sit, other than on the ground.

The lack of infrastructure and amenities at Occupy Boston dramatizes the fact that college has become a luxury few can afford. We live in an era when higher education is increasingly expensive and thus out of reach—even for students at public universities—and student debt has officially passed the \$1 trillion mark. Meanwhile, those who are able to attend university are increasingly driven to pursue “practical” courses of study, forsaking literature and philosophy, history and

- anthropology to pursue majors that could secure high-paying jobs—jobs now desperately needed to pay down burgeoning student loans.





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For past issues of Union News, a list of union officers, information about the union contract and other matters visit the website: www.fsu.umb.edu

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Letter from the President

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the 5th issue of Union News. It's full of information you need to know, gathered and written by our UMB colleagues. As always, let us know your thoughts about anything you read here.

Boston Campus Issues: Bargaining

We start bargaining our new contract in January. I hope you've seen and responded to the bargaining survey we've sent out. The survey asks: what are the issues and concerns of most importance to you and what proposals do you want the FSU to put forward for bargaining? We will compile the results of the survey and use this information to help determine our bargaining positions.

At the present time we are negotiating with the UMass President's office about a new contract offer from the Governor. Our current contract has a "trigger" clause in it which awards us 6 months of retroactive pay increases if the state hits certain revenue targets in both Fiscal Year 2011 and Fiscal Year 2012. Other public sector unions have chosen to forgo these retroactive increases in favor of the new 2-year contract (FY 2013 and FY 2014) offered by the Governor which has 3.5% raises in each year. All the UMass unions are pushing the President's office to make this same offer to us. If they do, then you can decide which contract plan would be preferable. At the all-union meeting on campus on November 1st after a long discussion about this, many people wrote personal letters to President Caret asking him to treat us as fairly as other public sector workers have been treated, and put the Governor's offer on the table.

Legislation: Pension Reform

If you are interested in switching your pension system from the Optional Retirement Program (ORP) to the State Employees Retirement System (SERS), you need to know about the pension reform bill recently passed by the Massachusetts House and Senate. This bill includes an amendment which would allow public employees to move from one retirement system to the other. Many of us in public higher education have been working towards this victory for a long time. We've lobbied senators and representatives for their support; the MTA has also made this opportunity for members a priority. We are very grateful to all those who have worked towards rectifying these problems with our pension plans. The pension bill must still be reconciled by a joint House and Senate committee and have the support of the Governor. So, there may be more work to do before we're through.

There are valid reasons for this amendment. Many employees felt unfairly pressured to choose their pension system too quickly when they were first hired; some were influenced to choose the ORP (a defined contribution system), or were incorrectly told they had to join the ORP; while others made their decision prior to the change in the marriage laws. In all these cases, individuals might want to seriously consider moving to SERS, (a defined benefit system). If this amendment becomes law, we'll certainly provide useful information to help you decide whether to change systems or not. We'll keep you posted on the progress of the bill.

Regards,

Catherine Lynde

Catherine Lynde, Economics, FSU President

Defending small classes

Amy Todd, *Anthropology*

Our College of Management boasts “classrooms that seat fewer than 40 students, not in lecture halls.” Our honors program promises small classes to honors students. The University of Massachusetts website promotes our campus as a one where “students easily interact with professors because most teaching occurs in small class sizes.” 30% of our classes have less than 20 students and only 5% have more than 50, positive contributions to our U.S. News and World Report rank. Any teacher can rattle off obvious problems that arise as class sizes increase. It gets harder to engage students in classroom discussion, there is less time to meet individually with students, there is less time to get to know their strengths and weaknesses, help them develop basic skills and mentor them as they plan their careers. The advantages of small classes seem obvious.

...factual recall may not be affected by large class size but complexity of discussion, problem-solving, critical thinking, long-term retention, and attitude toward the discipline suffer.

But the obvious is not highly valued in academia. When a group of concerned lecturers met with administrators in the spring, we were challenged to find scholarly research linking class size to quality of education. After sifting through the pseudo-research (for example, studies appearing in publications that receive advertising revenue from vendors of classroom technology) legitimate studies turn up in increasing numbers. Some of these have been reviewed by Joe Cuseo (2007) in the *Journal of Faculty Development* and John Zubizarreta (2009) in *To Improve the Academy*. While studies are based on different methodologies, certain themes emerge. For example, factual recall may not be affected by large class size but complexity of discussion, problem-solving, critical thinking, long-term retention, and attitude toward the discipline suffer. In a six-year study that controlled for instructor, course load and other variables, James Monks and Robert Schmidt (2010) report “unequivocally” negative consequences of “supersizing” classes at

a business school. Under explored in this body of research are the effects on teacher moral and job security.

Traditionally, class size at UMass/Boston has been small. Two developments on our campus, however, threaten class size. First is the growth of distance learning, since the virtual classroom has infinite seating capacity. Faculty may already notice fewer sections of certain courses being offered during winter and summer sessions, not because fewer students are taking these courses but because increasing student to teacher ratios in the asynchronous distance classroom is less costly than adding sections. The second development are the plans to create large lecture halls on campus, which will be accomplished by reconfiguring space in McCormack and Wheatley Halls and by constructing the first of up to three General Academic Buildings.

As a union, we will need to monitor developments in class size, both virtual and traditional, in order to develop a strategic response to what is likely to become an increasingly pressing issue.

The Delaware Study: Auditing “The Return on Investment” in Faculty

Institutions of higher education everywhere are trying to cut costs by reducing “expenditures per student credit hour.” Nearly 600 colleges and universities have participated in the Delaware Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity. Institutions pay \$1,000 per year to participate in the Delaware Study, which is less a “study” than “a management tool for provosts, deans, and department chairs” to “benchmark teaching workloads, instructional costs and productivity, by academic discipline.” The Delaware Study allows administrators to determine “the return on investment” in faculty. While UMass/Boston is not among the participants, UMass Amherst, UMass Lowell and all seven of our “aspirational peer institutions” are.

Cleaning Workers Burdened by Layoffs, Increased Work-load and Harassment

Dick Cluster, *Honors Program*

Cleaning workers are essential to the health of this campus. UMB contracts out this work to approximately thirty custodial employees of UGL-Unicco Service Company. The workers are represented by Service Employees International Union local 615 and covered by a collective bargaining agreement negotiated between SEIU, UMB and a consortium of such contractors in the Boston area. UNION NEWS spoke with some of the UMB cleaning workers and their union representative about the challenges they confront. The following comments from workers, who spoke anonymously for their own protection, have been translated into English.

From 2008 or 2009, I'd say there has been a 75% change in our conditions, because many employees have been laid off. What I think happened was that the contract negotiated between the university and the new company, Unicco, was very low. I don't exactly single out either the company or UMass for blame, because the economy was very bad, but I think the university demanded a lower-cost contract, so the company needed to reduce personnel. Daytimes, where once there were more than twenty of us, now we're down to more like seven or eight in all the buildings. Only those of us with the most seniority are left, and that's what has protected us, because the union has defended our seniority and our benefits. But we've had a lot more to do, with the company treating us rather harshly, supervisors standing over us piling on more duties, saying do-this, do-that, more than anyone can accomplish in 8 hours. Where once we might have had three custodians in a building (plus those who clean the bathrooms, from building to building) now we're down to one. With previous companies the treatment was better, more understanding of the workers. With Unicco, especially lately, that has not been true.

The university's outsourcing contract with Unicco began in 2009, when the previous contract with One Source expired and the UMB administration made the switch, presumably to the lowest bidder. Unicco agreed to rehire the same employees, but fewer of them. According to SEIU 615 rep Sergio Duenas, the total of members in the unit (full- and part-time, day and night) dropped from about forty to thirty or so at that time. Workers can remember a time under previous contractors, years ago, when the number was as high as fifty or sixty.

Tufts University, where cleaners are also represented by Local 615, made a similar switch to Unicco last summer,

promising no adverse consequences to the workers, but in fact all had to reapply for their jobs and many have not been rehired. In an action in October, the Tufts workers marched on the university president's house to demand posting of these jobs for part-time members of the unit to apply for full-time status.

At UMB, long-time cleaning workers credit the union for preserving seniority, but also point out that faculty, staff, and students have defended their rights.

Without Local 615, the companies would lay off cleaners every fifteen days so they didn't have to make anyone permanent, with rights and benefits. Also seniority defends the long-time workers from the company people hiring their

friends and relatives, which has also occurred when they create openings. But as far as protection from the behavior of supervisors, support from students and professors and other staff has been very important.

Especially when a new company or a new manager comes in, thinking they know how everything can and should be done, more than those of us who have been working here a long time.

Like, 'you've been working

such-and-such a shift in a certain building a long time, that's not how we do things, we're going to move everyone around, and if they don't want to accept that, they can leave.' Or 'you don't speak enough English, I'm going to replace you with someone who does.' There have been cases where professors protested, or program directors, or students have signed petitions defending the employees they're used to working with. These professors and students are people we've developed relationships with, we know what they want done in and around their offices, and how, and as far as language, we understand each other well enough. When professors, and students and staff have gone to the Facilities office to protest, the outsourcing company managers have backed down.

Local 615's master collective bargaining agreement with the contractors' consortium expires next fall, in September 2012. UMB custodial workers will be counting on both their own union and support from other campus employees, local unions and students.



Trabajadores de limpieza abrumados por despidos, más trabajo y hostigamientos

Salomé Skvirsky, *English*

Los trabajadores del servicio de limpieza son indispensables para mantener la salud general en la universidad. UMB emplea aproximadamente treinta personas de la empresa UGL-Unicco Service. Los trabajadores son representados por Service Employees International Union local 615 y están asegurados por la negociación de convenio entre SEIU, UMB, y el consorcio de contratistas en la región de Boston. UNION NEWS habló con algunos de los trabajadores de limpieza de UMB y su representante sindical sobre los desafíos que confrontan. Los comentarios de los trabajadores que hablaron anónimamente para evitar represalias y que fueron traducidos al inglés son los siguientes.

Desde el 2008 o 2009, yo diría que nuestras condiciones han cambiado un 75% porque muchos empleados han sido despedidos. Lo que creo que pasó fue que el contrato negociado entre la universidad y la nueva compañía, Unicco, los sueldos eran muy bajos. Yo no voy a echarle la culpa ni a la compañía ni a la universidad porque la economía estaba muy mala, pero lo que si pienso es que la universidad exigió un contrato de costo demasiado bajo, por lo tanto la compañía tuvo que reducir el personal. Cuando en otra época, en el turno del día, había mas de veinte de nosotros, ahora somos a penas siete u ocho en todos los edificios. Solamente los [empleados] con mas longevidad están todavía, y eso es lo que nos ha protegido, porque el sindicato ha defendido nuestra jerarquía y nuestros beneficios. Pero hemos tenido que trabajar mucho mas duro que antes, la compañía nos trata con severidad, los supervisores constantemente nos dan mas tareas, diciéndonos hada esto, haga lo otro, mas que cualquier ser humano podría hacer en ocho horas. Cuando en otros tiempos teníamos tres conserjes (además de los que limpiaban los baños de los edificios), ahora contamos con uno solo. Con las compañías anteriores, el trato era mejor, había mas comprensión para los trabajadores. Con Unicco, especialmente últimamente, eso no ha sido cierto.

El contrato con Unicco empezó en 2009, cuando el contrato anterior con One Source habia expirado y la administración de UMB hizo el cambio obviamente con una oferta mas baja. Unicco aceptó volver a contratar a los mismos empleados, pero no a todos. Según el representante Sergio Duenas de SEIU 615, el numero de miembros de la unidad (tiempo completo, tiempo parcial, día y noche) se redujo de cuarenta empleados a treinta aproximadamente. Los trabajadores se acuerdan que hace algunos anos los contratados anteriores rutinariamente tenían de cincuenta o sesenta trabajadores.

Tufts University, donde los conserjes también son representados por Local 615, realizó un cambio parecido al contratar a Unicco el verano pasado, y prometió que no habría adversas consecuencias por los cambio efectuados. Sin embargo, todos los trabajadores tuvieron que presentarse nuevamente y muchos no fueron contratados otra vez. En Octubre, en una acción de protesta los trabajadores marcharon hacia la casa del presidente de la universidad de Tufts para exigirle que permitiera que a los trabajadores de medio tiempo se les diera puestos de tiempo completo.

En UMB, los conserjes con longevidad le dan crédito al sindicato por la preservación de reglas de antigüedad, al mismo tiempo que señalan que los miembros de las facultades, los empleados universitarios, y los estudiantes han defendido sus derechos.

Sin Local 615, las compañías despedirían trabajadores cada quince días para no tener que mantener a nadie como empleado permanente con derechos y beneficios. También, la regla de longevidad defiende a los trabajadores con antigüedad contra la practica de la compañía de emplear a sus amigos o familiares y esto ha ocurrido cuando han habido puestos vacantes. Para parar el mal trato de los supervisores, el apoyo de estudiantes y profesores ha sido muy importante.

Especialmente cuando una nueva compañía o un gerente nuevo llega, piensa que sabe como las cosas pueden y deben ser hechas, mas que nosotros que han estado trabajando aquí por mucho tiempo. Dice "tu has estado trabajando por mucho tiempo el turno tal o cual en cierto edificio, pues esa no es la manera en que nosotros hacemos las cosas, vamos a cambiar todo de lugar, y si les gusta, pueden irse." O "tu no hablas suficiente ingles, voy a reemplazarte con alguien que si lo hable." Han habido casos en que los profesores se han quejado, los directores de programas y los estudiantes han firmado peticiones defendiendo a los empleados con los que están acostumbrados a trabajar. Estos profesores y estudiantes son personas que han establecido relaciones con nosotros, sabemos el trabajo que ellos quieren que hagamos en sus oficinas, y, en cuanto al idioma, nos entendemos suficientemente bien. Cuando los profesores, los estudiantes, y otros empleados de la universidad han ido a la oficina de "Facilites" a protestar, los administradores de la compañía han dado marcha atrás.

El convenio entre Local 615 y el consorcio de contratistas caduca el próximo otoño, en Septiembre del 2012. Los conserjes de UMB cuentan con el apoyo de su propio sindicato y con el apoyo de los demás trabajadores de la universidad, el de los sindicatos locales, y el de los estudiantes.

Unions and Students Must Work Together to Save Higher Ed

The Future of Labor Organizing in Higher Education – Conference at UMB

Dorothy Shubow Nelson, *Editor Union News*

“Unions should stop competing with one another.” This statement is one of many compelling ideas heard at the Conference on the Future of Labor Organizing in Higher Education held at UMass Boston on Sept. 30 and October 1, 2011. Co-sponsored by the Labor Resource Center of UMB, SEIU Local 615, The MTA and The American Federation of Teachers, MA, this first annual international conference gathered 155 labor and student activists and scholars.

Time for Campus Labor Coalitions

Conference organizers were intent on promoting strategies and values that would awake the dormant power of many union locals on campuses in America and around the world. A pressing theme, emerged immediately in the first plenary, the need for campus labor coalitions, where all workers would join together to preserve the integrity and missions of college campuses and protect the interests of those who work and study in these institutions.

Ed Childs, a dining hall worker, chef and union activist from Harvard offered an example of how this kind of coalition worked at Harvard. Childs pointed out that “dining hall workers and custodians helped pick the new President of Harvard.” He added that their contract included language that called for sustainable jobs and sustainable food.

As the first speaker in the Friday evening plenary, Susan Moir, Director of the Labor Resource Center at UMB asked, “How do we buck these global trends and respond to society’s needs?” Her answer, one that was echoed by others, was “We must have a voice no matter where we work in the higher education industry.” Moir pointed out that education workers are now facing what manufacturing workers faced in the 1960’s and 1970’s, consolidation, outsourcing, restructuring and speed-up. But she emphasized that this struggle is not just about wages and conditions of work. “We don’t make refrigerators or battleships or microchips. We make citizens and we build democracy.”

Moir assailed the high pay of some administrators, high student debt, the fostering of educational inequality, lack

of transparency and accountability, and the treatment of students as consumers. She stressed the need for all educational workers to be involved, urging faculty to join this movement. But she added forcefully: “We do not invite faculty to lead us. A movement based only on faculty interests will be a movement to restore traditional institutions and faculty prerogatives.”

“Our lives begin and end on whether or not we speak out on things that matter. Politicize Bargaining. Raise Questions.” Joe Berry.

Joe Berry, veteran labor organizer, author of the book *Take Back the Ivory Tower*, and founder of COCAL, the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor, brought his experiences, understandings and vision to bear in the afternoon workshops. “We need workers centers for the unorganized so that people who don’t have a union can organize and get labor education. Public sector unions need to be active in the broader labor movement. There should be across union organizing in higher education. No more competition between unions. “We need to this,” he urged. “Politicize bargaining. Raise questions.” Berry and others also stressed the need to continue to push organizing in the private sector of higher education.



Students Should Have Power and the Support of Labor Unions

Students need to be enjoined in the work of running these campuses: token representation on the board of trustees or on college councils or committees is not sufficient. The meaningful and active participation and leadership of students is central to challenge the lopsided balance of power that has begun to affect the trajectory of higher education. All campus unions, as Alex Kulenovic of PHENOM stressed, should have been supporting the needs and rights of students all along, fighting against increased tuition, higher fees, high textbook costs and increased class size particularly in public educational institutions. “Students are under siege,” said Kulenovic. A worker from Providence College, a private institution, supported the need for these campus labor coalitions. “The way state government has turned on the public sector, we

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Grievance Committee Takes Tough Stand

Michelle Gallagher, FSU/MTA Legal Consultant and Lorenzo Nencioli, FSU Membership Coordinator

The FSU Grievance Committee has dubbed the 11-12 academic year the year of compliance. During the September, 2009 through May, 2010 round of negotiations with the administration-over the University College contract, the FSU/MTA bargaining team announced several bargaining principles that guided their proposals. These principles were: to assure that the collective bargaining agreement was comprehensible, to guarantee that it could be implemented, and to make certain that it was enforceable. During the bargaining process the FSU/MTA bargaining team checked with the administration to be sure the terms and conditions the administration was agreeing to were in fact administrable. Revised provisions and new agreements, like the promise to distribute course priority lists to all affected non-tenure track faculty members by August 15th of each year are extremely important if bargaining unit members are to be able to determine whether or not their rights are being honored.

Other provisions of concern to the FSU/MTA include the timely processing of grievances, distribu-

tion of individual contracts to all faculty, recognition of the obligation to provide multi-year contracts to senior lecturers, and timely notification of eligibility for promotions. The FSU/MTA Grievance Committee has committed itself to monitoring these provisions and, where necessary, filing grievances to assure the contract language is

ence at UMB. While we prefer to not have to file numerous grievances, the fact is the grievance procedure is the most effective way to resolve disputes and identify issues that need to be decided by a third neutral party in those circumstances when people have a different understanding of their respective obligations under the current collective bargaining agreement.

It is vital that the parties clarify the differences in relation to the current agreement. These issues can then be raised in the next round of bargaining so that we can come to a common understanding in negotiations to make sure that whatever we agree to will be able to be implemented.

Members should feel free to contact the FSU office or the grievance officers and staff listed here with their individual concerns whether or not that results in the filing of a grievance. We are happy to answer questions about the contract and/or employment related issues. In fact, we believe that the more our members know about the contract the stronger our union will be. If you wish to learn about the contract in greater detail join the FSU Grievance Committee (contact the FSU office for more information on this).

honored. At present the FSU/MTA Grievance Committee is handling over 10 grievances. These grievance concerns largely stem from the list of issues mentioned above. In addition, FSU President Catherine Lynde notified the Chancellor of our expectation that from this point on, these contractual issues must be dealt with in a timely manner as required by the contract.

This effort is starting to have good results. All of the grievances filed were scheduled for hearings. Two of these were resolved at the initial step of the process, a rare occur-

Grievance Officers

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are next," he said. Other presenters charged that democracy on campus was being forfeited to those who are eyeing market forces and the market culture of the business world.

Erosion of Faculty Rights

Sheila Slaughter, in her keynote address, called attention to changes in the U.S. that have affected the rights of faculty to govern the direction of their institutions and maintain control over their working conditions. Laying out what she called the characteristics of Academic capitalism, Slaughter claimed that "the boundaries between the public and private sector are now blurred. Students are defined as consumers... The private sector is being valorized by the public sector. Global outsourcing and marketization are neoliberal policies." Many of the ideas included in her talk are expounded in the paper, "Academic Capitalism in the New Economy" by Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter" published in *American Academic* 1, 1 (2004) and made available at the conference. Slaughter claimed in her talk that "new circuits of knowledge" among other challenges, have instigated this shift away from the democratic culture of higher education. In fact much of Slaughter and Rhoades paper (and their book by the same name) address the ef-

fects of technology and current business models on teaching and learning, the slipping away of shared governance, faculty responsibility and the slow disintegration of the original missions of these public universities to serve the underserved in their communities. "These decisions... are increasingly shaped by market considerations, as academic managers see these new curricular forms and delivery systems as mechanisms for generating new revenue." (49)

The Labor Resource Center under the leadership of Susan Moir and Anneta Argyres brought together teachers, the trades, security, secretaries, food service workers, administrators, clerical workers, custodians and students to participate in these plenary sessions and workshops for an intense day and one evening. Representatives from 36 U.S. colleges 14 U.S. states plus the District of Columbia filled the ballroom at the Campus Center. Among those registered were attendees from Puerto Rico, The United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. A Second Annual Conference is being planned for next year.

This was the last of three conferences on The Future of Work in Massachusetts, a joint research project of the Labor Centers at UMass Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth and Lowell, funded by the University of Massachusetts President's Office.

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The popular education at Occupy Boston is a direct counter to these trends. It is a bold declaration that higher education is a public good that should be freely available to anyone who wants it. It is a show of solidarity with those most direly impacted by the current financial crisis and an offer of help by those with the knowledge and capacity to supply it. Indeed, as faculty at this city's only 4-year public university, we are uniquely positioned to contribute to the popular education taking place at Occupy Boston. We not only participate in the production of knowledge by doing so, but we demonstrate the importance of its democratization through our pedagogical presence there.

When he spoke at Occupy Boston recently, Trinity College Professor of International Studies Vijay Prashad argued that students' desperate, debt-driven careerism "is reducing their horizon for being free." He meant this not simply economically, but intellectually as well. I share Prashad's conviction that education in its true sense is a practice of freedom, and I see UMass Boston's urban mission as an attempt to make such freedom a reality for everybody. The message of the popular education happening at Occupy Boston and of our urban mission are the same: namely, that everyone should have access

...everyone should have access to knowledge and learning, and the fewer the obstacles the better.

to knowledge and learning, and the fewer the obstacles standing in the way, the better.

It's easy to get involved. If you have knowledge you want to share through popular education, please contact me at heike.schotten@umb.edu and I will happily get you set up to do a teach-in of your own. To date, the following faculty from UMB have conducted teach-ins at Occupy Boston and there are more waiting in the wings.

- Arjun Jayadev, Assistant Professor of Economics, Monday, October 10th: "The Error of Austerity Measures as a Response to Recession" Watch Video: <https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=627806311078&oid=125511980885513&saved>
- Tom Ferguson, Professor of Political Science, Monday, October 24th: "Money and Politics"
- Luis Jimenez, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Thursday, October 27th: "The Perils of American Democracy: The Institutional Basis Behind our 'Broken Politics'"