



## Open Letter From The AAUP-Utica Leadership About Retrenchment

September 10, 2025

Yesterday, Utica University issued retrenchment notices to 23 academic departments as well as the library. Based on these notices, it appears the University's plan is to retrench 26 bargaining unit members on December 17, 2025, and 5 more on May 8, 2026. The loss of this many full-time faculty and librarians would have a profound and lasting impact, forever changing Utica University as we know it.

At this time, the AAUP-Utica has not been given any additional information beyond being copied on the retrenchment notices.

President Pfannestiel's comments in Faculty Senate last week about moving beyond what he characterized as a misunderstanding on the part of the administration gave us hope that the administration was again open to dialogue. Our negotiation team met on Monday morning to prepare a new outreach strategy to try to restart discussions. While we intend to continue with this strategy, given the recent communications from the University leadership, we must first set the record straight.

1. The University leadership has presented a narrative of the Union as unwilling to collaborate to solve a financial crisis. The AAUP-Utica has a well-documented history of stepping up when the administration has asked for help. Often, this has required us to communicate difficult news about the University and its financial condition to the bargaining unit when the University leadership has chosen to remain silent.
2. The AAUP-Utica has a long history of engaging in good faith bargaining to secure the University's future. Twice in the past five years, our members have ratified agreements containing significant financial sacrifices. This summer, however, our attempts to continue that collaborative process were met with the administration's demand that the Union waive contractual and legal rights as a precondition to any discussion. Agreeing to this condition was not a possibility as it would have left our members unprotected and made it easier for the administration to attempt unilateral firings.
3. The University leadership attributes our current financial crisis to overstaffing, specifically, too many full-time faculty and staff. This narrative ignores the lived reality on our campus, where we are already operating with critically understaffed programs, and struggling to offer enough courses and support our students. To suggest that our dedicated faculty and staff are the cause of this crisis, rather than the victims of it, demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of the actual financial mismanagement that has led this institution to the brink.

4. Our University leaders had many opportunities to be transparent during the Spring 2025 semester, yet in multiple forums, they never mentioned the possibility of a looming financial crisis, nor did they mention that their budget would require retrenchment of full-time faculty and librarians. These omissions are particularly egregious considering the significant financial sacrifices our members made in Spring 2025 with the understanding that these sacrifices would help stabilize the University as well as "avoid layoffs or retrenchments." We took the University leaders at their word. We had no reason to interpret their vague statements about "restructuring" as a euphemism for retrenchment or financial exigency.
5. At the June 5, 2025 meeting between eight members of the AAUP-Utica leadership and President Pfannestiel, no ultimatum regarding retrenchment was ever presented. The consistent notes and recollections of all eight AAUP-Utica attendees confirm this fact. Had President Pfannestiel issued a warning such as "if action wasn't taken, the Board of Trustees would have no choice but to move forward with financial exigent retrenchment," the AAUP-Utica would have responded swiftly. The University leadership's attempt to retroactively characterize this meeting as a final warning is further complicated by the fact that President Pfannestiel said certain financial information discussed in that meeting "could not leave the room," and he has yet to fully disclose it to the University community.
6. The AAUP-Utica's August 27, 2025 resolution to the Board of Trustees highlighted the serious institutional risks if financial exigency is not properly disclosed. We specifically raised concerns about the University's compliance with federal disclosure laws for bondholders and notification requirements for the Department of Education. A failure to disclose financial exigency as a material event can trigger a default on our bonds, giving our creditors the legal right to accelerate debt repayment, seize assets, and force the University to negotiate a forbearance agreement. A failure to disclose a financial exigency declaration can also jeopardize the federal financial aid our students rely on. Our repeated appeals for transparency have not been made to obstruct, but to protect the institution and its students.

Our priority has been, and always will be, working toward a solution to save this University. We have always worked to ensure our members are heard and to preserve their rights under our collective bargaining agreement. It is also our responsibility to hold our University leaders accountable—especially when we fear their silence is putting the entire institution at risk.

This is a hard day, and we all have deep concerns for the future. We worry about the careers we have devoted our lives to and our financial security. We worry about how our students will find the classes they need to graduate, how our programs can maintain accreditation with so many faculty gone, and how our University's reputation can withstand yet another significant blow.

In this difficult time, we stand united with our colleagues, our students, and our community.

In solidarity,

**The AAUP-Utica Governing Board, Negotiation Team, Grievance Officers, Board of Trustees  
Guests, and Hearing Committee Members**