

**The Fiery Inner Core of Solidarity  
at East Stroudsburg University:  
With Special Recognition of  
Dr. Allan Benn's Strike Leadership**

*Nancy VanArsdale*  
ESU-APSCUF President

The logo of East Stroudsburg University is the iconic Delaware Water Gap, a spectacular geological formation that originally was formed due to seismic activity more than 450 million years ago. For millions of years afterwards, after the volcanic eruptions that formed the Pocono range, the Delaware River cut a path through the mountain ridges, now crossed by both Interstate 80 and a major portion of the Appalachian Trail. Whenever thoughtful travelers see the Gap itself or the ESU logo, they are reminded of the fiery core of the earth, the power of seismic activity, and the ever-changing forces of nature over time. Reflecting on the success of the APSCUF strike in October 2016, I remain cognizant of how months of activity and a small core of dedicated East Stroudsburg University (ESU) APSCUF leaders were essential to the creation of rock solidarity at our campus—motivating almost all faculty to participate in the three-day strike held on October 19–21, 2016. Perhaps no leader was more visible, enthusiastic, or passionate than Dr. Allan Benn.

The core of leadership consisted primarily of our Executive Council (EC) members, who include our Legislative Assembly Delegates and Alternates. In a typical year, ESU APSCUF's EC meets at least once a month, and during the semesters we sponsor a monthly APSCUF membership meeting as well as a second monthly topical meeting. Taking advantage of this typical meeting schedule in 2015–16, with two visits from State APSCUF President Ken Mash, was pivotal in keeping the ESU membership informed of the lack of progress at the negotiations table. Certainly, the Delegates who participated in the February and April 2016 Legislative Assemblies remained the most informed APSCUF members on campus as Spring Semester 2016 came to its conclusion. But to be frank, many of our members were glad to head into summer without any strike activity, not even a strike authorization vote. We nevertheless took the steps to update all home email addresses of our memberships, in case of a later summer strike authorization.

As Chapter President, I continued to participate in Negotiations Committee conference calls over the summer, and Dr. Joseph Miele, our ESU Meet and Discuss Chair, participated as the ESU designee in the late summer meeting with the Negotiations Team. With guidance from Ken Mash, we did send out email updates to our membership over the summer, but we chose not to focus excessively on the possible strike itself, thus minimizing stress and permitting faculty to use summer time for their summer teaching, typical research, class planning, and personal time.

Yet as soon as the Fall 2016 Semester commenced, our core of ESU APSCUF leaders shifted into high gear—with 50 days of activity prior to the strike itself. The main point of this textual reflection is to record how a handful of very active APSCUF members kept extremely busy with meetings and activities, prior to the larger and more significant coordination of the faculty membership, first on October 13 in a red-t-shirted rally and march across campus, followed by Day 1 of the strike on October 19.

Two individuals need to be recognized in particular for the momentum that had quietly started to flow in the spring, but surged with heat throughout September and October: Dr. Allan Benn, Strike Spokesperson, and Dr. Douglas Lare, Mobilization Chair. Both of these individuals accepted appointments to these pivotal positions in the late spring, but their work, organization, rhetoric, and passion were keys to the strike success at ESU. Allan was the man with the bull horn, chanting “What’s disgusting? Union busting,” and getting others fired up to stay united. Doug was the quiet organizer who convinced ardent ESU APSCUF supporters as well as some more reserved members to step up and get involved, even convincing several to take on leadership roles as picket captains. The strike at ESU was an immense success primarily thanks to the voice of Allan and the organization of Doug, among others.

What meetings and events happened that helped the strike action to be successful? This is the critical timeline of events.

#### *August 31: ESU APSCUF EC Meeting*

ESU Executive Council holds its first meeting of the fall semester, with me as the Chapter President, and Joseph Miele, Meet and Discuss Chair, reporting on recent conference calls and meetings with the Negotiations Team. Allan Benn immediately kicks into high gear preparing emails and reaching out to the local media and the student journalists. ESU APSCUF Vice President Andrea McClanahan again permits ESU APSCUF to use extra rooms in her house near campus as ESU Strike Headquarters. Dr. Michelle Jones-Wilson, previous ESU Mobilization Chair, forwards all past plans to Douglas Lare for his review. Plans begin to take shape in identifying a temporary ESU APSCUF Office Manager, since our permanent Office Manager knows she will be recovering from some necessary surgery in a few weeks—at a pivotal time should a strike get called.

*September 6: ESU APSCUF Membership Meeting*

The focus is on the upcoming Strike Authorization Vote. Allan Benn speaks forcefully to the members about the importance of the vote.

*September 7–9: APSCUF Faculty Strike Vote at ESU.*

More than 88% of the members do vote, with several new and temporary faculty choosing to join.

*September 14: Additional ESU APSCUF EC Meeting*

EC works on increasing participation in the Strike School planned to begin immediately after the September Legislative Assembly. Additional outreach to students gets organized and planned. Douglas Lare continues to make progress on identifying picket chairs and preparing for actual mobilization. Allan Benn again gets the membership on their feet and chanting.

*September 14–15: ESU APSCUF Coach Strike Authorization Vote*

The turn-out for the coaches' vote is high.

*September 21: ESU APSCUF Outreach to Students.*

ESU APSCUF EC identifies volunteers to staff information tables outside of the University Center. Information cards on why a strike may happen are distributed. Students also ask questions and get information about the key negotiation issues. A temporary Office Manager begins her duties.

*September 22: ESU APSCUF Outreach to Student Senate*

Key members of the ESU APSCUF Leadership Team (Nancy VanArsdale, President; Andrea McClanahan, Vice President; Allan Benn, Strike Spokesperson; Jonathan Keiter, Membership Chair) attend the meeting of the Student Senate to provide information and answer questions.

*September 22–25: Legislative Assembly and Strike School*

ESU Delegates and newer ESU faculty, including two new members on our Public Relations Committee, attend. The leadership core is expanding and these members return to campus with red and blue scarves and enthusiasm. The PR Committee gets ESU EC permission to order red ESU APSCUF t-shirts for hundreds of our members.

*September 28: ESU APSCUF EC Meeting with all Department Chairs*

Department Chairs and/or Department Representatives invited. Turn-out is mixed. EC develops a follow-up plan to reach out to each Department again. Picketing volunteer shift cards get distributed to each APSCUF member on campus. EC members also recruit ESU APSCUF members to ride the bus to the October 6 State APSCUF Rally at the Board of Governors Meeting in Harrisburg.

*October 4: ESU APSCUF Student Outreach-Information Forum Meeting*

Turn-out of students is lighter than expected.

*October 6: State APSCUF Rally in Harrisburg*

More than 25 ESU APSCUF members and students participate in the rally at the Dixon Center. Allan Benn joins other talented APSCUF members from around the state in leading motivating chants. LATER IN THE AFTERNOON AFTER RETURNING TO CAMPUS, Doug Lare holds a meeting with nine picket chairs he has recruited from many disciplines. Nancy VanArsdale and Doug Lare also meet with ESU Campus Police and Human Resources Director to provide them with information about our strike plans. That meeting is positive, with a focus on safety and positive communication.

*October 12: Additional ESU APSCUF EC Meeting*

EC leadership convenes the meeting to review strike plans

and plans for a campus rally to be held the next afternoon. Professor Jan Selving, Chair of the Signs Committee, and Dr. Sandra Eckard, from the Public Relations Committee, will get signs and new red t-shirts to the designated location. Doug Lare provides mobilization updates and ongoing needs. ESU APSCUF is actively using Twitter, Facebook, and home email messaging.

*October 13: ESU APSCUF Campus Rally.*

Faculty turn-out is so high for a 2 PM rally that we run out of red ESU APSCUF t-shirts! This campus event is critical for tightening solidarity. Allan Benn delivers a powerful speech and then leads the members on a short campus march with chanting. Faculty energy and unity are strong. Picketing assignment information is distributed through campus home emails. Faculty members volunteer their nearby homes to be used for rest stops in the event of a strike. Several members of the faculty volunteer to shuttle picketers from parking areas to picket areas. The ESU APSCUF Office is now off campus.

*October 18: Additional ESU-APSCUF EC Meeting*

EC meets to review strike plans for next day. If a strike is called, the Chapter President will use social media and home email messaging to notify members to get up early. The plan is to convene in the early morning about a half a mile downhill from campus with all first-shift picketers marching together uphill through town to the campus picketing sites, if the strike is called. Some EC members are very confident in high faculty turn-out, others remain more skeptical.

*October 19: Strike Day 1-Early Morning March to Campus from Nearby Shopping Center*

Allan Benn, Joe Miele, Sandy Eckard and Jan Selving are first to arrive in the darkness at the shopping mall parking lot. The cars start coming and coming! Turn-out is beyond our expectations! Close to one hundred faculty report for the

first shift. Even some faculty, with walking issues, refuse to accept rides to campus, wanting to march uphill with the APSCUF membership. Four key picket locations are active all day, with a fifth branch-campus picket site active all afternoon. Dr. Michael Doherty, Chemistry Professor but now the key volunteer APSCUF taxi driver, drives his personal mini-van all day, offering any member rides to and from picket posts to cars. He does so all three days of the strike! LATE IN THE DAY: Picket Captain Meeting at the APSCUF Office (off campus). Student support of the strike has been phenomenal, with students bringing drinks and food throughout the day. Many people participate all day, over several shifts. Members report how interesting it is to converse with so many colleagues and students from other academic departments while doing picket duty. Allan Benn with his bullhorn keeps the chanting going, the pickets marching, and grants numerous interviews to the media. (Indeed, Doug and Nancy have a conversation urging Allan to take a break, so he doesn't wear himself out for day 2). A student reporter from the campus newspaper, *The Stroud Courier*, goes into major classroom buildings throughout the day. He tweets out photos and status reports that only a few classes have been held. His photos show most empty classrooms. Only a handful of faculty members have crossed the picket lines on day 1.

#### *October 20–21: Days 2 and 3 of Strike*

APSCUF faculty participation remains high. Student support increases. Almost no students are even attempting to enter the classroom buildings and very few classes are held. Allan Benn is constantly front and center at the central picketing location, always with the bull horn, always available to the media. Nancy VanArsdale and Sandy Eckard use Facebook and other forms of social media throughout the strike. The mayor of the borough and other members of the nearby community stop by to show their support. AFTER 4 PM on October 21: social media notifies ESU APSCUF membership that strike is over.

*Returning to Work:*

The ESU APSCUF membership returned to their classrooms the following week, with many, many faculty pleased with the unity generated during the three days of the strike as well as the tentative agreement. Faculty attended follow-up meetings to learn about the details. ESU APSCUF organized a happy hour at a nearby craft beer pub and a celebratory dinner for the strike leadership and picket captains, celebrating APSCUF camaraderie, solidarity and success. Indeed, the faculty who picketed at our branch campus site in the Lehigh Valley held their own celebration at a faculty home near that branch. A thank you day for students was organized, with APSCUF members handing out goody bags with thank you messages.

Members of ESU APSCUF and especially the ESU APSCUF Executive Council felt the strike actually led to a new sense of purpose, since so much of the strike mission had been about quality issues. Allan Benn continued to speak out at our organizational meetings, making sure all faculty members understood the strike's success. The three-day strike generated a positive outcome, and ESU APSCUF members felt stronger bonds than ever with other faculty at ESU and the 13 other PASSHE universities. ESU faculty eagerly returned to work at the beautiful Pocono university by the Delaware Water Gap.





## **Out of Concern for Students, APSCUF Puts Off Job-Action Vote Until Next Delegate Assembly**

April 9, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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After two hours of heated debate that featured anger and frustration at the lack of progress at the negotiations table and disrespect shown to faculty and coaches at last month's appropriations hearings in the General Assembly, delegates at the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties' legislative assembly today determined they would not take a job action this academic year, which ends this May. Instead, delegates voted to call for a strike-authorization vote at either an emergency legislative assembly in the summer or at their regularly scheduled September meeting, should there be no progress at the negotiations table.

"There was palpable outrage in the room, and for most of the debate, it seemed certain we would move toward a strike," said Dr. Kenneth M. Mash, APSCUF's president.

“However, in the end, my colleagues believed that a strike at the very end of the semester would unfairly burden students and their families. Uncertainty about the budget and the complications of tuition increases have made this a very stressful semester for students. My colleagues wanted to make it clear that their frustration lies with the State System administration and not with the students.

“However, everyone has their limits, and it is clear the delegates are close to theirs. If no progress is made soon, there will certainly be a job action in the future.”

One delegate wanted to make certain that the State System got the message clearly, and his pronouncement, “talk or we walk,” was met with thunderous applause.

APSCUF members have been working under an expired contract for almost a year, and APSCUF was never offered the type of one-year deal signed by Pennsylvania’s other public-sector workers. The most recent negotiations session was Jan. 8, and the next negotiations session is slated for April 28. Neither the faculty nor the coaches at the State System universities have ever been on strike.

The Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.



## **Contract Negotiations End in Frustration and Anger – 04/28/2016**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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Faculty contract negotiations between the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF) and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education ended with disappointment and frustration today.

“The State System actually presented us with a one-year proposal that was worse than the one they had given us earlier,” APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said.

Earlier this month, faculty decided not to strike during this academic year out of concern for the difficulties students faced during the extensive state budget battle. “We were angered by the lack of progress being made at the negotiations table and upset with the attacks by legislators and state system officials on faculty during the legislature’s appropriations hearings last month,” said APSCUF Vice President Dr. Jamie Martin. “Our faculty were ready to go on strike, but we pulled back for the sake of our students.

Today the State System ignored our good will and decided to fan the flames.”

The State System shared a one-year contract proposal that was virtually identical to an earlier counterproposal that seeks to shift nearly \$9 million in health care costs to faculty. The only difference was that this proposal delayed a step increase until June. “They took an insulting proposal that we had already rejected, and they made it worse,” Mash said. “Of course, we rejected it immediately.” Every other statewide public sector union signed a one-year deal and received a step increase in January of last year.

Faculty negotiators countered with a proposal with a one-year deal with a retroactive step increase, but unlike previous proposals it did not include additional money for research. “We sought to compromise, but System negotiators virtually sneered at our proposal before rejecting it. Our legislative assembly is set to meet again later this summer or early in the fall to discuss authorizing a strike. The State System knows this, and rather than try to seek compromise, System negotiators chose to be provocative,” said Mash.

Today’s meeting was the first negotiations session between the parties since Jan. 8. Negotiations, which have been ongoing since late 2014, had been slated to continue Feb. 12, but the State System requested later dates due to personnel changes.

The next negotiations session is scheduled for June 10, 2016. The collective-bargaining agreement between the parties expired June 30, 2015.

APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California,

Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.



## **State System Proposal Harmful to Quality Education, APSCUF Leaders Warn – 06/10/2016**

June 10, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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Negotiators for the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties are outraged after today's bargaining session with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, held at APSCUF's Harrisburg office.

The State System's comprehensive contract proposal includes:

- Increasing the minimum number of courses adjuncts must teach to be considered full-time employees — but without increasing pay, effectively cutting their salaries by 20 percent
- Permitting people without master's or doctoral degrees to teach courses
- Increasing the number of different courses adjunct faculty have to teach in a semester

- Giving administrators the unfettered ability to move faculty members among departments and teaching sites
- Attempting to shift nearly \$9 million in healthcare costs to faculty, including adjunct faculty who will pay more with reduced salaries
- Eliminating funding used by faculty to keep up-to-date in their disciplines

“The hallmark of our universities has always been that students will learn from highly credentialed faculty members who are dedicated to their students and their universities,” said Dr. Jamie Martin, APSCUF’s vice president and chair of the faculty negotiations team. “Our alumni consistently point fondly at that aspect of their university experience. The State System now openly seeks to undermine that quality.”

APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash echoed Martin’s reaction to the proposal.

“Every student, every parent, and every alumnus of our universities should be insulted by the proposals the State System put on the table today,” Mash said. “In fact, every resident of the Commonwealth ought to be alarmed. The faculty will not sit idly by while the leadership of the State System tries to move our great universities in the direction of Trump University.”

The faculty contract expired June 30, 2015, and this was the State System’s first comprehensive, multiyear proposal since bargaining began in late 2014. Previously, the State System offered one-year contract proposals that called for similar givebacks. Other statewide public-sector unions signed one-year deals that included step increases in January 2015.

“Now we know why the State System waited over a year to put these proposals on the table,” Martin said. “They knew how angry we would be.”

APSCUF negotiators presented a series of proposals that sought to improve working conditions and salaries for faculty, particularly those at the lower end of the pay scale.

“We are a union; that is what we try to do,” Mash said. “Our goal is always to attract and retain the best faculty we possibly can.

“We are fully expecting the System to distort our intent and to manufacture some theoretical cost. We are prepared now — and we have been prepared for more than a year — to negotiate seriously. There is no part of our being that desires a strike, but we will make that stand with pride to protect our students and ourselves.”

Delegates at APSCUF’s April legislative assembly voted to postpone a strike-authorization vote until either the summer or early fall. If a majority of APSCUF delegates call for a strike-authorization vote, the next step is for full APSCUF faculty members to vote on their campuses. A simple majority of faculty members gives Mash, in consultation with APSCUF’s negotiations committee, the authority to set a strike date.

Neither the faculty nor the coaches at the State System universities have ever been on strike.

APSCUF has not set a date for a special legislative assembly. Its regularly scheduled assembly meets in September.

“There is enough in their contract proposals the State System presented today to insult and harm every faculty mem-



ber, but we are used to that,” Mash said. “Going after the quality of our students’ education goes over the line. We will not be participants in the undermining of the System’s legislatively mandated charge to deliver a quality education to our students.”

Negotiators previously met April 28. That meeting was the first negotiations session between the parties since Jan. 8. The next negotiations session is scheduled for June 24.

APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.

