



Fund the Freeze Campaign

In the summer of 2016, AFT-Wisconsin's Higher Education Council (HEC) had just coordinated a series of No Confidence votes assailing UW System President Ray Cross and the Board of Regents for their attacks on tenure rights. HEC members now turned their attention to another facet of Governor Scott Walker's attacks on the UW: a mandatory student tuition freeze that deprived UW campuses of revenue, leading to staff and program cuts as costs inevitably continued to rise.

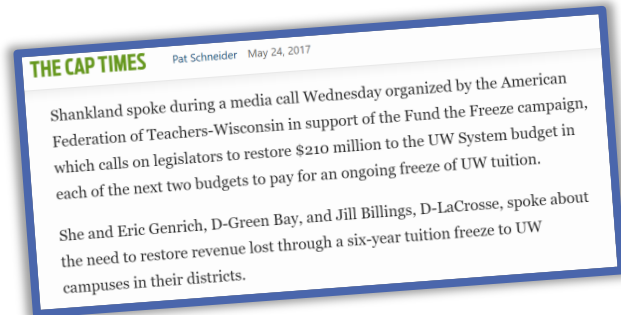
While faculty and staff believed in the need to curb tuition increases that threatened student access to the UW, they also knew that a pure tuition freeze could only lead to declining quality of education for the same students Walker claimed to be defending. The solution? The legislature needed to *fund* the freeze, providing adequate funding in each budget to make up for lost revenue.

Over the course of the 2016-17 academic year, members launched the Fund the Freeze campaign. They created a Fund the Freeze pledge online and made buttons and posters to distribute on every campus. Then at every campus, members used a variety of strategies to push and publicize the idea on their individual campus and in their communities.

The United Faculty and Academic Staff (AFT #223) of UW-Madison held a panel discussion on Funding the Freeze with state senator Chris Taylor. UW-Green Bay United (AFT #6511) invited state representative Eric Genrich and state senator Dave Hansen to a classroom event on the future of the UW. The United Academic Professionals of UW-La Crosse (UAPUWL, AFT #6502) recruited members and allies to a Legislative Forum on Higher Education, featuring senator Jennifer Shilling and representative Jill Billings.



Many other campuses passed resolutions through shared governance bodies, including River Falls, Stevens Point, Green Bay, Whitewater, La Crosse, and Milwaukee. Above all, using face to face organizing and digital advertising, members garnered nearly 1500 signatures in support of the idea, including state legislators and AFT President Randi Weingarten.



At the state level, in addition to supplying resources and support for the coordinated campaign, AFT-Wisconsin hosted a media call in support of the Fund the Freeze Campaign. The call was attended by Reps. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point), Eric Genrich (D-Green Bay), and Jill Billings (D-La Crosse).



All the organizing and attention worked. By 2018, State Superintendent Tony Evers would cast a dissenting vote against the Walker-dominated Board of Regents proposed budget to the legislature, declaring that the amount was too low. “(Tuition) is going to be frozen . . . We need to fully fund that,” he declared.

In 2019, state representative Katrina Shankland and state senator Dave Hansen went on to propose the “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” legislative bill package, which proposed not only to fund the freeze, but to require the legislature to fund all future tuition freezes. AFT-Wisconsin members supported this initiative too, gathering petition signatures from members and the public. AFT-Wisconsin President Kim Kohlhaas published an op-ed to promote the package, noting that “These bills would undo some of the damage from Governor Walker’s [attacks on the UW]. They would offer students a terrific education that still wouldn’t sink their lives with debt.”

Now we have a state budget proposal that will fund the freeze and more.

What will union faculty and staff do to make sure it passes?