

## **“What’s Your Arrest Record Like?”**

*Wesley Scott McMasters*

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

When Allen Ginsberg performed his first public reading of *Howl* in October of 1955, he couldn’t have imagined me at 27 years old, pursuing a PhD in Literature and working for a small poetry press in central Pennsylvania, reading lines from “Howl” over a megaphone after a rainstorm during a faculty strike.

My colleagues, many with tenure, many who were my professors in my graduate seminars in semesters past, as well as many who were frantically writing dissertations, teaching composition classes, and taking comprehensive exams, all rallied together in solidarity along the front lines in clothes none of them would wear to class. Something about the designation of ABD and Part-time/Temporary faculty, along with an APSCUF membership card, gave an opportunity for unification that I hadn’t felt from my office filled with other not-quite-PhDs.

Something in the atmosphere bordered on a sense of rebellion. Our students stood behind us in solidarity in a display that never softened; their spirits stayed as strong as ours through the three days of uncertainty. We were all fueled by pizza, lukewarm coffee, and bottles of water the students distributed to us with smiles and handshakes from the other side of the picket line. We were there for them, and they were

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there for us. We all wanted to be back in the classroom as soon as possible (though I'm sure students somewhat enjoyed a few days of reprieve). The sun shining and the guitar playing from my office mate on the first day ensured that our wills were strong.

The second day we continued to ride on the spirits of our colleagues, hopeful that our statement would not land on deaf ears. Hopeful that our students would continue to understand why we were standing outside with signs instead of standing in our classrooms reading *Howl*.

On the third day, the rain fell, and so did attendance on the picket line.

*I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed  
by madness, starving hysterical naked*

Students shared umbrellas, still on their side of the picket line, offering support as best they could from a dry distance. We shared canopies or mourned our soaked clothes in solidarity. The guitar playing had ceased, and all we had was the memory of an acoustic version of some Rage against the Machine or Woody Guthrie song. We walked along the lines, holding signs that were becoming illegible, tired and rain-soaked, like us.

*who passed through universities with radiant  
cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-  
light tragedy among the scholars of war*

We heard snippets of intellectual conversation—dissertation work halted, the points of each syllabus to which we would soon return. Students began to talk about how we would make up classes if the strike continued into the next week.

Someone mentioned that Temple's strike in 1990 lasted 29 days.

*who talked continuously seventy hours from  
park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the  
Brooklyn Bridge*

I remembered that I was supposed to teach *Howl* that day in class. When the Student Government Association's president was done chanting through his megaphone, I asked to borrow it.

*who wept at the romance of the streets with  
their pushcarts full of onions and bad music*

When I had finished part one, most people had dispersed, aside from my roommate, a few close friends, and my favorite professors, who were quite excited to hear some poetry in place of the typical chanting. I continued to deliver my reading of *Howl*, class in session or not.

Someone, who knows me as a poet and as a student of literature, asked what my arrest record was like.

*ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe,  
and now you're really in the total animal soup  
of time—*

It felt good. It felt like the transition from classroom to street was smooth. It felt like the divide wasn't there—and often, it shouldn't be. Our responsibilities stay the same whether the students are in front of us in a classroom or behind us on a picket line.

*the madman bum and angel beat in Time, un-  
known, yet putting down here what might be left  
to say in time come after death, / and rose rein-  
carnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the  
goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suf-  
fering of America's naked mind for love into an  
eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry  
that shivered the cities down to the last radio*

It's powerful when our students realize that *Howl* wasn't just written for Carl Solomon, but that it was also written for them. Sometimes we, as educators, as teachers with a responsibility to our students, need to remember that we are also still students and that we never stop learning. An APSCUF

card and letters like ABD or PhD don't change that. Sometimes, we would do well to remember that *Howl* was also written for us, tenured, dissertation defended, student, or otherwise.

*with the absolute heart of the poem of life  
butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a  
thousand years*

## **Our Laboring Bodies**

*Timothy Oleksiak*

University of Massachusetts, Boston

It is easy to forget that professors are laborers.

Rosie the Riveter, John Henry, or the iconic photograph of construction workers eating lunch on high beams above the New York City metropolis are much more accessible versions of the laborer than the oft bespectacled professor in her smart dress shirt or his stylish sweater. We do not often fit this image and so when issues of academic *labor* arise in public discourse, it can feel strange: Our public demands for equity and labor justice read too easily as the privileged simply asking for more.

The perception of the academic as anything but a laborer is perpetuated by common, negative stereotypes that pit us against more accessible images of laborers. When Pennsylvania State senator Pat Vance asked Chancellor Brogan how many hours faculty *teach* each week, Brogan's answer was "17." Never was there a clearer indication that faculty laborers were viewed with such contempt. The lie of the 17-hour workweek is part of a systematic alienation of academic labor from other forms of labor. "Those soft professors don't deserve what they have! They only work 17 hours!" The 17-hour lie re-enforces the image of "ivory tower" academics that are out of touch with the lived realities of communities. Compounding this image of the out-of-touch professor is

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false information about tenure. There is a widespread misunderstanding of what tenure is and how faculty work to gain it. Such misunderstandings contribute to the alienation of academic laborers from other laborers.

We are laborers.

And while there are many meaningful differences between the assembly line worker and the academic worker, between the journeyman drywaller, and the tenure-seeking professor, our bodies are shaped by the labor we do just as our labor is shaped by the bodies we possess. Together we struggle for equity and justice; we struggled for the right to be recognized for our labor. Those three days in October 2016 brought this to my attention in powerful and sustained ways.

I would not cross the line. I would not fear retaliation from management. And as a tenure-seeking professor, I walked right up to the high-profile picket locations at Bloomsburg University and I held my sign and joined the chants early in the morning. And I walked in circles in front of the iconic Carver Hall, the seat of upper management. And I walked in circles with arms raised. And I walked in circles and learned of new faculty members from different departments. And I walked with my union siblings, united, talking about justice and fairness and families and students and the need for our exploitation to end. And I walked in circles, arms above my hips. And I walked in the cold. I walked past students sitting on the steps of Carver Hall who came to support us, came to look, came to see what was happening. I walked between shifts and between picket locations where I was needed. Sometimes we were silent. Sometimes we were energetic and loud; proud of the messages we were sending to our students and our communities.

I walked the line.

Slowly.

And when my shifts were over my body was in pain. It wasn't the pain of an unhealthy man, a man who keeps telling himself to go to the gym or who struggles to eat the right foods. It was an ache in my lower back, feet, shoulders, hips,

and arms. It was a pain from the clenched jaw of a stressed man who walked with others going nowhere but around. Each step brought me closer to my siblings, closer to our goal, closer to the respect we deserved. And we ached. Our bodies moving in circles ached. For three days we walked. We ached.

The picket forced me to explore my body as a laboring body, as a body that hurt. Laboring academics exhaust our bodies. We work long hours without breaks or food. We worry our bodies. Will we get published? Will we be able to reach our students? Will we labor enough to prove ourselves? What if I get sick? We spend nights and weekends laboring in locations of our choosing over the work our students produce. We hunch our backs, cramp our necks, work our fingers, and strain our eyes.

Our bodies are laboring bodies.

Our bodies produce the work for others to consume, use, and reproduce elsewhere. Our bodies are laboring bodies. And it should go without saying that this hurt, this exhaustion, this body-work, is different from other laborers who sting from the heat of molten lead, who itch from the bite of construction dust, who burn from the fumes of poisonous cleanser. But it is the body-work that wears us down. It is in the body-work where we find our common strength, our common purpose. The products of our labor may be different and the effects of the ways we labor on our bodies may be different, but our laboring bodies and the ways in which these bodies are valued and worked is our common cause.

Our bodies are laboring bodies.

The line teaches me to think differently about academic labor. The line is the location where we come together as bodies working toward a common goal. The line brings us together, away from our individual labor-acts and toward a renewed spirit of solidarity in the face of alienation from other laboring bodies. The line reminds us that we are in control of our labor. It reminds us that bodies, *not* abstractions, make the products that circulate. We are united on the line, a

line that can extend beyond our individual working conditions. The line taught me that we must not allow our academic labor to be alienated from other forms of labor. The line gives us cause and purpose. We imagine the line not just as a horizon toward which we march, but also as a location at which our bodies are present as laboring bodies. It is on the line where our bodies represent the force of our solidarity and the courage of our union.



## **Faculty Members Head into Second Day of Strike as AP-SCUF Negotiators Wait for State System to Continue Bargaining - 10/20/2016**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Kathryn Morton, [kmorton@apscuf.org](mailto:kmorton@apscuf.org) or 717-236-7486

Faculty members at all 14 state-owned universities are on the picket lines for a second day after a strike began 5 a.m. Wednesday, Oct. 19.

Meanwhile, Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties negotiators still are waiting for Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education to return to the bargaining table.

“We waited until 5 a.m. before the strike, even after the State System told us they were done talking — and we continued to wait even on the picket lines — for a call from the State System to signal they were ready to settle a contract

so our faculty members can return to their students,” APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said. “We even took to social media to ask them return, but they did not go to the table.”

The day before the strike, negotiators were in their fifth consecutive day of talks at a neutral location. Tuesday afternoon, Gov. Tom Wolf issued a statement urging the sides to settle the contract and avoid a strike. But around 8:45 p.m., the State System handed APSCUF a last best offer and said it was done negotiating. After the fact, the System spokesperson said their team was waiting around.

“They told us they were done talking to us, they lifted the media embargo that was in place during negotiations, and they gave us a ‘last, best offer,’ which is negotiations speak for ‘go on strike,’” Mash said. “If they stayed, it was only for appearances. It’s clear the real decision-makers were finished for the night.”

APSCUF reviewed the 25-page proposal, in which the State System wants to:

- Cut funding for faculty scholarship and professional development that allows faculty to bring current knowledge to their classes.
- Substantially increase the number of interns faculty members would be required to supervise — by 67 percent, with no additional pay.
- Put adjunct faculty members, 60 percent of whom are women, on a separate — lower — salary scale. APSCUF is concerned about this as a pay-equity issue, Mash said. While the State System’s proposal did include raises, those raises were higher for higher-ranking faculty and lower for

lower-ranking ones, a further unfairness APSCUF believes was meant to divide union members, Mash said. APSCUF is proud to have adjunct faculty members in its union and wants them treated with the same respect as tenured professors, Mash said.

- Cut faculty benefits and charge more for them, even after APSCUF “accepted dramatic reductions in our healthcare coverage and accepted proposals to shift millions of dollars in healthcare costs to our members by accepting deductibles, increased copays for prescriptions and other givebacks,” Mash said. “But these concessions weren’t enough for the State System and Frank Brogan.”
- Take millions more in concessions from faculty than any other employees. APSCUF offered a wage package substantially smaller than other state employees, by a factor of \$31 million for a bargaining unit of more than 5,000, Mash said.

Other issues of concern in the State System’s proposal include changing the tenure and promotion processes, the removal of grievance rights for evaluations, delaying retrenchment decisions, making it easier to retrench, and making it harder for retrenchees to get benefits and find new jobs. Meanwhile, the chancellor and the university presidents took substantial pay increases last year.

APSCUF members will remain on strike until negotiators reach a contract agreement APSCUF believes is fair to students and to faculty. APSCUF will announce when it schedules a next negotiations session.

“For goodness’ sake, Chancellor Brogan, stop playing games,” Mash said. “Let’s devote our full energies to reaching an agreement so that the students get back to the classroom.”

This is the first strike in APSCUF's history. The faculty contract expired June 30, 2015, and negotiations have been ongoing since late 2014.

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.