

50-Year Member Interviews

The University of Iowa Chapter of the AAUP has three 50-year members, Ellis Holley, Ed Kottick, and Brad Sagen. Membership secretary Frank Durham was able to interview two of these 50-year members during the fall of 2009.

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Ed Kottick

Ed Kottick joined the AAUP 50 years ago when he was a master's student at Tulane University in New Orleans. The decision to join was easy, he said. His dissertation advisor simply told him, "This is your professional organization." As a result, he also joined the American Musicological Society at the time.

Although retired from the UI Music faculty in 1992, the Kottick's scholarly career remains in full swing. Although his first instrument was the trombone—he has recently picked it back up after several decades—he builds harpsichords and clavichords as an agent for Zuckerman Harpsichords International. He said he saw his first harpsichord kit when he was at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill when he was completing his doctorate there.

His scholarship on the instrument has produced three books, including "The Harpsichord Owner's Guide" with George Lucktenberg, "Early Keyboard Instruments in European Museums," and his latest, "A History of the Harpsichord," which covers the instrument's 600-year history.

As Kottick reflected over changes he has seen in the AAUP since 1959, he noted that the UI chapter was "bigger than it is now" and that the requirements, as well as the administrative process of tenure, have changed enormously since then.

"When I got tenure," he said, "I found out by reading it in the FYI. I didn't know I was up for tenure!"

He said, "My model of the university was the Golden Age," the era of post-war prosperity when universities around the country had larger budgets and plenty of students.

As he considered the tenuous position of contingent faculty on today's campus, he said, "There is no point in tilting at windmills. We have to modify the way we look at higher education," he said. "We have to ask how to accommodate it?"

Striking a positive note, Kottick concluded, "I think the U. of I. is in a far better position than many others as far as shared governance. The AAUP is there to help the faculty. Hopefully, you won't ever need that help. But by joining, you help the faculty."

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Brad Sagen

At the urging of a professor at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Brad Sagen joined the AAUP as a young graduate student. He continued his activities in the organization at the University of Illinois—Champagne-Urbana where he completed his doctorate in Education. He even published his first scholarly report in the AAUP Bulletin in 1959.

In that year, academic freedom topped the national AAUP agenda. McCarthyism still lingered in the air. And the University of Illinois was being censured by the AAUP for the university's—and the state legislature's—interference in response to a letter to the editor published in the school's newspaper.

In 1964, Sagen like many others was required to sign a loyalty oath at the University of Illinois. As a result, he wrote a public letter of protest declaring that he was not a Communist.

As Sagen recalled, “The AAUP played a large role” in the Illinois affair.

He added, “In this era, universities were susceptible to the censure of the AAUP.” They really did not want to be on that list, because one “might think twice before going to a school that had been censured.”

By comparison, he said that today the censure list “tends to be smaller, often (made up) of private universities that can be dominated by boards of trustees. That part of it has changed.”

By comparison, he said, “I think Iowa has done well in terms of what we consider academic freedom.”

Sagen also noted significant changes in the tenure system over time.

“The tenure process was much more casual then,” he said. I don't recall ever submitting anything” for review in the tenure process.

In all, Sagen sees the AAUP as a central resource to the faculty and to the university, especially in times of distress. He recommended recruiting new members from “units being affected by conflicts either within the unit or with the administration.”

Over the past 50 years, he said, “Problems have changed as external demands have shifted.” And the AAUP in its advisory capacity has been there.

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