



Letter from the Editor

Tim Barnett

Gov. Bruce Rauner seems to inspire as much pessimism as antagonism among many because he seems untouchable. He is in office for a few more years, and the recall process in Illinois is excruciatingly difficult. He probably does not plan on being re-elected and has enough money to continue to wreak havoc on the state of Illinois. And there is nothing we can do about it.

Or is there? I think it's true that we will not change Gov. Rauner's mind about the way the world should be run, even though our organizing **has** made a difference. However, we can get to him through his allies.

UPI members Alison Dover and Nancy Matthews visited State Reps Daniel Biss and Laura Fine over spring break, and the message from these two was clear: We need to speak directly to those Republican representatives under the most pressure to abandon the governor's agenda, reps from the college towns of Macomb, Charleston, and elsewhere. Republicans from these areas are vulnerable and worried about re-election in the fall. Therefore, on Monday, May 16, UPI members will converge on towns like Macomb (home of Western Illinois Univ.) to picket and talk to people in the community, who recognize more than ever that threats to their universities are threats to their community's economic and cultural survival.

We need to bring 25-50 people from NEIU to join hundreds in one of these towns on May 16. We can create a real victory if we mobilize, **but only if we mobilize**. We probably cannot speak in a way that makes sense to Rauner, but we can speak to his allies—who are already uncomfortable and facing pressure from their constituencies—who understand and respect the language of voting. Of course, we cannot vote to unseat these pols in the fall, but we can join with those who can to show them that the whole state is watching: The fate of the universities they represent, the fate of their communities, the fate of the state in many ways rests on their shoulders. They will be held accountable.

I fear that faculty, students, staff, and others will be busy on May 16 or will think that a trip to a campus town in Illinois will be a waste of time. However, we **can** beat Rauner if we come together this spring and summer and use the threat of fall elections to change the voting habits of just a few state Republicans—just a few. And that would be a sweet victory for those of us who sometimes feel helpless against the Rauner onslaught.

IMPORTANT DATES: MARK YOUR CALENDARS

May 16: Gather downstate to convince Republican politicians to save the schools they represent. Return to Chicago that night.

May 23-24: Call and email those same politicians so they know we are watching.

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Editor's Note:

This is a special issue of the UPI newsletter because it presents visions for NEIU from three of our faculty members. There is no reason to push aside our visions as we battle those who see schools only as potential sites of profit and students only as cogs in a massive economic machine run by a few. Faculty and staff need to imagine how NEIU might be an even more vibrant place for working people, first-generation students, immigrants, students of color, and others, and we need to imagine how to make our visions reality.

In the next issue of the newsletter, I will be asking staff and those working outside the classroom for their visions of NEIU, so please feel free to contact me if you would like to contribute.

My Vision

Emily Garcia

I teach at NEIU because I want to teach students whose education matters deeply to them. When I ask students what brings them to class, most of them mention others: Their parents, children, siblings, friends growing up, folks they left back home, the ones they hope to reach in the future. This motivation brings to Northeastern a deep sense of commitment, of community, and of respect for the process of learning. Each classroom also forges its own community of learners who might otherwise have very little in common. Such a learning community sharpens the ideas, outcomes, and stakes of every reading, every assignment, every project and discussion.

As I look to the next ten years at NEIU, I expect we will foster our deep ties to community in its most transformative forms: To inspire leadership, accountability, respect, innovation, and excellence in learning and service. And I expect we will deepen our commitment to research and scholarship: To offer increasing student support (financial and otherwise); to allow faculty to develop their potential as researchers and creative agents and to bring their work to the classroom; to find creative ways to develop systems of support for our mission, despite budget threats, an increasing class gap, and the anti-intellectualism seen in some quarters of our culture. I expect that Northeastern, as an institution, will continue to meet our students where they are and deepen its commitment to get them where they want to be.

My Vision

John Casey

At NEIU, we have a highly qualified, internationally recognized, and deeply committed faculty; we have attracted a student body whose diversity enriches NEIU's educational experience in uncountable ways and whose achievements match those of any university; we have carefully developed and sustained a general education program grounded in the liberal arts, but responsive to innovation in scholarship and pedagogy, that prepares our students for success as scholars and citizens; and, finally, we have a faculty-to-student ratio that would be the envy of any Liberal Arts college. My vision for NEIU is that we continue in our mission to serve the public trust by remaining true to our values, especially those of excellence and access.

My Vision

Erica Meiners

Most days I am excited because I know that NEIU is the future. Yet, sometimes I feel like we're working against deficit logic. "Our students don't graduate in six years. Our students can't write. Our students are not college ready."

I want to respond that Darren took custody of his niece and nephew this semester. He's brilliant and funny and a shining star in class. He's taking eight years to graduate because he's working full-time and is caring for family. And Andre works the night shift at Target in addition to her day job. She often has to work after her 8 a.m. punch-out and struggles to be on time for our 9 a.m. class. Even with too many commitments, she showed up for the Dyett hunger strikers last fall. She will be a fabulous teacher. And the students who are organizing over formidable challenges (including the Formerly Incarcerated Students Together; the Feminist Collective; and Undocumented, Resilient, and Organized) are actively making the world we need. These students are key to a future of free post-secondary education and possibility.

What we have now is unacceptable.

Pell Grants cover less than 32% of a student's annual college costs. Being a student increasingly means amassing debt with little hope of paying it off. Nationally, only 25% of all post-secondary classes are taught by tenure-stream faculty (workers who have some employment protection and reasonable compensation). Most public universities have been all but abandoned by their states and receive inadequate funding.

Exercising our imaginations to build alternatives is possible. We only have to look one or two countries over to imagine how post-secondary education could be different: High quality and accessible public education? Unionized faculty and students? Low or free tuition? From Montreal to Chile, from Puerto Rico to South Africa, students, faculty, and staff are demanding change. Yet somehow, for us, this imagining is difficult. Bent by the landscapes of capitalism and white supremacy and by decades of learning inside institutions that shame audacity, praise pragmatism, and punish dissent, we have consigned imagining to a lowly place. Imagining is to open oneself up to the possibility that everything could be otherwise.

What other choice do we have?