

the human rights bulletin at American University

An independent guide to the real AU

Fall 2015 #1

As a new student at AU, you may not know some of the details of how the AU world is organized.

When you walk into a dean's office or the financial aid office, you will meet individuals with adequate salaries and some of the best benefit packages outside of Silicon Valley. Their morale should be high and they should be happy to see you.

What exactly are the benefits AU employees—faculty and staff—receive?

- **Free Classes.** Many are here for a free master's degree which they can begin after four months of service; they and their partners enjoy free tuition for one class a semester as long as they work here.
- **Free Tuition for Children.** After their parents work at AU for two years, the children of staff and faculty can attend AU fulltime, undergraduate or graduate school, for free.
- **Tuition Exchange Program.** If their children would like to leave home, and attend college with a large scholarship somewhere else, this is also available to the children of AU staff and faculty through the Tuition Exchange Program with over 500 other colleges and universities.
- **Retirement Accounts.** And the University also provides all fulltime staff and faculty with an extremely generous pension contribution of ten percent a month.



Ms. Leila Williams, age 76, says that she can't afford to retire after 49 years at AU.

Inequality at AU

But there is an another side to the AU story. All workers have not been treated equally here for years.

The people who arrive at 6 A.M. to prepare food for your breakfast do not partake in the AU feast of benefits.

- They do not receive free classes for themselves. And as you might expect, they would love free tuition for their children, but they do not receive it.
- They do not receive the same contributions to their retirement accounts given other workers here.

So many of them can't afford to retire now, and must work into their late seventies or older. Ms. Leila Williams said she can't afford to retire. And she is not alone. One 66-year old worker with 38 years at the university has only \$11,000 in her retirement account.

Why are the Service Workers Left Out?

Why are the service workers treated differently than the other workers at the university?

In order to save money on pensions and health benefits, the University subcontracted service work—such as cooking and cleaning—to vendors in the early 1980s.

Since they now work for a vendor, the university has pushed them aside. The university has washed its hands of any responsibility to the service workers since privatization began. It has continued to pretend the service workers do not work on campus, and do not deserve the slightest attention from AU. It pretends that they are not AU workers.

Aramark and Marriot

The current vendor is Aramark for all food and cleaning services on campus. Aramark now makes a small contribution to the retirement accounts of workers. But this vendor does not have the authority to provide tuition remission. Nor is it the responsibility of Aramark to fund retirement accounts which the first private vendor—Marriot—did not fund in the 1980s and 1990s.

Over the years, the university has said that if service workers want tuition remission, just bargain for it with the vendor. But the Aramark can't provide this benefit. Only AU can. When will the university do the right thing?

What Can You Do to Help?

1. Please find out more about the retirement crisis. Ask the older workers in the Terrace Dining Room when they expect to retire. Or ask the cleaners in the residence halls.
2. Ask them how much how much they make an hour and how many weeks they work a year to get an idea of their incomes.
3. Also help spread the word about how AU treats it service workers. Please add the URL of this flyer <http://tinyurl.com/pgdlnb4> to your Facebook page so that your friends will see that the AU brand is more than thoughtful faculty and beautiful buildings.

It is also a long-standing tradition of the mistreatment of service workers on campus.

4. Ask your friends on other campuses what the situation for service workers is where they are studying.
5. Please write us at info@decencyatau.org with your suggestions for the next steps: lobbying of deans, lobbying of the Board of Trustees, civil disobedience on or off campus to publicize the situation, etc.

For more information:

Join the AU Student Worker Alliance on Facebook.

See the articles of a student about the working conditions the cleaners on campus face at Exploited Wonk Blog at AU <https://exploitedwonks.wordpress.com/>

See <http://tinyurl.com/q9bs8t2> for the first labor contract with Marriot which ended retirement accounts from the early 80s to around 2005.

Please write us at info@decencyatau.org if you would like to provide a future story about a worker or research for the next issue of this newsletter.

You can download copies of this flyer at <http://decencyatau.org> and please share this flyer with a classmate to save paper.

This web site and this newsletter are the work of a group of faculty and staff who met with service workers a number of times over the summer. These issues are what the service workers have asked us to publicize and push on campus this year.