



Dr. Jeffery Kallberg, Professor of Music  
Associate Dean, School of Arts and Sciences  
University of Pennsylvania

April 13, 2024

Dear Dean Kallberg:

At the University of Pennsylvania today, as at many other U.S. colleges and universities, non-tenure track employees provide most of the instruction to students. We write to urge the university administration to pay Deaf Lecturers in the American Sign Language (ASL) Program—who are members of this Task Force and authors of this letter—at a level commensurate with our qualifications and experience. Low and stagnant salaries and restricted benefits make it increasingly difficult for Penn to recruit and retain experienced ASL instructors, with detrimental consequences to the College of Arts and Sciences Language Program and the university's demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Penn Human Resources website clearly states that:

*Salary offers are made based on the candidate's qualifications, experience, skills, and education as they directly relate to the requirements of the position; as well as internal equity, external market benchmarks, and grade profile.*

Yet, Penn's salary offers to its ASL instructors, and for many other adjunct faculty positions, have fallen behind the market. Despite a demonstrated track record of high enrollments for many years, continually increasing experience in the classroom, and our own subjectivity as Deaf instructors, **our base rate of pay has permanently increased only once in the past two decades.** Notwithstanding the occasional bonuses we negotiated or "merit pay," this raises questions about how the university is capitalizing on our lived experience as Deaf people, as well as our long experience in ASL pedagogy.

Instituting a "step system" for wages would allow the teaching experience of instructors to be appropriately reflected in both the years under their belt and their pay. How is it fair and right that skilled and experienced ASL instructors are earning the same salary as those just starting out? Such a salary system disregards the 6+ years of training we received.

Moreover, the stagnant wages at Penn are particularly burdensome to our community, for as Deaf instructors we do not have the same ability to easily change jobs in search of higher pay that the general population does. **Therefore, we request across-the-board raises immediately to compensate for years of stagnant pay, and that future step-system rates be established.**

We believe that our request is reasonable and has validity. Many states have now increased the minimum wage to \$15 to \$17 per hour, and there have been salary increases at other universities. Just recently, on

February 5, the University of the Arts administration and faculty came to a tentative agreement to base pay on a step system.

At this time, Penn pays ASL instructors \$5,700 per course. Putting in 15 weeks of preparation, teaching, grading videos, and administering final examinations at 15 hours per week translates to \$25 per hour. We spend two 5+ hour days a week teaching and holding office hours in addition to 8-10+ hours a week preparing and grading our courses. Considering how little we get paid per hour, on average, we feel we deserve to be compensated well enough to reflect Penn's high educational expectations as well as based on the years of experience we bring to our students.

**Not only are we requesting that our salaries be increased, but also that benefits be added.** It should be pointed out, for example, that many employees receive matching retirement benefits from large companies such as Starbucks, Uber, McDonald's, and Amazon.

Our research indicates that West Chester University pays their ASL instructors \$6,500 per course, and Temple University pays \$6,700, while the rate at Haverford is \$8,000-10,000 and at Swarthmore it is \$7,700-11,000. We also note that Penn, at \$5,700 per course, has the lowest pay of all ASL programs at Ivy League schools. In this light, it is easy to see why Penn has been unable to replace a key full-time ASL instructor for the past two years: the salary and benefits on offer are simply not competitive in the market, for either the full-time or part-time positions.

Many adjunct lecturers get annual raises at other colleges, so it is quite difficult to understand why Penn does not recognize that annual raises are a regular occurrence in many if not all workplaces in America. Most of us can attest that we have received yearly raises as adjuncts at West Chester University, Temple University, Arcadia University, St. Joseph's University, and Swarthmore. Penn is an unfortunate exception, not only among Ivy League schools but in the Philadelphia area.

To this end, we ask Penn to revise our contracts to reflect market conditions, and to include annual increases in pay based on the number of years we have taught at Penn. **We make these requests for the contracts now being drafted for the 2024-2025 academic year.** The newly-formed AAUP-Penn Task Force on Health, Safety, and Disability and the ASL lecturers look forward to opening a dialogue with the Penn administration. We are also making ourselves available for a dialogue with the broader Penn community and the general public through traditional media, including the *Daily Pennsylvanian* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, as well as social media.

Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to this letter.

Sincerely,

AAUP-Penn Task Force on Health, Safety, and Disability

cc:

Steven Fluharty, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences  
Provost John L. Jackson

Interim President Larry Jameson  
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