

## **I. Narrative, background and context for recommendations**

In fall 2024, at the direction of President R.J. Nemer, Provost John Wiencek initiated faculty retrenchment pursuant to Article 15 of the faculty's Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), subsequently developing an initial proposal. Through this process, better alignment of the number of faculty with student enrollments in certain data-identified academic units was sought. Under the initial proposal, numerous academic departments were identified for retrenchment, including the Department of Anthropology, the Department of Physics, the School of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering, the Myers School of Art, the Department of History, the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, and the Department of Chemical, Biomolecular and Corrosion Engineering.

Upon release of the initial provost recommendation for retrenchment, faculty were invited to exercise their right to pursue a voluntary separation package under Article 16 of the CBA. While faculty in retrenchment-identified units were encouraged to negotiate under this provision, the University engaged in conversations across campus, resulting in approximately 20 voluntary separation agreements, both within and outside of the academic areas/units identified for retrenchment. Through this multi-month process, the administration has identified more than \$3 million in faculty compensation savings.

Additionally, the president's initiation of faculty retrenchment triggered the required formation of a Joint Committee on Retrenchment (JCR). The JCR first met in December of 2024 and was tasked with considering the initial provost recommendation and the development of its advisory recommendations to the president, which may include ways to relieve the need for retrenchment by raising additional funds, by reallocating funds or by cutting or eliminating specified activities. With mutual consideration given to both the Akron-AAUP and The University of Akron, the JCR timeline was formulated, with a [final report](#) due to President R.J. Nemer by April 4, 2025.

Because the University was able to reach voluntary separation agreements with faculty in several retrenchment-identified units, negating the need for further alignment, the following recommendations exclusively address proposed retrenchment in the Department of Anthropology, the Department of Physics, the Department of Chemical, Biomolecular and Corrosion Engineering (CBCE), and the School of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering (SPSPE).

In the cases of anthropology and physics, there is both a recommended course of action and an alternative course of action, triggered if, and only if, certain contingencies for voluntary separation agreements cannot be amicably reached and past the revocation period with identified faculty before the April 25, 2025, notice deadline.

The recommendations of President R.J. Nemer, enumerated below, accomplish necessary alignments of resources in the provost's proposal, comply with and outpace the four-year targeted budget improvement plans. Workload recommendations from the JCR and follow-up process management will help mitigate the impact on faculty and the

institution. In direct comparison with the initial provost retrenchment plan and the advisory recommendations of the JCR, the so-labeled “President recommendations” that follow will likely nullify the need for retrenchment and will achieve a more desirable financial outcome.

Comparing the three sets of recommendations (initial provost recommendation, the advisory recommendation of the JCR and the current recommendation from the Office of the President) over an extended four-year window, the institution is not only able to meet the budget improvement plan but exceed it.

Through conducting independent analysis, employing short-term and long-term vision, and considering the initial retrenchment proposal and subsequent JCR advisory recommendations, President R.J. Nemer, with the full support of the Office of Academic Affairs, recommends the following:

## **II. Recommendations of President R.J. Nemer**

### **A. Department of Anthropology**

Provost recommendation: Pursuant to Article 15, eliminate six (6) full-time faculty positions through retrenchment and alternative means.

President recommendation:

1. *Contingent upon the Akron-AAUP withdrawing or settling its grievance on behalf of the Department of Anthropology:*

- The reassignment of two (2) faculty, based on appropriate expertise, to openings/needs in the College of Health and Human Sciences and the Department of Sociology (Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences).
- Pursuant to a mutual agreement on Article 16 voluntary separations and non-renewal of non-tenure track (NTT) faculty, two (2) additional faculty members will be retained in the short term to complete a departmental teach-out program, with one faculty member exiting in May of 2027, and one faculty member exiting in May of 2028.
- The remaining two (2) NTT faculty members will not be retrenched and will retain full-time faculty status until May 2026, at which time it is expected that their NTT contracts will not be renewed pursuant to the CBA.

Alternative recommendation:

2. *If the Akron-AAUP does not withdraw or settle the grievance on behalf of the Department of Anthropology, the Office of the President recommends:*

- The reassignment of two (2) faculty to openings in the College of Health and Human Sciences and the Department of Sociology (Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences).

The remaining four (4) faculty members will be required either to sign an individual voluntary separation agreement or be retrenched according to the terms of Article 15.

#### B. Department of Physics

Provost recommendation: Pursuant to Article 15, eliminate six (6) full-time faculty positions, including the department chair, through retrenchment and alternative means.

President recommendation:

- Process the three (3) current voluntary separation agreements, pursuant to Article 16, and eliminate these three (3) faculty positions no later than June 30, 2026.
- Eliminate the current department chair position and move physics instruction to another academic unit.
- Three (3) faculty members will be retained to teach core physics courses in alternative fields that may include, but are not limited to, engineering units, polymers, chemistry, biology and others. Each of these faculty members must sign Article 16 voluntary separation extensions on mutually-agreed-upon end dates.
- Relocate lab tech position to physics' new academic department to provide necessary lab support.

Alternative recommendation:

2. *If faculty members do not agree to Article 16 voluntary separation agreements, the Office of the President recommends:*
  - All remaining faculty without Article 16 agreements will be retrenched according to the terms of Article 15.

#### C. Department of Chemical, Biomolecular and Corrosion Engineering

Provost recommendation: Pursuant to Article 15, eliminate five (5) full-time faculty positions through retrenchment and alternative means.

President recommendation:

- Three positions were vacated via prior attrition or recent voluntary separations.
- Consistent with the JCR recommendation, the department is expected to realize required Student Credit Hour increases while also reducing its faculty count through attrition over the next two years.

#### D. School of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering

Provost recommendation: Pursuant to Article 15, eliminate ten (10) full-time faculty positions through retrenchment and alternative means.

President recommendation:

- No retrenchment in SPSPE at this time.
- To better mirror the policies and practices of R-1 institutions, as self-described by SPSPE, reassign workload, update workload requirements and implement a research support buy-out policy.
- The University will explore the Frontier Fund and task the Office of Research Administration (ORA) to identify and develop more opportunities in conjunction with the Polymer Innovation Hub.
- Together, the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) and the SPSPE will explore alternative structures that will best support pathways for new and expanded research activity.

### **III. Conclusion**

Carrying out the original retrenchment plan across units would result in unnecessary impacts on the faculty and lessen progress toward the budget improvement plan. Further, in SPSPE, the initial retrenchment plan would trigger the loss of research and a diminished academic reputation.

While the JCR's report and advisory recommendation represents the culmination of diligent, creative thought, it falls short of the budget improvement plan. As such, President R.J. Nemer built upon the JCR plan and fully supports pursuing the revenue-generating ideas emanating from the JCR process. Through short-term and long-term strategy, the president's recommendations enumerated above achieve the necessary faculty-to-enrollment ratios, meet teach-out obligations and student demand, and outpace the total budget savings.