

## Ad hoc committee seeks input on 'living wage' policy

BY SUE CHEN

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Student representatives from the Ad Hoc Committee on a Living Wage discussed progress made and challenges ahead at its first fireside chat last Wednesday.

The forum allowed committee members to get input from students on wage compression, formal process and the integrity of the final proposal to the Board of Managers. The committee is charged with coming up with a "living wage" — earnings that are sufficient to cover the basic costs of living — for the college's staff.

"We want this committee process not just to be something that we do behind closed doors, but something this whole community has voice in," representative Emily Brown '03 said.

Student representatives Al Bradbury '05, Rachel Burstein '04, Andy Zuppann '03 and Brown shared their research into "living wages" in local counties with an audience of about twenty. The committee is now moving out of its research phase and into drafting the proposal it will present to the board in hopes of implementing a "living wage" by the 2004-2005 school year.

### The Ad Hoc Committee on a Living Wage

#### Faculty

Aurora Camacho de Schmidt  
Charles Grinstead  
Rob Hollister  
Barry Schwartz

#### Staff

Carolyn Evans  
Lynn Grady  
Jeff Jacquith  
Deb Kardon-Brown  
Gary Morrissey  
Andre Singleton  
Melanie Young

#### Students

Al Bradbury  
Emily Brown  
Rachel Burstein  
Andrew Zuppann



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Committee members emphasized in later interviews that the committee's job is to come up with an accurate "living wage" but also said it cannot completely discount how the board might react to the proposal.

While there is no guarantee that the board would approve of the proposal, some are optimistic, especially given the support for a "living wage" here at the college. "I feel it is possible for the college to find the amount of money we will propose," Bradbury said.

The committee has been gathering "living wage" data from Women's Association for Women's Alternatives and the Economic Policy Institute. Depending on family size and location, estimates for a "living wage" in areas surrounding Swarthmore range from just over \$8 an hour to over \$20 an hour. According to the committee's Preliminary Data on Target for a Living Wage, most of the estimates center in on the \$10 to \$16 area. Currently, Swarthmore pays its lowest-wage workers \$9 an hour.

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The committee is also looking at ways to keep the hourly wage down while increasing non-monetary forms of compensation such as subsidized childcare, housing and transportation, according to Burstein.

According to the committee's calculations, a low-end wage compression estimate — assuming an arbitrary "living wage" of \$13 an hour — would cost the college around \$242,000 annually.

The committee's goal is to present its proposal at the May board meeting.

Students at the fireside chat expressed the desire for the committee to start taking minutes of their meetings and making them available to the entire student body.



**"I'm working class. Borderline...I raised my kids by myself...I can't get [federal benefits like] Section Eight [housing]. But I don't have enough."**

*Environmental Services Employee*

*(see page 4 for testimonials information)*

## **Email the Ad Hoc Committee to let them know what you think!**

### **Some points to include:**

**FIRESIDE CHAT** - Congratulate students on fireside chat & encourage faculty & staff members of committee to host similar events

**MINUTES** - Ask Committee to keep and publish minutes!

**CHILD-CARE** - Support the idea (currently under consideration) of on-site child care and/or child-care subsidy as part of a living wage.

**FAMILY WAGE** - Advocate for a living wage figure that would allow a single person to support at least 1-2 dependent children.

**REAL LIVING WAGE** - Urge the Committee not to let financial concerns compromise its ethical concerns. The Committee should deliver on its mandate, and recommend a wage it thinks people can really live on. Offer to be vocally supportive of a really fair proposal when it gets to the Board of Managers.

**LONGEVITY** - Urge the committee to consider longevity and benefits in place of, or in concert with, other measures to address wage compression. Point out that frustration with wage compression may be connected to frustration with lack opportunities for pay increases in one's own job.

**BENEFIT DISTRIBUTION** - Ask the committee to look at the policies on retirement savings, tuition reimbursement, and paid days off, and to consider making these policies more equitable for low-wage and non-exempt workers as part of a living wage proposal.

**TIMELINE** - Ask committee to nail down its timeline. Right now it's unclear when the recommendation will reach the community for input and when it will reach the Board for consideration.

**swat-lw@swarthmore.edu**

Are you a Swarthmore staff member? Student? Professor? Alum? Would you like to contribute to upcoming *Labor of Love* publication? Contact Harris (hkomstl) or Cathy (cmealsl) for more information.

