Staff claims that wages are subpar

By Mara Hvistendahl
Phoenix Staff

Kase Kalwicz is still unsatisfied. A few years ago, Kalwicz, an administrative assistant for the education department, was concerned about her own wages, which were below the national average for her profession. Then, in her sixth year of employment, she finally began making the wages she had been told that she could expect after three to five years. Now, a year later, she advocates for increased wages for others and for more openness about the College’s payment system. “To me,” she said, “this is an issue of inequity.”

Labor conditions for non-faculty staff at Swarthmore have been a source of concern for at least a decade. In 1989, a report published by the Middle States Accreditation commission brought attention to wages that stagnated below the Fair Market Value (FMV), or the average wage that a worker performing up to standards gets in the marketplace. The report described workers who felt “underpaid and undervalued.”

Since then, the College has taken steps toward fixing this problem. To an extent, according to the Accreditation Self-Study, the lack of a Human Resources director is part of an ongoing problem. The report stated that “the College has had, as a part of its culture, a default position that dollars not spent directly on student and/or faculty, are dollars not well spent. Human Resources is a good example of this neglect.”

Employees echo this concern. Kathleen Kerns, administrative assistant for the political science department, said, “I think one of the big problems is that we feel our concerns aren’t taken very seriously, while the concerns of faculty and students are taken very seriously. We’re more or less replaceable.”

Aslam said, “Faculty and students are the core center of our institution,” he said, “but the staff are crucial to the overall success of our mission.”

Kalwicz would like to agree with Aslam, but, for now, she feels that the importance of non-faculty staff is not fully recognized. “They take the humanist approach,” she said of the College administration. “We’ve always told what great workers we are, but then they don’t act on it.”

The giving tree

Trees such as this one can be seen all over campus. Students, faculty and staff have pledged to buy the gifts specified on the cards that hang from the tree.