



Rutgers Council of AAUP Chapters

American Association of University Professors • American Federation of Teachers

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To fellow academics at the University of Washington:

I write to you as the president of the labor union representing 5000 tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty, librarians, teaching assistants, research assistants, post-docs, and academic advisors at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Our sister local, which shares leadership and staff with us, represents another 2000 part-time lecturers. Since you are now considering whether to form a union, I thought the experience of Rutgers might prove illuminating. Indeed, as one of the oldest, largest, and most prestigious unionized faculties, we provide something of a model for UW (not to mention sharing a past university president, Richard McCormick). As I will advise below, a union should give you power and protection sufficient to improve your own lot and to defend conditions for scholarship writ-large.

Let me start by addressing a fear commonly associated with collective bargaining. The very notion sounds conflictual. Will unionization fracture the community of your university into forever-warring camps of labor and management? The answer is “yes” and “no.” On the “yes” side, some conflicts are already brewing, regardless of the union. Your administration has been steadily converting tenure-track lines into contingent faculty positions. Through “contingentization,” the majority of teaching and research at UW now takes place without the protection, or even the possibility, of tenure. If you unionize, you can fight back to expand tenure protections. Surely, those of you who have tenure don’t want to be the last tenured faculty in a sea of insecure adjuncts.

But that, now-bilateral fight need not poison the atmosphere on campus. Union leaders and staff enjoy congenial relations with the president of Rutgers University and with the various vice-presidents with whom we bargain. President Barchi, McCormick’s successor, recently thanked us publicly, in front of the University Senate, for the Union’s “leadership of the faculty.” Mostly, I think, these administrators consider me to be a prof doing yeoman’s service for the university we all love.

At an institutional level too, the administration and the union cooperate as often as we tussle. Last month, for example, Vice-President Karen Stubaus and I agreed that each side should pay for a researcher to examine practices of evaluating teaching at other universities. When our labor-management committee completes its work, she and I will send a joint message – as we often do – to thousands of faculty. Deans and vice-presidents are continually pulling me aside and thanking the union for the various ways we help them behind the scenes. Our contract, in turns out, helps the university maintain its share of the state budget. In short, the union mostly works cordially and collaboratively with administrators on the basis of mutual respect and shared power (more on power below).

Perhaps you fear that unionization will somehow drive down the quality of UW. At Rutgers, exactly the opposite occurred. Having formed a chapter of the American Association of University Professors in 1922, we gained collective bargaining rights in 1970. At that time, Rutgers was a teaching-intensive institution, still rooted in its past as a private, liberal arts college. The union pushed salaries up and, over the decades, Rutgers attracted more and more accomplished faculty. In 1989, we

joined the Association of American Universities. Now, we stand at or nearly at the top rung of public institutions, just below the most elite private universities (where the law prevents faculty unionization). Your tenure-track workforce comprises roughly 30% of the faculty, versus 47% at Rutgers. We negotiated for that: our 2007-2011 contract established a “faculty development fund” so as to hire 105 new assistant professors on tenure lines. Collective bargaining has consistently raised the average salary and the pay floor. Your full-time contingent faculty earn a minimum of \$38,000 while ours take home at least \$50,000 this year and \$55,000 next year, thanks to a 10% raise obtained at the bargaining table. Deans still give out-of-cycle raises to the most prominent faculty members. The union has never discouraged or constrained this practice.

I hope I have made the case that unionization will not undermine UW. So what can it do to benefit you? As suggested above, collective bargaining can push salaries upwards and improve job security (by restraining “contingentization”). It should also result in more fairness. Our contract establishes transparency, due process, and a grievance procedure. Any candidate for tenure will know the deadlines, who is viewing her file, and what is in it. If denied, she may avail of an appeal process as well as arbitration with a union-hired attorney. Thanks to the union, even-handed evaluation – rather than favoritism or prejudice – almost always prevails in tenure and promotions. And if you have tenure, you still need fairness. Last year, a dean dismissed a full professor from her course following a student’s complaint. The matter could have escalated even further – up to a charge of harassment or bullying - but we brought the dispute into mediation. The dean apologized to the professor, and we will shortly devise a process of adjudicating student complaints.

Finally, **you might want to join a union because unions have power.** Senates and other faculty bodies can recommend reforms – and that is important. But, if UW is anything like Rutgers, the faculty senate has little legal clout or authority. Unions are different. If more than half of you vote for union representation, the National Labor Relations Act and the labor movement will immediately back you up. Your dues will pay for lawyers, lobbyists, researchers, press agents, and a host of other resources at your own campus and at state and national levels. You will be surprised at what you can achieve. In the fall, for instance, faculty in one of our science buildings came down with various illnesses. They complained to the Facilities Department, which sampled the air and dismissed the problem. Then these faculty called their union, and we sent an industrial hygienist, who has been carrying out detailed analyses. Working collaboratively with the administration – after its initial reluctance - we are mapping symptoms and devising a solution for this “sick building.”

Meanwhile, unionized faculty are defending higher education. Governor Christie proposed a budget cut of \$1.5 million to the Educational Opportunity Fund for undergraduates. These grants-with-advancing have been tremendously helpful for low-income, first generation students across New Jersey. Our union publicized the issue and joined with locals at every state college and university - and with our many allies among students and legislators. We restored the cut and added \$1 million more to the Fund for 2016. I could go on and on in this vein: about the ways in which unionized faculty are defending higher education from attempts to privatize it and run it like a business. Here are two press reports regarding campaigns at Rutgers against Pearson (successful) and Academic Analytics (just begun): <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/10/11/rutgers-u-graduate-school-faculty-vote-block-pearson-partnership> and <http://chronicle.com/article/Can-Data-Measure-Faculty/234595>.

You as faculty must decide whether to unionize at UW. I hope that this report from New Jersey will dispel some unwarranted fears and broaden your ambitions. I would love for you to join the Rutgers faculty in defending tenure, academic freedom, and affordable, high quality education.

Sincerely,



David M. Hughes