

IS IT TIME FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING?

For over thirty years, the **Campus Faculty Association** (formerly the Union of Professional Employees) has served as an advocacy group for UIUC faculty, lobbying the state legislature on matters of general concern to the faculty, and working with the University Senate and other groups on campus to establish sexual harassment policies, increase available child care, and otherwise enhance the professional lives of its members. In recent years it has also increasingly served as a watchdog group, urging greater budget transparency, and overseeing administrative initiatives on tenure standards, disciplinary procedures, and shared governance.

Over the past decade, however, we have seen the university and campus administrations turn to an increasingly top-down management style (as symbolized by the President's new title of "CEO"), while faculty input--even on matters of educational policy which should properly be our province--has had less and less effect. As a result, a growing number of our members are asking whether it's time for **CFA** to begin functioning as a real union, with collective bargaining rights that would protect faculty from arbitrary administrative decisions and ensure that we play a real role in university governance. Some of our other members, however, have serious concerns about unionization. This column is an attempt to address some of those concerns.

UNIONS ARE UNPROFESSIONAL. Today professional unions are one of the few rapidly expanding parts of the American labor movement. As professionals see their control over their working conditions eroding, they are increasingly forming unions. Among the very large number of unionized groups with collective bargaining rights are professional writers (Writers Guild of America), engineers (International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers), doctors (Physicians for Responsible Negotiation—an organization created by the American Medical Association), and accountants (Office and Professional Employees International Union).

UNIONS HAVE NO PLACE AT UNIVERSITIES. The American Association of University Professors currently has some 70 collective bargaining chapters across the country; faculty at many other colleges and universities are affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and other unions. The entire SUNY system in New York, and the entire University of Florida system are unionized. In Illinois, SIU, Eastern, Western, and other state universities are unionized. A useful overview of major unionized campuses is provided at:

<http://or.aft.org/000070/index.cfm?action=article&articleID=392b1c7f-02c5-471b-8d01-ee36c7cda833>

ONLY SECOND-RATE UNIVERSITIES HAVE UNIONIZED FACULTIES.

Faculty at private research universities like Harvard and Yale are not legally allowed to organize (Yeshiva v. NLRB, 1980). And only thirty states currently allow faculty at public institutions to join unions. However, as faculty at major public universities face tighter budgets, the weakening of shared governance, and the “corporatization” of their institutions, they are beginning to consider unions and collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is being discussed, if not yet actively pursued, by faculty groups at UC Berkeley (<http://ucbfa.org/join/>) and at the University of Michigan (<http://www.umich.edu/~aaupum/facneeds.html>), among other places.

UNIONIZATION WOULD PUT ALL FACULTY ON THE SAME PAY SCALE.

This is a common myth about unions. Traditional industrial labor unions often had a set salary scale, but most modern professional unions actually promote merit pay. Their primary goal is to ensure that all members receive the same benefits and enjoy the same working conditions. They may also negotiate for across-the-board cost of living increases for all members, while those who have performed especially meritoriously continue to receive higher salaries.

UNIONIZATION MEANS FACULTY WOULD HAVE TO GO ON STRIKE, WHICH WOULD BE UNFAIR TO OUR STUDENTS. For a union to be successful, its members need to be willing to take collective action against the administration. However, the threat of collective action may in itself be sufficient—and even if it’s not, there are many forms of action other than a full-blown strike—some of which would affect the administration but not our students. And of course no action could be undertaken without the approval of union members.