

Frequently Asked Questions



For the past year, the Campus Faculty Association has been advocating a faculty union with collective bargaining rights at UIUC. These are some of the questions we have received most frequently from our colleagues, and our responses to them.

HOW WILL A UNION HELP FACULTY?

A union will help faculty by giving us a more powerful voice in how the university operates, including the determination of our pay and working conditions. The key to an effective union is a collective bargaining agreement, a legally binding contract signed by the representatives of the union and the Administration.

Who would be covered by a union collective bargaining agreement?

A collective bargaining agreement would cover all faculty with an appointment of greater than 50%. However, faculty in the Veterinary School and the Law School are excluded by law.

How does collective bargaining work?

The elected representatives of the union negotiate with the administration on behalf of faculty. When both sides agree on a draft contract, the union members then vote whether to accept or reject the contract. Some contracts may last for a single year but in most cases they will be for two or three years.

What is included in collective bargaining agreements?

Every collective bargaining agreement is different. Nearly all agreements include specific recommendations for minimum pay raises, benefits and grievance procedures. However, many issues related to education and/or working conditions can be collectively bargained. These might include: limits on class size, limits on the use of contingent faculty, bans on the use of furloughs, guidelines for teaching loads, and accommodations for disabled faculty. Agreements can also govern assignments of lab, research and office facilities as well as protect faculty from layoffs during program streamlining or elimination by mandating fair reassignments. Any violation of the contract can become the subject of legal action.

Can a union help preserve our pensions even though they are controlled by the state , not the university?

In the Illinois public university system, our pensions are run by the State University Retirement System (SURS), not UIUC. Therefore, they cannot be the subject of a collective bargaining agreement. However, faculty unions are typically part of state and/or national unions which have paid lobbyists and researchers who advocate on behalf of their members in Springfield. At present our only voice in Springfield is the university administration. A union would give us spokespersons directly accountable to us.

Do other universities have faculty unions?

Yes. There are more than 200 four year colleges and universities that have unions with collective bargaining agreements. These include a number of research universities-our peer institutions. These include: University of Florida, SUNY, and Rutgers. Likely even more institutions would be organized but nearly all private universities and as well as public universities in certain states face enormous legal obstacles in attempting to form a faculty union

Will a union mean that everyone earns the same salary ?

Not at all. Other universities with collective bargaining agreements continue to have competitive salaries with merit pay, retention offers, effective promotion processes, and research incentives. Collective bargaining agreements set minimums, not ceilings. Like baseball players or film actors who are union members, faculty retain the power to negotiate their salaries individually. However, the minimums negotiated by unions particularly assist those faculty who remain disadvantaged in most university systems: women, faculty of color, and contingent or contract faculty.

FAQ **(continued)**

Does having a union automatically mean we will be going on strike?

No. Strikes by faculty are rare. They are a last resort. Ultimately, no strike can take place unless the majority of union members vote in favor of such an action. Moreover, Illinois Higher Education Labor Law requires attempts at mediation and arbitration before a strike can be legally carried out.

How much will the dues be in a union with collective bargaining?

Dues vary from union to union. In some places they are a flat rate, in others members pay a percentage of their salary. For example, at Rutgers, union dues are .85% of a person's salary. For someone earning \$50,000, that would be \$425 a year or roughly \$35 a month. For someone earning \$100,000 it would come to \$850 a year. Typical union dues are about 1% of gross salary.

What are dues used for?

Dues go to funding union office and staff, union-related campaigns, policy research, member education, legal costs to represent members, plus research for negotiation and enforcement of the contract. In addition, a percentage goes to a national union to which a local is affiliated.

Do people who are not members of the union have to pay dues?

Illinois law holds that even faculty who are not members of the union benefit from the union's presence. Therefore, non-members must pay what is called "fair share" dues which are a percentage of what is paid by union members. The amount of "fair share" is negotiated with the employer and intended to only cover the costs of negotiating and enforcing the contract, not the other expenses of operating the union.

Will a union replace the senate?

Absolutely not. In universities with unions, the senates retain their advisory powers on academic matters. The union's efforts are complementary to the work of the senate, adding legal obligations to the administrations interactions with faculty. In addition, the contents of a union contract may contain language that further empowers the academic senate, such as specifying the right of the senate to review policies on certain issues like curriculum, admissions, examinations, and certification.

What are the steps to forming a union with collective bargaining rights?

In Illinois this can be done in one of three ways: i) by the administration voluntarily recognizing the union ii) by a vote of faculty iii) by faculty union organizers getting more than 50% of faculty in the bargaining unit to sign a card saying they want a union.

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