

Your Union

Union of Nontenure-Track Faculty



Save the Date

Oct. 2 **General Membership Meeting**
 Wednesday, Oct. 2
 Beggars Banquet
 218 Abbot Rd., East Lansing
 4:30-6:30pm

Join us for appetizers, drinks, and updates on bargaining, health care and more!

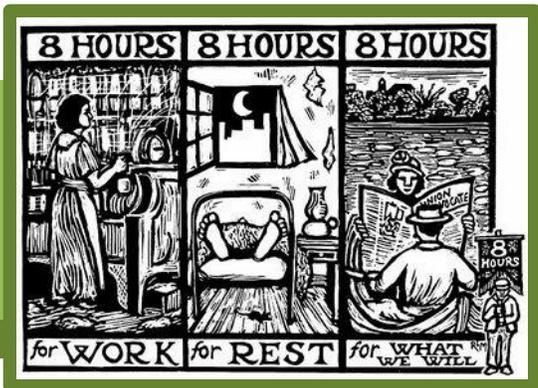
Sept.-Oct. **Member Survey**
 Check your email for an invitation to provide feedback on the issues most important to you and your working conditions.

Countdown to Negotiations

Our first contract expires next May. This means that UNTF has a very busy year ahead of us! Though we won't sit down at the bargaining table with MSU until this winter, officers and members are already hard at work preparing for our negotiations process. **We need your help!** If you have an extra hour a week to spare, please contact us at office@untf.org to find out how you can contribute to the research process as we gear up for negotiations. Turn to **page 3** for a rough timeline of what you can expect from UNTF this year.

“[Unionization] does empirically make a difference,” said Adrianna Kezar, professor [of] education at the University of Southern California and director of the Delphi Project to examine and develop the role of adjunct faculty. **“It is one of the few changes that helped to make changes so far.”**

– From “Adjunct union contracts ensure real gains including better pay,” Colleen Flaherty – Inside Higher Ed, 26 July 2013



Member CARMEN DE LORENZO staffs the UNTF table at the 2013 New Faculty Information Fair (ABOVE)

Happy Labor Day to all our members! (LEFT)

The myth of probation for fixed-term faculty

Some chairs seem to think that it is not enough to keep their faculty on a fixed term appointment. They try and make them think that they are also on probation. But this is a myth. **There is no "probation" for UNTF members at MSU.**

The vast majority of employees at MSU have long term job security and no end for their employment. This type of employee does serve a probation period when first hired. The purpose of this probation period is for MSU to decide if they want to grant long-term job security to that employee. During a probation period, an employee can be fired for any reason or for no reason at all. Once the probation is up, the employee remains employed until they quit, are fired for just cause, or are laid off for lack of work. Since adjuncts are already on a fixed-term appointment, this logic does not apply to them.

Fixed-term faculty never get long-term job security. We are, by definition, always "temporary". There is always an end date when we can be let go without quitting, without being fired, or without being laid off for lack of work. (UNTF has been fighting to make that temporary time as long as possible and Designation B requires MSU to make

the appointment for at least 3 years.) Since we are never granted long term security, there is **no** probation period for the University to use to decide if that security should be granted. The MSU/UNTF Union contract does not contain any provision for UNTF members to be put on probation. But some departments try anyway.

Occasionally, a chair will send a letter to a UNTF member informing them that they are on probation. They may even ask the employee to sign this letter. **However, these letters are not binding.** The MSU/UNTF Union contract states that any such agreements are not binding or effective unless signed by MSU and UNTF (Article 37). Recently UNTF saw a letter to a member who has worked at MSU since 2009, saying she was appointed for just one semester on a probationary status. We sent this to Human Resources in the hope they will give direction to that Chair. If you have been presented with a letter about an alleged probation period, we would like to hear about it.

We may be temporary, but our contract guarantees that during the term of our appointment we can only be fired for just cause (Article 19).

2013 Merit Raise Approaches!

Our current MSU/UNTF Union contract includes merit raises for each of the four years of the contract. In October 2013 MSU is required to give nontenure-track faculty an average 2% merit increase. To be eligible to be considered for the raise you must have had an appointment on January 1, 2013 AND have an appointment on October 1, 2013. You do NOT need to have had an appointment during Summer 2013 to be eligible for raise consideration. Raises awarded are reflected in the November 2013 paycheck.

Current MSU policy for merit pay distribution is that each college must establish a pool based on the current salary of all eligible fixed-term faculty. That pool is given to the college to spend as they determine, but it must be spent entirely on fixed term faculty. Before UNTF was formed, MSU established a joint tenure and non-tenure merit pool for raises. This allowed departments to give their tenured faculty merit raises and exclude the nontenure-track faculty from the process entirely. One of the benefits of the UNTF is that the merit pools are now separate, ensuring that fixed term faculty get their share of the raises.

A similar merit raise was given in 2012. UNTF has been reviewing the records from that raise. 260 eligible members did receive a raise in 2012; there were 24 fixed term faculty who were eligible for the raise but who were given no increase. The largest raise given without a change in job titles was 5.6%. Two individuals were given new titles and even larger raises.

We have found that some departments hired fixed-term faculty (or processed their paperwork) after the merit pool had been established by the university. This resulted in the overall pool being smaller because 2% of those salaries were not factored in to the total amount available in the pool. In addition, some departments, for reasons that are not yet clear, told the administration not to include some of their employees who appear to be eligible. This resulted in the overall pool being even smaller because 2% of these salaries were also excluded from the total pool. UNTF has an ongoing grievance regarding the distribution of the 2012 merit raises.

New “catastrophic” health plan

UNTF officers and staff met with MSU at the end of August to discuss health care. The university informed us that they will offer a new plan to tenure-stream faculty members beginning January 1, 2014. The basic outline of this plan is as follows:

- Monthly premium payments lower than those for BCN, our base plan
- Very high deductibles (i.e., the amount you must cover yourself before insurance kicks in): \$2,000 for the individual or \$4,000 for the family. Compare to BCN in-network deductibles of \$100 for the individual or \$200 for the family
- \$750 contribution from MSU per year in an HSA (Health Spending Account) that can roll over from one year to the next.
- Copays ranging from 20-50% after the deductible is met, costing up to an additional \$2000 for the individual or \$4000 for the family. (As a comparison, the BCN plan offers 0% copays with flat dollar copays in some cases for in-network providers.)

MSU stressed that this was an “opportunity” that would “offer more choices” to employees. Members should be aware that our current BCN and BCBS/PPO plans are **significantly** richer and provide much better coverage in every single category, including prescription drugs. For the average user, the annual costs will be much lower in BCN and BCBS plans.

MSU proposed to make this the new “base plan” for the other campus unions. We suspect that the university will attempt to make a similar proposal during the UNTF bargaining sessions this winter, one which would greatly increase the cost of our current health care plans to employees. **UNTF is fully committed to retaining our benefits at their current levels, without additional costs to the employee. Stay tuned to this newsletter and come to our General Membership Meeting for more updates on changes to health care.**

Negotiations timeline

September-October: Bargaining survey

What you can do:

- You should see an email invitation by mid-September, so fill out the survey ASAP and contribute your voice to the priorities-setting process!
- Become a full member to ensure that your voice is heard and to send the university a clear message that we are united and ready to stand up for our rights.

October-December: Preparation and research

We’ll be meeting regularly during these months to crunch numbers, gather comparative data about our peers at other universities, and analyze our survey data.

What you can do:

- Join us! Just an hour a week can make a huge difference to the bargaining team at the table.

January 2014: Negotiations begin

UNTF will use research data we gather to craft its initial set of proposals, and MSU will offer its own proposals – and we’ll negotiate from there.

What you can do:

- Join the negotiations team. The only experience necessary is the experience you already have as a faculty member at Michigan State, and the passion to improve working conditions for yourself and your colleagues.
- Attend rallies, Board of Trustees meetings and events to show your support for UNTF.

The final step: Ratification

Once both sides come to a final agreement, the details of that agreement will be released to UNTF members, who will then vote on whether or not to accept the agreement.

What you can do:

- Attend membership meetings and read newsletters for updates on negotiations.
- Cast your vote next year!

Designation B Update

we discussed a grievance on behalf of an individual who was denied Designation B, even though she had never been evaluated previously, her department had no criteria publicly established, and the department seemed to violate its own policies, which it maintained applied only to tenure-stream faculty (though this was not stated in their own handbook). We await Vice President Curry’s formal response, but we anticipate the implementation of clear and transparent policies in this department.

Our officers reiterated to MSU the necessity of maintaining clear application procedures and selection criteria in each department, as well as performing annual evaluations. Vice President Curry and MSU representatives recognized that currently, the materials provided by departments and colleges are insufficient, and we are moving forward with a plan to improve those materials before the next round of Designation B applications is due.

UNTF President **Penny Gardner**, Vice President **Rich Manderfield**, and Communications Chair **Peter Sakura** met with MSU Vice President **Terry Curry** and members of the Office of Employee Relations in August to continue our ongoing discussion about Designation B. For the first half of the meeting,



**Union of Nontenure-Track Faculty
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Mark your calendar!

**Please join your union for our first
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING of the year!**

**Wednesday, October 2, 4:30-6:30pm
Beggar's Banquet**

- Get updates on Designation B, 2% merit raises, health care and more!
- Meet officers and members
- Learn more about our 2014 negotiations

Sangria and Appetizers provided.

See you there!