

Chapter History

The AAUP-UC Chapter: 40 Years of Collective Bargaining

Striving “to improve the economic status of the faculty and increase the faculty role in university government and to remain the watchdog of academic freedom.” – Maita Levine, AAUP UC Chapter President, 1974-75

Forty years ago this month, faculty at the University of Cincinnati voted to give the AAUP UC Chapter the right to represent them in collective bargaining. In one of its communications to the faculty during the election campaign, the Administration stated that “no question of greater importance has come before the faculty in many years.” That was most certainly true, since the stakes for UC faculty—salaries, paid health and dental insurance, shared governance, and clear grievance and reappointment, promotion and tenure procedures, among other things—couldn’t have been higher.

The UC Chapter AAUP had been in existence since the World War II era, when it was formed to promote academic freedom, tenure and shared governance, principles which had been advanced by the national AAUP since its formation in 1915. In the early 1970s, as inflation skyrocketed and significantly eroded the real incomes of university faculty across the country, the national AAUP organized a committee to examine the possible utility of collective bargaining for faculty within higher education. This committee’s work culminated in a statement, adopted by the national AAUP at a meeting in 1973, recognizing collective bargaining as “a major additional way of realizing the [AAUP’s] goals in higher education.”

As the national AAUP weighed collective bargaining as a tool for promoting the interests of faculty and higher education in general, efforts were underway to establish the UC Chapter AAUP as the collective bargaining agent for faculty at UC. In May of 1972, the UC Chapter’s “Committee N,” which was formed to research and make recommendations on the viability of collective bargaining at UC, issued a report to the membership on the factors involved in collective bargaining. Since there was no collective bargaining statute in Ohio at that time (and there wouldn’t be until 1984), Committee N rightly pointed out that it was “completely within the discretion of the

Administration and Board of the University whether they would choose to recognize, bargain or contract with the unit.” (View Committee N’s full report [here](#)).

The first step for faculty organizers was to get a majority of their colleagues to sign union designation cards, stating that they supported holding a facultywide election to designate the UC Chapter as the collective bargaining agent for faculty. (View the original designation card [here](#)). In the UC Chapter’s first *Candor on Campus* newsletter, the Chapter provided a running total of the signed designation cards as of October 1973. (View the newsletter [here](#)).

After several years of discussion and the campaign to collect the union designation cards, the Chapter voted in January 1974 to request that the UC Board of Trustees authorize an election for a collective bargaining agent. Surprisingly, the Board of Trustees agreed to hold an election to determine if the faculty wanted the UC Chapter AAUP to serve as its collective bargaining agent. In May of that year, the UC Chapter began a push for increased membership. Coincidentally, for the first time in its history part-time faculty were eligible for membership in the national AAUP, giving early indications of the future growth of contingent faculty on campuses across the U.S. (View the UC Chapter’s membership call from May 1974 [here](#)).

On November 7-8, 1974, over 87% of the UC faculty who would constitute the bargaining unit (including, at the Administration’s insistence, faculty at the College of Medicine) participated in the election. On November 12, 1974, the results were tallied and made public: by a vote of 676 to 583, the UC faculty designated the UC Chapter AAUP as its representative in collective bargaining. Then UC Chapter President Maita Levine

stated that “We are very pleased that the turnout was large and that a substantial majority of those who voted favored the AAUP as collective bargaining agent. We shall strive to improve the economic status of the faculty and increase the faculty role in university government and to remain the watchdog of academic freedom.” (View the News Record article on the victory [here](#) and the Candid Campus story on the election [here](#)).

The time leading up to the November 1974 election was not without contest or controversy. At one point in May 1974, the UC Faculty Senate threw its collective hat into the ring as a potential collective bargaining agent to represent faculty. However, after vigorous internal debate, the Faculty Senate withdrew its request to be added to the ballot as an alternative to the AAUP-UC Chapter. (View the News Record article on the Faculty Senate issue [here](#)).

In addition, the Student Government debated the issue of faculty unionization and, prior to the November 1974 vote, made demands that students have a place at the bargaining table. This included the somewhat unusual demand for the time that students

have the right to accept or reject proposals on faculty wages, hours and other conditions of employment, and even to declare negotiations at an impasse. Other

student strongly disagreed with the Student Government leadership and supported the faculty's right to unionize and collectively bargain without students having an equal seat at the bargaining table. (View two of the differing opinions on this issue in the November 5, 1974 News Record [here](#)).

The years-long effort to establish a faculty union at UC was followed by a year-long effort to achieve the first collective bargaining agreement. Negotiations for the first contract began in March 1975 and ended in April 1976 with an agreement that included significant salary increases, paid health insurance, minimum salaries, and codified RPT and grievance procedures. These were all major steps forward for UC faculty, and provided the foundation for all other contractual improvements and innovations since then. While progress has been steady, it has not always gone smoothly. During negotiations over the third collective bargaining agreement in 1979, the Administration proposed salary increases that were well below the cost of living in an era of double-digit inflation, and also proposed to permit programs to be discontinued—and affected faculty fired—at its discretion. After months of fruitless negotiation, and after an overwhelming vote by Chapter members to authorize a strike, the UC faculty went on strike in October 1979. Although the Administration claimed that “business as usual” would prevail, participation in the strike was high (only 33% of classes were held on the first day) and striking UC faculty received support from labor organizations both locally and across the nation. On the fifth day of the strike, a tentative agreement was reached; the Administration withdrew its proposal for the discretionary discontinuation of academic programs, and the final contract provided for a substantial salary increase.

After over a decade of relative calm, tensions between the Administration and faculty rose, including a unilateral decision in 1991 by then-President Joseph Steger to cancel all paid academic leaves for the 1992-1993, and a faculty vote of no confidence in the Administration in that same year. Although an arbitrator subsequently found President Steger's decision to be in violation of the contract, the stage was set for a difficult round of negotiations in 1992, culminating in a week-long UC faculty strike in 1993. Subsequent rounds of contract negotiations proceeded somewhat more smoothly over the following decade.

The decision by then-President Nancy Zimpher in 2004 to remove the Administration's outside counsel from the bargaining table ushered in an era of collaboration and creativity which marked a sharp break from the past. For the next two contract rounds (in 2007 and 2010) the Administration and the Chapter created a new grievance process which has shown to be highly effective, innovated with respect to compensation (with merit and compression adjustments), implemented health insurance benefits for domestic partners, and instituted “fair share,” which has allowed the Chapter to provide significantly expanded services to the entire bargaining unit.

In 2011, this era of progress seemed as though it might come to a halt altogether, when

newly-elected Governor Kasich signed Senate Bill 5 (SB5) into law. SB5 aimed to gut collective bargaining rights for public employees in Ohio and barred faculty in higher education altogether from engaging in collective bargaining. This extreme attack on public sector labor galvanized labor organizations across Ohio and provoked a public outcry. The Chapter participated in a massive effort by We Are Ohio, an umbrella labor coalition formed to combat SB5, to gather signatures for a voter referendum and then to get out the vote. Voters resoundingly rejected SB5 at the polls in November 2011.

The spirit of activism and solidarity engendered among UC faculty during the SB5 struggle remained strong through the Chapter's next battle: an unexpectedly difficult and protracted round of negotiations over the 2013-2016 CBA. The Administration resumed its old practice of using outside counsel at the bargaining table, and presented numerous proposals, including a proposal that would have doubled or even tripled health insurance costs, which sparked outrage among UC faculty. Months of steadily escalating activism and protests by increasing numbers of UC faculty were instrumental in bringing about a tentative agreement in 2014 which not only kept health insurance costs at a reasonable level, but also brought significant improvements to faculty development funding and a commitment to incorporating a parental leave policy in the contract.

As the most recent contract battle raged, Chapter membership increased dramatically, and in the end, the Chapter emerged even stronger and more unified. Moving forward, the Chapter will continue to act as a staunch advocate for both the economic and professional interests of UC faculty, and for an even better University of Cincinnati.

You can view additional archival documents from the 1974 campaign to establish the AAUP UC Chapter as the faculty union at the links below:

[Union Voting Ground Rules, 1974](#)

[News Record, November 12, 1974](#)

[News Record, October 22, 1974](#)

[Candid Campus, April 24, 1974](#)

[News Record, October 11, 1974](#)

[Collective Bargaining Election Campaign Flyer, October 1974](#)

[Election Observer Instructions, 1974](#)

[Collective Bargaining Bumper Sticker](#)