

News You Can Use

UFAS campaigns for fair pay and against intimidation of workers at UW-Madison

By Alyssa Franze, Chad Alan Goldberg, and Anna Paretskaya

How do you fight for equity without the right to bargain collectively? The Fair Pay for Faculty Assistants campaign at the University of Wisconsin-Madison shows how.

Faculty Assistants (FAs) are a category of instructional academic staff at UW-Madison; most have graduate degrees, and all of them perform duties similar to or greater than those of graduate student teaching assistants (TAs).

The FA title was created for situations where there are not enough TAs to cover all the teaching needs of a department, and it was intended

and jobs to support themselves and their families.

Last year, in a campaign led by FAs, United Faculty and Academic Staff (UFAS) American Federation of Teachers Local 223, set out to remedy this disparity. We located and connected with FAs on campus; reached out to department heads in programs that rely heavily on FAs; met with administrators, HR staff, and campus leaders; publicized our campaign in the press; and secured the endorsement of student government, the teaching assistants' union, the Academic Staff Assembly, and the Faculty Senate.

This broad support was a re-

ministrators announced significant improvements for FAs at the end of the academic year. Returning FAs received raises this fall, and new FAs are now hired at up to 10 percent higher rates.

Furthermore, the ESL Program, which last year was the largest employer of FAs on campus, reclassified its FAs to Lecturers, a more appropriate job title with a significant pay raise (10-49 percent) and a clear path to promotions, acknowledging their contributions to the university and the fact that they are professionals.

Dismayingly, two experienced FAs who were leaders in the fair pay campaign—and who were told by their supervisor to “back off” during the campaign—were pointedly excluded from the better-paying Lecturer positions that their union activism helped to establish. UFAS assisted one of them to file a formal grievance with the university, and we circulated a petition in support of their right to criticize their working conditions without retaliation.

In just ten weeks, our petition collected, online and on paper, over 500 signatures from academic staff, faculty, university staff, students, and alumni of UW-Madison and UW-Extension; members of other labor unions; and concerned supporters in Wisconsin and nationwide. The TAA, AFSCME Local 2412 (representing university staff), and the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice also endorsed the

petition. UFAS recently sent a letter to the UW-Madison Provost to inform her about the strong support our petition has garnered and the widespread concern it reflects about employees' due process rights, job security, and working conditions on campus.

Although the two FAs named in our petition were not reinstated to the ESL Program, both were quickly hired in teaching positions elsewhere—casting serious doubt on management's claim that they weren't qualified or experienced enough to continue teaching in their former program.

Equally important, our campaign raised awareness and educated our colleagues about the problem of intimidation on campus, spurring a broader public discussion within and outside of shared governance bodies about this problem. Furthermore, our union showed that it will stand with members when they experience retaliation.

When we ask non-members for support or get involved in union activities, we can't guarantee that they will always be safe from intimidation by their managers. But we have demonstrated that they won't face intimidation alone. This is critical for future organizing efforts. Lastly, the campaign built our union's capacity, strengthening our ties to other unions on and off campus.

We thank everyone who supported our fair pay campaign and signed our petition in support of two of its leaders. While the campaign started as a fight for pay equity, it has highlighted important problems with job security on our campus, especially for short-term instructional staff.

UFAS members are now discussing how to amend university policies to strengthen the due process rights of academic staff. In the spring 2018 term, we look forward to promoting a UW Worker Bill of Rights written by colleagues in the AFT-Wisconsin Higher Education Council, as well as assisting pro-labor and pro-education political candidates through our newly formed political education committee. Our work isn't done yet, but we've shown that even when academic workers are deprived of collective bargaining rights, we can still fight for workplace equity—and win. Alyssa Franze, Chad Alan Goldberg, and Anna Paretskaya work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and are members of United Faculty and Academic Staff, American Federation of Teachers Local 223.

The FA title was created for situations where there are not enough TAs to cover all the teaching needs of a department, and it was intended to be a temporary position.

ed to be a temporary position. But as student enrollments have increased in programs like English as a Second Language (ESL) and Chemistry, many FAs have remained in these positions long-term; some have been teaching as FAs for over a decade.

At the same time, FA pay rates stagnated for many years, leading to the situation that despite their qualifications and experience, FA pay minima were 7 to 15 percent lower than those of teaching assistants. This forced many FAs to take on sec-

sounding answer to the question we repeatedly asked colleagues: What kind of university do you want to work in, a winner-take-all campus, or a campus where fairness, justice, and solidarity still play a role in the work that we do together? We consistently framed our campaign as part of a broader push for equity on campus, not just for FAs—even if they were at the forefront of the issue—but for all staff and faculty.

In response to publicity and pressure from the union and shared governance bodies, university ad-

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