Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the BGSU-FA/AAUP and Unionization

Well over 100 BGSU faculty have already joined the BGSU Faculty Association (BGSU-FA), the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). We believe that “collective bargaining” is a necessary and productive step in the real process of “shared governance”.

In accordance with Ohio labor relations law, we are now conducting a “card campaign” to determine whether there is sufficient support to hold a campus-wide election about forming a faculty union.

On the following pages, we address the “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQs) that have arisen in conversations with colleagues. The topics are listed below, but please ask any other questions that come to mind.

- What is the purpose of “signature cards”?
- Why establish a faculty union?
- Which union would represent the faculty?
- Who would be in the “bargaining unit” represented by the union?
- What will collective bargaining mean for “shared governance” at BGSU?
- What happens to tenure under collective bargaining?
- Will unionization lead to academic mediocrity?
- Considering BGSU's and Ohio's financial straits, isn't this a bad time for the faculty to form a union?
- How will collective bargaining affect our faculty salaries?
- Will our salaries be leveled out under collective bargaining?
- What will collective bargaining cost me in dues?
- How would my union dues be used?
- What happens after the BGSU-FA/AAUP has been certified as the collective bargaining representative of BGSU faculty?
- Additional questions of mine …
What is the purpose of “signature cards” in relation to proceedings before the State Employment Relations Board (SERB)?

Faculty unionization is governed by Ohio law and is administered by the State Employment Relations Board (SERB):

- The first step is for a majority of BGSU faculty to demonstrate their support for collective representation by signing “union authorization” (or “signature”) cards. These are treated confidentially and will be sent to SERB when a sufficient number have been received. BGSU-FA/AAUP has distributed cards to all full-time faculty. Signed cards may be mailed back directly to P.O. Box 425, Bowling Green, Ohio 43402 or given to any BGSU-FA/AAUP officer or to any member of the steering committee or signature-card campaign committee.

- Although an election petition may be filed with SERB when only 30% of the faculty have signed authorization cards, the BGSU-FA/AAUP seeks a solid majority in favor of an election. Once we meet our goal, we will file an election petition, accompanied by the signed authorization cards (which are kept confidential by SERB). Updates on campaign progress will be posted on our BGSU-FA/AAUP website (see document footer, below).

- The State Employment Relations Board will assist the BGSU administration and BGSU-FA/AAUP to reach an agreement on the composition of the bargaining unit and the particulars of the election. However, it would not surprise us if our administration, like those at other Ohio universities, uses a typical tactic – to raise a variety of issues on a piecemeal basis in order to delay proceedings or prevent an election.

- After either an agreement between the administration and the BGSU-FA/AAUP or a hearing and decision has been made by the SERB, a secret ballot election is conducted by the SERB. The mechanics of the election are much like what we experience at local precincts on Election Day – with lists of eligible voters, voter sign-ins, secret ballots, etc. The election will be held on campus at times and locations that make voting as convenient as possible.

- At the conclusion of the voting, the SERB officer conducting the election will canvass the ballots in the presence of observers. If a majority of the votes cast are in favor of collective representation, the SERB will certify the BGSU-FA/AAUP as the bargaining representative of the BGSU faculty.

Why establish a faculty union?

At colleges and universities across the country, the role of full time faculty is being diminished by administrations and boards of trustees who prefer unilateral decision-making and who believe that an academic institution should be run more like a business. This trend has weakened the role of faculty in “shared governance”. Collective bargaining is a way of restoring and protecting this important role for faculty because it leads to a formal and legally enforceable collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between the faculty and administration. We believe that this is vital to the future of BGSU.

Which union would represent the faculty?

The BGSU Faculty Association (BGSU-FA) is our local chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). It was reactivated this past Fall and seeks to become the faculty's representative. If a majority of BGSU faculty vote in favor of collective bargaining, then the BGSU-FA/AAUP would be elected to represent all members of the BGSU faculty. Any faculty member or administrator may become a member, but only faculty members eligible to be part of the bargaining unit can vote. Although faculty need not join the BGSU-FA/AAUP to be represented by the union or to benefit from a collective-bargaining agreement, the more faculty who join the union and actively advance the faculty's economic and professional interests and values, the more effective and capable our AAUP chapter will be.
Who would be in the “bargaining unit” represented by the union?

All full-time faculty who do not supervise other faculty would be included in the “bargaining unit”. This includes all tenured and tenure-track faculty and non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF) in all degree-granting units of Bowling Green State University, including the University Libraries and BGSU-Firelands, as those terms are defined and delineated in the Academic Charter. This includes faculty members with reduced teaching loads and released time for temporary administrative duties (such as undergraduate advisors or graduate program coordinators) or on faculty improvement leaves. Department chairs, academic deans, associate deans, center-institute- and school-directors and others who may hold faculty rank but whose job-descriptions are primarily supervisory are, by law, ineligible to be included in the bargaining unit.

What would collective bargaining mean for “shared governance” at BGSU?

BGSU has an established governance structure that includes a Faculty Senate. Collective bargaining agreements often formalize the role of this body in setting educational programs and curriculum and in establishing academic and professional standards. For example, at Kent State University, which has had a collective bargaining agreement since 1976, the contract incorporates the Faculty Senate Charter and Bylaws into the bargaining agreement, making these governance documents legally enforceable, in contrast to “shared governance” at BGSU where the Faculty Senate is now merely advisory to the BGSU central administration and Board of Trustees. A collective bargaining agreement may also codify the structure of faculty governance at the department and college levels. For example, at both Wright State University and Kent State University, the departmental and college bylaws or handbooks are incorporated into the employment contract, and are binding and enforceable. Moreover, changes in those bylaws or handbooks must be approved by a majority vote of faculty in those academic units, thus guaranteeing joint governance at the unit level.

BGSU-FA/AAUP will not be directly involved in academic policy, but it would reinforce and complement the authority of the Faculty Senate. Policies and procedures for promotion and tenure would still be defined by faculty bodies and referenced in the contract, thus making these procedures legally binding. AAUP contracts also often specify advisory bodies to provide for and enforce a meaningful process of consultation. And on many campuses with collective bargaining agreements, upper administration regularly consults with union leadership to address large and small problems together.

What happens to tenure under collective bargaining?

Tenure stays, and the process becomes more transparent and consistent. Most AAUP-negotiated employment contracts incorporate college and departmental governance documents and/or handbooks. In our case, we would negotiate to ensure that individual academic units will continue to abide by specific guidelines and standards on tenure and promotion as set forth in the Academic Charter and in individual collegiate and departmental governance documents. In other words, the role of the faculty, in particular, and of “shared governance”, in general, will be strengthened and enhanced by a faculty union, not weakened.

Will unionization lead to academic mediocrity?

On the contrary, unionization would allow BGSU to raise academic standards in partnership with administration in a number of ways. For example, most unions have negotiated contracts that provide for periodic professional development activities, ensuring that tenure’s guarantees of academic freedom come with the responsibility of keeping up academic standards. Unions have also negotiated formal policies for domestic partner benefits, family leave policy, and spousal hiring guidelines, thus ensuring that their institutions will attract and retain top faculty. Academic excellence will always be among the BGSU-FA/AAUP’s top priorities.
Considering BGSU's and Ohio's financial straits, isn't this a bad time for the faculty to form a union?

Quite the contrary, under collective bargaining, the faculty can negotiate its salaries and benefits in both good times and in bad. For years and into the future, BGSU will be looking to cut costs - cutting programs and cutting corners on salaries and benefits. Only by having a collective bargaining unit can we ensure that crucial decisions affecting academic quality will be undertaken in a partnership between faculty and administration, rather than unilaterally, with at best, token faculty input. For example, last year the Board of Trustees increased faculty salaries minimally (on average, 1.5%) while health care benefits were drastically modified by administrative fiat to the general detriment of faculty. We contend that unions are even more essential for the protection of academic freedom and faculty interests during bad or lean times.

How will collective bargaining affect our faculty salaries?

Unionized faculties in Ohio have consistently benefited from greater salary increases over the last several years. For example, before unionization, Wright State University was ranked 8th among state universities in Ohio in terms of faculty salaries; now it is 4th. This year, Kent State University's faculty will receive salary increases averaging 6% and are assured salary increases averaging 13.5% over the three years of their current contract, regardless of what happens with state funding. But at BGSU, in budgeting terms, faculty are a "residual claimant". In other words, salary is the lowest budgeting priority. The administration and Board of Trustees decides upon other parts of the budget, and then the faculty gets what's left. Through collective bargaining, BGSU faculty would become a “primary claimant” on the budget. Faculty salaries would be a first priority, with other budgets being addressed after faculty salary and benefits are set.

In 1999, the BGSU Board of Trustees enacted a “compensation plan” for faculty with the declared goal of raising faculty salaries above the 70th percentile at peer institutions nationwide. Rather than budgeting for this goal, the Board spent its money elsewhere. Today, BGSU all-rank averages are near the bottom of the list in Ohio and within-rank averages are similarly of low standing (relevant data are posted on our website). But rather than addressing this failing, last Fall, the Board of Trustees redefined the “peer” group against which BGSU salaries are being measured. The target has been moved lower down the wall. Collective bargaining will ensure that faculty salaries become a top priority in BGSU budgeting.

Will our salaries be leveled out under collective bargaining?

No. Collective bargaining doesn't level salaries at other universities, and it won't here – but it will make merit processes more transparent and consistent. BGSU-FA/AAUP can negotiate to ensure that those merit policies that have been defined jointly between administration and faculty at the college and department level continue, and if merit evaluations are not be applied consistently, faculty will be able to file a grievance if necessary. Furthermore, the process of market-adjustment increases, now administered at the college level, could be governed by the contract in such a way that deans will be required to consult with the faculty (e.g., on policies and priorities) before decisions are made.

What will collective bargaining cost me in dues?

The specific amount of union dues will be determined by the members of our local chapter, not by the Ohio Conference nor by the national AAUP office. Among the seven AAUP chapters at Ohio public universities that have AAUP collective bargaining agreements, member dues range from 0.5% to 0.8% (less than 1%) of base salary per year. Thus, if collective bargaining results in a raise that is at least 0.5% higher than might have occurred without collective bargaining (for example, a 4.5% raise rather than a 3.5% raise), that raise is incorporated into your base salary. In other words, one slightly larger raise as a result of collective bargaining will pay for your union dues for the rest of your career!
How would my union dues be used?

Only thirty to forty percent (30-40%) will be sent to the Ohio Conference of AAUP (to help coordinate and support AAUP chapters in Ohio) and to the National AAUP. National AAUP provides guidance and assistance to AAUP chapters, conducts training for union leaders, investigates alleged violations of academic freedom, publishes *Academe* (including the annual survey of faculty salaries), has an active appellate litigation program that focuses on issues relevant to our profession, and maintains an active legislative program in Washington, DC. Further, the AAUP Collective Bargaining Congress oversees an emergency fund for chapters in need.

That said, most local dues money will be retained by BGSU-FA/AAUP to run and administer our local organization. Monies would be used to lease some office space and maintain a modest office staff, along with basic office equipment and supplies, and just as the administration employs or retains experts of various sorts, our chapter would also retain the services of a lawyer and other experts, as needed. Our BGSU-FA/AAUP constitution and bylaws ensure democratic procedures and transparency regarding finances and other operational matters.

What happens after the BGSU-FA/AAUP has been certified as the collective bargaining representative of BGSU faculty?

As has been done at other Ohio universities whose AAUP chapters became faculty unions, the BGSU-FA/AAUP will invite faculty to participate in committees to study key issues that can be addressed by collective bargaining (e.g. salary and benefits; grievance procedures; faculty leaves; procedures for review, promotion, and tenure). These committees will prepare contract proposals. Those responsible for representing the chapter in contract negotiations will also receive training and guidance from Ohio AAUP leaders, other experienced AAUP union leaders, and national AAUP staff. We would like to achieve our first collective bargaining agreement within a year of the election.

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