

Frequently Asked Questions about Unionization

How would forming a union and negotiating a contract help us with issues we face at Plymouth State?

A union contract will give Plymouth faculty a clearer and stronger voice in important campus decisions. A collective bargaining agreement (CBA) would re-establish and codify real shared governance. We seek greater control over decisions that affect our programs, our working conditions, and, ultimately, the success of our students.

PSU faculty committees have worked hard to revise procedures such as promotion and tenure, and they are clearly spelled out in the faculty handbook. Isn't that enough of a guarantee?

The procedures in the Faculty Handbook are not guaranteed, and the administration is not bound by them. The Disclaimer at the beginning says "The University System and Plymouth State University reserve the right to change any of their policies, rules, or regulations at any time.... This Handbook and its provisions do not and should not be construed to create a contract of employment or establish any legally binding conditions of employment." Also, not all critical processes are fully spelled out in the Faculty Handbook. A clearly articulated and shared CBA would clarify university policies, procedures, and expectations which benefit the faculty and administration. A negotiated CBA would also be legally binding.

Does "regularizing processes" mean a one-size-fits-all approach to our concerns, like workload? Faculty work varies in all kinds of ways. Does this mean all faculty will have a uniform salary, too?

A contract would not impose uniform workloads. If the members wish, it could provide guidelines for what constitutes a reasonable workload, varying by department. Nor would it necessarily impose uniform salaries (although we would be free to negotiate for that if we wanted it). While regular salary increases are often bargained into a contract, including merit-based and cost-of-living raises, it's up to us to decide on our negotiating goals.

Would a contract come from outsiders who work for a union?

Our contract would be negotiated by us, members of the PSU faculty, to address our priorities and concerns. We would consult with AAUP experts and members of other AAUP unions for advice, but the membership at Plymouth State would ultimately decide what our contract should cover. All members would have the power to approve or reject a proposed contract before it went into effect.

What sorts of processes can be included in a contract?

All contracts are different, since each one is drafted to address the needs of members at particular campuses. But most contracts include regularized processes for evaluation, promotion and tenure, grievance resolution, and sanction and termination, along with traditional contract provisions such as compensation and benefits.

Why aren't contract faculty being included in this conversation?

The New Hampshire Public Employee Labor Relations Board has ruled that contract and tenure-track faculty should not be included in the same bargaining unit. Contract faculty may start a union drive as well, if they wish.

Why do this now, instead of waiting a year or two to see how the new administration is working out?

Now is precisely the right time. As the university plans to restructure and reorganize how we work, faculty need to ensure we have a strong and united voice in navigating the changes ahead. Having a CBA in place guarantees faculty participation in all stages of these processes. Relationships between administration and faculty have generally been congenial at PSU, based on good will, mutual respect, and bonds of friendship. There's no reason to believe that situation has changed. Even so, the stable faculty position achieved by a union, negotiating process, and eventual contract will help clarify our respective rights and responsibilities. Faculty control over the curriculum, governance, and our work lives should rest on more solid ground than individuals and personal relationships.