

**Union of Nontenure-Track Faculty
AFT, AFL-CIO
Tentative Agreement
Frequently Asked Questions
May 18, 2010**

CONTENT OF THE AGREEMENT

1. How will I be better off after this contract than before it?

We are already better off as a result of forming our union than we were before. This year's merit pay settlement—which resulted in the creation of a 1.5% merit pay pool that, for the first time, was set aside specifically for UNTF unit members—was the first time in years that many members have received any pay increase at all. That only happened because we took action as a union.

The contract we hope to ratify on Thursday, May 20 is the next step in our ability to work together to improve the working conditions for all of us. Though the pay increases (particularly in the first year) aren't what we hoped, we successfully fought off an administration demand for a 10% pay cut—as well as a demand for us to pay 50% of our health care premiums. Neither of these things will happen if we vote “yes”; both were apparently in their plans for us if we hadn't secured this tentative agreement (TA).

In later years of the contract, we've secured pay increases that are as high we could have expected in this economic environment.

The appointment provisions of the contract represent a real improvement to circumstances for UNTF unit members who have been chronically appointed for a semester or year at a time without any reward for years of service to MSU.

For all of us, this contract contains the beginnings of a system of evaluation that we hope to link in future contracts to longer appointments, and to the presumption of reappointment in between appointments.

2. What is the relationship of the contractual salary minima listed in the tentative agreement to what people are paid now?

The minima you see in the tentative agreement posted here and circulated via email may look like very low numbers to you (as they do to us).

But they represent something real-- a 10% increase to the minima currently in effect at MSU. Though very few people are paid at these minima, there are some in the bargaining unit who are; for those people, this contract will result in a 10% pay increase.

For those of us who've worked at MSU for fewer than ten years and are currently paid above the new minima, our pay won't change because of the contract in its first year.

We—like all other employees with contracts negotiated this year—will be taking a 0% pay increase. (Those of you with ten or more years of service will be in a pool for a 1% merit increase.)

But the contract specifies minimum requirements, and explicitly permits chairs to offer Employees more. So if you've been receiving \$100,000 a year, you can continue doing so—you can negotiate for more, even in the first year of the contract, if you'd like (and we'd be happy to share our negotiating experiences with you as you think about how to do it).

After the first year, everyone will be eligible for merit pay money distributed according to department or unit policies on merit (1.5%, 2%, and 2%, respectively, for the last three years of the Agreement).

These pools, like the ones from which the merit pay settlement was paid to you in your April 30 paycheck, will be specific to the UNTF unit—the money cannot be used to pay anyone but us.

3. If I'm already in an appointment of longer than a year, does this contract mean that I'll have to go back to one-year appointments after my existing appointment expires?

No. The contract is explicit that chairs may appoint Employees to longer terms at their discretion. The intent of the contract is to provide a way for people who have received one-year (or one-semester) appointments for a long time to progress to longer appointments, not to get in the way of longer appointments for those who already have them.

4. How does the contract impact people who serve at MSU outside their UNTF unit appointments?

All of the contract's provisions apply only to the portion of your MSU service that is in the UNTF bargaining unit.

You will be charged dues only on the portion of your pay that comes from your UNTF unit service.

5. I see that the new contract says that people can be laid off with two weeks' notice for a variety of reasons. Isn't that a loss?

No: in fact, this is more job security than we have ever had before. We have secured a "just cause" standard for discipline or discharge (whatever your appointment letter said previously, up until now we were all "at will" employees who could be fired for any reason--or for no reason--at any time). We've also secured a more transparent process for reappointment—if we're not reappointed, the university must say why.

And relative to what MSU wanted to be able to do with layoffs, it represents a very real win.

In the middle of our negotiations, MSU unilaterally decided to announce that it was going to enforce a pre-existing policy (of unclear duration) of sticking to one-year appointments and requiring the provost's approval for longer ones.

We've successfully beaten back this demand; the result is the proposal you have in front of you on appointments.

The university also unilaterally announced that Employees hired after March 2010 could be terminated with 30 days' notice (though it was unclear whether this was intended to refer only to brand-new hires or also to current employees whose appointments were renewed anytime after March 2010).

Here, too, we made progress: under this Agreement, Employees who would have been terminated under the old policy will instead be placed on a layoff list, given two weeks' notice or pay (or a pro-rated combination thereof), and given first consideration for available job openings.

UNION MEMBERSHIP and VOTING

1. Do I have to be a member to vote on this contract? Why?

Yes, you must be a union member to vote on the contract.

UNTF was formed by a democratic vote administered by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission. Everyone in the bargaining unit was eligible to cast a vote, and the margin of victory for the union was more than 2:1.

As a result, everyone in the bargaining unit benefits from the protections of the contract, and from the specific ways that it can improve our personal working conditions at MSU.

But people who want to participate in the governance of the union need to take the additional step of becoming members in order to vote in officer elections, on contracts, and on other union business.

Persons who are not members have other rights guaranteed by law--including the right to representation by the union in cases of dispute about the interpretation of the contract--but not the right to vote.

In conformity with the mandates of state and federal law and the AFT constitution, the UNTF constitution lays out the rules that govern union members' rights in the organization. Under the constitution, not even associate members (persons who pay dues at the associate member rate when they are out of the bargaining unit) may vote.

A "50% plus one" vote of those union members currently in the bargaining unit and casting votes carries the vote.

2. I am a member & I cannot attend the ratification meeting. But I want to vote. What can I do?

Submit a proxy ballot following the directions on the proxy form (either a general proxy or a personal proxy are available; both have already been distributed. Contact us at office@untf.org if you need another).

3. I have other questions about my eligibility to vote. Who can I ask?

Write the UNTF office at office@untf.org

DUES

1. How much will dues be? Why are we contemplating setting them that way?

Dues will be voted on by the UNTF membership in a meeting to be held after the contract ratification vote meeting (probably in late August or early September, so that the largest possible number of people will be available to participate).

The UNTF Executive Board will come up with a proposed budget for the year based on the kinds of expenses we expect to incur (for our office, for a staff organizer who will help us administer the contract, for our affiliation fees to AFT and AFT Michigan—whose members have funded our organizing drive until now—and for other items like legal, postage, and copying expenses).

We'll apply that budget to the total salary of the bargaining unit (about \$20 million per year) to determine at what percentage we'll propose setting dues.

Members who attend the meeting will have the opportunity to propose revisions to the budget, and to vote on the final dues amount.

In other similarly composed local unions in Michigan and elsewhere, dues range from 1.3 to 1.8% of gross pay from one's work in the bargaining unit. (This is not a "progressive" dues system, as the percentage at which dues are charged does not increase with income. But neither is it the kind of disproportionate sharing of the burden that would exist if union dues were a flat rate charged no matter what one's salary.)

2. What happens if someone doesn't want to be a member or pay any dues at all?

Michigan is a fair-share state; that means that UNTF, like other Michigan public employee unions, has been able to negotiate a contractual provision under which every individual in the bargaining unit must pay his/her fair share of the cost of negotiating and

administering our contract. (This parallels the union's obligation, under the law, to represent everyone in the bargaining unit, whether or not s/he wishes to be a member.)

3. How much will this “fair share” fee be? Why are we contemplating setting these fees that way?

Under the law, fair share expenses (or “agency fees”) can only reflect the cost of negotiating and administering the collective bargaining agreement; any other costs (for union-sponsored social events, political activity, etc) cannot be charged to non-members.

A relatively high proportion of the union's basic expenses are related to negotiating and administering the contract, so agency fees are customarily in the area of 90% of the dues amount for a given local. The exact figure differs by local and by year; each union local must provide an accounting of what it spends money on to bargaining unit members who ask for it.

THE FUTURE

What is next for the Union of Nontenure-Track Faculty?

Now that the union is established, and once we've ratified the tentative agreement on Thursday, we have some work to do in finding and training union stewards to serve in each department.

Our biggest job this year will be making sure that the administration honors our agreement!

It's never too soon to start thinking about the next contract; if you have ideas about what should be in it, or would like to be involved in the process, please contact the office at office@untf.org.