

With Recent State Statute Changes, You May Not Have the Benefit of an Election

If the union can demonstrate that a majority (**more than 50%**) of employees who could be in the union signed cards, the union can be deemed the authorized representative by the NH Public Employee Labor Relations Board **without an election.**

If a union is voted in or certified by majority petition, the union would be the legal and sole representative of all employees in the bargaining unit for all bargainable issues. In general, these issues are those relating to wages, benefits, hours, and working conditions.

Union Membership Fees

The costs of union membership vary widely from union to union, but regardless of the amount, dues represent an expense to employees that they would not otherwise have. A typical union worker pays hundreds of dollars per year as a result of dues requirements. Nonunion employees may well ask why they should pay more for employee benefits that they already enjoy as a part of the employer's wage and fringe benefit program.

Salaries

Trustee-approved salary pool increases for FY 2007 and 2008 totaled 9 percent. Further, for FY09 the USNH Board of Trustees' Executive Committee recently endorsed a recommendation that has been discussed and reviewed for the past several months. If approved by the full board, it would give staff a total salary increase package of 4.5 percent, plus additional budget funding for market adjustments in FY09 and a new annual contribution to a health spending account described below. This will be voted on by the full board on Feb. 21.

Benefits Issues

Despite what staff union organizers would have you believe, the faculty contribution to health care cost containment has not been made up through staff contributions. Until a faculty contract is agreed upon, those increases are coming from college and school budgets and **not** from the fringe benefit pool.

Employer cost of benefits has been rising at a greater rate than funding sources to pay for them resulting in the need for employees to incrementally take on a greater share of the cost. However, a very substantial portion of the cost is still shouldered by the University System.

Below are comparisons between what a staff member pays and what USNH pays annually for the Harvard Pilgrim HMO plan, the plan in which most staff are enrolled:

	Staff member pays	USNH pays
Single person	\$510.24	\$5,542.80
Two Person	\$1503.24	\$10,590.48
Family	\$2,979.48	\$15,155.04

In addition, several annual benefits mitigation strategies have been put into place as outlined below to help offset the increase to employees.

In FY07, in addition to the 3 percent salary increase pool, taking into consideration market position and increased cost of benefits to employees, the University distributed funds equal to 1.5 percent of the salary base to staff in the form of merit and /or internal equity with an effective date of December 30, 2006.

Staff with a full-time equivalent annualized salary of \$40,000 or less as of June 30, 2006 received a one-time lump sum adjustment of \$650.

All staff were given the opportunity to cash-out up to five earned time days (37.5 or 40 hours), or five vacation days.

In FY09, an annual distribution of funds each January 1, equal to \$500 (pro-rated for any employee below a 75% time appointment) has been recommended in order to offset increased benefit costs. The exact means of distribution will be determined soon, and, at the present time, it is expected to include the establishment of a Health Reimbursement Account. The USNH Board of Trustees' Executive Committee recently endorsed this recommendation and it will be voted on by the full board on Feb. 21.

Working Conditions

While groups like the PAT and OS Councils would not disappear, staff councils **cannot** play a role that would usurp or be a substitute for the responsibilities that a union would have as the sole representative. The staff councils have played a major role in developing policy changes that are family-friendly and which have enhanced our workplace. They include policies such as the compassionate donation of leave time, the use of sick leave for the medical needs of family members and the development of solutions to challenges such as the increasing costs of benefits.

The various presidential commissions – which represent the interests of women, people of color, and the GLBTQ community – would likely still exist but, as with the staff councils, may not meet with the same success.

With the exception of rights established by federal and state statutes, negotiations begin with a blank slate. All terms and conditions of employment, including compensation and benefits, are open for negotiation in a unionized environment. Whether your current benefits will stay the same or change cannot be predicted prior to the conclusion of the bargaining process and adoption of the contract. For example, Annual Leave, Sick Leave and Earned Time would be subject to negotiation. The benefit of being able to take classes is no longer a guarantee; that too would be subject to negotiation.

Staff Testimonials

Jason Brodeur, WSBE Graduate and Executive Programs:

“In my professional career that now spans nearly 15 years, the University of New Hampshire is, without question, the best employer for which I have had the privilege to work. When the topic of employment comes up in conversation with new acquaintances, reactions nearly always betray some level of envy. Where else can you go that affords the opportunity for free education, professional development, comprehensive health and generous retirement benefits, competitive wages and the knowledge that you are part of an institution making a positive impact in the lives of real people both locally and around the world? Quite literally, you won’t find this anywhere else in the state. And I’ve only just scratched the surface of the benefits which I enjoy as an employee of UNH. The collegial spirit and positive environment I encounter every day are intangible factors that bind all the rest together. Through my involvement with staff governance closely collaborating with university administrators, I continue to discover and appreciate that we have a respected voice in every critical discussion affecting staff and a seat at every decision-making table. In these and countless other ways, UNH is a genuinely unique place to work. For this season of my life, I cannot imagine being anywhere else.”

Tracy Boyle, Energy and Campus Development:

I have been at UNH since 2000, on the PAT Council for the past five years and active on the SPPC Council for two years. This has provided the opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on many personnel and benefit policy changes presented during that time. Based on the councils’ feedback at those meetings, many policies have been changed or modified from their original state and I became aware of how important our voices were to the administration. In the PAT Council, we wrote and developed two major additions to staff benefits - the Compassionate Leave Donation program and the Family Leave policy. These benefits were not handed *down* to us by the administration but handed *up* to the administration by the councils. I had the opportunity to work on the sub-committees that wrote and developed both of these. We reviewed what other institutions were doing and created one that we felt would improve the benefit portfolio of the campus community - it was the staff’s voice in implementing these programs at UNH that has helped many employees in times of need. Without the council input they may never have been written. These avenues of governance have proved to be an effective and worthwhile link to the administration and I am proud to have been a part of that.”

Jen Dube, UNH English Department:

“I like UNH, and I do want to make a difference. But I don’t want an outside group speaking for me - I want to do it myself.”