



UNITED ACADEMICS
of the University of Kansas

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KU Faculty and Academic Staff Announce Union Organizing Effort

LAWRENCE, Ks.—University of Kansas faculty and academic staff on the Lawrence and Edwards campuses announced today they are organizing a union to improve working conditions for educators and learning conditions for students.

United Academics of the University of Kansas (UAKU) would represent over 1,500 full-time and part-time tenured and non-tenured-track faculty; teaching, research, clinical and online professors; lecturers; curators; librarians; scientists who conduct grant-funded research and other categories of faculty and academic staff. The union would be affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and the American Association of University Professors.

“KU has long enjoyed high rankings for academics and recognition as a premier research university, but that status is at risk. Faculty and academic staff need a voice in decisions, especially when the student experience is at stake,” said Lisa-Marie Wright, an Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of Sociology.

UAKU pointed to several issues that prompted the organizing campaign: KU’s recent attempt to suspend tenure and its over-reliance on short-term contracts for many teaching faculty, no voice in major decisions about academic programs, stagnant wages that are not competitive with other flagship universities, and a decline in state funding that hinders the kind of world-class research that benefits all Kansans.

“A union will help us retain outstanding teachers and researchers that provide the quality of education our students deserve,” said Berl Oakley, a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Molecular Biosciences.

“Collaboration is the best way to solve problems, but that can only be accomplished when faculty and academic staff have a recognized union. With a union, we can advocate for what’s best for our students and the university as a whole,” said Stephanie Meehan, a Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Speech-Language-Hearing.

UAKU said it has been inspired by faculty organizing efforts on campuses nationwide, most recently at Miami University of Ohio, the University of New Mexico, the University of Oregon and the University of Illinois at Chicago. More than 300,000 faculty and staff at universities across the country already belong to AFT and AAUP-affiliated unions. In Kansas, other faculty unions include Pittsburg State University, Fort Hays State University and Johnson County Community College.

As public employees, KU faculty and academic staff have the legal right to form a union and collectively bargain, as guaranteed by the Kansas Public Employer-Employee Relations Act.

UAKU will be collecting union authorization cards over the coming months, with a secret-ballot vote to officially form a union to follow.

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