



UW Professional Staff Organization

## Q&A on Unionization for Professional Staff

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**What is unionization?** [Return to top](#)

Unionization is the process where employees, acting as a group, select a representative (generally a recognized union) to act on their behalf to negotiate their terms and conditions of employment with their employer.

**Why is unionization of professional staff now possible?** [Return to top](#)

In April 2007 the Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 2361 granting certain higher education professional staff employees the right to pursue the ability to collectively bargain.

*The legislation can be viewed at:*

<http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/2007-08/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Law%202007/2361-S.SL.pdf>

## **Who asked the State to pass this legislation enabling professional staff to organize?**

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A consortium of unions throughout the State requested this action.

## **Are all professional staff included in the decision to unionize?** [Return to top](#)

No. The enabling legislation excluded some categories of employees engaged in confidential work, labor relations or those otherwise representing the interests of the employer in the administration of collective bargaining agreements. This latter category includes directors, administrators and managers, human resources staff and certain executive assistants (*see enabling legislation at the URL above for a complete list*). Decisions on which job titles will be included in the bargaining unit groups are ultimately decided by the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) and are initially subject to discussion between the employer and the union. Elections may be held for each identified grouping as sufficient signature cards are gathered. Groupings of employees are yet to be determined; groups of various sizes might be approached if positions have a similar purpose/description.

## **What happens next regarding organizing?** [Return to top](#)

Effective July 22, 2007, union representatives can solicit UW employees to sign cards requesting affiliation with the union. More than one union may solicit employees, including unions already representing UW employee groups and those not currently representing any groups on campus. (The University currently bargains with several different unions representing different employee groups.)

*For a list of unions and which UW employee groups they represent see:*

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/laborrel/bargunits.html>

## **What does signing a card signify?** [Return to top](#)

Signing a card means that you authorize the union to represent you in negotiations with your employer on wages and working conditions. If at least 30% of an identified group of employees sign cards, the union may petition the Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC) to run an election to determine if that group will be represented by that union. If at least 70% of the identified group sign cards, no election is necessary and the union will represent 100% of the employees in the identified group.

## **What is PERC?** [Return to top](#)

The Public Employee Relations Commission is an independent state agency responsible for resolving disputes involving most public employers and employees, and the unions that represent those employees.

*For more information on PERC go to:*

<http://www.perc.wa.gov/default.htm>

### **Why is PERC involved? [Return to top](#)**

The PERC is involved in determinations on the appropriate groupings of employees for collective bargaining, verifying the signature cards and eligibility of persons requesting unionization, and supervising the election. The PERC then certifies the organization as having the support of the majority of the employees in an appropriate bargaining unit.

*For further information on this and other employer/employee actions PERC is involved in go to:*

<http://www.perc.wa.gov/services/Case%20Descriptions.htm>

### **Will there be an election and if so, how will it take place? [Return to top](#)**

If at least 30% of the identified group of employees sign cards (indicating they wish to be represented by the union), the union may petition the PERC to conduct a secret mail ballot. A simple majority *of those voting* will trigger unionization. A simple majority is 50% plus one vote of those *votes cast*. For example, if there are 200 employees in a group of related job classifications who are eligible to vote and 60 (30%) of them have signed cards, the union may petition the PERC and ballots will be mailed to those 200 employees.

- If 50 voted and 26 votes were cast for unionization, that would represent a simple majority and the union will be installed to bargain collectively on behalf of all 200 employees.
- If 120 voted and 60 voted for and 60 against, the vote would not carry and another organizing petition could not be presented to the PERC for 12 months.
- If 140 employees signed cards and were validated by the PERC, this would be 70% of the group and no election would be necessary. The union would represent all 200 employees in collective bargaining with the employer.

### **What is the timeline for deciding on whether any group of professional staff will be unionized? [Return to top](#)**

Union representatives may start collecting signatures of employees interested in union representation starting July 22, 2007. More than one union may be on campus collecting signatures. As soon as 30% of the eligible employee group sign cards, the union may petition the PERC and if those signatures are validated, an election can be held by secret mail ballot. This process can continue on an ongoing and indefinite basis among various employee groups. Unions can petition the PERC annually to represent an identified group of employees.

### **If the employees in the identified group elect to unionize, will they pay dues? [Return to top](#)**

Payment of dues or fees as a condition of employment (creation of a union shop) is a subject for negotiation. Unions traditionally argue for a union shop in which all employees join and pay dues or do not join but pay a representation fee. UW classified staff who are union members on campus pay between 1% and 1.7% of gross income with a cap of approximately \$60 a month, depending on the union.

Employees are not required to join the union; however, they are required to pay a representation fee of about 90% of the member dues they would pay. For example, if 200 employees have an average salary of \$4,000 per month, \$48,000 per year, 1% would be \$480 per year deducted per employee and \$96,000 of annual income to the union. Unions have bylaws regarding member obligation to pay dues.

*For an example see Article X – Dues in the Constitution and By-Laws of SEIU local 925:*  
<http://seiu925.localsonline.org/docUploads/Bylaw%20amendments%20October%202006.pdf>

**What do unions do for employees?** [Return to top](#)

Unions are the exclusive bargaining agent for the designated employee group on matters such as wages, hours, vacation and sick leave accruals and working conditions. Salary increases, for instance, may be determined by what the union negotiates for all employees in a particular job classification rather than what an employee may negotiate with a supervisor or what the supervisor would approve. Unions also provide shop stewards or union representatives in the case of employee grievances against the employer. Unions have rules that apply to their members and can fine them for failure to follow those rules.

*For more information on representation at the UW go to:*  
<http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/laborrel/representation.html>

**Which union would represent professional staff on campus?** [Return to top](#)

Any union may solicit UW professional staff to sign cards selecting their union.

*For information on your right to choose, change, or reject union representation go to:*  
<http://www.perc.wa.gov/Forms/Union%20Rep%20Guide.htm>

**What do I do if I want to be represented by a union?** [Return to top](#)

Sign the card when you are asked by a campaigner. Vote if there is an election.

**What do I do if I do not want to be represented by a union?** [Return to top](#)

Do not sign the card when approached by a campaigner or a coworker. Signing a card is a definitive decision, not a step toward further consideration. Vote if there is an election. Failure to vote leaves the decision to those who do vote.

**What do I do if I change my mind about union representation?** [Return to top](#)

If there is an election, you can vote for or against unionization whether you signed a card or not.

*For more information on your right to choose, change or reject union representation go to:*  
<http://www.perc.wa.gov/Forms/Union%20Rep%20Guide.htm>

**How can I find out more about the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a union? [Return to top](#)**

Objective information on the advantages and disadvantages of union membership is not readily available and the examples of success with some employment groups may or may not transfer to other types of employees. Source documents referring to specific agreements between employees and employers are not necessarily representative of a potential agreement that might be negotiated between a union and the UW on behalf of the eligible professional staff employee group. Seek information from several different sources and compare.

References on the UW Web site include:

*Policies regarding the professional staff program:*

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/polproc/prostaff/index.html>

*Contracts negotiated between various unions and the UW:*

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/laborrel/contracts.html>

Specific unions may have informative Web sites advertising their goals and accomplishments. Look for information on dues, budgets, bylaws, boards of directors, activities other than representing employees, lobbying, and local staff.