

CCF: Who We Are, Why We're Here, What We've Done, and What We're Doing

1. Who is CCF?

A group of adjuncts and term faculty formed the NMU Coalition of Contingent Faculty in December of 2007. We were concerned about the working conditions of adjuncts and the challenges created by the higher education system for those fluctuating between adjunct and term status. At NMU, that means gaining and losing union representation periodically, along with health care and other benefits.

We worked quickly to get the attention of adjuncts and term faculty, to urge participation in our group, and to gather the specific concerns of those two groups:

- Organized speaking events.
- Participated in media outreach.
- Worked closely with Committee O of NMU's chapter of AAUP.
- Met with NMU administration to convey adjunct concerns.

We have worked continuously since December of 2007. We understand that the transient nature of the adjunct and term faculty populations, and also the challenging conditions under which we all work make it difficult for many to devote constant time and energy to this cause. Our work regularly entails:

- A small board of officers who meet weekly.
- Open monthly meetings to update all adjuncts and term faculty on our projects and progress.
- Continual open communication with the national AAUP, NMU AAUP, and the NMU administration.

We encourage any adjunct or term faculty member interested in participating more to contact current chair, Jamie Kuehnl at jkuehnl@nmu.edu, current board secretary Heidi Stevenson at hstevens@nmu.edu, or current webmaster and graphic designer Lindsay Henderson at lhenders@nmu.edu.

Any NMU faculty member may also subscribe to our CCF listserv by sending a blank e-mail to nmu-ccf-subscribe@yahoogroups.com from the e-mail address at which he or she would like to receive messages.

This listserv was created at the behest of NMU adjuncts. All meeting invites and minutes are posted there. Any member may also start or reply to threaded discussions, or vote in polls, including our upcoming elections. As we serve an ever-changing population, we duplicate invites to our monthly meetings and major announcements to the NMU adjunct e-mail list.

2. What has CCF done?

Some of our special projects over the last few years include:

- Speaking events.
- Fall Fest table.
- The distribution of CCF t-shirts in the Winter 2009 semester and several "t-shirt days" to raise awareness.

- Presentation on the possibility of adjunct membership to AAUP's Executive Committee, and subsequently:
 - the formation of a subcommittee with members of AAUP's Executive Committee to determine possible details of adjunct membership.
 - a vote by the AAUP's Executive Committee to support our efforts, which was a first step toward the AAUP's vote to accept adjunct membership.
- Establishment of an adjunct liaison to NMU administration, who has worked with CCF to:
 - create an adjunct luncheon series.
 - establish a professional development fund.
 - institute a 3% pay raise for adjuncts.

Our largest project to date has been gathering data from NMU adjuncts, adjuncts elsewhere, union organizers, NMU's chapter of AAUP and the national AAUP, AFT, and MERC on the topic of adjunct unionization. After months of research, we moved forward with pursuing adjunct membership in NMU's chapter of AAUP, starting late in the Winter 2008 semester.

3. Why has CCF moved forward with adjunct membership in NMU's chapter of AAUP?

CCF has conducted continual research on the possibilities for improving working conditions for adjunct faculty at NMU over the last two years. This has involved studying national trends and events, consulting with other adjunct groups at similar universities, and gathering data from adjunct faculty at NMU. We ultimately decided to move forward toward pursuing adjunct membership in NMU's existing chapter of AAUP for a few reasons:

- a. Representation by an established union ensured us a real chance at implementing genuine, and likely more immediate positive changes in the working conditions for adjuncts.
- b. Representation by a single union would allow us to work with full time faculty on our shared concerns, such as educational quality at NMU. It would allow us to acknowledge that we are a single workforce of educators, doing the same work and moving toward the same ultimate goals.
- c. Repeated efforts to gather data from NMU adjuncts indicated interest in this action.

This resulted in a vote by AAUP late in the Winter 2009 semester to accept adjuncts as members under specific terms:

- Those who have taught a minimum of 16 credits over the past two years would be eligible for:
 - full voting membership.
 - membership on AAUP committees.
 - membership on university-wide committees for which AAUP nominates members.
- ***This point is currently being decided upon. Over the summer of 2010, NMU administration acknowledged the right for adjuncts to accrete into the existing union, but feel that it should be "those who have taught a minimum of 12 credits within a two year period." MERC's administrative law judge will be ruling on this any day now.

- Those teaching less would be eligible for an associate membership, in which they would have a voice within the union, but not voting or committee membership rights.
***The actuality of this is uncertain at this point, since it is something that still needs to be bargained for.

The vote came down in our favor, but only by a slim margin.

4. Why didn't CCF move forward toward starting an individual adjunct chapter of AAUP?

Our research indicated that this would be a more difficult process for all involved, with less of a possibility to successfully bargain for improvements for adjuncts. CCF sees it as a more difficult venture with less chance for real and immediate improvements in adjunct hiring and working conditions, after looking at similar models at other institutions.

5. Will adjuncts be forced to join NMU's chapter of AAUP?

No. Union membership will be elective under the same model that full time membership in the union is elective. If an adjunct qualifying for full membership chooses not to join the AAUP, he or she may be required to pay a slightly lesser agency fee in lieu of dues, since he or she will still benefit from the work being done. This possibility is based on modeling our membership after full-time membership.

6. How much will adjuncts pay in union dues, if they join?

This is something that still needs to be bargained for; however, NMU's chapter of AAUP's constitution currently states that no members will pay more than 0.75% of their gross income. You can be assured, then, that your dues will not exceed that. Often, in the national models we've studied, adjunct rates are lower than full-time rates.

7. What benefits will union membership afford me?

Adjuncts will have a union organized under a national organization supporting them. Adjuncts will participate in union activities, including regular contract negotiations, as AAUP is a legal bargaining unit. Currently, adjuncts have no way to legally negotiate their contracts; we are at the mercy of the administration. For example, some adjuncts have expressed displeasure at the details of how the 3% raise was implemented, since a raise for anyone making above the minimum adjunct salary was at the discretion of each separate department; even that kind of raise is not guaranteed without a formidable legal bargaining unit, negotiating on a continual basis for adjuncts.

8. Who, exactly, will represent me within the union?

According to the terms of the Winter 2009 AAUP vote, Committee C, which will deal with contingent faculty issues, will be established and open to any union member. The chair of this committee will represent contingent faculty on the AAUP Executive Committee.

9. What has the process of joining the AAUP entailed?

Here are legally required steps that CCF has already taken:

- Defined the "recognized unit," or population of adjuncts and qualifying adjuncts (per AAUP vote terms) at NMU with the aid of the NMU AAUP.
- Collected current addresses from the "recognized unit" via e-mails to the NMU adjunct

e-mail list at the end of Winter 2009, and a follow up flyer campaign starting the week of September 21-25, 2009 which will further determine who qualifies as of the Fall 2009 semester.

c. Cleared petition language with MERC and legal counsel from the national AAUP.

d. Conducted the petition drive, which resulted in 75% of the recognized unit indicating interest in AAUP membership. The legal minimum percentage to move forward was 51%.

d. Approached NMU's administration and asked for voluntary recognition of NMU adjuncts as AAUP members. This step was optional, but CCF made that attempt as it was a more direct possible route toward adjunct union membership.

h. Moved toward a MERC vote after the administration did not recognize the unit as members. The MERC vote has entailed:

- o Filing Form 1A, "Petition for Representation" form from MERC through the NMU chapter of AAUP.
- o Submitting the cards from the card drive with Form 1A.
- o Multiple conference calls between NMU administration, NMU's chapter of AAUP, and MERC.
- o Meetings throughout the summer of 2010, between NMU administration, CCF leadership, and AAUP-NMU leadership to concretize several points, including the exact parameters of the accreting unit.
- o Accepting a stipulated MERC hearing instead of a traditional MERC hearing in Lansing, in a effort to save resources.

Here are legally required steps that CCF is in the process of taking:

- o A formal stipulated hearing, which will legally determine whether or not the recognized unit will be recognized as union members. It will also determine the minimum proportion of credits over time that an NMU adjunct must teach to acquire full AAUP membership.

Here are legally required steps that CCF will take on your behalf in the future:

- o Organize the adjunct election: Within about three weeks of the administrative law judge deciding on the unit and the unit configuration, MERC sends mail-in ballots to qualifying individuals' (adjuncts') homes. The adjuncts then have about three weeks to return these secret ballots in the self-addressed envelopes to MERC to be counted.
- o Determine the conditions under which adjuncts will function within the NMU AAUP, in conjunction with AAUP members.
- o Continue to function in a representative fashion for all NMU contingent faculty.