

Unions Are for Faculty: The Rutgers University Experience

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As a member and leader in the Rutgers AAUP-AFT faculty union, David Hughes has seen the challenges faced by academics today and found that unions are uniquely suited to meet them. The Rutgers faculty union has taken up the issues of metrics based evaluations, adjunctification of the academy, and attacks on academic freedom.

Challenges faced by faculty and the academy

- Metrics programs are increasingly used in hiring, firing, advancement, and funding decisions. These programs may not account for teaching experience and have been found to overlook important professional achievements.
- The “corporate turn” in academia is resulting in fewer tenure lines, less job security for non-tenure faculty, and a concentration of decision making power among administrators.
- The rise of social media and ‘safe space’ discourse has sometimes been accompanied by attacks on the academic freedom of faculty.

Power of a union

- During collective bargaining, administrators are required to listen to and respond to faculty on issues which are considered mandatory subjects of bargaining, such as wages and benefits.
- While union contracts do not always contain explicit language about discrimination or harassment, grievance procedures ensure that those impacted have effective representation and a path to resolution of the issue.
- As members of a union, faculty are guaranteed due process.

Victories of Rutgers AAUP-AFT

- The union won dramatic wage increases and greater job security for non-tenure track faculty members, including multi-year contracts, and a path to tenure, and earlier notice of non-renewal with appropriate justification.
- Faculty have increased the number of tenured faculty positions at Rutgers through collective bargaining.
- Being part of a union enabled Rutgers faculty to draw on the resources of their national colleagues.

“The pressures that we face on scholarship and teaching are the kinds of pressures that a union is really uniquely set up to defend higher education from.”



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