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Tufts University's full-time professors vote to unionize

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT FEBRUARY 13, 2015

Full-time professors at Tufts University voted overwhelmingly on Thursday to unionize.

The move marked a first for a local Service Employees International Union campaign that has successfully organized part-time faculty at several Boston-area schools over the past two years but until Thursday had not unionized full-time professors.

The Tufts instructors and lecturers are not on track to receive tenure, which is generally considered a permanent position.

By unionizing, the faculty hope to negotiate better work conditions.

"We're hoping to have job security, better pay, and more of a



voice, and the union, because of collective bargaining, gives us a strong voice,” said Claire Schub, a French literature lecturer who has taught at Tufts as a full-time, nontenure-track professor for 22 years.

“It also makes us more a part of the academic community, so the students benefit ultimately,” added Schub, who helped lead the organizing effort.

Fifty-two of the Tufts faculty voted for unionizing, 24 voted against, and about a dozen did not cast a ballot during the two-day, in-person election, which was held at the Medford campus, according to SEIU officials. The next step for professors is to negotiate with the university to develop a contract.

Tufts spokeswoman Kimberly Thurler said in a statement that the university’s administration has supported the lecturers’ right to vote and respects their decision.

The statement said full-time lecturers “already have stable positions,” and receive the same benefits and average salary increases as tenure-stream faculty. The lecturers also play a role in university governance, the statement said. They have voting rights at faculty meetings and are members of and sometimes leaders of faculty-administration committees.

“Moving forward, we hope to work productively with the SEIU as the collective bargaining process begins,” the statement said.

Similar campaigns to organize full-time, nontenure-track faculty at other area schools, including Brandeis and Lesley universities, are underway, officials said.

While average annual pay nationally for tenured and tenure-track faculty is in the \$85,000 range and can climb to more than twice that amount, the median salary for full-time nontenure-track faculty falls around \$50,000, according to surveys by the American Association of University Professors.

But, unlike part-time or adjunct teachers, full-time faculty who are not on the path to tenure typically are eligible for employer benefits, including health and retirement insurance, and they often receive better pay than adjuncts.

Like part-timers, however, most full-time faculty who are not on the tenure track do not have long-term job security. They say they have little influence in decisions made by their colleges, including ones that directly affect their working conditions.

In the fall of 2013, adjunct professors at Tufts became the first of several local groups to organize since the SEIU launched its faculty unionization campaign. About 200 part-time faculty at Tufts reached a contract agreement that will give most a 22 percent pay raise over the next three years and better job security.

Last week, more than 750 part-time professors at Boston University voted to unionize and will soon enter contract negotiations.

The newly unionized professors from Boston area schools have joined Faculty Forward, which is a part of SEIU Local 509 and now has more than 2,700 members, officials said.

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