

Miami University Librarians Unionize for Equity and Dignity: An Interview from the Frontlines of a First Contract Negotiation

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ABSTRACT: An interview conducted by Ian McCullough with Miami University librarians Ginny Boehme, Ken Irwin, Rachel Makarowski, and Jerry Yarnetsky

Librarians describe their path to unionization at Miami University. After losing a hearing and being removed from a faculty union's bargaining unit during a union certification drive, librarians used their signed union authorization cards to file for and win a union authorization vote. The new Faculty Alliance of Miami - Librarians (FAM - L) group was formed and are currently bargaining for their first contract. This interview with four librarians deeply involved with the union drive and bargaining details the conditions at Miami they hope to improve and their challenges and hopes looking towards the future.

Keywords: unions, organizing, collective bargaining, contract negotiating



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Higher education is currently enjoying a renaissance of union activism (Thelen, 2023) and about 2/3 of Americans currently approve of unions (Hsu, 2023). At Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, the Tenured/Tenure-Track (TTT), and non-tenure track Teaching, Clinical Professors and Lecturers (TCPL) faculty won a certification vote by an impressive 450-251 margin to form a union represented by the Faculty Alliance of Miami (FAM) AAUP-AFT in May of 2023 (Mitchell, 2023; State Employment Relations Board, 2023b). But absent from this union victory were the librarians of Miami University. On March 9, 2023, Miami University management won a challenge to the bargaining unit composition that removed the librarians from the bargaining unit in addition to visiting faculty and “mixed appointment” faculty. In their ruling, the State Employment Relations Board (SERB) stated: “Neither does the Librarian group bear a community of interest or share terms and working conditions with the TTT group and the TCPL group. Members of the Librarian group are categorically different than any of the other four groups in their wages, hours, and other working conditions.” (State Employment Relations Board, 2023d, p. 20)

Often, exclusion from a bargaining unit is the end of the union drive for those workers, but not so for the Miami librarians. Due to an extensive organizing campaign, the librarians had plenty of valid union authorization cards in hand. Undaunted, librarians rapidly formed their own bargaining unit and filed for another election, which both parties signed a consent election agreement for soon after (State Employment Relations Board, 2023c). The swift reapplication and vote resulted in a 28-0 vote by the librarians to be represented by FAM AAUP-AFT, which was certified by SERB on July 6, 2023 (State Employment Relations Board, 2023a). The new unit for just the librarians was called FAM-L and the original unit is now FAM-T.

The Journal of Radical Librarianship sought out some of the organizers and leaders of the FAM-L unit representing the remarkable librarians at Miami University to learn more about their labor struggle. Four volunteers offered to be interviewed about their unionization journey:

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| Ginny Boehme | FAM Core leadership group, organizer, bargaining team lead negotiator for FAM-L, and co-chair of the Bargaining Council. Ginny is a Science Librarian at the Oxford campus. |
| Jerry Yarnetsky | Member of the joint negotiating team and communications team. He created and manages the union’s web services. Jerry is a Web Services Librarian at the Oxford campus. |
| Ken Irwin | Research Committee, Bargaining Council, liaison work. Ken is a Web Services Librarian at the Oxford campus. |
| Rachel Makarowski | FAM Core leadership group, organizer, former chair of outreach committee, co-chair of Bargaining Council, and on the FAM-L negotiating team. Rachel is a Special Collections Librarian at the Oxford campus. |

Glossary

AAUP-AFT	American Association of University Professors - American Federation of Teachers. AAUP-AFT is the labor union FAM decided to affiliate with.
Bargaining Council	The Bargaining Council is a group including the negotiating team that formulates proposals and crafts counterproposals (Faculty Alliance of Miami, 2024).
Core	‘Core’ is a body including chairs of various union committees and other representative members that steers the overall direction of the union.
FAM	Faculty Alliance of Miami. The local organization that organized with AAUP-AFT.
FAM-L	Faculty Alliance of Miami – Libraries. This is the librarian unit of FAM.
FAM-T	This is the TTT/TCPL unit of FAM.
TCPL	Teaching, Clinical Professors and Lecturers. This is the permanent non-tenure track faculty portion of the bargaining unit.
TTT	The tenured and tenure-track faculty portion of the overall FAM bargaining unit.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length and was conducted on February 12, 2024.

Ian McCullough:

When did the faculty start organizing for a union drive at Miami? Was there a specific moment or decision that spurred this?

Ginny Boehme:

I think I've been involved for the longest time, so I can jump in on this. There were a couple of things that led up to this. First, pre-COVID there was a due process issue where two tenured professors were let go. They were terminated very abruptly due to some hallucinogenic plant scandal they had in our herbarium on one of our regional campuses. There was a whole bunch of coverage about it, but the big issue was that they, our administration, very much overreacted. They just let them go without any kind of hearing or trial or following up, and then they spent a lot of money out of pocket on lawyers and eventually were very quietly reinstated because their due process protections were violated.

Then, when the pandemic hits, our administration made the unilateral decision to “non-renew”, that was their term, for basically firing a bunch of our visiting assistant professors (VAP). About 200 of them were let go, even after our faculty circulated a petition with hundreds of signers saying we're happy to take a pay cut if you retain these people. They still let them go and I think that was really the thing that opened everybody's eyes and realized we need to fix something. I

would say the VAP nonrenewal was the bigger issue for a lot of people, that was really the galvanizing moment, but it had been bubbling for a while. Because of that academic freedom due process issue.

Rachel Makarowski:

Yeah, I can add some of the things in the libraries that had been percolating alongside that, that made us so determined. Which included things like forcing us to return to the office for the most part without providing PPE during the time of COVID. So, we're already a little bit on edge, very wary from them releasing the VAPs. If the financial situation does hit the fan, libraries were one of the first groups on the chopping block in 2008 with that recession. It's not out of the realm of possibility that we might also end up on the chopping block. So, there was a lot of frustration about that and also the lack of transparency in the decisions that were being made.

From what I can see, here at Miami, there are so many decisions that are made at the top levels and then kind of force downward rather than like getting that true buy in. So, when the faculty said we want to unionize and they said librarians, by the way, even though at Miami you're considered unclassified staff, you are faculty, you are one of us. Do you want to join us? There were way more folks who were eager to unionize than not from the library perspective.

Ian McCullough:

So, moving on to the next question, which was actually just touched on by Rachel, how supportive were the library faculty of the initial drive and were you included from the beginning?

[I see a lot of smiles and nods.]

Rachel Makarowski:

We were definitely included from the beginning. FAM started initially as an AAUP advocacy chapter which librarians not only were allowed to join, but actually helped to found, so we've kind of been involved from the very beginning. When we heard that we were unionizing, we were very much in favor of it. We're often treated here at this institution as like less than faculty, but more than staff, which puts us in a really weird liminal space when it comes to things like policy, because we're a part of faculty assembly, we submit dossiers, we have a promotional system, but then we also have something called continuing contract instead of tenure. We saw the unionization drive as a real opportunity for us, not only in maybe one day regaining faculty status, but we also saw it as a chance to kind of fix some of the issues that we had been experiencing because of this weird liminal space. Also, I feel our profession in general is not only very pro-labor, but also very 'for the good of the whole' and our unit is no exception.

Ginny Boehme:

As Rachel just said, I don't think it was a very hard sell for most of us because we're already treated as second class employees in a lot of ways. The university likes to treat us as staff when it's convenient to them, just as it likes to treat us as faculty when it's more convenient to do that and, as a result, we have a lot of lack of clarity about a lot of things and we are heavily overworked. When we put out a bargaining survey to try to get a sense of where our priorities were, the faculty status issue, surprising to me, actually did not come to the top. It was workload,

workload and pay, because we are so severely exploited by the university. And I think once we really started diving into those organizing conversations, “if you could change one thing about your job right now, what would it be?”, workload, workload and pay, were some of the things that really, really floated to the top. Because, yeah, there's just so much lack of clarity and when we are treated as faculty, it's often as a way to just exploit more labor out of us.

Ken Irwin:

So, Ginny might know more of the backstory on this, but in 2020 there was a round of outreach from other faculty members who were already part of the organizing effort, and librarians were included, as far as I can tell, from the beginning of those conversations about “Do we want to form a Union? Do we want to go forward with this?”

Ginny Boehme:

Yeah, I think the effort started in one of my departments. A couple of my faculty in the life sciences would have these conversations and because I was a known quantity and had taught classes for them, I was a way in for those folks. They were like, “Oh, yeah, we do need to get the library support, let's talk to Ginny.” I had my one-on-one conversation with one of my faculty, and that's when they brought me on board. He was laughing because when you're organizing folks you categorize them based on their level of enthusiasm, right? One means “I'm going to get involved now. I'm super supportive and I want to do stuff.” Two is “I'm supportive, but I don't have the energy or don't want to be involved.” and obviously three is “undecided” and four is “completely opposed”. He was laughing at me because I said “I don't have the capacity. I'm super supportive, I don't have the capacity, but let me know how I can help.” and he was like “You just you just told me you're a one. What are you doing?”

My enthusiasm for it just kind of spilled over and that's when I started getting involved, and I think I did a lot of the one-on-one conversations with the librarians. I think Rachel and I were writing up a manuscript one day at my house and I was like, “Hey, you know what's going on?” And immediately she just latched on to it as well, and we kind of spread our tentacles from there.

Ian McCullough:

Were any of you (folks within the library not you personally) surprised that Miami wanted to exclude everyone but the tenure and tenure track faculty from the bargaining unit?

Rachel Makarowski:

Yeah, I'm just gonna go for it. I think that we were the opposite of surprised. We knew the university would want to narrow the scope as much as possible because our bargaining unit, while it was incredibly appropriate, included not only tenure and tenure track folks, but TCPL, librarians, and the visiting professors. So, when the university came to FAM and said, “No, we disagree with this bargaining unit, it's only tenure, tenure track,” there was a lot of outrage, but it wasn't unanticipated. We knew that they were going to make that type of rejection. I think that there was a lot of frustration on all ends because the tenure, tenure track folks for the most part were like “OK, but what if we removed ourselves from the unit instead? Because everyone else in the unit needs the protections more than we do.” So even in that rejection, that challenge, there still was a real air of solidarity around everything that was happening. I will leave it there.

Ken Irwin:

This might be jumping ahead, but I think what's surprised me was not that the university opposed it, but that SERB let them get away with it. I think that having sat through the SERB hearings, the administration had a lot of incorrect information. [The administration] had a lot of, like, really weak arguments and evidently in Ohio, that's enough to convince SERB to, you know, ignore better evidence and better arguments. So that was disappointing.

Rachel Makarowski:

I think to how we all felt when reading the court transcripts, the briefs, the evidence that was presented. We not only had stronger arguments, but it was also very clear that their side did not understand what our jobs were, how we operated, what we did for the university, and how we fit into the university community. So it was really kind of depressing when SERB came with that announcement. But also, in the actual ruling itself there was incorrect information. They called us "hourly employees" and we kind of wish we were because we were not. There was nothing we could do beyond make a note to the court for the record, "This is wrong", but the decision was made.

Ian McCullough:

How prepared were you for the exclusion decision? Did you actually have this contingency plan or were you all, it sounds like you were all really surprised and didn't really have that next step planned. Is that accurate?

Rachel Makarowski:

So, No.

Ken Irwin:

No. I mean, we were prepared from the sense that the backup plan was we know we have super strong support in the library and we can go it alone if we have to. We would rather do it with the other faculty because it's stronger with the faculty. But we filed within like a week of when that decision came down, so we were prepared to move.

Jerry Yarnetsky

The decision was made super-fast. A number of us reached out, Ginny, Rachel and myself included, and said, hey, this ticks the hell out of us, you know we've got the cards already signed, and they didn't say we couldn't file. We don't want to stop and so we just said screw it we're filing anyway. You don't want us to be a union? Tough. You know we're filing, and so we did.

Rachel Makarowski:

Just to add further context to all of that - the day the decision came out those of us on CORE, which I forgot to mention earlier I am in fact also on CORE with Ginny, we had an emergency CORE meeting that night to figure out. "Where do we go from here?" Pretty immediately into that meeting, beyond the outrage and surprise and frustration, they were like well the TCPLs were included, which is great. The visiting professors were ruled to not be seasonal employees, which is a win, but the unit that would be poised to continue moving on, and like having a fairly quick reaction are the librarians. So the folks on CORE allowed Ginny and I to steer that conversation and really say, look, we think that our unit would be completely on board with just

refilling our authorization cards, but first, before we do move on that, we don't want the two of us to be making that decision without talking to folks. So, we did take a few days following that ruling. Thankfully, it wasn't hard to find people because, like Jerry said, we had a ton of people reaching out to us being like, "Can you believe this bullshit? Like what are we gonna do about this? What can we do?" So, when we pitched the idea to all of them, they were like, oh, yeah, let's just go for that.

Jerry Yarnetsky:

At which point you all did hold the meeting.

Ginny Boehme:

Yeah, to Jerry's point, I think we found out this decision on a Thursday. We talked about it in our CORE group with all the other Union leaders on a Friday, we called a meeting with the librarians on a Saturday we were like, "Alright, this is what we're doing" and then we refiled our cards a week after the SERB decision. We were right on the ball. We were really quick. We're like, "Hey, they're good for a year after signing. We're still within that window so let's just move quickly." And really, really send a big middle finger like "You don't want us in the other union? Fine. We'll form our own. We'll be the best union ever," and that's what we did.

Ian McCullough:

The librarian bargaining unit had a unanimous 28 to 0 election petition. Do you have any thoughts or comments on the level of solidarity and Pro-Union energy among the librarians?

[Lots of smiles.]

Ginny Boehme:

There's a lot, there's A LOT of solidarity. Not everybody was fully convinced of the Union until they started seeing all of the documentation, all of the fighting, that the university did to keep us out. That really galvanized a lot of people. The misinformation that they put into their hearings, the misinformation that was included in the in the SERB decision, really just kind of hammered home they have no idea what we do. They have no idea what we want, so clearly we have to fight for it ourselves and that solidarity has stuck with us ever since. We had a bargaining session on Friday and there's even more anger right now, because some of the proposals that are being passed by the university. So really the only thing they're doing is firing us up more.

Ian McCullough:

Yeah, it's an old saw, but you know management is the best organizer.

Ginny Boehme:

Yes, yes indeed.

Rachel Makarowski:

Yeah, I mean, like the sheer energy that we had around the election was really kind of infectious in all honesty. Our AAUP staff organizer was kind of in awe because we were all so quick and on top of things.

People were just really eager to participate in the vote, which was great. It was really awe inspiring to know that there were no “no” votes, there are a few folks who like aren't “pro/super pro” union, but they also clearly weren't against it at the end of the day because they chose to abstain rather than intentionally vote no. We've actually seen that spirit continue. We have folks who are engaging with the process now that we're in negotiations and being “you believe management did that?” So that's been like management being a great organizer for unions has continued to prove true in that sense.

Ken Irwin:

I wanted to mention the fact there were some abstentions, so the unanimous vote reflects a lack of opposition rather than like 100% approval and we have a few people who are not interested in having the conversation. But I would say we have probably a third of the unit actively involved in writing proposals and so I feel like a third of the unit is pretty solid representation. And then we have more who are not as involved but are at least in the loop and interested and want to hear what's going on.

Ian McCullough:

I've noticed that your bargaining sessions are open. Is that something that management did not want? Usually the Union wants the sessions open and management's like “No, no, no, no, no, no.”

Ken Irwin:

As far as the open sessions, I don't remember the extent to which they have tried to not let us be there. But certainly, we're required to take vacation days to be there, including the people who are on the negotiating team have to either make up the time or take it as a vacation day, so that's pretty absurd. They've done their best to hold the sessions as far away from campus as possible. We're a multi-site campus and we have a very small campus with no faculty who live there and that's where the first several negotiation sessions were - almost all of the Fall, I think. They eventually moved them to a regional campus, where there were some faculty and librarians present who were involved but still half an hour to 40 minutes from the main campus. Recently we finally convinced them to have some sessions on campus. And I think FAM must have found the location that we're at now, which is actually only a 20 or 25 minute walk from campus.

Rachel Makarowski:

We have some amazing staff members from AAUP and AFT, and one of the top things they taught us was, “We're adults. We don't need ground rules.” Management loves ground rules. So, while we did not win no ground rules at the table, what we did win is getting the open sessions. Because initially they were like, it's just going to be both negotiation teams and we were like “no”. So not only did we convince them to allow our members into those sessions, but their ground rules were actually absurdly restrictive - like they also said you can't go to the media about anything and we would never agree to that. We did get permission to stream the sessions to our members, so if they couldn't make the 30 - 45-minute trip to one of our regional locations where the in-person session happened, they could at least hop on Zoom even just for half an hour, to see what was happening at the table.

Ian McCullough:

Broadly, what are the biggest labor concerns expressed by the faculty? You've touched on some of these already, but you know the laundry list of things that have come up in sessions and we have sort of a library specific one later that's going to follow on this, but this is the big picture.

Ginny Boehme:

Broadly, the faculty concerns are very similar to the librarian concerns. Pay has been stagnant for a while; it has definitely not kept up with inflation. This year they refused to even give us the 2% raise that they budgeted and promised and gave to everybody else because we unionized. How dare we? But that is not enough to make up for inflation. So, the pay and having actual raises is definitely a big one. The workload is a big issue for faculty as well, which is unfortunate because we are barred from negotiating on it in Ohio. Trying to find some creative solutions around that has been interesting to say the least. We were threatened with an unfair labor practice at the table because we toed too close to the line, so we're still trying to figure out how we can account for that, but the workload is definitely an issue because ever since the pandemic workloads have increased. They have increased inequitably from what I gather for faculty and the promise of return to normalcy has not been seen. So, faculty want a return to pre-pandemic levels of workload or at the very least better workload and better workload balance. Promotion and tenure - clarity around expectations. Job protections for our permanent non-tenure track folk. Things like that. Those are really some of the bigger priorities for the Union at large.

Jerry Yarnetsky:

I think inequities in general. You know, pay inequities, labor inequities, especially gender inequity I think is a big concern.

Rachel Makarowski:

Also, inequities across campus is what I was going to say. So, Jerry and I are on the same wavelength there.

Ian McCullough:

You have mentioned that you have a number of different campuses. Is there an equity problem between the campuses - like the big campus gets a different pay rate?

[There are many nods and smiles of agreement.]

Rachel Makarowski:

This is related more to workload, but the regional faculty have in some ways a higher workload. So, let's think of our tenure track colleagues here on the main Oxford campus. They might be teaching a 2-2 [Ed. Note – meaning 2 classes in Fall semester and 2 classes in Spring semester] or a 2-3, indicating the number of courses that have three or four credit hours, while our faculty colleagues on the regional campuses are doing 4-4s. So, there's a lot of inequities in terms of the way in which the workload is spread out across campus in addition to the pay issues that we're also seeing.

Ian McCullough:

Could you tell me how and if you do collaborate regularly with the TTT & TCPL faculty unit in

bargaining? And could you talk a little bit about that coordination and collaboration?

Ginny Boehme:

We went into the the Union drive as one union and we left the decision as one union.

We are two separate units, but we are one Union and that has been the guiding principle for us. FAM largely shares its labor across both units. We have librarians on every committee, just like we have tenure/tenure track and TCPL's on every committee in group. So, the Bargaining Council is a mix. Our negotiating team is a mix. We share one bargaining council and one negotiating team for both units.

In practice, we do also have a couple of librarian specific committees. So, we have a FAM-L Bargaining Council, which is just a subset of the full and we just we take that time to work on proposals that are specific to us.

Our goal has always been to have parallel contracts ever since we got split up, because our issues, for the most part, are exactly the same. So why should we have two separate contracts and perpetuate the inequities between us? That's been how we approached everything. However, we do recognize that there are some differences like librarian; we're staff we actually can negotiate on workload. So, we did have a workload proposal.

Ian McCullough:

Surprise management.

Ginny Boehme:

I know, right?

So, there are some of those things, so we do need at least a little bit of our quiet time to ourselves to figure out where we need to go but largely we are fully incorporated.

It has resulted in some workload inequities within the bargaining council where the librarians are picking up and doing, as we kind of expect and just in a larger trend of things, a lot more or we're pulling way more of our weight than we should, but that's a separate issue.

Ian McCullough:

It's a separate issue, but this is for a journal about librarianship, and this is, to me, the story of being a librarian in the Academy. Which is that as you know, as Rachel said before, but we're treated as less than faculty but more than staff. So, it's not surprising that librarians are doing more here, maybe not being treated exactly the same, it's something that we experience a lot professionally.

Ginny Boehme:

When we started this, Rachel and I were just on the negotiating team. We were not co-chairs, but our chair got sick and Rachel and I kind of slid into leadership and took over very, very quietly. Because we seem to be the ones getting stuff done, and no one has really complained about our coup, we're just kind of rolling with it.

Rachel Makarowski

I feel like coup is a little strong, but there's a level of trust we had fostered over time. Because although we slid into that role, I distinctly remember when our chair fell ill he reached out to Ginny and was like, "Hey, I'm not going to be there today can you run the meeting?"

So, it's a single meeting, but we had another meeting with bargaining council the following day and when I logged into it, it was to two other members of bargaining council being like, "What are we doing for this meeting? Do you have an agenda? Well, we're going to wait for Rachel to show up, she should know what's going on."

So, there was a certain amount of them just having complete trust that we did know what was going on, however unfounded or untrue that might have been.

Ian McCullough:

Faculty get used to librarians organizing information for them.

Rachel Makarowski:

Also, librarians will always be crafty and savvy and able to work with change on the fly because that's a part of our profession, unlike some other parts of the Academy.

Ken Irwin:

I feel like this is just an extension of the thing where you're walking down a street in a foreign city, and somebody comes to ask you for directions because you look like you know what you're doing and you know the answer anyway.

Jerry Yarnetsky:

Every single town I've ever been in, somebody asks me for directions, even in Midtown Manhattan.

But yeah, I think the faculty are always in their own little silos and four directions to the wind, whereas we are there every single month of the year. We're always there, we're always in the middle, we're always cross disciplinary in our predisposition and our roles. We fall into that position by our sheer nature and although we may be neither fish nor fowl, but that classification also, at least that trust is there at the same time.

Ian McCullough:

OK, this is a throwback to an earlier question I asked about the faculty, but what are the prominent workplace issues the library and the librarians want to improve with your new unit?

Ginny Boehme:

Same kind of thing, pay did not immediately flip to the top of our conversations, it was kind of an undercurrent. But I think the workload issues were more egregious. We have in the library, seven departments, six departments, something like that. And there's a librarian in every single one of those except for one. But in every one of those departments, it seems that one or two people are somehow taking on the bulk of the work. So, the workload equity issues within

departments and across the library are really stark. Some of our members have health issues because of the stress that it's causing. They're unable to do a whole lot as far as more service and scholarship which is also required for our promotion and job security because their main job duties are so expansive. So, the equity is a real issue. If we can force the redistribution of such duties, if we can force hiring more staff we've been hemorrhaging staff like most libraries, and just "Oh yeah you can take this on, right? You can pick up these extra duties? There's no problem, right?" Just the job creep, the scope creep, has been abysmal.

Also, because we're quasi-faculty we have a faculty like promotional system with faculty like requirements, but there's no clarity. There's very little guidance for how to succeed without killing yourself, basically without going way too far. So, trying to inject some more clarity, a rubric or something like "Here's what we expect to see from a librarian at your level - these kinds of service activities, these kinds of scholarship activities." Those kinds of things were really big issues for us because our librarians skew very heavily younger. I think this is the first year, once everyone gets promoted in a couple of weeks officially by the board of Trustees, that we will finally have more promoted librarians than non-promoted librarians. We skewed very heavily 'assistants' over the last six or seven years rather than fully promoted and continuing-contractified or 'tenured' if you want to call it that.

Ian McCullough:

According to the SERB bargaining unit decision, "the librarian group does not bear a community of interest with any of the other four groups put forth by AAUP and does not share wages, hours, or terms and conditions of employment with them." Are there any librarian specific topics that diverge substantially from the TT/TCPL contract language so far? I'm really curious about what librarian-specific topics that you've been able to address that may have gotten lost in a bigger faculty unit.

Ginny Boehme:

I think workload is the big one here. Just the fact that we're legally allowed to bargain for it. So that was one of the first proposals that we put together and put forward that was not just modified from the faculty unit. We proposed way more aggressive pay because we work 12 months rather than nine months, but we based our pay proposal on what the faculty worked on and put forward. So really, workload is the big one. We went really extensive with our promotion and tenure rewrites, thanks in no small part to Rachel. We have a document called LARPS, Librarian Appointment Rank and Promotion System, that has been in place since 2003 that has basically become a catch all grab bag of random library policies, including the ones about criteria for promotion. She and a couple of our other colleagues tore it apart completely and reformed it into something that actually works for us. We were just like "Here is the entirety of our P&T package, our proposal and we're just going to shove it forth." It's about a 30-page document we passed across the table. It was amazing. But I can't think of any other big things that have heavily deviated because we're all so similar.

Rachel Makarowski:

There is one additional proposal that hasn't been passed across yet, that faculty definitely don't need to pass across, but we do, and that is on teaching credit bearing courses. Because there's only so many faculty it's not uncommon for those of us in the libraries to either be tapped to

teach a course or to be co-instructing a course with another faculty member. But any time that we've discussed this at the Librarian specific table, they're like, "Well, librarians don't teach credit bearing courses." So that's something that we're having to educate the management team on. Our faculty colleagues are like, "Wait, what do you mean you like you don't get paid for every course that you teach?" "What do you mean you get paid for this course in PD funds?" "What do you mean that the professional development funds that you are paid are only \$250?" It has blown their minds a little bit, so that's one issue specific to our unit. Like I said, it hasn't been passed across the negotiating table, but hopefully will be soon.

Jerry Yarnetsky:

There's a small deviation in part because we are 12-month, and they consider us staff. As such we have some changes in benefits that we've been going through, but that's not huge. And then there's a couple of things, like for professional development, because every division and department in the entire university does it different, we have to customize it just for ourselves. But other than that, it's been pretty similar.

Ian McCullough:

That's the end of my structured questions for the interview. I just want to open it up in case there's anything you'd like to say for the record, or maybe advice for other librarians who are kind of looking at this possible road ahead of them, the organizing route.

Rachel Makarowski:

Yeah, I definitely have some advice and I mean, please, Ginny, Ken and Jerry jump in at any point.

My advice is to make sure that nothing relies on a single person. Because a good way to make sure to sustainably build your union is for it to not rely on any single person. The way in which we currently have it set up, yes, Ginny and I do a lot, but I think that honestly if tomorrow came and we had to step back we know that there are other people who could step into our place and do just as good of a job.

Also, persistence is really key, like one of the things about the FAM librarians especially is it's OK to feel things, like we all were very frustrated and upset by the SERB decision, but we still persisted. So that persistence in the face of adversity, it sounds so cliché, but it really is so important as you're looking to start a union at your institution, but also you can't take things personally.

If someone says, "I'm not interested in a union," that's not an attack on you being someone who is pro-labor. That is just them saying, "Hey, I don't think this is for me" and that's OK, but even a 'no' isn't a 'no' for forever. So, it is important to keep everyone engaged and keep that door open. Like I said, we've seen some really great interest growing in some of the folks who initially said, "I don't want any part of this" or "I'm not sure that this is even what I might want." So just continuing to have those conversations with each other, and just for relying on each other so that no one does take on too much work.

Ken Irwin:

I've got two things.

One is just how valuable it has been to do this in tandem with the classroom faculty. The librarians are showing up disproportionately compared to the faculty as a whole, but having the faculty expertise, especially economic expertise and legal expertise, and having people really bringing their disciplinary backgrounds to the effort in a way that we have also been doing, having that support from across campus has been really valuable. So, I think even if there's an academic library that is organizing as a library unit from the beginning having that outreach to campus faculty can be really valuable and I hope that people will do that.

The other thing is more a personal perspective. I came to Miami four years ago, and it was just as the Union drive was getting going. It was while it was still in its quiet and semi-invisible phase. But I had come from an institution where we realized too late that we needed a Union, that we needed the advocacy support. The university was making some really terrible decisions, the same kinds of things actually that were going on at Miami and we didn't have that structure in place. So, my immediate reaction when somebody said, "Hey, do you want to organize?" was "Absolutely!" because I don't want this to happen again. Next time I need a Union, I want to have already made one. So, I'm really glad that we are now in this situation where I think we can see all the things coming at us that will require that we have the Union at our back and for us to have spent the last several years bringing this into being is going to be something we need for the rest of our time at Miami.

Ian McCullough:

Management saying things on the record and in writing is extremely clarifying for many people and not just an academic workplace, but in any type of workplace where labor suspicious folks usually think, "Well, no, the company is good."

Jerry Yarnetsky:

I came to Miami six years ago from Montgomery County Community College outside of Philly, and it was a union college since 1979 recession, and we were having to chop like crazy. The way we ended up getting out of that horrific mess was an early retirement buyout plan that basically took out 1/3 of the college. In essence our library went from 35, 38 to 25.

But I thought I would get a lot more out of that experience for this experience, but doing a contract renewal is nothing like trying to do one from scratch. But it has given me some perspective to look at the long term in a lot of ways - I've seen what a college is like when it is unionized. I've seen how it works with shared governance. I've seen administrators be thankful that the contract is in place and that gives me hope that when we get to the end of this that will be worth it.

And I've also seen the negotiating process, although it's like I said, it's totally different on a new one. I have seen where they throw the absolute worst-case scenario at you the first go around. So, for lack of a better term, I know not to panic until at least you get through three or four counters in to see where the lines really exist. Because it's really hard to know how much of it is just for show and how much of it is actual intent.

Right now, things are hard to read because we're not only mashing up against our own administration, but also against the political climate in Columbus. They are seemingly against higher education and that is pushing our university to the point where departments are proactively pulling DEI descriptions out of job descriptions. It's like we're fighting multiple tides. So, it's hard to read when proposals are thrown at us out of context, they're like grenades right now. But like I said, having been through the process once, at least I know I'm not going to panic quite yet and just to see how things play out for a while.

Ginny Boehme:

As Jerry mentioned, the first contract is hard, the first one is difficult. This is a very long road that we have been on, that we will continue to be on, for quite a while. Sometimes it's hard to see the light at the end, but this is a fight worth fighting. This is a battle that's really important. It's not about us and it's hard. It's emotionally taxing, it's mentally taxing, but it's worth it and that's what I got.

Rachel Makarowski:

Yeah, it goes to show that the company you work for doesn't care about you, but your colleagues do, like the people that we work with every day, who see us every day - those are the people that we're fighting for, like we are fighting for them today we are fighting for them 10 years from now.

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