

SOME VIEWPOINTS FROM YOUR COLLEAGUES

Note that the authors of the emails are identified with their permission; any other names or communications referenced in the original emails have been redacted.

On Fri, Jan 20, 2012 at 11:31 PM, Keith Williams wrote:

My esteemed colleagues,

As a newer adjunct at AU, I wanted to share some items with you about the unionization attempt. I am also an Adjunct at GWU and am now under the stewardship of the SEIU (without any choice as it turned out). I have attached some documents that I receive each time that I instruct a class (please forgive the redaction of personal information) and I hope that you feel that the content is intrusive and stifling as I do. After the negotiation, the SEIU can literally instill the fear of termination in an adjunct professor if they fail to pay their dues! To me this is not about freedom or protection for adjuncts but padding the pockets of the union under the guise of protection. I have never needed their protection from a bad evaluation or a threat to the academic freedom to teach in a certain manner either at AU or GWU. Mr. [XX XX] was most eloquent in his estimation, so I will not belabor the point but felt I could provide some factual evidence of the terms that will be foisted on us if the unionization is allowed to be formalized.

And here is an interview about the tactics that the SEIU uses "on behalf" of its membership. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to be affiliated with an organization such as this. I surely am not willing to do that.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEsdxakaBIo>

Keith L. Williams

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-----Frank Rangoussis <[frank.rangoussis@msn.com](mailto:frank.rangoussis@msn.com)> wrote: -----

Date: 01/20/2012 01:55PM

Subject: RE: Unionization

Dear colleagues,

In response to [XX] email, I would like to share my thoughts as well. I have been an adjunct at AU for 14 years, teaching at the School of Public Affairs. I hope you join me in opposing the formation of a union of adjunct faculty at American University.

At the outset, I believe it is important to dispel some of the grievances outlined by the pro-union correspondence that we have received over the last several weeks. Based on my many years at AU, I simply disagree with the union's assessment. For instance, the union has claimed that adjuncts "lack office space to meet with students, have little say in department decision-making, and have no platform from which to address issues and concerns." They claim that we feel that our "contributions are not as valued as they should be." Conspicuously absent are examples to support this statement.

My own experience over the last 14 years is completely opposite from what the union describes. For instance, we, in fact, are provided office space in case we need it. The university has provided us an office where we can meet with students and do work. We are invited to attend and participate in departmental meetings. Our department does not prohibit adjuncts from participating in faculty meeting and we are frequently invited to attend meetings and share our thoughts about improving our institution. Over the years, I have talked formally and informally with the department chairs, who have always treated me with respect and valued my opinions and suggestions. Throughout the years, my department has made copies for me, ordered my books and proctored my exams. Every year, my department honors the best adjuncts with an award and scheduled salary increases. Most importantly over the last 14 years, the university has always accommodated my schedule, by moving my class to a different time and a different day. From my perspective, accommodating my busy schedule to fit MY needs is the greatest indicator that the university values my "contribution." Also, the University's flexibility is one of the main reasons that I have been able to teach for so long. As the university pointed out, I'm afraid that forming a union may result in less flexibility, which will ultimately hurt all of us.

The pro-union correspondence also suggests that forming a union protects “academic freedom” and will eliminate the “fear of student evaluations, and a desire not to displease those in positions of authority.” Once again, conspicuously absent are examples of why this statement is true or how the union will eliminate such things, even if they do exist. As fellow adjuncts in SPA, you know that our class lectures usually involve some of the most divisive issues facing our country. This, of course, increases the possibility of a student complaining about the things stated in class, providing negative evaluations, and complaining about the tone of class discussions and the substantive material covered in class. In other words, if there is a place where academic freedom at AU is tested – it is in the classes we teach at AU. I can assure you that not a single time has my syllabus been questioned by the university. Never has the university instructed me to include material in my course, or to remove material in my course. AU has never even hinted at curtailing my academic freedom. Indeed, the administration has even backed me up in grade disputes with students. The university also understands that there are always a few students with illegitimate grievances who will give bad evals.

Apart from making promises it cannot guarantee, it seems that the union has completely misunderstood the nature of what we do and the nature of the adjunct position. Ironically, forming a union may actually hurt adjuncts by reducing the number of available adjunct positions and reducing our flexibility. For instance, a recent pro-union correspondence from Anee McLeer, the Director Research and Strategic Planning at SEIU, stated the following: “Faculty at American University, like faculty across the nation, are deeply concerned about the over-reliance on adjunct and contingent temporary faculty in institutions of higher education. This situation is detrimental for faculty and for our system of higher education.” Incredibly, the union, which seeks to represent us and our interests, apparently believes that AU has too many adjuncts and that the situation is detrimental to higher education. For us, the question is whether we want to cede our voice to a union that believes such a thing.

The union may claim that the point of this is to force AU to hire more full time tenured faculty from the ranks of adjunct faculty and offer greater job security. There is no guarantee that will happen. Indeed, it is likely that the exact opposite will happen. AU may ultimately hire more full time tenured faculty – but not from the ranks of adjuncts, thus eliminating our opportunity to teach at AU. As a result, the unintended consequence is that some of us may lose our position because of the union-pursued policy. Unfortunately,

because the union will have the sole right to speak on our behalf, we will have no ability to object to this policy and whatever voice we did have with our individual departments will be lost.

Ms. McLeer's correspondence also stated the following: "Adjuncts ... travel from campus to campus in a day as they have to teach in many different institutions, or work other jobs in order to get by. Many go without health insurance and get into debt while teaching a full load of classes." This, more than anything, reflects a misunderstanding of the adjunct position. The adjunct professor is supposed to offer a contrast to the full time professor who spends his or her day on campus, versus the adjunct who actually practices in the field of study and likely has real-world experience. Although I respect and admire the adjuncts who go from school to school during the day and teach a full course load, the fact is that the contrast between full time faculty and this type of adjunct is lost. For the university and the students, the benefit of adjuncts is not simply cheap labor - it offers students the ability to learn from people who actually practice in the field. That brings us back to the point I made above - pursuing the union policy of more full time tenured professors will, in the long run, hurt the adjuncts by providing fewer available positions. If the union is successful in demanding more full time faculty, there will be less room for adjuncts. It will also hurt students because they will have fewer professors with real world experience.

Is there room for improvement for AU - of course there is, and the union indeed makes some legitimate points (especially about salaries - we should earn more). Unfortunately, when I fully consider the union's broader anti-adjunct agenda (i.e. concerning the detrimental effect on higher education of too many adjuncts); the loss of my ability to negotiate for myself with my individual department; the risk of reduced flexibility in managing my course schedule; the risk of fewer adjunct positions; and the mandatory requirement that we financially support the union at the cost of \$29 per month - it is my judgment that forming a union AT THIS TIME, is simply a bad idea.

Thank you taking the time to hear me out.

Respectfully,  
Frank Rangoussis

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From: Rainey Ransom/rransom/AmericanU  
Date: 01/20/2012 01:55PM

Subject: RE: Unionization

[XX, XX, XX]

Thank you for sharing your views on this important matter. I too am strongly opposed to the union and will be voting NO. Having been an adjunct at American University in SPA for 20 years, my experiences have been positive and see no reason to change. I concur with all the individual points you each made in your emails; thus, see no reason to pile on. However, I will share the fact that I have several friends who used to be adjuncts at GW, who no longer work there because of the union. GW adjuncts unionized some three or 4 years ago and the restrictions that came along with that choice made it an intolerable place to work. GW lost several long standing adjuncts because the union took over. Individual freedom and choice were eroded.

Don't allow your personal voice to be taken over by outsiders who generalize their literature to an academic community they clearly know nothing about as evidenced in the points you each made.

Rainey Ransom

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From: Matthew Caspari/caspari/AmericanU  
Date: 01/21/2012 01:04PM  
Subject: Unionization

Dear Colleagues, I have been a union member in my professional life and I have no philosophical objection to unionization. I did not intend to chime in on this issue, however, I feel compelled to write in response to the several pro-unionization e-mails I have received with no opportunity to "reply all" to explain why this rush to unionization should be delayed and more carefully considered. I am currently mobilized to the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC, so e-mailing you all is really the only way to communicate at this late hour. I wrote the below e-mail to my colleagues yesterday in the School of Public Affairs however I wanted to share it with you as well since there are so many adjuncts affected by this decision. I appreciate the reality that many of you may hold strong beliefs on this issue one way or the other and may be better informed than I. The latter is in fact my point and why I'm voting no for the time being. I apologize in advance if this e-mail offends anyone, not my intent. First, I feel like I have been solicited by a door-to-door salesman without any protections of a 3 day right of rescission. I first heard about this unionization effort only 3-4 weeks ago. Now we

are expected to vote and most of the information I have received is from the well-organized union that stands to benefit financially if the adjuncts unionize and AU becomes a closed union shop. I feel rushed and, as explained below, I have some concerns about the representations made in support of unionization, concerns that need additional time and discussion with my fellow adjuncts, not particularly the union organizers, to resolve. I don't understand the rush, we can unionize anytime. The reverse is not true – once we unionize and this union obtains a forced monopoly on all adjuncts, it is extremely difficult to de-unionize. I'm voting no at this time because I need more time.

Second, I'm not convinced at this point with the union's argument. They claim they will get us pay raises and describe one adjunct who is trying to raise a family on \$17K a year. However, the adjuncts I know, including one with 15 years experience at AU, have received raises when they asked for them without any support from a union. I've never asked for a raise so I'm not prepared to outsource management of my AU career to a union on matters that I haven't yet asked for myself and been unfairly denied. Since other adjuncts have received raises, I'm not convinced we need a union yet to receive raises.

In terms of trying to support a family in D.C. solely upon an adjunct's salary, that's not the role of an adjunct position in my opinion. Adjuncts are professionals with careers outside of academia that are brought in to provide that real-world experience to the students. The unions' view of adjunct is not the same as mine if they are trying to extract large pay increases for adjuncts on the premise that it's the adjuncts' only salary to support his or her family. The union also claims that it can negotiate fairness to an evaluation process where some adjuncts have been fired as a result of a disgruntled student's evaluation. Candidly, that has not been my experience. I have received several disgruntled students' evaluation and because they were obvious outliers among positive evaluations, I never heard a word about it.

Overall, I see the union as a solution in search of a problem and I need more time to learn about the real, versus perceived or contrived, problems that requires a union. I have not been micro-managed in how I teach or felt my academic freedom impacted at all. Let's think this through before we make what effectively is an irrevocable decision that can substantially alter the adjunct role at AU under the law of unintended consequences.

Thank you for your time and I apologize in advance if this e-mail offends anyone, not my intent.  
Matthew Caspari

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From: Patricia Mitchell/profmitchell@gmail.com  
Date: 01/21/2012 06:18PM  
Subject: Unionization

Thank you to everyone who has provided insight and opinion regarding the unionization issue. I have been an adjunct at AU as well at Univ. Balto and George Mason law schools since 1999. None of my positions have been union positions, so this is new experience.

I am curious as to what has created the rapid move to seek a vote. Like most people, I would love to earn more money - at AU or in my full-time job as a Maryland judge. But during my many years at AU I have never felt that I was a second class citizen, unfairly treated, treated with indifference or lack of respect.

In fact, my experience is quite the opposite. I wish that I could attend the many meetings, seminars, social events and training opportunities to which I have been generously invited. Obviously I am only on campus in the evening, so my interaction with day-time adjunct professors is quite limited. If there are concerns about which I am ignorant, I am happy to learn more.

Thank you again for this discussion.

Sincerely,

Patti Mitchell

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