



# UNION WIRE

NEWSLETTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER

2021

## **To my fellow UCPEA Muslims and members from the Middle East, Northern Africa and the Indian subcontinent**

As the crisis in Afghanistan escalates, I fear for us and our communities abroad of the impending hatred towards our peoples.

Along with the terror and destruction on September 11th, 2001, many of us will never forget the onslaught of islamophobia that followed. The attacks on this country were crimes against humanity committed by those who lied to the world about what it meant to be a Muslim. This led to a vast and violent misunderstanding of folx not belonging to the dominant demographic. Hate crimes targeted us for our skin color, for believing in faiths other than Christianity, for having “foreign” names, and/or for speaking languages other than English. Recall that this hatred affected even those who did not identify as Muslims. Being different or “close enough” was enough for hatred to ensue. I speak of my Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist siblings. I speak too of brown Christian and Jewish communities as well. All who suffered alongside Muslims, the target of misdirected anger, grief, and xenophobia.

As Afghanistan unravels and falls to the Taliban, I write to say that the hate and fear that they monger is not Islam. The international terrorism of the Taliban, ISIL, and Al-Qaeda have nothing to do with us and our faiths. These groups use Islam as a tool to spread their violence and propaganda (as has been the fate of many religions). I write to remind us all that suicide bombings are not Islam. Oppression is not Islam. These groups, their actions, their ideals do not represent the global Muslim community. I write to say that I see you as you are. I see us as we are: a peaceful, loving faith community.

May we continue to be there for one another in the difficult times that lie ahead.

In sh’Allah.  
God Willing.

Nishelli Ahmed  
UCPEA Vice President of Social Justice

## **Welcome, Jordan McMillan**

Jordan McMillan joined the UCPEA staff this August as the new Field Representative.

Before moving to Connecticut for her Masters and Doctorate in Sociology; Jordan was a Social Worker in Alabama.

Jordan's path to the Labor Movement started as a graduate student in UConn's Sociology Department. She came to the University right before graduate employees unionized for the first time. She has the unique experience of working as a non-unionized University employee, and then as a unionized employee at the same University.

As Jordan connected to the common struggle that she shared with other Graduate Assistants, she became more involved in her union. Winning the GEU's second contract was a highlight. Collective action including a sit-in that she led made this win possible.

Jordan most recently served as the President of the GEU. She is no stranger to the ways in which the University creates exploitative and toxic relationships with workers, and she is committed to shifting that power dynamic and holding the University accountable.

Jordan will be an enormous asset to the UCPEA community in her advocacy for members and through her defense of our contract.



## "Collective Bargaining 101"

As we prepare to go back into contract negotiations in October, it's worth taking a moment to check in about what we (the membership, staff, and negotiating team) can all do for our collective benefit, and review where we are in the process:

"What are the steps in the bargaining process?"

The two parties (UCPEA and the University) must first set Ground Rules for negotiations (this was done in the spring). Then they negotiate the articles of our current contract. When a tentative agreement has been reached for all articles, it is brought to the UCPEA members for a vote. If the membership votes "yes", the contract will go to the Legislative Assembly for ratification. If the membership votes "no", the two parties may return to the bargaining table or possibly go to arbitration as a last resort.

What does the negotiating team do?"

The negotiating team works on all aspects of the bargaining process: attending all negotiation sessions, taking notes, preparing proposals, and planning strategy. The team may also invite members to speak on specific issues in order to provide testimony of their personal experiences.

"What are we bargaining for?"

Each of the 52 Articles in our current contract:  
[http://ucpea.ct.aft.org/sites/default/files/article\\_pdf\\_files/2018-01/final\\_ucpea\\_cba\\_2016-2021.pdf](http://ucpea.ct.aft.org/sites/default/files/article_pdf_files/2018-01/final_ucpea_cba_2016-2021.pdf)

can be bargained, including salary, working hours, compensatory time, telecommuting, longevity, and tuition waivers.

"Why should I show up as an observer?"

First and most importantly, because this is your contract, and any changes will directly affect you! As you know, we can have 18 UCPEA observers at every negotiation session. The University did not make it easy for people to sign up, but this is the most important thing you can do. You'll soon receive a reminder of how to do this, but in the meantime, remember we're all in this together. Your negotiating team needs you at every single session to provide support and show the University that we are united. Nothing will show that more strongly than having those 18 hard-won virtual seats filled for every session. This is a huge morale boost for your negotiating team, and sends a powerful message to the University.

Click here for a useful manual that explains general negotiation practices and terms.

<https://teamster.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/72717bargainingmanual.pdf>

## UCPEA Victory at Arbitration

The UCPEA recently brought a grievance to arbitration to argue that an unsatisfactory evaluation issued to one of our UCPEA members, was issued without just cause. The arbitrator agreed with the union, which changed the score and obligated the University to pay the back pay associated with the salary lost when the 2020 wage increase was not applied.

Of the five possible scores on an annual evaluation; the only score that can be grieved is an overall unsatisfactory. Part of the reason unsatisfactory scores have a special grievable status is because the impact is significantly greater than any other score. An employee who receives an overall unsatisfactory is ineligible for any wage increases. The University also uses overall unsatisfactory scores to justify higher levels of progressive discipline. There is a University practice of using two consecutive unsatisfactory scores as background for a termination. All of this, plus the disrespect of being given an unsatisfactory score, adds up to a significant toll for the UCPEA member.

Whenever there is a grievance, there is an opportunity to resolve. The first two steps of the contractual grievance process go through University decision makers. Sometimes a resolution is a change to the overall score, in other cases a resolution is a resetting of goals and a real chance for demonstrated improvement. In this case, a fair resolution was not offered through the initial steps of the grievance process, so the UCPEA Executive Board voted unanimously to send the case to arbitration.

The arbitration step requires great courage from the grievant. The Union's job is to defend our member and prove that the score is unjust. The University comes into the hearing prepared to prove that their employee's performance was unsatisfactory. UCPEA's brave grievant needed to sit through a full day hearing that discussed his performance in order to reach this victory.

In cases where the union's position is that the manager did not have just cause to issue discipline, there are seven tests that are commonly applied. One of these tests is: was the employee adequately warned of the consequences of their conduct? With an unsatisfactory evaluation, the manager may pass this test if they have repeatedly counseled their employee about performance deficiencies. Often this will result in disciplinary letters about performance. In this arbitration, the UCPEA successfully argued that there was not appropriate warning or fair opportunity for progress.

The individual impact of this case is that the UCPEA member who brought forward the grievance received justice after a year-long fight. They will receive the raise they missed out on and the backpay from what was lost. By stepping forward in such a bold way; this member also impacted the whole bargaining unit. This case sets the firm standard that managers cannot simply hand out unsatisfactory scores if they have not made efforts to communicate and to support improved performance. The case also shows the University that the UCPEA is going to stand firm in our advocacy and will bring cases like this all the way up to arbitration.

## Q and A with UCPEA's VP for Communications: Justin Kyle Tanner

Q: For those members who don't know you yet, will you share a bit about how you became involved with your union?

A: I became involved with UCPEA because I saw it as another way to gain new skills, make connections, and honestly make my life (and my friends') better. The first time I was introduced to UCPEA was during our orientation day and I'll never forget when Lindsay said that UCPEA is here for you but you have to be active. I asked Lindsay what that meant and Lindsay said whatever you're willing to do! Little did Lindsay know that I would take her up on that and here we are, from committee member to Steward to now VPC!

Q: What are your goals during your term as VP for Communications?

A: My goals are easy: transparency, representation, and collaboration. I've heard stories of folks who have been here longer than I that things aren't always crystal clear, both at UConn and UCPEA. Take that and pair it with the lack of collaboration and being a team and UConn can be quite an isolating place. So, my goal is to get more younger folk involved, take away the mysteries, and create space for folks to help one another (and to get help!).

Q: How will you use the Union Wire to reach some of these goals?

A: The Wire needs all the voices. ALL. So, you may see that the Wire changes from the past. The Wire is a chance for folks to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. To create avenues of seeking support and calling out injustices. It is also a place where any and all information can gather. It will take some time to get it there, but hopefully soon it will not only be consistent, but increase in publication!

Q: Will the Union Wire look and read differently?

A: The Wire should be pro-union, pro-employee, pro-liberation. The Wire is not just a place that gathers dates and times. It is a place where members can share their stories. The Wire has done a great job in the past of keeping information neat and organized. However, in order to be pro-union, one has to be assertive against the University when there is an issue. In order to be pro-employee, that means calling out managements shortcomings. In order to be pro-liberation, the system must be critiqued. I challenge the members to reflect on their experiences here at UConn. Has it been 100% perfect? If so, then I'm so happy. However, that's not the case for a lot of the membership. So, the Wire must be a way to call attention to and arm our membership to battle injustices in the workplace.

Q: Outside of the Wire, will there be other changes to the ways that the UCPEA communicates?

A: We hope to be more active. From world events to sharing information on negotiations, the goal is to make things more frequent, bold, and employee-focused. We also want our members to learn and grow and so hopefully with special Wire editions that are focused on identities, folks not only learn but also feel empowered.

Q: The last issue of the Wire generated a good amount of discussion. What are some of the ways members can be more involved with UCPEA Communications?

A: Volunteer! One voice is never enough. If you have a certain idea of professionalism, then join and be ready to be challenged. If you are someone who can't see the message because the grammar is in the way, then help make one of the most difficult languages more clear in sharing the message. Want a Union that takes strong, pro-employee actions? Then join the fight!

## Payroll Deduction Updates Regarding Dues

A dues increase for AFT National will appear in member paychecks dated October 22, 2021.

Effective in the paycheck dated October 22, 2021, AFT National dues will increase by \$.20 to \$11.41 for all members with an FTE of 100%. All members with less than an FTE of 100% will see an increase of \$.10 per pay period to a flat amount of \$10.20. These increases follow UCPEA guidelines under our Bylaws when AFT National increases dues.

## Volunteer for a Committee

UCPEA is calling for members to join our committees. Many of the services provided to UCPEA members are the results of hard work done by committees of volunteers. These committees plan events, programs, distribute professional development funds, among other member services. Serving on a committee will help you learn more about UCPEA, help other members, and helps to create a sustainable, active membership. Your voice matters, and the best way to create a better work place and University Community is to volunteer. A list of our committees, with contact information for the committee chair follows:

*Childcare Reimbursement:* Reviews and processes childcare reimbursement applications. Lisa Orcutt, Chair: [lisa.orcutt@uconn.edu](mailto:lisa.orcutt@uconn.edu)

*Committee on Political Education (COPE):* Addresses all aspects of political action affecting UCPEA members; endorse candidates for office. Peter Morenus, VP for Political Affairs: [politicalaffairs@ucpea.org](mailto:politicalaffairs@ucpea.org)

*Constitution and Bylaws:* Addresses all aspects of operations and activities for UCPEA. Don Babcock, Secretary: [donald.babcock@uconn.edu](mailto:donald.babcock@uconn.edu)

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*Finance:* Develops long-range financial plans and drafts annual budget. Dave Paquette, Treasurer: [treasurer@ucpea.org](mailto:treasurer@ucpea.org)

*Hiring Practices:* Monitors the University's policies and practices relating to hiring, promotion and professional advancement issues which affect the membership. Maintains an awareness of the human resources management systems and procedures utilized by the University. Chris Dahl, Chair: [christina.dahl@uconn.edu](mailto:christina.dahl@uconn.edu)

*Membership Services:* Developing and promoting membership and community of belonging including planning and facilitating events, and programs to build a better workplace for our diverse membership. Nisha Joshee Hardnett, VP Membership Services: [membershipservices@ucpea.org](mailto:membershipservices@ucpea.org)

*Nominating:* Administers the nomination process for all elected officers, Union Stewards and convention delegates, as outline in the Constitution. Donald Babcock, Secretary: [secretary@ucpea.org](mailto:secretary@ucpea.org)

*Professional Development Committee:* Distributes money for professional development activities such as conferences and workshops. Monitors the tuition reimbursement process. Jen Morenus, VP for Professional Development: [professionalissues@ucpea.org](mailto:professionalissues@ucpea.org)

*Sick Bank:* Reviews applications for UCPEA employees seeking additional sick time with very serious or catastrophic personal illness or injuries when all other options have been exhausted. Valerie Kiefer, Chair: [valerie.kiefer@uconn.edu](mailto:valerie.kiefer@uconn.edu)

*Communications:* Reviews all UCPEA Communications, collects informational and pro-employee content for UCPEA's Wire Newsletter, social media and marketing content creators. Justin Kyle Tanner, VP for Communications: [communications@ucpea.org](mailto:communications@ucpea.org)

*Scholarship Committee:* Reviews UCPEA Sandy Schulte and Austin Leadership applications in May of each year. Scholarships are presented and awarded at UCPEA's Annual Meeting. Chair: Marita Decozio-Wiley, [marita.d.wiley@uconn.edu](mailto:marita.d.wiley@uconn.edu)

## Dates, Deadlines, and Things To Do

All events and meetings are at noon, unless otherwise noted.

Sept. 23, Thurs., Executive Board Meeting - SU 410 & Zoom  
Sept. 28, Tues., Hiring Practices Committee Meeting - Zoom  
Sept., 29, Wed., Member Services Committee Meeting - Zoom  
Sept. 30, Thurs., Executive Board Meeting - SU 410 & Zoom  
Oct. 4, Mon., Social Justice Committee Meeting - Zoom  
Oct. 6, Wed., Union Steward Meeting - Zoom  
Oct. 7, Thurs., Executive Board Meeting - SU 410 & Zoom  
Oct. 11, Mon., UCPEA Office Closed Indigenous Peoples' Day  
Oct. 12, Tues., Professional Issues Committee Meeting - Zoom  
Oct. 13, Wed., Member Services Committee Meeting - Zoom  
Oct. 14, Thurs., Executive Board Meeting - SU 410 & Zoom

**Professional Development applications are reviewed at the beginning of each month**

### Childcare Reimbursement Applications

May 15 for January-April Expenses  
Sept. 15 for May-August Expenses  
Jan. 15 for September-December Expenses

### Dependent Tuition Waivers

The benefit applies to Fall & Spring semesters only  
Deadlines: Fall Semester – June 1  
Spring Semester – November 15

### Employee Tuition Waivers

The waiver applies to the Fall and Spring semesters only.  
Deadlines: Fall Semester – October 15th  
Spring Semester – February 28th

### Tuition Reimbursement

Reimbursements apply to summer, fall and spring course work  
Summer: Sept. 15; Fall Semester: Jan. 15; Spring Semester: June 1

#### OFFICE STAFF

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