

30-Minute ASE Orientation, Suggested Talking Points

Note: Feel free to edit as you wish. This is merely *a suggested set of talking points*.

Materials to have on hand: (1) membership cards; (2) know your rights flyers; (3) buttons; (4) department sign-in sheet; (5) intro to your union tri-fold.

INTRODUCTION

- **Introduce yourself**, department, year, what you've taught and for how long, position in the union (if any).
 - We are members/stewards of the union, volunteering to make sure you know what your rights are as employees before you start to work. One of our most fundamental rights as employees is to represent ourselves through a union. So, one of the main things we'll do today is to explain how the union works and why it's important for you all to be involved.
 - Academic Student Employees (ASE's) have a dual role in the University; we are both students and workers. Just as we guarantee our rights as students through organizations like student government, the union is how we guarantee our rights as workers.
 - We have a lot to cover, and I'm sure you will have questions, so we'll make time **during and after** the presentation to **answer questions**.
 - **Sign-In Sheet:** Please put down your information if you want more info or are interested in getting involved.
- **What is the union?**
 - **Question: How many people have been members of a union or have family members who have been members of a union?**
 - The union represents over 12,000 tutors, readers and TAs at the University of California. We joined together as a union to have a say over the policies that affect us as employees. Some of these policies are set by the university, and some are set by the legislature.
 - The right to union representation is a fundamental right of all employees, and we fought hard to win that right here at UC. The campaign that eventually led to the recognition of our union in 1999. Recognition was finally won after TAs went on strike on all UC campuses in December of 1998 during finals.
 - We are part of a growing national movement of academic student employees (ASEs) to win the right to have union representation.
- **What has the union done/what does it do now?**
 - We **negotiate a contract** with the University **every three years** that outlines your rights and benefits when you work as a Graduate Student Instructor, Teaching Assistant, Reader or Tutor.
 - Thanks to our contract, we have many protections and benefits as employees that we didn't have before the union, and that we couldn't maintain without it. If you look on the "Know your rights" handout you will see some of the things we have won, including: educational remission, workload protection, healthcare insurance, wage increases, paid leave, and a childcare subsidy.

- **The last contract we negotiated was settled at the end of 2010.**
- **Coalition and Solidarity Work:** We also organize alongside students and other UC unions.
- **Organize our members to defend public education**
 - The legislature just cut **\$650 million from UC's budget**; This is in addition to a **20%** cut in state funding for the UC system in 2009 (a **3%** cut in the total UC budget).
 - In part due to these cuts, and in part due to the mismanagement of the UC system, tuition has more than tripled in the last ten years, including another fee hike passed at the UC Regents meeting in July, when people aren't around to contest the decision; likely mid-term cuts and potential mid-year fee increases
 - The Regents' and UCOP's choices regarding spending and tuition over the last ten years have prioritized executive pay over educational quality and public access. Recent cuts have fallen disproportionately on students and low-wage workers and provided cover for a longer-term **privatization of the UC system.**
 - We believe grad students are in a strategic institutional location as educators and as academic labor. **By organizing we can defend public education.**
 - Inclusive membership meetings; growing network of department based stewards to organize grad students where we work and study
- **Questions?**
- **Our Contract**
 - Next we're going to tell you about our contract, which applies to every one of us when we work as a tutor, reader or TA. You can see many of these on your "Know your rights" handout.
 - If you feel any of these protections have been violated, please come talk to us about it after the presentation!

Rights and Protections:

- **The most basic form of protection we have as part of the contract is the contract itself.** Before we had a union, we had no contract. And if any part of the contract is violated, we have a way of enforcing it. There is a fair ***grievance procedure***, as part of the contract, in which a neutral third party has the final say over any dispute, and both the university and the union have to honor that decision.
- We recently settled a new contract in November of 2010. Our contract expires on September 30, 2013.

Let's turn now to some of the specific rights and protections written into the contract:

- **Protections against sexual harassment and discrimination:** In our 2007 contract, we won added anti-discrimination protection based on pregnancy status and gender expression or identity.

- **Workload protection:** Critically important, this insures that we are paid for all the work we do. That means you are paid for all duties related to your appointment, including reading the course material, attending lecture, preparing for discussion, answering student e-mails, etc. It also means you can't be required to work more than the hours you are being paid for.
 - For a teaching assistant working at 50%, this means that you cannot be asked to work more than 370 hours during the semester. This should average 20 hours a week, and you cannot be asked to work more than 40 hours in any week, or more than 8 hours in one day. If you feel that you cannot reasonably complete your assignments within that amount of time, you should contact us at the union office.
- **Tutors:** If you are working as a tutor, you must be paid for your scheduled session, even if your student does not show up. (all campuses except UCSC)
- **Appointment Notification and Security Rights:** This ensures that when you get an offer for a job, it's in writing, and it's guaranteed. For example, if one of your sections is canceled after you're hired, the university either has to reassign you to another section, or pay you anyway.
- **Supplemental Documentation:** This ensures that everyone is entitled to a clear, written description of what the duties of the job are, before you start to work. At the beginning of every semester you are supposed to receive a document, called your supplemental documentation, that details what course you will be assigned to, and what your specific duties will be.
- **Health and safety:** The contract guarantees a safe workplace. (This is most relevant to ASEs who work in labs, but can be important for others as well, for example, if a building you work in has asbestos in it.)
- **Any Questions so far about anything I've said?**

Pay and Benefits:

- **Full remission of in-state education and registration fees and health care premiums:** Whenever graduate students work at least 10 hours a week as a TA, reader or tutor the university pays 100% of our in state education and registration fees in addition to our healthcare premiums. This also applies to undergraduates working as TAs. Prior to our first contract in 2000, the university only paid (on average) 65% of these fees. Full fee remissions have not only benefited graduate student employees, but also departments by freeing up resources to dedicate to research, fellowships, and equipment purchases.
- **Leaves:** Our contract also guarantees various kinds of paid leave, which we first successfully negotiated into our contract in 2007. This includes paid sick leave and paid parental leave. (2 days paid sick leave per quarter/ 3 days paid sick leave per semester & 4 weeks paid leave for the birth parents; 2 weeks paid leave for non-birth parent to care for a newly adopted or new-born child).
- **Childcare:** Any academic student employee working at 25% time or more who has non-school-aged children is entitled to a \$450 per semester childcare reimbursement.
- **Wage increases:** We've received at least 24% in wages increases since our first contract in 1999—this is not compounded and is higher for some titles. In recent

years, we've received annual increases between 1.5-5%. Because of the current budget crisis, we did not negotiate wage increases for 2009-2010. However, we also managed to stave off the wage reductions that have been happening throughout the UC.

Enforcement

- **Moving on to enforcement, our contractual rights are only meaningful if we know what they are and protect them through enforcement.**
- There are a number of ways that this budget crisis may impact our working conditions. Cuts to jobs and appointment percentages can lead to being overworked. The need to cut costs may include violations to the wages article. Departments and hiring units may violate appointment notification and job security rights in an attempt to hold off promising employment security. As such, it is our responsibility to fight against the negative effects of cutting budgets by enforcing our contract. Through the **union's grievance procedure** we can let our departments, the university, the legislature, and the governor know that we will not do extra unpaid work to make up for UC's and the state's failure to fully fund higher education.
- If any of your protected rights and benefits have been violated, the union can help.
- If any of you have any questions about your rights under the contract, or how to participate in actively enforcing them, let me know at the end of the presentation.

Become a Member!

Anyone who works as an academic student employee is covered by our contract, but you need to sign up in order to be a member. Being a member does two things:

1. It gives you the right to **participate** in the union—it's a democratic, member-run organization. Being a member gives you the right to vote, run for office, let us know your priorities when we go into negotiations, basically to have a say in how the union is run and the decisions that get made—decisions that will affect you.
 2. It adds to our **collective strength** as university workers. Our power and influence with the university and the legislature comes from our membership. Each month the university sees the percentage of the people working under the contract who are signed up as members. We've always had a strong majority, which is how we've won strong contracts and helped push back some of the budget cuts and fee increases.
- We're going to **pass out these membership cards** and you can go ahead and start filling them out. Please leave them with us **when they've been filled out.**
 - (If people ask about dues and fees:
 - Since everyone is protected by the contract and gets all the rights and benefits, everyone automatically pays a fee for representation, called a "Fair Share Fee" of 0.85% of your gross monthly pay. For a first step GSI salary, this is about \$14/month.
 - When you sign up to be a member, you pay Membership dues instead of fair share fees which is a total of 1.15% of your gross monthly salary. For a first step GSI, this is about \$19/month. So, the difference between being a member and not is normally only about \$5/month

➤ There is also a one-time \$10 initiation fee when you first sign up.)

- Be sure to sign and date at the bottom.

- **VCAP:**

On the other side of the card is another form. This is to enroll you in our Voluntary Community Action Program. Our union does not use dues money to make hard political contributions, so we have a simple way for members to make monthly contributions to a special fund that we use to campaign for pro-education, pro-labor candidates and initiative campaigns.

Get Involved

- The union works through the participation of its members
- The most effective way to fight the budget cuts and fee hikes and win strong contracts is by being a grassroots, member-run organization, where members mobilize other members.
- We have an ambitious work plan for the upcoming year, including linking up a network of activists in every department, organizing graduate student researchers, fighting workload increases and fee hikes, and participating in state-wide coalitions to oppose austerity measures. Plus, barbeques, movie nights, and more. If any of these activities or campaigns sound interesting to you, we'd love for you to help us make them happen. And if you'd like to see the union involved in other initiatives, you can propose them at our monthly membership meetings, the first of which will be held August 30th.
- **SIGN UP ON THE SIGN IN FOR MORE INFO!** If you are interested in finding out how to become more involved in proactive solutions to this budget crisis or any of the other elements of our organizing work, put down your name and phone number and we'll contact you. Your info will be kept private; we only call or email you with info about important meetings, events or actions.
- **Finally, please join us at the next Monthly Membership Meeting: [insert date and location] and [insert other events]**