

psu Strong

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MTA/NEA

Powering UMass Amherst and UMass Boston

PSU Files Unfair Labor Practice Charge Over Privatization of Jobs

By Liz Smith, PSU member

After months of stalled negotiations, in June PSU filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the state Department of Labor Relations over the issue of converting PSU positions to jobs with a private nonprofit organization. Specifically, the complaint requests that more than 20 positions currently housed under the University of Massachusetts Amherst Foundation (UMAF), the private fundraising arm of the campus, be returned to PSU.

For the past year, PSU has been working to resolve this significant unit erosion issue within the Advancement division on the Amherst campus. Advancement has been using UMAF, a private, non-union organization, to hire at will employees for positions that should rightly be PSU and non-unit state positions. The complaint was filed because this practice threatens the unit as a whole and creates a dangerous precedent in privatizing state positions that are represented by unions.

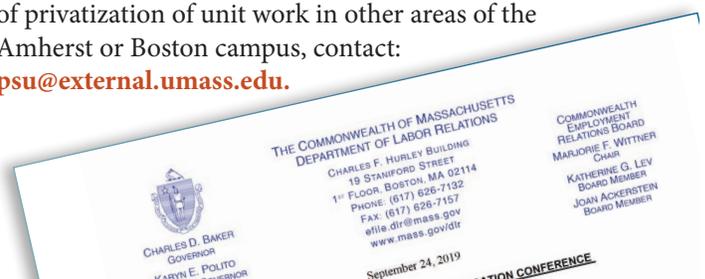
Currently, UMAF employees do not have the same hard-fought benefits enjoyed by their PSU colleagues, creating a two-tiered system within Advancement. These benefits include just cause and due process for termination or discipline, the ability to file grievances, representation by the union, and access to the sick leave bank, among many others. UMAF employees are also denied benefits received by state employees such as vesting in the state pension system

and the multiple health care options provided under the GIC. Unlike PSU employees, foundation employees are at will. They can be fired or laid off at any time, for any reason, without due process, despite doing the same work and, in many cases, having the exact same job titles, managers, responsibilities, and work locations.

PSU is also working to clarify reporting structures within Advancement. At present, many Advancement PSU employees are supervised by a UMAF employee. PSU is demanding that all unit employees report directly to state employees who can be held accountable by our contract with the university.

Since the filing of the unfair labor practice charge, the campus administration has come to the bargaining table several times to meet with PSU. The next step in the process, if an agreement cannot be reached, is an investigative hearing by the state Department of Labor Relations. The hearing is scheduled for January.

If you have any questions or concerns or are aware of privatization of unit work in other areas of the Amherst or Boston campus, contact:
psu@external.umass.edu.



PSU members gathered October 29 in Amherst's Old Chapel to celebrate 30 years of union representation of professional staff. Boston also had a celebration with members bringing donations for a student food pantry.

Party goers in Amherst included PSU founders. From left, Dennis Bromery, Joe Twarog, Jose Bou, Ferd Wulkan, Si Keochakian, Carol Edelson, Karen Lederer, David Lafond, Tom Coish, Joanne Levenson, Doris Clemmons, David Greenberg, Helen Wise, Maura Sweeney, Joe Connolly, Dale Melcher



Photo by Frank Aronson, PSU member

Join the Movement

Amherst CORE meets monthly in the Campus Center. Boston's CORE meets every 3rd Wednesday from 12 to 1 p.m. in the Union Conference Room (Quinn 02/081). The next meeting is **December 18**.

If you are interested in learning more or joining CORE, contact

Amherst

Dan LaBontedlabonte@umass.edu
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Boston

Mary Jo Connellymaryjoconnellypsu@gmail.com

Fight for Racial Equity

By Dan LaBonte, PSU member, and
Mary Jo Connelly, PSU Boston organizer

On both the Amherst and Boston campuses, PSU's Committee on Racial Equity (CORE) has been working to build the capacity of our union to address racial discrimination and inequality using contract language, research, and education.

Amherst's chapter is still relatively new and continuing to grow. Notable achievements since it began two years ago include being awarded a campus climate grant to implement two cohorts of a book club centering discussions around Ijeoma Oluo's seminal work *So You Want to Talk About Race*, and collaborating with the UMass Amherst Police Department to modify terminology and protocols in an effort to reduce bias in community reporting.

In September, at its first meeting of the semester, the group decided to clarify the way it engages with the CORE mission, hoping this year to introduce racial justice into contract bargaining, determine strategic and effective uses for PSU employee equal opportunity (EEO) data, and build on-campus coalitions. During this meeting, Graduate Student Senate (GSS) President Justin Burch also shared initial progress on GSS's goal to collaborate with the administration on the development of sustainable racial justice practices. GSS is calling for proactive and comprehensive campus wide diversity-equity-inclusion education, clear and concise university communications, coherent and reparative community responses, and intentional and actionable campus campaigns.

Boston's chapter eagerly engaged new activists through its October 9 fall kick-off. The event included a diversity and equality dominos game as well as hearing selections from *Walking in Our Shoes: Readings from the CORE Stories Project*, which highlights various PSU members' experiences with racism in the workplace.

Knowing the challenges for staff of color to find support and encouragement at Boston, the chapter chose for its first book club selection Brené Brown's *Dare to Lead*. In the coming year, the group will continue to prioritize visibility, both expanding member engagement with CORE and ensuring that PSU staff know and see CORE as a resource. In addition, Boston CORE will be collaborating with the PSU bargaining team to develop racial justice and equity contract proposals. Those efforts will be led by Boston CORE leader, Ade Igbineweka, who has been elected to the bargaining team. The group also looks forward to working more closely with the grievance committee to better understand and address instances of racism with regard to PSU members.



The UMass Boston CORE members played equality and diversity dominos at their fall kick-off meeting to encourage conversation about equality, equity, prejudice, privilege, institutional racism, intersectionality, and other issues.

GOODBYE AND THANK YOU, FATMATA JAH

BOSTON PSU ACTIVIST RETIRES

By Mary Jo Connelly, PSU Boston organizer

Fatmata Jah, a long-time PSU activist and the co-founder of PSU Boston's Committee on Racial Equity (CORE), retired October 18. Jah came to the U.S. from Sierra Leone and started her studies at UMass Boston in 1993. She started working at UMB in 1998, first in the registrar's office, then in graduate admissions, and for the past eight years in university advising. Through PSU, Jah became active with women's labor organizations, including the Women's Institute for Leadership Development and the Summer School for Union Women, where she learned public speaking and other skills that helped her grow professionally and as a leader.

Q: What brought you to the U.S., and what led you to working at UMass Boston, supporting students for the past 21 years?

JAH: I used to visit my brother who was a student at Boston College and realized that my ticket to freedom was to come to the U.S. to go to school. You see, I was denied access to higher education in Sierra Leone, not because my family could not afford it, but only because I was a woman. I had to get married, and when I was married, I didn't have the freedom to do anything or make any decisions.

The civil war was going on in Sierra Leone then (from 1991 to 2002) and I had to help my family financially. It was really hard to be an adult student, working full time, and going to school and I did not get much support. That's why I started helping students at UMass and how I got into advising.

Q: How did you get involved with PSU and would you recommend others get involved?

JAH: I went to a couple of PSU meetings and started asking questions and realized that the union was supporting people who felt intimidated or could not advocate for themselves. We have gained a lot because of the union: the sick leave bank, parental leave. There is strength in unity. We need to help each other grow, and by doing this we make our institution grow as well.

Q: Why is it important to have a group like the Committee on Racial Equity (CORE)?

JAH: Some people are afraid to confront issues on their own and CORE is a platform for them. We help them feel comfortable expressing their views or feelings about racism they have experienced at work, and feel comfortable working with PSU to address racism.



Fatmata Jah

Q: What about other parts of your life, beyond UMass, PSU, WILD, and labor women?

JAH: My goal is to use writing in the future to help women develop and attain the freedom they want. I work with an amazing group of women writers called the "Streetfeet Women."

Q: What's next for you?

JAH: I am still going to continue with my writing as one of my major projects. Since family comes first, I'm going to see my mum in Sierra Leone, who I have not seen in six years. While I'm there I will revisit my fight against female circumcision—I grew up where it is still practiced on teenage girls. I may also reopen the library I set up there. I want to find a way to advocate for girls, to help them believe in themselves and know that with education, you can do anything you want, as I have been able to do.

Q: Do you have any words of wisdom for PSU members as they go through yet another budget crisis?

JAH: I would say: don't give up and don't let current circumstances derail you from your goals and dreams, or change who you are. Acknowledging the humanity in everyone you meet here helps a lot—just smile and say hello! I suggest stepping out of your comfort zone and always have an alternative plan.



To read a longer version of Fatmata Jah's interview with Mary Jo Connelly and view more photos, go to umass.edu/psumta

UMASS BOSTON CONTINUES BUDGET FIGHT

By Peter Tattlebaum, PSU Boston member



Enough is Enough is the cry going up from staff, faculty, and students at UMass Boston as the 2019–2020 school year is underway.

The goal of the **Enough is Enough** campaign is to increase awareness both on and off campus about the damage being done to the university's urban mission, students, staff, faculty, and programs due to budget cuts. As part of the campaign, staff and students handed out fliers on campus during the October convocation to spread the word and encourage others to raise their concerns.

For the third year, the campus administration has announced that Boston is starting the year facing a budget shortfall—this year the purported deficit is \$14 million. For the second time, the administration's response to the continuing budget crisis is to offer a Voluntary Separation Incentive Program (VSIP) followed by layoffs. Of the 47 employees who took advantage of the VSIP, 26—more than half—were PSU members. So far, PSU has been notified of



five layoffs, and more cuts are threatened to the campus' vital centers and institutes.

The UMass central administration has blamed previous fiscal mismanagement and over-spending for the crisis. They have offered no relief to the campus and have, instead, continued to demand that the campus balance its budget without using any of its own reserves to mitigate the impacts of the deficit.

During this time, PSU along with other unions and student organizations who have formed the SaveUMB Coalition, have argued that the crisis stems directly from the huge debt load the campus is carrying from reconstruction projects and from the central administration's insistence that the campus pay for this debt while maintaining a balanced budget.

"It is clear that the legacy debt on this campus is unsustainable, and if the trustees and the legislature continue to abandon our campus to the rising debt waters, we are at ever greater risk of drowning," noted Tom Goodkind, PSU's grievance secretary.



Go to umass.edu/psumta to read a speech Annetta Argyres, president of PSU Boston, delivered to the UMass Board of Trustees in September.

NEW BARGAINING TEAM

By Iris Jenkins, PSU member



Amherst union members who attended MTA sponsored workshops on negotiating are from left, Jennifer Page, Risa Silverman, and Liliya Giurgiu and back row, Ben McNamee, Lori Peterson, and Karen Hayes.

In September, PSU in Amherst and Boston elected members to serve on the negotiating committee for the next contract. The current contract expires June 30, 2020. The committee will soon begin preparing for negotiation sessions with management, which are set to start in the new year.

Unit A Amherst negotiating committee members are: Jennifer Page (Center for Data Science), JoAnne Martone (IT Services), Judith Cameron (Advancement), Lori Peterson (School of Public Health and Health Sciences), Dominick Usher (College of Social and Behavioral Sciences), Olivia Frazier (College of Nursing), Karen J. Hayes (University Relations), and Brad Turner, co-chair; four alternates: Ricardo Cuesta (Undergraduate Admissions), Thomas Bak (UCard Office), Joanna Boody (Research Compliance), and Kenn Hannah (IT Services).

The Unit B Amherst bargaining team members are: Risa Silverman, co-chair, Liliya Giurgiu (Residential Life), Dennis Bruffee (Facilities and Campus Services), David Wilson, (Facilities and Campus Services), and Mike DuFresne, (Facilities and Campus Services).

Boston elected by acclamation Annetta Argyres, president, Sarah Bartlett (Registrar's Office), Adesuwa Igbineweka (Career Services), Tom McClennan (IT Application Services), and Ben McNamee (College of Management, Undergraduate Programs). The Boston committee also includes two alternates: Tom Goodkind (College of Science and Mathematics, Dean's Office), and Rashelle Straker (McCormack Graduate School, Dean's Office).



The Hottest Place to be in August:

The MTA Summer Conference

By Mary Jo Connelly, PSU UMass Boston organizer

The MTA Summer Conference every August offers union skills and professional development workshops to members and leaders, and brings us together to reflect on our past and future challenges. More than 80 workshops were offered this year, along with tracks for new leaders and members. The workshops were augmented by social events, including yoga classes, dances, tours of the UMass Amherst campus and the nearby Emily Dickinson House, and trivia night.

UMass Amherst Co-Chair Risa Silverman attended the New Presidents' Track; UMass Boston President Anneta Argyres co-taught the Naming the Moment: Education for Action track; Amherst New Member Committee Coordinator Jules Bannister presented at a workshop entitled "Welcoming and Engaging Your Higher Ed Members"; and Amherst Organizer Ferd Wulkan helped organize a table where student Sunrise Movement activists promoted the September climate strike and their movement. I attended workshops with Amherst members Katy Maher and Fermin Valle, and Boston PSU member Baifeng Sun came out for the ALANA (African, Latino, Asian, Native American) events.

Valle shared his perspective on the conference. "The conference provided me the opportunity to learn from a diverse group of educators, from public school teachers, to substitutes, to paraprofessionals, to vocational instructors, and beyond. I developed a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of different educators and our shared struggle for more socially just educational systems and work environments for everyone."

Katy Maher noted, "It is also important to connect not only with other colleagues in higher education but also K-12

colleagues. I learned a lot about the state of K-12 funding and the challenges of being a classroom teacher. There was a lot of solidarity between the two groups, and the conference provided opportunities to reflect on the current state of higher education, and to think about public education as a whole."

During the conference, I met hundreds of savvy, energized MTA members. My own summer conference highlights were:

- **The Naming the Moment workshops:** attended by more than 100 participants engaged in analyzing the key forces and events shaping public education today. Small groups used Naming the Moment tools to make plans for addressing issues such as funding gaps, testing, social-emotional learning, and racial justice.
- **Workshops on racial equity and justice and inclusion for members and students:** centered on effective organizing and bargaining strategies that MTA locals have used.
- **Higher Education Day events:** offered updates on progress with passage of the CHERISH Act, which will increase funding for public education by millions, and sought input from the rank and file.

Watch for information in **June/July** on how to register and apply for scholarships for next summer's conference.



New Union Powerhouse

By Risa Silverman, PSU Amherst co-chair

The newly formed Western Massachusetts Area Labor Federation is a collective powerhouse of union strength harnessed to help all local unions, including PSU, especially during critical times such as bargaining.

The federation, a merger of three Central Labor Councils, represents more than 50,000 union members and hundreds of thousands of non-union workers across the four counties of Western Massachusetts. By pooling resources, the federation has hired a full-time organizer to better coordinate regional strategies and campaigns.

The federation will more efficiently bring people together across sectors and towns, turn union members out in solidarity to support each other's fights, make political endorsements, get out the vote, and help coordinate union campaigns to fight for the dignity of all workers.

Want to get involved? PSU has been allocated six delegates to the federation, who will help determine agendas and goals. Delegates can also run for a seat on the 21-person executive board. Contact **Lydia Wood**, federation organizer, at lydpw86@gmail.com for more information, or **Risa Silverman** at risa@schoolph.umass.edu.

Meetings will be held on the second Monday of every month. Locations will vary and carpooling will be arranged. For more info: [facebook.com/WMALEF/](https://www.facebook.com/WMALEF/)

NEW PSU MEMBER PROFILE: PA TAMBA NGOM

By Iris Jenkins, PSU member

Pa Tamba Ngom joined PSU Amherst in June 2019 after accepting a position as manager of laboratory instructions in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. He comes to PSU with experience in leadership roles within unions in his native country The Gambia as well as the UK.

While Ngom is not new to unions, PSU is his first union membership in the U.S. For Ngom, unions provide a means of connecting with others as well as a platform for voicing concerns and working towards resolving important issues as a team. He says, “What you can do on your own, the union can do better with you.” He is enthusiastic about using his experience to contribute to PSU’s efforts around diversity and inclusion. He is also interested in initiating a PSU mentoring/support program for international PSU members that may have unique needs associated with their international status.

“What you can do on your own, the union can do better with you.”

Ngom first developed an interest in working with unions while in high school in the early 1980s. In his native country he served as a social secretary of his high school student union in Banjul City. The group worked to boost student morale, engage students in social activities, and build networks with students in other countries. It also engaged the local community to help provide them with assistance, ranging from cleaning up the environment to promoting healthy living. Working with the student group allowed Ngom the opportunity to support others while being supported himself. It provided a sense of community, he recalls.

After graduating high school in 1984 he attended Exeter College in England and was able to find that sense of community again by becoming a member of the college student union. This time, he was involved on a much larger scale. He became the first overseas student officer at Exeter

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A Welcome for New Members

By Jules Bannister, PSU member

Chances are that if you’ve become a member of PSU Amherst since June 2018, you’ve met me—Jules Bannister ’12—or at least read my name in an email. That is the month I became involved with the PSU Membership Committee, first as a member, and soon after as the chair.

The function of the membership committee is to welcome people who are new to the bargaining unit. The committee typically meets new employees for 30-40 minutes for a union orientation. This is an opportunity for people to meet a friendly union member, become acquainted with the union mission and structure, ask questions, and complete membership paperwork. From there, we connect them with their area delegate and serve as a resource as questions come up, or help new members get more involved with the union. Several new members have become area delegates and many have shown strong support for PSU.

Providing a warm, welcoming, and engaging first contact is important to help set the tone for what PSU is all about, and to share the message that “PSU is you!” In addition to running orientations, the committee is also creating a PSU contract guidebook and holding new member lunches to help people get to know each other and meet union leaders. The committee’s goal is for new members to feel welcomed and valued.

The membership committee now has seven members: Marcie Savoie, Amy Chapman Drake, Frank Aronson, Eshwar Shanker, Lance Overby, and Rommel Cordova-Fiori. Ann Stephany has also assisted this past year. Previously, Savoie and Chapman alone kept the committee afloat and trained new members (including me), and for that I am so grateful!

For Amherst members email

Jules Bannister.....jbannister@umass.edu

For Boston members email

Sarah Bartlett.....sarah.bartlett@umb.edu



The PSU Welcoming Committee sponsored a Mt. Toby hike in July. Hikers, from left are David Ruderman, Fran Fortino, Pa Tamba Ngom, Jules Bannister, and Ferd Wulkan.

NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE

Navigating the Workplace is PSU Strong's new advice column dedicated to helping members tactfully and effectively address challenging workplace issues. Please send us your questions to psu@external.umass.edu.



STEPPING OFF THE DEBATE STAGE

By Dan LaBonte, PSU Member

What do you do when a coworker wants to talk politics?

This is a timely question considering that political debate season has already begun. The good thing about these debates is they demand that we negotiate our values. The bad thing is they model closed exchanges, which limit opinions to right or wrong and confine ideas and people to winners or losers.

We cannot expect that the increase in national conversations around trade wars, gun violence, resilient women's movements, and racial reparations will remain solely as talking points for political candidates. So what happens when a coworker brings the debate to you? And what is your plan when the conversation turns to race, religion, gender, ability, or family status?

Instead of following the rules of debate, you may find more success in inviting others to an open conversation. Be curious about their viewpoint. Offer empathy. Listen to understand rather than as a place marker for your next opportunity to talk. Express the connections you found when listening. Finally, add new information and perspective.

These steps read very simply, but it is easier said than done. At times, someone may say something that offends you or others as it relates to social identity. Their words or actions may perpetuate negative stereotypes or ideals and uphold the oppression of a marginalized group. When this happens, here are some considerations for calling someone into a conversation:

- **Listen** and refrain from defensiveness.
- **Focus on the words** and actions that occurred, and explain why what was said or done is unacceptable.

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College, and represented the college at the National Union of Students of the United Kingdom, a confederation of college student unions from all over the UK. He received leadership training, attended national conferences, and advocated for student rights. In addition, Ngom participated in other activities with the union such as marching against apartheid and working to free Nelson Mandela. These experiences demonstrated to Ngom the strength of unity and the value of working as part of a team.

Even after he graduated from college in 1989, Ngom continued his involvement with unions. He returned home to The Gambia and began working for the British Medical Research Council, where he was an active member of the

- **Steer the conversation** away from defining character—speculating about personal intent or motive takes away from identifying solutions to address the harmful impact.
- **Extend grace to yourself and others**—remind yourself that people make mistakes and that you too needed to learn from your missteps at some point.

• **Confront the behavior** because it is the right thing to do, not for the sake of gaining praise.

• **Know your limits and resources**—too often, people with marginalized identities bear the unnecessary burden of educating others. Sometimes it is ok to let others do the work.

Respectively, if you are called into a conversation, the same considerations are true. It may also be helpful to recall the three steps to offering a successful apology:

- **Thank your colleague** for bringing the mistake to your attention.
- **Acknowledge** what you did wrong without any conditions.
- **Take responsibility** for your actions and make a commitment to change the behavior.

In the fall semester, PSU members practiced communication techniques in **Dignity and Respect in Action: Community Conversations**, a program offered by the Amherst Office of Equity and Inclusion.

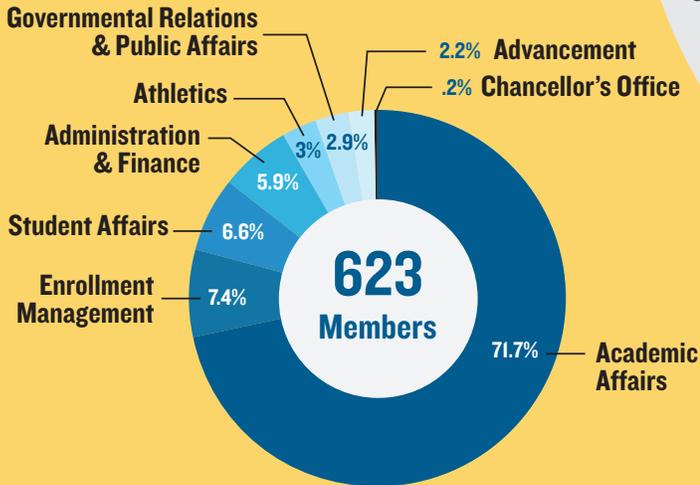
For more information about building a respectful and inclusive campus community, and to learn about opportunities to actively engage with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at UMass Amherst, visit: umass.edu/diversity/get-involved

workers union and held various leadership roles. When recalling his experience with the workers union Ngom says, "Unions are beneficial because they offer a sense of belonging and support. They also help resolve problems for employees as well as employers by serving as the mediator."

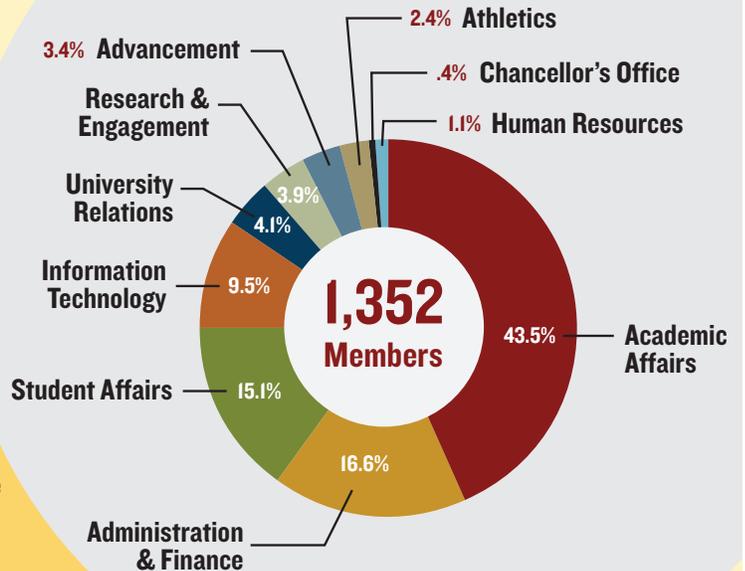
Although he has only been on campus for a short time, he has already connected with other union members by participating in the PSU Labor Day Hike. In addition to enjoying the outdoors, Ngom is an advocate for sustainable environmental practices and plants trees whenever he has the opportunity. Ngom is looking forward to connecting with more members of PSU and working to address issues that are important to the membership. We are excited to welcome Ngom to the PSU family!

OUR WORKPLACE HOMES

% of PSU Boston Members by Work Area



% of PSU Amherst Members by Work Area



Source: UMass Administration September 2019

OUR WORKPLACE RIGHTS

Weingarten rights guarantee an employee the right to union representation during an investigatory interview by an employer. If the conversation could in any way lead to the employee being disciplined or terminated, or affect their working conditions, the employee should request a union representative be present. Not sure? Ask for a union rep.

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Judith Cameron, Iris Jenkins, Dan LaBonte, Jennifer Page, Liz Smith, Peter Tattlebaum, and Ferd Wulkan **Designer:** Sarah Jarman

Talk Back

Questions, opinions, letters to the editor: psu@external.umass.edu

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