

# HFCC Adjunct Faculty Organization Organizing Committee News



Help us build the Adjunct Faculty Organization! Help us build a better college!

## Administration Agrees to Inclusive Definition of AFO Bargaining Unit Union Representation Election Will Begin April 15!

Thanks to a tremendous effort by the Adjunct Faculty Organization (AFO) Steering Committee and more than a little help from our friends, we have reached an agreement regarding the definition of our bargaining unit and the procedures for our union representation election. Beginning April 15, the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC) will mail ballots to the home addresses of eligible voters. After voting “YES,” your signed ballot will go into a return envelope that will have to get back to MERC by May 5.

As previously reported, we filed for a union representation election with MERC in December. Since then we’ve been in talks with Elizabeth Davis (the college’s director of Human Resources) and Robert Boonin, an attorney from Butzel-Long. From the beginning we were pleased by the tone of the discussions and the college’s willingness to listen to our position, but at times it felt like we would never reach an agreement. The college initially held that a substantial proportion of adjuncts – those who have been teaching for less than two years AND those who teach less than 4.5 credits per term – were “casual” employees and should not be allowed to vote. We took the position that all adjuncts are committed to their students from the time they begin preparation for their first class and therefore all of us, regardless of length of

tenure or the number of classes taught, should be eligible for membership.

Those issues were finally resolved on February 26 when the College agreed to include all part-time instructors teaching credit-awarding classes, as well as those doing non-credit instructional work as part-time librarians, counselors, English Language Institute and Learning Lab instructors, job placement officers, and cooperative education specialists. While certain jobs will be excluded (e.g. counselors who come in to work only the two weeks at the beginning of the semester rush), overall we achieved the “inclusive” bargaining unit that we sought from the beginning. (If you are not sure from this description whether you will be covered, reach out to a Steering Committee member and we will get an answer for you.)

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Eligible voters will include all those falling under this definition and working this Winter semester. The AFO will gain legal recognition as an HFCC union if a simple majority of those casting ballots vote “yes.” However, as any adjunct teaching political science can confirm, the more people who vote and the higher the proportion of “yes” votes, the stronger our mandate will be. Forming a union and gaining legal recognition to bargain for improved

working conditions for adjuncts is not the goal; it is simply the first step. Our long range objective is to improve the quality of education

HFCC students receive by working constructively with college administrators to build a healthier college community.

### AFO Member Profile: Neam Zalzala



Between teaching, going to school, caring for new baby Sunen and five-year-old Fedek, Neam Zalzala’s life is a busy one.

The Adjunct Faculty Organization (AFO) will be a strong organization both because of the diversity of our membership and because of our shared experiences. To highlight the many factors that draw us together and to celebrate our individuality, the *AFO Organizing Committee News* will feature a series of “member profiles” beginning with Neam Zalzala, who has been teaching “Nutrition and Physical Education for Classroom Teachers” at HFCC since 2004.

One thing all HFCC adjuncts seem to have in common is the fact that we lead busy lives. Between teaching three sections at HFCC and one class at U-M Dearborn, working on her PhD in curriculum and instruction at Wayne State University, and caring for her daughters, five-year-old Fedek and three-month-old Sunen, Neam’s life is busier than most. Her full schedule has limited the amount of time she has available, but it has not kept her from being an active contributor to our AFO organizing efforts. *(continued on back)*



*A Union of Professionals*

## From Legal Recognition to Our First Contract

While this is no time to get complacent (we need YOUR vote), we are confident that we will win our union representation election—the question is how large our mandate will be. Once we win recognition, our next steps will be to agree to a constitution, elect officers, establish bargaining priorities, form a bargaining committee, and negotiate our first contract.

All eligible members, including those who do not vote in the union representation election, and even those that vote against the union, will be represented by the AFO and we want everyone to be part of the post-election process. Our constitution will establish procedures and by-laws that will determine leadership positions and govern the process for establishing our bargaining priorities and setting up a bargaining committee. The constitution will also determine what we will pay in union dues. Our dues will likely be around 1.5-2% of our pay depending on how we structure things, but no dues will be collected until after our first contract is in place. If dues are 2% of pay, members will contribute \$20 for every \$1,000 they earn.

Since we will be affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), our plan is to use an AFT template as the starting point for creating our constitution. After reviewing the details and modifying the provisions as necessary to fit our unique situation, we will make the document available for review to all members and schedule a meeting to discuss and explain how it will work. All members, including those who do not attend the meeting, will be eligible to vote for or against the constitution. Once the constitution is ratified, we will nominate and elect officers.

Based on input we received during and since the card-signing campaign, it is likely that our bargaining priorities will include better pay (HFCC adjuncts are currently the lowest paid community college adjuncts in Michigan and we're among the lowest paid in the country), access to health care and other college benefit programs, and some sort of job security. All members will be encouraged to participate in the process of establishing our specific priorities and developing rationales for getting the College to agree to them. The bargaining committee will have the difficult job of attempting to convince College administrators that realizing these priorities is in the best interests of everyone involved. While it is far too early to set a timetable, we optimistically hope that our first contract will be agreed to by December 2008. Once the bargaining committee reaches agreement with the College regarding the contract's provisions, the entire membership will have a chance to vote for or against acceptance.

We wholeheartedly believe that we will have a constructive working relationship with the College. The administration has agreed to take a neutral position regarding our union representation election. This step shows that they have decided to let us make our own decisions, which bodes well for a relationship based on trust and a mutual interest in building a healthier college community. Forming a union is not the ultimate goal; it is merely our first major stride toward achieving our objective of ensuring that HFCC provides students with a high quality education while compensating all of its employees in accordance with their level of professional attainment.



This is OUR union and will be as strong as WE make it—contact the steering committee at [afo@hfcc-afo.org](mailto:afo@hfcc-afo.org) to get involved!

### ...With a Little Help From Our Friends!

A special thank you to John McDonald, president of the HFCC full-time faculty union: AFT Local 1650. John, 1650 members, and staffmember JoAnne Dalton have helped out in many ways during our campaign, from hosting phone-banking in their office to talking with adjuncts one-on-one. In this last phase of negotiations over the bargaining unit, John went above and beyond the call of solidarity and put untold hours into helping us reach an agreement. Feel free to offer a heartfelt “thanks” the next time you see John or any 1650 member in the hallway!

### Member Profile

(Continued from P. 1)

Neam was born in Iraq, but moved to the U.S. with her parents when she was three months old. Like many Iraqi families, hers settled in Dearborn. After graduating from Fordson High School, Neam attended HFCC before moving on to WSU to earn her bachelor's and master's degrees. She hopes to someday land a full-time faculty job, ideally at a research-oriented university.

Not only is Neam an HFCC graduate, both of her parents have taught Arabic language classes at HFCC, and her mother now teaches nutrition. When baby Sunen was born in December, Neam's mother proctored her final exams—other than finals week Neam didn't miss any school in either the fall or winter terms!

Neam notes that before the formation of the Lecturer's Employee Organization (LEO) at U-M, her pay there was similar to her pay at HFCC. Now she earns three times as much per credit hour at U-M. She was also motivated to become active with the AFO because of the way her parents have been treated. Both lost their positions as Arabic teachers when they were bumped.

As Neam says, “What's going on with adjuncts is not fair. I want to help current and future adjuncts avoid the kind of treatment my parents received. Our first contract should provide us with better pay and some security—maybe even a right to take a maternity leave.”

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