

Working Effectively with TA Unions

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MSU context—know your context!

- Michigan is “pro-labor”. Not a “right to work” state. UM was organized (along with UW-M) in the mid 1970s. WSU organized in 2001.
- MSU organized (Amer Fed of Teachers) 2001. First CBA in 2002. Currently 3rd CBA.
- http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/contracts/GEU_2008-2011.pdf

Role of the Graduate Dean

- As the “honest broker” –trusted by both sides to provide information and discussion of “consequences” of various suggested language during negotiations. At MSU—not “at the table” to bargain.
- Work closely with employee relations
- After a contract is approved— work in partnership with Employee Relations to discuss issues prior to formal grievances. Language for “special conferences”

Organizing and Negotiating

- Know your state laws!
- Work with employee relations and university relations (for the press).
- Know when to shut up!
- Design a neutral website with DATA.
- Have a “strike plan”
- Be patient and honest (anger makes you stupid)

“Living with” a contract

- Understand all parts of the contract
- For each contract (especially the first and subsequently –any changes), a workshop with employee relations, general counsel etc present for Grad Dean to explain all provisions & expectations of hiring units.
- Use it to improve working conditions for all TAs—that is primarily why they organized in the first place.

Final words

- Observations from 9 years of experience with a TA union:
 - It does fix existing problems in the units by adding consistency and fairness
 - It sets up other problems, e.g. teaching as an academic requirement
 - It is a balancing act for Grad Deans!