

Our Kent State Faculty Union and AAUP Vol. 4: Next steps, timelines, and processes

October 30, 2024

Dear Kent State Faculty,

This is Volume 4 of a series of communications that I am sending out this semester concerning the choice that we must make later this academic year about whether or not to disaffiliate from AAUP. In previous installments, I discussed the circumstances leading up to this stark choice and the pros and cons associated with each option. This installment will discuss the steps that we will be taking over the next several months leading up to an eventual vote on the question of disaffiliation from AAUP.

Previous Installments in this series of communications can be found at the links below and on our [website](#):

- [Vol. 0: Our Kent State Faculty Union and AAUP](#) (sent April 22, 2024);
- [Vol. 1: A deep dive into the history and circumstances leading to our disaffiliation discussions](#) (sent September 27, 2024);
- [Vol. 2: The pros and cons of remaining affiliated with AAUP and becoming compliant with our affiliation dues](#) (sent October 2, 2024);
- [Vol. 3: The pros and cons of disaffiliating from AAUP](#) (sent October 11, 2024).

Decisions made by the Joint Coordinating Board (JCB)

Per our [Constitution](#), the Joint Coordinating Board (JCB) is the decision-making body of our union on matters that affect the union as a whole. (The decision-making bodies for matters affecting either of our two bargaining units are the Executive Committee and Council of that bargaining unit.) The JCB is chaired by the President of the TT unit and includes the President of the FTNTT unit, the First Vice President of the TT unit, the Secretaries of both units, the Treasurers of both units, and the Grievance Chairs of both units. The President of the TT unit does not vote on motions except in the case of a tie.

At a meeting on September 23, 2024, the JCB passed a motion to **conduct a vote of the members on the question of disaffiliation**. This JCB motion was subsequently endorsed by the Executive Committees and Councils of both bargaining units. Although the JCB had been discussing the possibility of disaffiliating from AAUP for over a decade, it was clear that we'd need to spend some time bringing our members up to speed on the circumstances leading to and rationale for this action by the JCB. The aim of this email series has been to ensure that, when the time comes for our members to vote, they will be able to make an informed decision. No doubt, some questions still remain. However, it is my hope that this series of emails has largely fulfilled its educational aim.

Another action taken by the JCB at its September 23rd meeting was to pass a motion to **explore changing the name of our union to better reflect our independence**. This JCB motion was

also subsequently endorsed by the Executive Committees and Councils of both bargaining units. Changing the name of our union is a step that we plan to take prior to the vote to disaffiliate. As noted in previous communications, this would be the second time since our incorporation in 1975 that we have changed our name. (The original name of our union was ‘United Faculty Professional Association of Kent State University’(UFPA).) Although the JCB will have the final decision concerning a new name for our union, we will be seeking input from our members before the decision is made and will seek endorsement of the new name from the governing bodies of our two bargaining units afterward.

Straw poll of members

In early November, we plan to conduct **a non-binding straw poll of our members concerning a potential new name for our union**. That poll will include a couple of options provided by the JCB as well as an option for members to suggest alternatives that the JCB has not considered. The poll will include both the full name under consideration and its acronym. It will be important that we select a name that is descriptive and that has an acronym that doesn’t carry unintended content. (More than one member has pointed out that my use of the description ‘our Kent State faculty union’ lends itself to the unfortunate acronym ‘KSFU’.)

The straw poll will also **take the pulse of the members on the question of disaffiliation**. It will provide two Likert scale questions asking how strongly you agree/disagree with each of the following statements:

- The Kent State faculty union should remain affiliated with AAUP and raise membership dues so as to become fully compliant with our dues obligations to AAUP.
- The Kent State faculty union should disaffiliate from AAUP.

Answers will include a ‘neither agree nor disagree / no opinion’ option. Recall that, in [Vol. 2 of this series](#), I noted that my back of the envelope calculations suggest that we would need to ask our members to immediately increase their dues from 0.08% to 1% of salary and would need to increase dues periodically as affiliation dues to state and national increase—perhaps as high as 1.5% of salary over the next 10 years—in order to get into and remain in compliance.

We will conduct the poll using Survey Monkey. A link to the poll will arrive via an email from “office@aaupksu.org via SurveyMonkey <member@surveymonkeyuser.com>.” We will send out an email from our account ahead of the start of the poll to let you know when to expect it. (If you don’t see the email from the Survey Monkey account, you’ll want to check your spam or other folder.) We’ll keep the poll open for two weeks to ensure maximal participation from our members.

As indicated, the results of this straw poll are non-binding. However, the JCB will strongly consider any consensus from the members on a new name for our union and will use the results of the questions concerning disaffiliation to decide how best to word the eventual question on which the members will be asked to vote in what will be a binding vote on the question of whether or not to disaffiliate from AAUP.

Town hall meetings

Prior to the formal vote on the question of disaffiliation, we plan to conduct a number of town hall meetings via Teams. There will be at least two and potentially more meetings scheduled on different days and times to accommodate our members' diverse teaching schedules and family obligations. I imagine that the town hall meetings would take place sometime in December and/or January.

These town hall meetings will primarily be an opportunity for the members to ask any remaining questions and express concerns about and support for the various options under consideration. **I encourage the members to re-read Vols. 1-3 of this email series before attending a town hall meeting so that the information provided there can further the conversation on this important issue.**

It is my hope that we can arrange to have Sara Kilpatrick, Executive Director of the [Ohio Conference AAUP](#) (OCAAUP) and a representative from the [Kent Education Association](#) (KEA) attend one of these townhall meetings. (KEA is the independent union that represents K-12 teachers in the city of Kent.) This will allow our members to hear what OCAAUP believes to be the benefits to our union of remaining affiliated with AAUP and perhaps even becoming affiliated with AFT. It will allow our members to hear what KEA takes to be the advantages to an independent, autonomous union of shedding its affiliations with state and national associations. Such a meeting would also allow our members to ask questions of our two guests.

Two questions that I would like to hear Sara Kilpatrick address are:

- What specific benefits / resources has AAUP provided directly to Kent State's faculty union in connection with its collective bargaining activities (e.g., incorporation of either of our bargaining units, negotiations, contract enforcement, etc.) over the years?
- Will AAUP (and AFT) acknowledge and respect the fact that we are an autonomous union if we choose to remain affiliated?

Two questions that I would have for a representative of KEA is:

- What are the benefits of being independent?
- Have you considered re-affiliating / affiliating anew with a state or national collective bargaining organization since you became independent of all such affiliations in 1981?

If we are able to arrange to have these external guests speak with our members at one of the town hall meetings, we will endeavor to record the meeting so that it is available to all of our members.

Vote on the question of disaffiliation

Once we've decided how to rename our union and held our townhall meetings to further discuss the pros and cons of disaffiliation, we will schedule **the formal vote on the question of disaffiliation from AAUP**. That vote **will likely happen in February or March, but certainly before the end of the academic year**. We will be conducting the vote using the BigPulse

software that we use to conduct elections and to conduct votes on the ratification of tentative agreements on successor contracts. We will send out an email from this account alerting members to look for an email from our BigPulse account with a link to the election. (Those emails are frequently directed into spam/other filters.) Members will have a two-week period in which to vote.

- If the members ultimately vote to disaffiliate from AAUP, that will be the end of this process.
- If the members ultimately vote not to disaffiliate, we will conduct a separate vote on the question of raising dues.

It's worth noting that, if our members vote not to disaffiliate and not to raise dues, we would have to remain out of compliance with our dues obligations to AAUP in order to have the financial resources needed locally to continue to represent our Kent State faculty at the same level that we have in the past. In such a case, AAUP would likely be forced to take steps to expel us as an AAUP Chapter.

In solidarity,
Deb

Deborah C. Smith
President of Kent State's Faculty Union