

Our Kent State Faculty Union and AAUP

Vol. 5: Introducing the Kent State United Faculty Association

December 2, 2024

Dear Kent State Faculty,

On November 25, 2024, the Joint Coordinating Board (JCB) of our union voted to change the name of our union to better reflect our autonomy from AAUP. (This decision was made independently of and does not impact our ultimate decision about whether or not to remain affiliated with AAUP.) The new name of our union is the **Kent State United Faculty Association (KSUFA)**. In this Volume 5 of the communication series regarding our potential disaffiliation from AAUP, I'll discuss the rollout of our new name, update you on the results of the non-binding straw poll of our members conducted between November 6-22, and fill you in on some developments since the last communication.

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);
- [Vol. 4: Next steps, timelines, and processes](#) (sent October 30, 2024).

Adopting and rolling out our new name

As mentioned in previous communications, the Joint Coordinating Board (JCB) is the decision-making body of our union on matters that affect the union as a whole. The JCB had been considering two potential new names for our union:

- Kent State Faculty Association (KSFA) and
- Kent State United Faculty Association (KSUFA).

The former has the advantage of a shorter acronym (we're told that shorter is generally better), while the latter has the advantage of highlighting that we are a **union** by including the word 'United'. In order to better inform its decision, JCB decided to query the membership (a total of 897 full-time faculty) in the straw poll to see whether there was a strong consensus favoring one of the two options. The poll also included a 'no opinion / undecided' option and an option to suggest an alternative name.

While a plurality of respondents (42.63% — 191 responses) indicated a preference for 'Kent State Faculty Association (KSFA)', no strong consensus emerged. Significant proportions of respondents either favored 'Kent State United Faculty Association (KSUFA)' (28.13% — 126

responses) or had no opinion / were undecided (21.88% — 98 responses). The remaining 7.37% (33 responses) indicated that they would prefer another name. Among these 33 responses:

- 11 indicated that they would vote to remain affiliated and preferred that we keep the name ‘AAUP-KSU’;
- 9 indicated that they would like the word ‘union’ or ‘united’ included in the name; and
- no other suggestion received endorsement from more than 4 respondents.

Meanwhile, 449 of our members declined to respond to the straw poll. (I’ll present more of the results of the straw poll below.)

While acknowledging the plurality of members who favored ‘KSFA’, **the JCB ultimately voted unanimously to adopt the name: Kent State United Faculty Association (KSUFA)**. Two considerations carried the day in this decision: i) the fact that we do want our name to clearly reflect the fact that we are a **union** and ii) the fact that the ‘ksfa.org’ domain name was unavailable, but we were able to obtain the ‘ksufa.org’ domain name. Including ‘United’ in the name is also a nod to our original name: United Faculty Professional Association of Kent State University.

We have instructed our attorney to notify the State Employee Relations Board (SERB) of our name change and will formally notify the University shortly. (The University has been aware of our plans and will not be surprised by this announcement.) We will begin notifying other entities with which we do business (including AAUP) in the days and weeks ahead.

We will begin the transition of our website and email addresses to the ‘ksufa.org’ domain soon. The first thing you will notice is the re-branding of our current website. Once the website is duplicated at the new domain address, we will set up the old website to direct visitors to the new website. Meanwhile, we will set up our old ‘aapksu.org’ email addresses to forward all communications to our new ‘ksufa.org’ addresses. After a suitable transition period, we will sunset our old email addresses. While there are bound to be a few bumps here and there, we hope that the transition will be relatively seamless.

The name change will require purchasing new letterhead and re-branded supplies, an expense for which we have already budgeted. As part of our re-branding, we would like to adopt a new logo (initially, we’ll just change the name on our current logo). If you have expertise in graphic design and would like to work with us on the new logo design, please contact the union office. It would be great to have a fresh new logo designed by a Kent State faculty member.

Results of the non-binding straw poll on the questions of disaffiliation

The straw poll was sent out to the 897 dues paying members of the TT and FTNTT collective bargaining units of our union. Since the topics on which members were polled affect the union as a whole, we did not collect data that would allow us to disaggregate the responses by TT/FTNTT status. We received [responses from 448 full-time faculty](#) (just under 50% of those who received the survey).

In addition to the question concerning a new name for our union, the non-binding straw poll contained 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.

The results of the non-binding straw poll are as follows:

	strongly agree	somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree / no opinion	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree
Remain affiliated with AAUP	18.3%	15.85%	9.38%	25.45%	31.03%
Disaffiliate from AAUP	29.53%	28.41%	10.07%	14.54%	17.45%

As you can see, only 34% of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that 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. By contrast, **a majority (58%) of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that the Kent State faculty union should disaffiliate from AAUP.**

As indicated, this straw poll was non-binding. **The ultimate decision regarding whether or not to disaffiliate from AAUP will be determined by a vote of our membership on a single yes/no question concerning disaffiliation.** That vote will be conducted sometime during the Spring semester. Given that there were a significant number of our members who declined to respond to the straw poll and given that those who did are free to change their minds, we do not know the extent to which the result of the straw poll will prove predictive of the eventual vote on the question of disaffiliation.

Our most recent meeting with AAUP representatives

On October 30, Sue Clement (President of the FTNTT unit of our union), Coleen Taylor (our Executive Director) and I met with three leaders from AAUP national: Mark Bostic (Director of the Department of Organizing and Services), Aaron Nisenson (Interim Executive Director/Senior Counsel), and Danielle Aubert (Secretary-Treasurer). The purpose of this meeting was to inform AAUP that our JCB had made the decision to conduct a vote on the question of disaffiliation, to direct them to the information available on our website, and to inform them of our next steps. We also hoped to identify a way our union could enjoy a fruitful union to union relationship with AAUP and continue to support the advocacy work that they do at the state and national level if our members ultimately vote to disaffiliate.

We had heard from several of you that **you wanted to hear directly from AAUP what they take to be the benefits to our union of remaining affiliated with AAUP** and becoming compliant with our affiliation dues. At this meeting, I invited the AAUP leaders to submit a statement that we could share with our members. Although they indicated that AAUP would develop such a statement in “the next few weeks,” we have received nothing from them to date.

If and when we do, we will pass it along to you and post it on our website in the form in which we receive it. I also indicated to the AAUP leaders at this meeting that we would be happy to invite a representative from AAUP national to attend one of the virtual townhall meetings we are planning to hold (likely early next semester) to answer questions and address concerns from our members.

This October 30 meeting with AAUP was disappointing on a number of fronts. We had hoped that we would be able to reach some sort of compromise with AAUP that would allow us to remain affiliated, but continue to cap the affiliation dues that we pay at no more than a third of our revenue. Unfortunately, the leaders in attendance made clear that **AAUP isn't open to any relationship with us that doesn't involve our becoming fully compliant with affiliation dues.** This attitude is hard to understand given that their refusal to consider any compromise with us with respect to affiliation dues makes our disaffiliation all the more likely. **When we expressed the hope that AAUP would reconsider refusing to accept any donations from us if we were to disaffiliate** (as had previously been suggested by the leadership of AAUP national), **we were met with silence by the leaders in attendance.** The idea that, if we were to disaffiliate from AAUP, they would close off every avenue by which we might financially support their advocacy activities at the state and national level makes little sense and displays a shocking lack of solidarity toward a fellow union. We can only hope that this attitude will soften if the membership ultimately votes to disaffiliate.

Another disappointing aspect of this meeting is that the **AAUP leaders in attendance continued not to acknowledge our status as a wholly independent union** with our own [Constitution](#) that cannot be overridden or revised except by a vote of our members. When they asked what we mean when we say that they don't seem to respect our autonomy, we articulated our frustration that neither AAUP nor the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) ever responded to any of our written communications informing AFT that our union had not voted to affiliate with AFT—a step that would be required by our Constitution. To this day, AFT continues to communicate with us as if we are an AFT Chapter. In response, the AAUP leaders made it clear that AAUP's position is that, when AAUP members around the nation voted to affiliate with AFT at the national level, our union was thereby converted into a Chapter of AFT regardless of any language to the contrary in our Constitution. The fact that **AAUP believes that a vote by individuals who are not Kent State faculty could alter our Constitution in such a significant way** clearly demonstrates that, at a fundamental level, **they do not respect our autonomy.** As mentioned in [Vol. 2 of this series](#), I view the undermining of our autonomy as an independent union as the greatest threat to our union in remaining affiliated with AAUP.

Answers to some post-election queries

I've been asked several versions of the question: how have the election results at the state and national level changed the calculus for us in terms of the pros and cons of disaffiliating? These are definitely times of peril both for institutions of higher education and for collective bargaining rights. In particular, I am deeply concerned that the State Legislature will feel emboldened to radically weaken or even eliminate the right to collectively bargain for faculty at Ohio's public colleges and universities. **I've been asked whether remaining affiliated with AAUP as a national**

organization would shield us from the loss or erosion of collective bargaining rights at the state level. The answer to that question is ‘no’. The [National Labor Relations Act](#) of 1935 provides (most) private sector employees the right to collectively bargain, but leaves up to the individual states whether state employees enjoy that right. The bill giving Ohio public sector workers the right to collectively bargain ([ORC 4117](#)) was signed into law in 1983 and came into effect starting in 1984. If the State Legislature and Governor DeWine decide to weaken or eliminate the rights contained in that law, that will negatively affect our union whether or not we are affiliated with AAUP, AFT, or any other national entity.

AAUP and AFT invested a significant amount of both time and money in attempting to elect pro-higher education and pro-union candidates at both the state and national level. They are no doubt extremely disappointed with the outcome of the election on those fronts. We can only hope that AAUP and AFT will be more successful in lobbying those who were elected and convincing them to support—or at least not negatively impact—institutions of higher education and unions. We can also only hope that AAUP will accept support from us in those endeavors if we ultimately vote to disaffiliate. In any case, **whether or not we vote to disaffiliate from AAUP, our union will continue to work with other unions and fight against any bills proposed in Columbus that would undermine our academic freedom, shared governance, tenure, or our right to collectively bargain.**

I can understand and sympathize with those who believe that the election results would increase the value of our affiliation with a national organization. (This perspective was expressed by more than a few faculty in the open comment question on the straw poll.) Even so, my own sense is that it is now more important than ever to maintain our financial resources locally to support Kent State’s full-time faculty. If we send more and more of our resources to Washington DC (as we would have to do were we to remain affiliated), we are unlikely to have sufficient resources here to weather whatever challenges Columbus sets in our path. If the future political landscape in Ohio worsens the University’s financial outlook in a way that makes the need for reduction in force/retrenchment seem inevitable, Kent State’s faculty will be better served by their union if **we** have funds to provide some assistance to faculty being involuntarily separated from the University. If the future political landscape in Ohio poses an existential threat to our union, Kent State’s faculty will be better served by their union if **we** have the resources to survive as an organization long enough to potentially see a brighter political future. So, from where I stand, the disaffiliation calculus remains either unchanged or tipped even more in favor of disaffiliation by the election.

In solidarity,
Deb

Deborah C. Smith
President, Kent State United Faculty Association