

## Faculty Union Creates Critical Partnership with Administration

by Julie A Cajigas

Professor Thomas Flechtner started at Cleveland State University in 1972. "When I started in '72, it was a big time of transition for the university," says Flechtner. "My joke was that when I came in to interview, one person was president, when I got offered the position, my offer was signed by a different president and then when I finally started, everyone was trying to learn how to spell the name of the new president."

Working in an environment with a lot of administrative unrest and transition was challenging for Flechtner. "I spent my next six years working as hard as I could to get tenure, doing research and working with graduate students," he says. The tenure process would prove to be a difficult one for the budding Chemistry Professor.

When Flechtner was up for tenure, he had the support of his department, but when they sent their recommendation to the Dean, it was denied. "The Dean apparently felt that I had not done enough research," says Flechtner, "but I had done as much as many professors who had already been promoted."

There was no formal grievance process for Flechtner to appeal the decision, and he began to lose hope. Then, without any conversation, he learned that his fortune had changed. "The Provost had overruled the dean, but there was no explanation behind that either," said Flechtner. He received his dossier a year later with a letter saying that he had been promoted.

After the promotion, Flechtner relaxed and began to interact more with the campus. "I got more involved with the university outside of my department," he said, but he noticed that there was a negative atmosphere. "There were a lot of really unhappy people and quite a few faculty members who



refused to come to campus except when they had class," he explained. "Then, in the late '80s a group started talking about forming a union," he says, "and that struck me as a good solution to a number of issues." During that time the faculty had little input, no grievance process and a limited voice in the direction of the campus. "I was immediately interested in the idea of a union," he said.

After an open meeting where faculty could listen to representatives from three organizations including the AAUP, Flechtner was convinced that the AAUP spoke the language and was the right organization for the faculty. "I was so in favor of the promise the AAUP offered, I got involved," he said. "I passed out leaflets, showed up for meetings to increase numbers and eventually got very enthusiastic and became involved with the board."

Flechtner was union president during the first contract negotiations and served a second term as well. He

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was also the chief negotiator for the faculty during the last negotiations before he retired. "What I saw as a result, was a big change in what people could do," he said. "I think some people had just been meeting the requirements and going home, but as the conditions improved, the faculty was more involved in the campus and the development of their students," he says.

To what does he attribute this change? "The union creates a partnership between the administration and the faculty," says Flechtner. "The process leads to a direct communication and a much deeper understanding on both sides about the problems that exist and the potential for building solutions." The partnership between the faculty and the administration leads to an open work environment, which leads to increased campus participation and a more positive attitude on the campus.

"Young faculty in particular have a lot of pressure not to spend time doing anything other than research," says Flechtner. "It's one of the main reasons that a strong union makes for a stronger university. It clears up ambiguity and allows new faculty members to see the administration-faculty partnership as an advantage of joining Cleveland State University's faculty."

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"If a new faculty member or an old one wants to see their problems addressed or their ideas explored, they have to be part of the union, that's where the union gets ideas from, the membership," he said. Flechtner hopes to encourage the young faculty to participate in the union fully. "If a faculty member wants the union to work on their particular issues or needs, they need to get in there and speak their mind," he says. Keeping an eye on the partnership between the faculty and the administration is another task he hopes that younger faculty will keep up, since he himself is retired. "It's a partnership, a wary partnership... both sides keep a strong eye on one another, but it takes both sides to get things done," he says. The faculty is a crucial part of the union and the more participation the better.

### **Thomas Flechtner**

Associate Professor Emeritus Flechtner grew up in western Ohio, earned his A.B. at Dartmouth College, his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin Madison, and did postdoctoral study at Columbia University. He started at CSU in the Fall of 1972 and retired in 2002.

While at CSU, he studied the photochemistry of organic molecules, synthetic pathways to useful carbohydrates (especially aminoglycosides), and the mass spectra of oxygenated organic compounds. He wrote a student handbook for accessing chemical information.

Since retirement he and his wife Valerie (who is also retired) have established a second home in Chicago (where their children and grandchild live) and have traveled to southeastern Alaska, the Mojave Desert, Death Valley National Park, and Germany.

## **About the Author**



**Julie A Cajigas** is graduate student in the Department of Communication. Cajigas received her B.A. in Communication and her B.Mus. in Music Education from Cleveland State University in 2006.

After graduation, she pursued a career in public relations, and after several years working for a major Cleveland corporation, she started her own business as a professional writer and public relations specialist.

Cajigas is currently pursuing her Masters in Applied Communication Theory and plans to pursue her Doctorate Degree in the hopes of one day becoming a tenured Professor of Communication herself.

She is an active writer in the Cleveland area; a frequent contributor to *CoolCleveland*, a weekly e-zine devoted to Cleveland events and accolades, and has been published in the Plain Dealer.

Cajigas also serves as a contributing writer for a number of trade publications on a monthly basis. She is an avid musician and performs regularly with the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus and Cleveland State University Chorale.

This is her fourth article in a series of seven.

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