

Collective Bargaining is an Evolution, It Works Best When *ALL* Members Get Involved



By Julie A Cajigas

Diana Orendi, PhD, was hired in 1989, just before unionization began to evolve on the campus of Cleveland State University. Orendi had taught at various other Universities, but her tenure-track position was her first fulltime teaching position.

“When I arrived at Cleveland State, I sensed immediately that there was a great tension between the faculty and administration,” says Orendi. “I wasn’t really sure about where the tension was coming from, but through my work on a committee that studied faculty salaries, I became aware of a huge discrepancy between individual faculty member salaries and I began to understand the situation and the unease it created,” she says.

Unionizing was not a simple process. “First, you have to decide what organization you want to unionize through,” says Orendi. “The assistance we received from the AAUP was invaluable,” she says. “Without the direct and practical help we received from the Washington office of the AAUP, we would not have gotten anywhere.” The AAUP provided the interested professors with legal advice and information about how to negotiate an initial contract that would improve relations between the faculty and the administration.

In working with those who were establishing the union, Orendi depended on her knowledge and experience of the way that grievances and salary grades were handled abroad. “In Germany,” she says, “all teachers and professors are in faculty associations, the salaries and working conditions are all pre-prescribed, and there’s no doubt of how you will be treated or how much you will be paid.” While there are some limitations to this type of pay schedule, professors there did not have to worry about arbitrary salary grades or the inability to have a grievance appropriately handled.

Here in Cleveland, Orendi leant her vision to the process of becoming unionized. “We were challenged by some of the faculty’s views about unions, including those that had experienced union corruption in other institutions.” The faculty members interested in unionizing were able to overcome those challenges. “The people from Washington came to help us collect faculty cards,” she said, and when we had agreement by 55% of the university faculty, we held the election and won.”

Though the original contract was not the perfect solution to all of the issues the faculty was experiencing, the contract would change and improve over time. “In 1995 we did get a very good grievance process, which ensured that the faculty voice was heard and listened to,” says Orendi. The contract has evolved over the past 15 years,” she says. “It’s really a process. The present contract is a little different, but it has been overall, a good evolution.” This means that as the issues that affect the faculty grow and change, the contract must also change to reflect them and provide adequate

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solutions. That kind of continued evolution requires faculty participation from all parts of the university.

“Whenever we had elections to form the executive committee, we’ve tried very hard to involve all of the different colleges,” says Orendi. “Sometimes, however, there is a bit of dissonance because salary structures are different in the humanities than other colleges where the professors are often compensated more in order to compete with the salaries they might have in their professional lives. Thus the regulation and regimentation of the union can be seen as limiting on the amount they can earn, which makes relations difficult upon occasion.”

Another issue the union is struggling to deal with is salary compression. “There’s a problem that occurs in all universities, and it deserves careful consideration,” says Orendi. “Salary compression is a big problem which occurs when, in order to attract excellent new faculty, the salary offers need to be higher, perhaps higher than those who have taught for more years.” As these eternal issues continue to challenge the union, increased faculty participation is essential.

“Sometimes I am concerned that the younger faculty takes for granted what the older ones fought very hard to achieve,” says Orendi. “Many think it’s a given that there is a grievance process,” she says. Without the union, faculty have little support to address administration actions.

“The problem is, as in all relationships, if you take something for granted, it may slip away. We need to be ever alert and on the lookout for challenges on the horizon, so that the union can adapt and thrive in offering a secure environment for faculty.”

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Orendi recalls that during the last recession, faculty positions were in jeopardy because of the budget. “In difficult economic times, the administration has suspended salary raises, which cause salary stagnation,” she says. “If the administration feels that the faculty doesn’t support the union, then the administration may try to negotiate lower raises—or no raises at all,” says Orendi. “There are even universities out there experiencing lay-offs, which is why tenure needs to be protected.”

According to Orendi, tenure is one of the things that the union has defended strongly and worked hard to protect. “But,” she warns, “the faculty needs to show their support of the union in order to retain and improve salaries, working conditions and even tenure.” Vigilance has and will be

rewarded with an excellent working environment, a secure process for tenure and fair salary increases. “I hope that all faculty members will consider becoming more active in their union,” says Orendi.

Diana Orendi

An Associate Professor of German, Diana Orendi taught at CSU from 1989 until her retirement in 2009. A native of Frankfurt, Germany, she completed her undergraduate work at the Universities of Heidelberg and Munich. She holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in German from Washington University, St. Louis and an M.A. in English from John Carroll University. Orendi's fields of specialization, both in her teaching and her numerous scholarly publications, are Holocaust and multicultural literature, specifically German-Jewish literature in postwar Germany.

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About the Author



Julie A Cajigas is both a Cleveland State University alumni and a current 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.

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