

## Another Perspective on Unionization

I've chosen to share my personal opinion regarding the unionization vote, which reflects my 27 years as an RTPC faculty and administrator. I write this as a member of a unique academic culture and community here at Viterbi and as someone who cares about the role faculty play at USC and who has served in many capacities of shared governance across the university, particularly in 9 years as co-chair of the Academic Senate's Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee and as a long-time member of the University Committee on Curriculum. My hope is that this opinion is taken in the spirit of open dialogue in which it is offered. Any hesitancy to express my opinion publicly due to my current profile is reflective of the adversarial dynamic that I feel unionization might bring.

My position is not anti-union. The question before us is not, in fact, choosing between joining a union or not joining a union. The choice is joining this union (the United Auto Workers and full-time, part-time, and adjunct RTPC faculty from 22 schools) or not joining this union. While unionization may have an appeal in an aspirational sense, the potential practical impacts on Viterbi RTPC faculty could be quite negative, especially because joining essentially changes our primary affiliation and identity from Viterbi faculty to membership in a union of full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty across the university.

There are certainly advantages to what an ideal union might bring – potentially higher salaries for some, benefits that are more secure, and representation in investigatory processes, to name a few. Many of us feel, though, that these can be attained through the current form of shared governance. This current form is not perfect – but neither is unionization as currently proposed by the UAW. Much of the autonomy we currently enjoy could potentially be replaced with conditions, rules, and expectations that will be the result of bargaining.

Those who have rightly bemoaned the corporatization of the institution under various university administrations may see the culture calcify even more. The aspects of an academic life we currently enjoy may take on a rigidity we currently don't have: a specified number of sick days to be tracked, office hours that need to be entered into Workday, requirements to justify the number of hours we spend on campus, the inability to provide accommodations that are particular to one person's needs.

As a result, the chasm between RTPC and TT faculty may grow larger. The differences between Viterbi and other units on campus, however, will narrow. Here at Viterbi, we have certain benefits, both tangible (course loads and research profiles, special teaching accommodations) and intangible (the conditions under which we negotiate our individual conditions and scenarios) that may be lost due to joining our identity with one collective bargaining unit. And in this bargaining unit, full-time Viterbi RTPC faculty will make up 4% of the total membership.

In terms of shared governance, having a "seat at the table" sounds like an achievable goal, but recent examples prove otherwise. One only needs to read Article 17 – Management and Academic Rights of the NYU Memorandum of Agreement with their new union of full-time faculty, dated March 30, 2026. It begins: "Management of New York University is vested exclusively in New York University." Despite what the UAW representatives say, we can't

know for sure how our workplace will change. It is naïve to think that all demands will be met. Having the university bargain in good faith does not equal getting what the union wants.

One final important point: I sincerely believe the union representatives are doing what they think is right to establish true shared governance by wanting to shift more decision-making power to the faculty. However, with this particular union and in the way it was formed, they have unintentionally achieved the very thing they so passionately criticize. They are taking away the agency of faculty who never asked or wanted to join a union and who are being compelled to do so against their will. Forcing faculty to join who have vastly different needs and who might oppose positions and actions of the UAW is as wrong as the actions the university has taken that the union claims to be against.

To be clear, the current level of shared governance at USC is untenable and must improve. The administration must do better if RTPC faculty are truly partners. But turning over a defining part of our professional identities to an outside union is unlikely to advance faculty agency or influence. While a differently conceived union might align with our identity as Viterbi faculty, the union as currently proposed does not. In my opinion, joining this union is not the answer for Viterbi RTPC faculty.

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