
Democratizing the Union at UC Berkeley: Lecturers and Librarians in Solidarity

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how librarians and lecturers at the University of California, Berkeley, worked together to make their union more participatory in a context of increasing corporatization in public higher education. Written as a case study, we examine this ongoing revitalization process initiated by lecturers in the summer of 2016 and how it transformed librarian activism and bargaining strategy. For context, we also examine the history and unique nature of the University Council–American Federation of Teachers, the union representing both librarians and lecturers. We discuss why librarians had become ambivalent about their union and how an active group of librarians changed the culture in the organization and worked to bring members’ voices into the 2018/2019 librarian contract negotiations. Engaging membership and encouraging participation required a group of committed organizers, with the support of paid union staff, to actively seek feedback from members, to communicate regularly, and to organize solidarity events. Throughout this process, the local worked to build coalitions with other campus unions, and members became increasingly aware of the important role unions play in protecting and advancing the mission of a public university and as a site for social justice activism.

INTRODUCTION

The University Council–American Federation of Teachers (UC-AFT), the librarian union at the University of California (UC) Berkeley, was one of the first academic library unions in the country but had been relatively dormant for the last twenty-five years. In 2016, a small group of UC-AFT members, frustrated by what they saw as a decision-making structure in

the union that was not inclusive, enacted a series of reforms to make the union more participatory. In this study we will describe the democratization process, examine what precipitated the changes, as well as analyze the impact that these renewal efforts had on union activities.

Democratization is a broad concept, but for the purposes of this case study, we see a democratic union as a participatory one in which members' voices are sought out and heard. Democratization is more than contested elections for leadership. It is about creating a culture in which rank and file—the members of the union—refer to “the union” in terms of “us” not “them.” In this case study, we sometimes use the term “democratization” interchangeably with “renewal,” “revitalization,” and “participatory.” Whichever term we use, democratizing the union is about building power among membership and winning favorable contracts.

As background, we briefly chronicle the history of professional organizations and librarian unionization at UC Berkeley and the librarian struggle for academic status. We also briefly explore the trend toward privatization in public higher education and how frustration with these neoliberal encroachments at the University of California served as a motivating factor for many UC workers to become more involved in their unions. The democratization of the UC Berkeley local took place around the time of Trump's election, and much of the increased membership activity was undoubtedly tied to the larger political context.

Finally, we examine how the recent process of union democratization led to a renewed engagement of UC Berkeley librarians during the 2018/2019 contract negotiations. We will recount the successes and shortcomings of union organizing efforts and describe how librarians helped overcome an antiunion culture, built stronger connections with lecturer colleagues, and worked to build coalitions with other unions. As we reflect on this process, we will also examine how organizing efforts at UC Berkeley are relevant not only to academic library workers but also for the nearly 160,000 workers of all job classifications at the University of California.

UC-AFT Local 1474

There are a variety of unionization models of higher education faculty in the US (Geron and Reevy 2018), but the University of California model, in which librarians and lecturers are represented by a union that does not also represent tenure-track faculty, appears relatively unique. While librarians and lecturers at UC have academic status, they are not members of the Academic Senate, the body of some 10,000 UC faculty who participate in shared governance of academic matters. That UC's tenure-track faculty are not represented by a union is noteworthy because in institutions where faculty are unionized, librarians and lecturers are often in the same union and thus are able to “ride the coattails” of their generally more numerous and more influential tenure-track faculty colleagues.

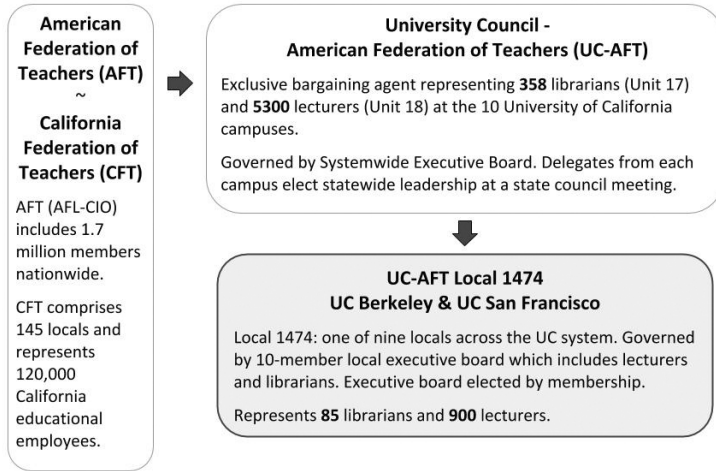


Figure 1. Organizational affiliation of UC-AFT Local 1474

The University Council–American Federation of Teachers is comprised of 358 represented librarians and an estimated 5300 full and part-time lecturers at all ten University of California campuses, with Local 1474 representing 85 librarians at UC Berkeley and UC San Francisco (UCSF) and 900 lecturers, primarily on the Berkeley campus (Bill Quirk, email message to authors, January 8, 2019). See figure 1 for more details.

Lecturers, variously referred to at other institutions as adjunct, contingent, or nontenured faculty, are responsible for a significant percentage of classroom instruction. At UC Berkeley, teaching by lecturers range from a high of 70 percent of courses in the business school to, on the low end, 30 percent of courses in STEM departments (Burawoy and Johnson-Hanks 2018). Employee turnover among lecturers is high, hovering around 28 percent from year to year (Bill Quirk, email message to authors, September 24, 2018).

Local 1474 librarians work in more than twenty-five libraries and administrative units across the Berkeley and San Francisco campuses. At Berkeley, librarians represented by UC-AFT work alongside a number of unrepresented staff, including librarians in supervisory positions and those in the Library Professional 4 classification. Other library staff are represented by such unions as the Teamsters (library assistants), AFSCME (security staff and mailroom workers), and UPTE (technical staff and computer programmers). In total, there are more than 380 full-time employees in the UC Berkeley libraries.

Lecturers and librarians negotiate contracts separately. The statewide contracts are negotiated on three- to five-year cycles, and the union bargaining team is comprised of representatives from each campus who, as

a rule, step forward voluntarily. The union does not hire a professional negotiator but does appoint a lead negotiator from among the librarian or lecturer ranks. All members of the union bargaining teams, including the lead negotiator, continue their day jobs as librarians or lecturers. Sitting across the table from the UC-AFT bargaining team is a chief negotiator from UC Labor Relations (referred to throughout this discussion as “management”). Based out of the statewide Office of the President, Labor Relations oversees twelve system-wide labor agreements with some ten unions across the UC system. In contrast to the UC-AFT’s do-it-yourself approach to contract negotiations, management’s chief negotiator is a full-time employee. In addition to the chief negotiator, there are up to a dozen other representatives from management at the negotiating table, including representatives from most of the campus human resources departments.

RESEARCH STUDY AND METHODS

A key goal of our research was to contribute to the case study literature on library workers and unions; we employed the case study approach through a systematic analysis of the experience and lessons learned by librarians and lecturers at UC Berkeley over a two-year period. Although we did not conduct formal data gathering through questionnaires or other instruments, our methods are based on participant observation and direct experience in the union organizing campaign; ongoing communication with union colleagues and other stakeholders; and review of email archives, meeting minutes, and historical documents. As active participants in this case study, we hope to convey to readers what Stake (1995) calls “naturalistic generalizations,” which are “conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience” (85). As authors we are describing our own engagement in many of the democratization activities, activities motivated by a desire to improve the structure of the union, build power among the membership, and, ultimately, gain favorable contracts that best serve the union’s librarians and lecturers. Through this experience, UC-AFT members developed a deeper engagement with other public-sector unions and became increasingly aware of the important role unions play in promoting “policies advancing the common good more broadly” (MacGillvary and Jacobs 2018, 1). Through this “narrative inquiry” approach, our goal is to reflect on our experiences and tell our story not only to other researchers but to the participants—in this case, our colleagues and fellow union members (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, xiv).

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast body of literature on the internal politics of institutions and organizations, especially unions. The focus of our literature review was on studies of organizational revitalization and renewal as well as union

democratization. Among the most cited studies on union democratization is the classic book by Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956), which examined the International Typographical Union (ITU), a highly democratic union with regularly contested elections and periodic changes of leadership. The authors argue that the structural factors that led to greater union democracy include greater local autonomy, a less bureaucratized union leadership, and greater homogeneity of interests among the membership (414). They contrast the ITU with what they call the “one-party oligarchy” model of unions. These unions are highly bureaucratic organizations that wield control over financial resources and communications; membership involvement is low, and there is a high status differential among leaders and rank and file. In a chicken and egg situation, lower member participation leads to one-party oligarchy, and one-party oligarchy leads to lower member involvement. Conversely, Tannebaum and Kahn (1958) argue that when unions secure favorable contracts, they “heighten the loyalty of the members . . . [and] increased loyalty in turn tends to make the union more powerful” (180). Subsequent labor scholars have been critical of the ITU study for its suggestion that the ITU is an anomaly and that conditions that led to its democratization are unique and unlikely to be reproduced in other labor unions (Stepan-Norris 1997).

Cook (1963) closely examines the concept of union democracy, suggesting that many decisions, even when made in a democratically structured union meeting, are the “decisions of an activist minority who do not necessarily represent the rank and file” (11) and that the challenge for unions seeking to democratize is that people are by nature apathetic whether in their union, as members of other organizations, or as citizens; thus they are generally content to leave decision-making to a small group of active members. Perhaps, then, the goal is not so much fostering democracy within the local but to adopt what is described as the “organizing model” of unions. The term, coined in a 1988 AFL-CIO manual, draws “a distinction between the ‘servicing model of local union leadership — trying to help people by solving problems for them’ and the ‘organizing model — involving members in the solutions’” (Forman 2013).

Voss has written extensively on union revitalization and the movement by some unions to break out of “bureaucratic conservatism” and to transform into “social movement organizations” (Voss and Sherman 2000). Organizational changes are often the result of a “political crisis within the local” (305) such as significant internal mismanagement that results in a change of leadership which, in turn, brings outsiders and “innovators” into leadership positions. Another analysis of union renewal suggests that serving the interests of new constituents in a diverse workforce is an important element of union democratization (Voss 2010). Summers (2000) writes that the most essential element in a democratic union is “the ability of union members to have an effective voice in determining unions

policies and electing union officers” (9). Summers also states that, in practice, most unions are one-party states and argues that “if we measure democracy by responsiveness to the members’ views rather than by who wins contested elections, then unions may provide a substantial measure of democracy” (10). In other words, increased participation can take many forms other than simply voting in elections.

Union activists are finding ways to increase rank and file participation and elicit feedback from membership beyond simply urging them to vote in elections. And, an important voice in the union democratization movement outside the academic literature is Labor Notes. Their popular publication *Democracy is Power* (Parker and Gruelle 1999) has become an instruction manual “for activists who want to create a movement for democracy in their union” (ix). Indeed Local 1474 was adopting some of the practical guidelines put forth in this publication even before they had read it; the local had embraced the importance of “making the workplace the place where union issues are discussed . . . since most union members seldom attend meetings” (39), and was making an effort to normalize the concept that “union democracy is a dead issue if union members believe the union is irrelevant to their concerns” (98). An equally important point made by Labor Notes that Local 1474 adopted was the notion that union involvement can be “enjoyable when the member feels that he’s (*sic*) learning something, contributing something, making a difference” (99).

As for librarian unionization, Harris (1992) notes that “frustration with the lack of progress made by library associations in achieving better conditions for their members resulted in library workers’ willingness to unionize” (103). This was due to the ambivalence professional associations—centered on the library, not the librarian—had about employee unionization. Indeed, librarians’ main professional organization is the American Library Association (ALA), formed in 1879 to promote increased professional recognition of libraries and librarians. ALA membership is open to librarians, library managers and administrators, nonlibrarian staff, and for-profit corporations serving libraries (ALA 2010). Its current mission statement, “to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all” (ALA 2008), makes clear its priority is libraries and library services, not exclusively librarians. Harris contrasts ALA to other professional associations—such as those for nurses and social workers—that represent their members in contract negotiations. When the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) was founded in 1916, the union explicitly excluded school administrators from its membership in order to better represent the professional and economic interests of teachers (Lyons 2007, 89). The tension between library professional organizations, which pursue the overarching goals of

libraries, and unions, which promote the professional and economic interests of librarians, continues to this day, with most unionized librarians also belonging to professional organizations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

History of the Librarian Union at UC Berkeley

The first twenty-five years. UC Berkeley librarians were the first public academic librarians in the United States to form a union in response to national and state liberalization of labor laws and the increasingly active social movements of the 1960s, and in order to increase status and benefits (Haro 1969, 994). Whitson (1992) provides a rich history of the first twenty-five years of UC Berkeley librarians' professional organizations and unionization based on campus archives and his own recollections. In the early 1960s, UC Berkeley employed 175 librarians. The University librarian was a member of the Academic Senate and "identified more with faculty than with librarians on his staff," and much of the collection development at the time was done by faculty members. Librarians "felt themselves a low-status occupational group, underpaid, underappreciated and denied perquisites and opportunities for continuing education, professional leave and travel, participation in the University governance process, and so on" (3). Indeed, as Whitson writes, the history of UC librarians is "the history of development of academic status" (3).

University of California librarians' struggle for professional recognition achieved a modicum of success in 1962 when UC President Clark Kerr deemed that librarians were "academic employees." However, implementation of academic status was not realized until 1972 when the University added sections to the *Academic Personnel Manual* defining librarians as academic employees (Whitson 1992). Also in 1962, President Kennedy signed Executive Order 10988, which recognized federal employees' right to collective bargaining, and a number of states subsequently began developing similar legislation for state employees (Hovekamp 2005). In 1963 the Berkeley University Teachers Union (BUTU) was formed with several librarians in the organizing group. But, as faculty were uncomfortable having librarians in the same union, UC Berkeley librarians formed the Library Chapter of the Berkeley University Teachers Union in May 1965, the first public university union (Haro 1969; Spang and Kane 1997). This took place in the context of increasing campus politicization following the 1964 Free Speech Movement and the ongoing national struggle for civil rights. Haro notes that the "dramatic push of American Negroes for human and civil rights . . . has had great impact everywhere. . . . It is not far-fetched to assume that there has been a psychological effect on librarians" (1969,

996). With more than fifty members, the Library Chapter of the BUTU represented a third of the librarian staff, and by 1967 had received its own charter from the American Federation of Teachers.

Much of the BUTU's discourse in the early years related to "academic status." Yet some librarians felt that unions were "inappropriate for professionals" (Whitson 1992, 6) and, playing out the tension between professional organizations and unions, chose to align with the Librarians Association of the University of California (LAUC), newly established in 1967. This statewide library association was formed to address professional matters including librarians' emergent academic status, benefits, and working conditions and to serve as the "main organizational vehicle for librarians to have a voice in library policy and procedures" (Whitson 1992, 7). Over the next ten years, LAUC solidified its role as the professional organization for UC librarians by establishing bylaws and appointing the peer-review committee responsible for librarian advancement and promotion.

As LAUC was being formally recognized by University administration, first-term Governor Jerry Brown signed legislation that brought collective-bargaining rights to educators in California. The 1978 Higher Education Employer-Employee Relations Act (HEERA) gave UC and California State University employees the state-sanctioned authorization to organize and engage in collective bargaining. While previously chartered by AFT, the librarian union only received state-sanctioned authorization under HEERA. UC Berkeley's AFT local was soon formally recognized, and the University Council of the American Federation of Teachers was established ("Bringing Dignity to UC" 2018). In 1983, UC librarians narrowly elected UC-AFT as their exclusive bargaining agent. The following year, campus lecturers also elected UC-AFT as their exclusive bargaining agent. UC-AFT's first librarian contract with the University of California was signed in 1984 (Weil and Rotkin 2009).

The nineties through the new millennium. Longtime UC Berkeley librarians remember a general sense of contentment within the librarian ranks throughout the nineties and into the new millennium. Indeed, as Whitson concludes:

Librarians in the UC system never achieved full faculty status, membership in the Academic Senate, tenure, sabbaticals, salary equivalent to those of the faculty. . . . On the other hand, UCB librarians no longer seem to consider any of those original aspirations to be very important, or even desirable. What UCB librarians appear to value in practice are flexibility in the use of one's time, office support in both staff and equipment, and financial support for professional activity. (51)

Contract negotiations throughout the '90s were largely uneventful, and the majority of rank and file librarians took for granted the periodic, if

modest, increases in salary and professional-development funding. Only a few librarians—primarily those who had been involved in the union since its inception—remained active, and many other librarians perceived the union activists as a throwback to a bygone era. To be sure, issues of salary, executive compensation, UC mismanagement, and college affordability have always been discussed by UC-AFT. A 1990 article in the union's quarterly *UC-AFT Perspective* bemoans the "chancellors' third raise in 18 months," which was "approved with no public discussion" (1). The Regents gave seven-percent raises to 350 campus executives and senior staff while at the same time justifying a raise in student fees because of a "tight state budget" (1). In the meantime, UC librarians saw an overall decline in real salary when compared to faculty librarian colleagues at the California State University and California Community College systems who by 2018 were earning 25 percent more than UC librarians. Workload was also a perennial issue, particularly as the university lost librarians and other staff due to budget cuts and early retirement programs in the late 1990s.

By the early 2000s, most of the librarians who had been active in unionization efforts had retired. The remaining rank and file was disengaged, as evidenced by the fact that few librarians stepped forward to assume roles in contract negotiations or as grievance stewards. UC Berkeley's representative to the Statewide Bargaining Team in the 2000s was legendary in his grasp of salary, cost of living, and other financial data, but, by his own admission, outreach and membership engagement was not his strong suit. As he described it, "We lacked creativity in coming up with ways to build community among librarians and lecturers" (Harrison Dekker, email message to authors, August 20, 2018).

Professional contentment among the newer librarians during this period may also have mirrored broader economic affordability trends in the late 1990s. This, combined with the fact that the librarian workforce had attended college and graduate school at a time when higher education was affordable, meant that the profession was not experiencing intense external economic pressures. Many librarians lived in the community immediately surrounding the university and enjoyed affordable rents and home prices. Additionally, at least half the librarians working in the UC Berkeley library were also alumni and had a fierce loyalty to the institution; they were dedicated to the students and viewed librarianship as a personal calling to serve the public.

Neoliberal Transformations in Higher Education and Libraries

Following the 2008 financial crisis, the Occupy Movement introduced a renewed critique of inequality into popular discourse. Student debt also became a recognized national crisis, and many in higher education became increasingly vocal about the neoliberalization of the academy. David Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private rights, free markets, and free trade. . . . If markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. (2)

Evidence of neoliberal trends emerged through shifting discourse within academia, including descriptions of faculty as academic entrepreneurs and students as consumers (Giroux 2002). Like public universities throughout the country, the University of California faced rapidly diminishing state support and was forced to raise tuition and increase reliance on private funding. Whereas in 1990 the state provided over 50 percent of the per-student educational cost, by 2018 that percentage dropped to only 14 percent (University of California 2011; University of California, Berkeley, Financial Aid & Scholarships 2018). In the mid-1980s, annual, in-state undergraduate tuition was \$1,296; by 2018/2019 it had increased eleven-fold to \$14,184 (Vega 2014).

As public higher education began to succumb to the creep of neoliberalization, academic libraries in the University of California and beyond were severely impacted, as evidenced by increased outsourcing of collection-development activities, reduced staffing, and “consolidation” (that is, closure) of subject-specialty libraries and reference desks. Starting in the 1990s, academic libraries also became increasingly dependent on the “big deal,” large packages of journal content that included valuable and, often, less valuable content for a single subscription cost (Frazier 2001). Meanwhile, subscription costs skyrocketed with journal publishers, many acting as oligopolies, reporting profit margins as high as 36 percent (Monbiot 2011). Libraries entered into contracts for demand-driven acquisition of monographs and preapproval plans in which books would be automatically sent to libraries. Indeed, eliminating the librarian “middleman” increased efficiency and saved money as collections became increasingly homogenized. With reduced staff in cataloging departments, non-English materials languished in cataloging backlogs, thus insuring the primacy of English-language resources at the expense of local and vernacular materials, the very materials that gave large research libraries like UC Berkeley their distinction. In an effort to stay “relevant,” library spaces that once housed book stacks and reference desks were replaced with learning spaces that hosted group study areas, maker spaces, and meditation rooms (Najmabadi 2017).

Librarians at UC Berkeley adapted to and, in some cases, promoted and embraced these new realities. But by the 2010s, it became harder for many of them to square their duty to public service with the increased

administrative bloat they witnessed at the campus level. One of the most egregious effects of neoliberalization was the ever-increasing salaries paid to top administrators, including in the Library, and the transformation of administrative roles into positions more akin to CEOs than traditional leaders of institutes of higher learning. While athletic coaches earn the highest salaries—as much as \$3.5 million a year in the UC system—chancellors at the ten campuses also enjoyed rapidly increasing salaries, many earning well above \$500,000 a year along with other perks (Bauman, Davis, and O’Leary 2018). When Nicholas Dirks was appointed chancellor in 2012, he was awarded a salary that was more than eight times that of a midlevel librarian. (The University Librarian, the top library administrator, at the time was making about three and a half times what a midlevel librarian earned; by 2017, the University Librarian would be making nearly five times as much as that same librarian and almost seven times as much as an average library technical processing assistant.) At UC Berkeley, the chancellor’s sense of entitlement led to various scandals, including the chancellor and his family using university recreational employees as personal trainers, the construction of a \$700,000 fence to wall off his residence, and the creation of an internal escape exit from his office to be used in the event of protests. By 2016, campus administration was also embroiled in several high-profile scandals involving the mishandling of sexual harassment cases and a \$150 million annual structural deficit largely due to unrealistic financial modeling of a renovated football stadium (Mele 2016; *Daily Californian* News Staff 2016). On top of that, it was revealed that the campus had spent \$200,000 on image consultants to “improve the chancellor’s strategic profile” (Asimov 2016).

As workers watched diverse financial and management crises envelope UC Berkeley, they began to ask why university executives were not demonstrating the same loyalty to the institution as they had. UC staff agreed to pay cuts, reduced hours, and sacrificed salary increases out of a sense of duty to the public mission of the university in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. For example, a 2009 furlough program required most faculty and staff to take off eleven unpaid days that year (Gross 2009). Also a second, less favorable, tier was added to the pension system for employees hired after 2013 (University of California, n.d.). Where was this sense of self-sacrifice among campus administrators? A growing awareness emerged that unions and collective bargaining would be important tools for reasserting rights to competitive salaries, reasonable working conditions, and, like librarian predecessors in the 1960s, their academic and professional stature. Moreover, workers began to see the potential role that unions could play in holding the university accountable in its mission as a public university and “as a countervailing force to corporations in the public policy realm” (MacGillvary and Jacobs 2018, 2).

DEMOCRATIZATION OF UC BERKELEY'S LOCAL 1474 BEGINS

The Lecturers' Initiative

During the 2015/2016 UC-AFT lecturers' contract negotiation, an organizing committee was formed and, despite little support from the local executive board, sought to more actively engage members in negotiations, enroll new members, and build relationships with other campus unions. Local 1474 membership meetings had become infrequent and, when they did occur, only executive board members were permitted to vote. Lecturers who had become active on the organizing committee became frustrated by what they saw as a leadership that actively discouraged rank and file participation. In response, two lecturers ran for executive board seats on a platform that advocated "making the union a more democratic and participatory space [and] increasing engagement in the union." Upon their election, they proposed a number of changes to the bylaws, including monthly membership meetings (as opposed to once a semester); inviting members to shape meeting agendas; making meetings the primary union decision-making space; and, granting every member present at meetings the right to vote. In a series of meetings to solicit feedback on the proposed changes to the bylaws, the new executive board members described how these revisions were meant to make the local more democratic and create more member-engagement opportunities. The bylaws were passed in October 2016 with 94 percent voting in favor.

Librarians Wake Up

While lecturers were transforming the Local 1474 executive board, librarians were in contract reopener negotiations, an interim negotiation in which only salary and professional-development funding were on the table. In prior negotiations, many librarians were content to rely on the representative to the Statewide Bargaining Team and were not particularly interested in the nitty gritty of the contract. This time, things were different. Nearly twenty members showed up for the one and only bargaining update held the summer of 2016, an unusually large number. UC Berkeley's long-standing representative to the Statewide Bargaining Team took a position at another university; meanwhile five to eight librarians began meeting on an ad hoc basis to discuss the negotiations. Much to the surprise of the Statewide Bargaining Team, this group of UC Berkeley librarians started participating in planning conference calls and began asking difficult questions of the Statewide Bargaining Team.

When, in late 2016, the Statewide Bargaining Team reached a tentative agreement for a paltry 1.5 percent salary increase, seventeen UC Berkeley librarians drafted a statement to the local membership encouraging a "no" vote. Although UC Berkeley librarians roundly rejected the tentative

Table 1. Timeline of UC-AFT Local 1474 milestones, 2016–2019

2016	
Spring	Local 1474 executive board annual election <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 new lecturers elected on a platform of “making the union a more participatory space [and] increasing engagement.”
Summer	Librarian contract reopener (no Berkeley representative on UC Statewide Bargaining Team). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead negotiator for UC Statewide Librarian Bargaining Team holds update for Berkeley librarians. 20 Berkeley librarians attend. • Berkeley librarians form ad hoc organizing committee and start participating in statewide contract negotiation planning calls.
Fall	New field representative hired for Local 1474. New Local 1474 executive board members hold meetings to consult membership about proposed bylaws revisions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New bylaws ratified by Local 1474 membership. Statewide Librarian Bargaining Team reaches tentative agreement on contract renewal. Small group of Berkeley librarians lobby against voting for new contract.
November	Statewide membership ratifies librarian contract renewal (despite Berkeley and San Francisco librarians’ rejection).
2017	
January	Local 1474 lectures and librarians join other campus workers in J20 protests against Trump inauguration. Local 1474 contingent joins Oakland Women’s March. Additional social justice activities throughout spring and summer.
Summer	Formal Berkeley Librarian Organizing Committee formed. Holds regular meetings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berkeley Organizing Committee surveys librarians to identify key issues to negotiate. • Statewide Librarian Bargaining Team formed. Berkeley librarians appointed to Statewide Bargaining Team.
Fall	Berkeley Organizing Committee holds first in series of “library listening tours.”
2018	
April	Librarian contract “sunshined.” Statewide call-in sessions organized. First librarian bargaining session. Statewide Bargaining Team meets with UC Labor Relations on the Berkeley campus. 100+ librarians and allies participate in noontime rally.
October	Librarian contract expires. Librarians reject offer to extend contract.
Spring – December	Librarian contract bargaining sessions held throughout the state. 11 bargaining sessions held over the course of 7 months.
2019	
January – March	Librarian bargaining sessions continue every two weeks. 6 sessions in total. Tentative agreement reached at 18th negotiation session.
April 1	Five-year librarian agreement ratified by 98 percent margin. 94 percent of librarian members cast a vote.

agreement, these efforts were too little and too late, and the new contract was ratified by the statewide membership. The contract reopener ratification was announced on Monday, November 7, 2016, the day before the US presidential election. Already discouraged by the contract vote, Trump’s election further rallied many union members.

The Trump Era and Social Justice Activism in the Local

At the beginning of the 2016/2017 academic year, just as the new local executive board was becoming active and librarians were becoming involved in the contract negotiations, a new UC-AFT field representative was hired to replace one who was retiring after thirteen years. He joined a part-time field representative hired a year earlier to help with membership recruitment. These new field reps embodied a younger generation of energetic social movement unionists who had cut their teeth in the UC graduate-student-worker union that had recently brought a more social justice-oriented leadership to power. The field reps encouraged members to address social justice issues at membership meetings and, within days of Trump's election, members of the local participated in a Bay Area worker rally in solidarity with Standing Rock. On Inauguration Day, the local joined other campus unions in J20 events, including a noontime walk-out to protest Trump. Members of Local 1474 subsequently participated in the Oakland Women's March, celebrated May Day, protested against members of the "alt-right" antagonizing the Berkeley campus, and took part in a number of other solidarity actions.

Librarians and Lecturers in Solidarity

Based on their common activist experience, librarians and lecturers began working closely together for the first time. The field rep also played an active role in fostering stronger connections between librarians and lecturers. While no librarians were on the newly democratized UC-AFT local executive board that first year, the new executive board began to actively recruit librarians, and within two-years a librarian and a lecturer would be serving as cochairs of the local and four out of ten executive board seats would be held by librarians. Throughout this period, there was a growing appreciation for the unique strengths that each unit brought to the union, which contributed to the overall rejuvenation of the local. Librarians, though small in number, had greater stability of employment and could be readily found on campus. Lecturers, numbering more than 900, were responsible for an increasing percentage of teaching on a campus with a burgeoning student population and had a more immediate impact on the teaching mission of the university. But lecturers, with high rates of turnover, were less stable, were on campus less often, and had office spaces scattered throughout the campus.

Awareness of an Antiunion Culture

As librarians started becoming more active in the local, they realized that one of the biggest barriers to greater membership participation was overcoming an antiunion culture. Much of the antiunion sentiment was self-imposed, a lingering vestige of the "professional vs. union" discourse prevalent since the 1970s. When the topic of the union came up in staff

meetings, represented librarians were often the first to say, “We’re not allowed to talk about union matters here.” Over the years, the librarian peer review committee developed a common practice in which they did not consider union service in assessments, despite the fact that there is no explicit policy against including union service in one’s self-evaluation. A decades-old grievance in which the union had supported a notoriously difficult represented member became folklore among librarians and served as further rationale for indifference to union activities.

Librarians had also grown accustomed to library administrators and department heads who, while not overtly hostile, directed regular slights toward unions. They were known to use “the union” as an excuse for not moving forward on initiatives to improve the library or library working conditions. One persistent jab was to tell staff that they would like to give employees a paid afternoon off before a long weekend, “but the union won’t let us.”

Salary negotiations had always been the union’s domain, but discussing salary issues at work was considered unseemly. And while library administrators played a role in creating this culture, librarians were often their own worst enemies. With an intense professional ethos and a strong sense of calling, UC Berkeley librarians, like librarians throughout the profession, frequently fall into the trap of what Ettarh (2018) calls “vocational awe,” defined as “the set of ideas, values, and assumptions that librarians have about themselves . . . that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique” (para. 1). Ettarh believes that the notion of librarianship as a “sacred calling” leads to a martyr complex in which librarians derive their professional satisfaction from the good work they do and willingly take on extra work and accept lower compensation for that work. Furthermore, librarianship is a predominantly female profession (the latest figures suggest that 79 percent of library workers are women [DPE 2019], although at UC Berkeley the figure is closer to 60 percent women). Given the female demographics of the profession, academic librarians are expected to continuously perform emotional labor—not only through caring for students and faculty, but through constant availability, attentiveness, and setting their own needs aside to first address the needs of patrons (Emmelhainz, Pappas, and Seale 2017). This patron-centered, service-oriented professional attitude can undermine librarians’ professional autonomy and self-advocacy. In fact, this mindset has been capitalized on by one high-ranking UC Berkeley library administrator who was known to have conceded to job candidates during interviews that librarians are not in the profession for the money.

LIBRARIAN CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

In discussing contract negotiations, the focus of this part of the case study is almost exclusively on the librarian contract. While our emphasis is on

contract activities at UC Berkeley, we also discuss activities throughout the ten-campus UC system as UC-AFT contracts are negotiated statewide. There were two key organizational bodies that played distinct roles in the librarian contract negotiation:

- **Local Organizing Committee (OC):** This twelve-member committee at UC Berkeley held biweekly meetings, provided suggestions and feedback to the Statewide Librarian Bargaining Team representatives, and planned local negotiation strategy. The Berkeley OC organized listening tours and outreach to members. Not all UC campus locals had an OC.
- **Statewide Librarian Bargaining Team:** This ten-person team, often referred to as the table team, included a lead negotiator plus librarian representatives from each campus local. UC Berkeley had two librarian representatives on the Bargaining Team. The Bargaining Team was at the table for all contract negotiation meetings with university management.

Librarian Organizing Committee Formed

After the disappointing 2016 contract reopener, a core group of ten librarians was poised to organize and re-engage membership for the next round of negotiations set to begin eighteen months later. A multigenerational group of librarians from a variety of library departments and subject disciplines organically emerged and took leadership positions. Librarians stepped forward out of a sense of commitment to the profession, their colleagues, their students and the university as an institution, and none of them were involved solely to improve personal well-being. Berkeley Organizing Committee (OC) members' diversity and general approachability signaled to the rank and file that this group intended to represent all librarians.

Over time, the OC learned that holding regular meetings, conducting member outreach, and maintaining momentum is hard and often tedious work that can lead to burnout. With a larger group, however, the OC was able to distribute organizing responsibilities and support one another when work or family obligations took them away from union activities. There was also a very conscious effort to look out for one another and to encourage overextended members to pull back while others stepped up. Less active members more willingly took on additional responsibility when another OC member personalized the request saying, "I need your help" rather than "can you help out the union." Another key to successful organizing was paid staff; field representatives had the time and organizational skills to facilitate the local's activities and the wisdom to know when to step back and let the members own the process.

It should be noted that the OC was not an official body proscribed by Local 1474 bylaws but more of an ad hoc committee formed to address

contract negotiations. As such, unlike the local executive board, which is comprised of member-elected lecturers and librarians, much of the OC's activities were improvised. None of the members of the OC had served in formal union committees before, and this lack of experience made field representative support crucial. Some OC members took advantage of training offered by the California Federation of Teachers. While lecturers were not active in the librarian OC, some on the executive board began paying attention to librarian contract organizing when the start of the lecturer contract negotiations loomed, another example of how the increased collaboration between lecturers and librarians brought on by the democratization process was creating synergies within the local.

Membership Survey and Listening Tours

As part of the local democratization effort, the OC knew it would be important to hear from the rank and file, so they surveyed all UC Berkeley and UCSF librarians in July 2017 to identify their key issues for upcoming contract negotiations. Not surprisingly, survey results revealed that salaries needed to be drastically increased to meet the rapidly increasing Bay Area cost of living. What was surprising, however, was the nearly universal recognition that more recent hires at the lower end of the salary scale, specifically entry-level librarians hired as assistant librarians (comparable to faculty hired as assistant professors) needed additional redress. This led UC Berkeley, and subsequently the Statewide Bargaining Team, to call for a one-time, across-the-board dollar increase that would more significantly support lower salaried librarians than the traditional across-the-board percentage increase. The survey results also revealed that librarians were interested in sabbaticals, attaining principal investigator status on research grants, securing increased professional development funding, and—given the outrageous Bay Area housing costs—housing support. Some additional issues, impacting fewer librarians, such as the use of sick leave for baby bonding, and extending benefits for opposite-sex domestic partners, also emerged in these listening sessions and were later incorporated into proposed contract language.

With the survey results in hand, the Berkeley OC held a series of meetings, as part of a listening tour, which more than half of the librarian membership attended. UC Berkeley's two representatives to the Statewide Librarian Bargaining Team made it clear that they were not negotiating "for" the members but rather were representatives, voicing the concerns of membership. They wanted to ensure that members understood that the union was an inclusive organization to which everyone belonged, not just a small, self-selected group pushing their own agenda. Conversely, active member participation was necessary to secure the bargaining team's demands. Though many members remained skeptical of the union's ability to secure competitive salaries or housing stipends, the OC's willingness to

actively listen and to engage them signaled to the rank and file that the OC had their interests at heart.

Solidarity Events

When contract negotiations formally began in April 2018, UC-AFT demanded open negotiations be held on UC campuses throughout the state, a strategy learned from Berkeley graduate-student workers represented by the UAW. In prior negotiations, bargaining was held exclusively at the UC Office of the President in downtown Oakland where the office of UC Labor Relations (i.e., management) was located, but away from the campuses. Librarians now insisted on negotiating on their home turf, which allowed the OC to organize rank and file librarians to observe contract negotiation sessions, support the Statewide Bargaining Team, and, most importantly, to let management see that librarians were paying attention. Librarians also held large rallies on the host campuses. In recognition that many librarian colleagues were not a rabble-rousing group, events at Berkeley were relatively low key in order to make all librarians feel welcome. There were no speeches or bullhorns. In fact, these events were called “turn outs” rather than “rallies,” as in “Turn out for UC Librarians.” Generally held on the steps of the main library, the events garnered student newspaper and local media coverage; they were festive and an effective solidarity activity where librarians, lecturers, graduate students, and other union allies socialized, ate pizza, and, of course, took pictures that were promptly posted to social media. Within the first six months, 70 percent of represented UC Berkeley librarians had attended. The 2018/2019 contract negotiations contrasted significantly with previous negotiations in terms of membership engagement; as one longtime Statewide Bargaining Team member recounted about past negotiations, “We did not have rallies and t-shirts” (Miki Goral, email message to authors, August 18, 2018).

Communication

Ongoing communication was another key element of member-engaged bargaining, and the OC made the decision to err on the side of too much communication rather than not enough. One member of the OC deployed their considerable influence on Twitter to rally the troops. In addition to tweeting on a personal account to some 2,700 followers, they created and managed quasi-official accounts for the Berkeley local (@UCAFT1474) and librarians statewide (@UC Librarians). The OC also began communicating with the membership using the Hustle app, a texting platform used by political organizers. Immediately following each bargaining session, the Statewide Bargaining Team issued a detailed email of the day’s negotiations to every member. In addition to keeping members apprised of the union’s proposals and management’s responses, these bargaining updates also served to inoculate members to management’s occasional

communications, which were spun to make management seem reasonable and the union as recalcitrant. At UC Berkeley, the OC held numerous face-to-face report-back sessions with members that allowed for more informal discussion of strategy. The OC began to understand that employing a variety of relevant communication methods was essential to an effective outreach strategy to the union's diverse membership.

Social media's importance cannot be overstated. UC-AFT is a relatively small union, and members are dispersed throughout the state, so communication was key to solidarity. Live tweets during bargaining sessions and rallies, and detailed summaries sent out after each bargaining session, allowed for a common message to be immediately communicated to all statewide members. Management was also monitoring the union's social media, and the union hoped that seeing activity across multiple platforms would let management know just how engaged the membership was and give librarians that much more power in negotiations.

Despite its best efforts, many members still did not read messages from the local or respond to surveys. Frankly, many members expressed frustration at information overload and were tuning out messages. Finding the balance between too much and not enough information continues to be a fundamental organizing challenge.

Changing the Culture

As the union became more active, OC members set out to change what they perceived as an antiunion culture within the library. Activist members sought to normalize union involvement by adding the union to their email signatures, mentioning union activity in job descriptions, and highlighting it in promotion and advancement packages. When invited to do library instruction and information literacy sessions in the classroom, some briefly noted their union membership.

Throughout the months of contract negotiations, UC Berkeley librarians held "T-shirt Thursdays" in which members would gather at noon wearing union t-shirts for a photo op in front of popular campus locations; these photos were then posted to local and statewide Instagram and Twitter sites. Wearing t-shirts to work and the jovial photo sessions also helped normalize union activity. By reviewing the photos over time, the OC was able to identify members who had never attended and to reach out to them individually to identify their issues. Over the course of several months, more than 70 percent of represented librarians showed up to the Thursday photo sessions. Another aspect of normalizing union involvement was having active union members become involved in the professional peer review committee and serve on the executive committee of the LAUC professional organization. In other words, active union members made a concerted effort to bring up union issues regularly and unapologetically.

It should be noted that newer librarians were among the more enthusiastic members of the local. They had not been socialized within a culture of union ambivalence. And low salaries, high cost of living, and student debt had become the new normal for younger members. For them, being involved in the union and collective bargaining made perfect sense, especially when the statewide librarian bargaining team proposed an across-the-board salary increase targeted to benefit them. Their willingness to embrace the union mirrored trends being reported in the popular press about new union-friendly Millennials (Johnston 2018; Stolzoff 2018).

By the same token, the OC also understood that some colleagues chose not to become involved. Some because they were too busy, others because they feared retribution, a few because they were not on board ideologically. When a respected colleague confessed that she did not see much need for the union “because it’s not like I’m an auto worker,” the OC realized they still had a way to go in normalizing union discourse within the organizational culture. Regarding “vocational awe,” UC-AFT librarians will always be proud of their profession and of their role promoting intellectual freedom and democracy, and they remain unapologetically committed to the teaching and research mission of the university. But librarians are increasingly less willing to sacrifice their economic well-being and competitive salaries on that altar.

Academic Status and Academic Freedom

As academic employees, librarians always assumed they had academic freedom, an issue tied directly to the academic status UC Berkeley librarians had struggled for since the 1960s. However, because of disparate practices at some of the campuses, the Statewide Bargaining Team decided to add an academic freedom article into the contract. Much to everyone’s surprise, it was denied by management as “not a good fit for librarians” (Borg 2018). Initially stunned by this response, members took to social media to get the word out about this fight, and it wasn’t long before the issue of librarians and academic freedom garnered national attention in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Ellis 2018) and in ALA’s flagship magazine (Smith 2018). This attention was a confidence booster and helped fuel momentum for local and statewide organizers. Management, it turned out, had handed the union the organizing tool needed to further unite librarians and engender support among faculty previously disinterested in librarian negotiations. Discussion of academic freedom also elevated the discourse among librarian rank and file beyond bread and butter issues to fundamental professional values. It became clear to librarians—even to those who were less union-friendly—that the union was a vehicle to assert core librarian ethics and advocate for principles fundamental to their professional identities. Librarians also learned that sometimes the tool

management attempts to beat you with can be turned back against them and used to gain new allies.

Coalition Building

As UC-AFT actively worked to build stronger internal ties between librarians and lecturers, a number of sister unions were also involved in contract negotiations, and UC-AFT worked to build coalitions with them as well. In 2018 and 2019, librarians and lecturers showed up on the picket lines for one- and three-day strikes called by AFSCME and UPTA. UC-AFT also took inspiration from the graduate students in UAW 2865 who had successfully called for open negotiations on campuses and who live-tweeted their negotiation sessions. Librarians and lecturers were in the room on the first day of UAW negotiations and, in turn, graduate students were among the librarians' biggest boosters, attending librarian rallies and speaking with the media. At an April 2018 "turn out" event in Berkeley, a graduate student was quoted in the student newspaper saying, "Librarians make my world go round. I need librarians more than I need a chancellor" (Shrivastava 2018). When a Local 1474 librarian shared that article on Twitter, the tweet received more than ten thousand "impressions," thirty-two retweets, and almost one hundred "likes."

Those active in the librarian contract negotiation also put UC-AFT's efforts within the context of the more than 160,000 other UC workers, including clerical and administrative staff, computer programmers, engineers, health professionals, food service workers, maintenance and facilities staff, and others. As academic employees, librarians are among the more privileged UC unionized employees. They do not face the kinds of personal and daily challenges described in a 2016 report on working conditions for UC employees which stated that 70 percent of UC's clerical, administrative, and support workers suffer from food insecurity and that the employees in these vulnerable positions are overwhelmingly women and people of color (Dreier, Bomba, and Romero 2016). While the librarian contract may not be the place to fight for the rights of workers in other classifications, when one union negotiates favorable contracts, it paves the way for other workers to do the same. Furthermore, UC-AFT can stand up and support fellow UC workers and lend voice to their struggles. Local 1474 also connected their efforts to the larger union movement—especially the wave of teacher strikes sweeping the country from West Virginia to Los Angeles. Members showed up on the picket line when teachers in neighboring Oakland went on a seven-day strike in February 2019. Just two weeks later, the president of the Oakland Education Association, along with a number of other Oakland teachers, came to a rally for librarian bargaining, telling them, "librarians stood on the picket line with us, now we're here to support you."

CONCLUSION

Although UC-AFT, with its 85 local and 358 statewide librarians is a small group, the goals of their contract campaign were far-reaching. The University of California is one of the most influential public university systems in the country, so the union viewed its fight for librarian working conditions and compensation as a fight on behalf of all academic librarians, especially those in public universities. Moreover, librarians came to believe that increasing salaries and professional-development support would allow the university to more readily increase staff diversity, not to mention improve recruitment and retention of excellent librarians who, in turn, will contribute to the excellence of the institution. UC-AFT's fight for academic freedom is a fight for the fundamental values of all librarians and academic employees.

Actively involving and giving voice to members makes a union stronger because, as organizers discussed throughout the contract campaign, the union's ability to secure victories depends on member participation. But engaging membership and creating structures that foster participation requires continued commitment and hard work. Organizational democracy is an ongoing process that demands a multipronged approach. The 2018/2019 contract campaign gave UC Berkeley librarians a common goal to work toward. The challenge ahead for the union is finding other common goals that sustain engagement and participation between negotiations. But if there is one thing librarians share, it is a strong sense of professional values and a commitment to the teaching and research missions of their universities. Advocacy for both of those—our values and our institutions—is nothing less than advocacy for a truly public university.

Addendum: After seventeen negotiation sessions and almost a year of bargaining, UC librarians ratified a new contract on April 1, 2019. The new contract significantly closed the wage gap between UC and the California State Universities. UC lecturers began bargaining for their new contract in April 2019.

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