

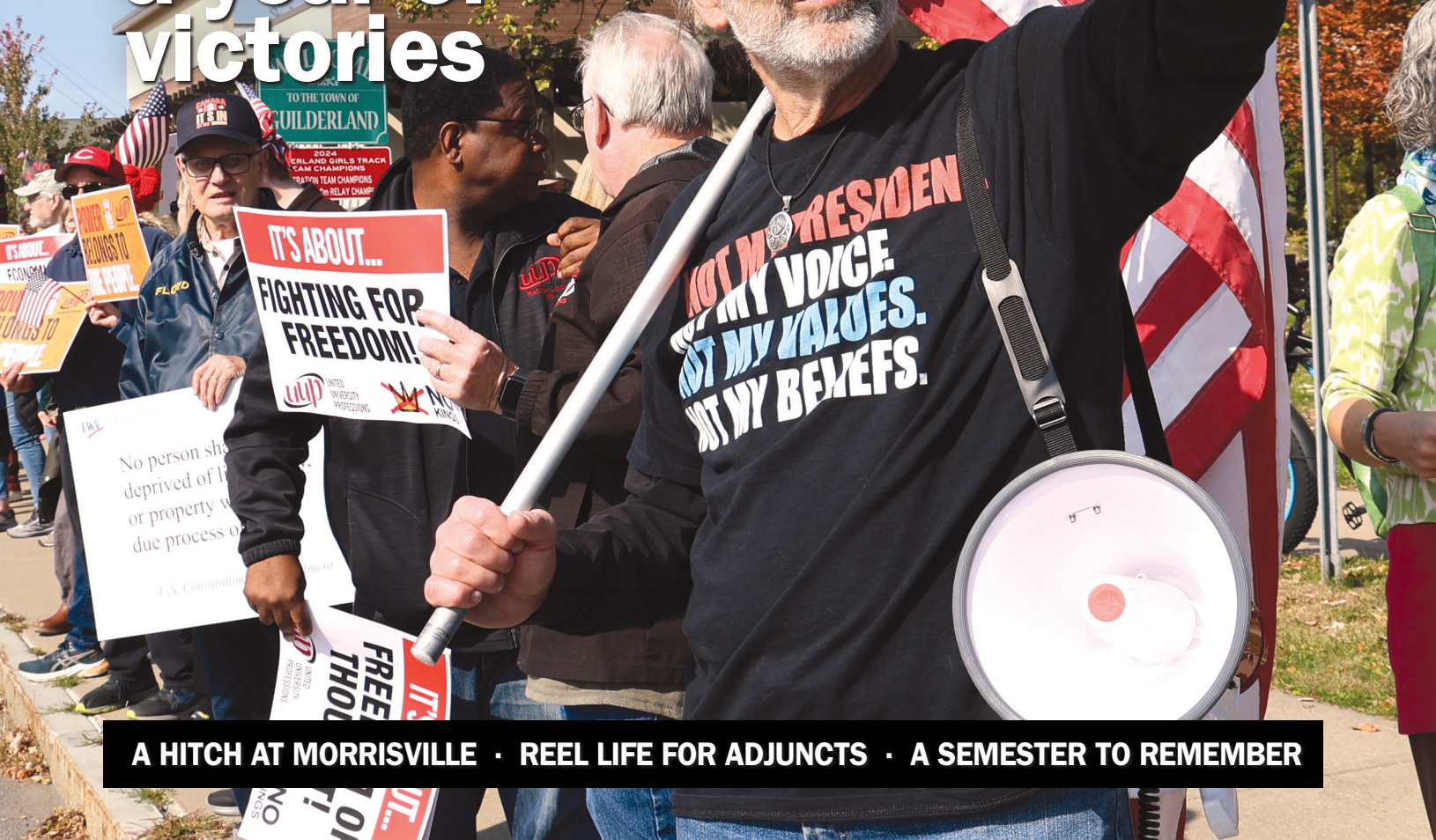
# THE VOICE

uup

Winter 2026



A year of  
struggles,  
a year of  
victories



A HITCH AT MORRISVILLE · REEL LIFE FOR ADJUNCTS · A SEMESTER TO REMEMBER





## THE VOICE

Fall 2025

The Voice is a publication of United University Professions (UUP), bargaining agent for the more than 40,000 academic and professional employees of the State University of New York.

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# WE CHOOSE TO FIGHT

It was a matter of time—not that it made the news any easier to bear.

In late October, President Trump's immigration crackdown ensnared a UUP member, a janitorial supervisor at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse who was detained with his husband as they waited for an immigration hearing.

We were sickened but not surprised. Our campuses attract a global workforce and so our campuses and hospitals are targets for Trump's deportation plan.

NBC News reports that international new-student enrollment has dropped by 17%. Academics and researchers have departed the U.S. in droves; their international counterparts find it much harder now to obtain visas.

ICE agents—incompetent, savage, conscienceless—have snatched tens of thousands of people, most of them with no criminal conviction. So much for Trump's promise to deport the “worst of the worse.”

The Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University reports that more than 71% of nearly 60,000 detained immigrants as of Sept. 21 had no criminal convictions. Many of those who did had committed minor offenses.

During raids in Chicago, just 16 of 614 detainees had significant criminal histories, according to The Chicago Tribune, citing the Department of Homeland Security.

We don't know why ICE apprehended Alex Gonzalez and his husband, Yan Vazquez, a CSEA member. What we do know is that this couple fled Cuba, sought asylum and followed the required process—and were apprehended anyhow.

We will fight for Alex and Yan, just as we will fight for any UUP member caught in Trump's immigration nightmare.

With a frigid wind blowing snow sideways, more than 300 people rallied outside the federal building in Syracuse Nov. 10 to call for the couple's release. UUP organized the rally with help from CSEA, NYSUT,

the Greater Syracuse Labor Council, the Central New York Area Labor Federation and community groups.

Syracuse Mayor-elect Sharon Owens, NYSUT President Melinda Person and Brittany Anderson, executive director of Pride at Work, were there.

We held vigils in Syracuse in the weeks following the rally to remind people that Alex and Yan still sit in a Buffalo-area detention center awaiting their fates.

We have sent an unmistakable message that UUP will always protect our members. Always.

More union members will likely be swept up by ICE. Trump has set a goal of 1 million deportations each year, so ICE has been terrorizing Los Angeles, Chicago, Charlotte, New Orleans and Minneapolis.

We take comfort from Robert F. Kennedy's famous “ripple of hope” quote from his 1966 Day of Affirmation Address:

“Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts

“ By taking action, we sent an unmistakable message to our members and anyone else watching: UUP will always protect our members. Always. ”

to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

We, all of us, are that hope.

Together, we will stand with our colleagues and testify to the dream of a just America where those who play by the rules and live by the law will be welcomed.



**Frederick E. Kowal**  
President, UUP





## LRS wins for faculty at Cortland, Canton

**U**UP President Fred Kowal has made it a priority to ensure that zealous legal advocacy remains a cornerstone of UUP's work, and he has signed off on a record number of filings over the past year.

To this end, each year the NYSUT Labor Relations Specialists assigned to UUP file dozens of improper practice charges and grievances on behalf of members.

A recent case at SUNY Cortland prompted management to change how curriculum is assigned and to compensate some faculty. The case involved several professors who were newly assigned to teach two extra labs on top of their existing class load.

Whenever management unilaterally and substantially increases a UUP member's workload, our union has the right to intervene and demand negotiations. In this case, when management refused to negotiate, UUP filed an improper practice charge with the New York State Public Employment Relations Board alleging a violation of the Taylor Law.

"When there's no contract language to specify the load, we have to go on history," said Chris Sielaff, the Labor Relations Specialist assigned to Cortland. "In this case, the assigned courses and the structure of the assignment were unique. We argued for precedent to prevail."

Notably, UUP was able to achieve a settlement crediting the professors for work they completed and

awarding back pay. There is also an agreement for how work will be assigned moving forward.

"People stood up for themselves and worked with their union to make sure the terms and conditions were fair," Sielaff said. "They could've just taken it, but they reached out. In a unionized environment you don't have to suffer in silence."

**"People stood up for themselves**

**and worked with their union.**

**In a unionized environment you**

**don't have to suffer in silence."**

UUP also achieved a win at SUNY Canton with a separate workload improper practice charge.

This matter addressed the concerns of faculty who were unilaterally assigned to do the work—for no additional compensation—of a specialized assistant who left without a replacement. As a result of the settlement achieved through the union's advocacy, the college agreed to compensate the affected faculty for the work previously performed and to fill the position.



## Online education best in measured doses, Kowal testifies

**O**nline education is deeply embedded in SUNY, but it should not be a universal solution for all students and should not entirely replace face-to-face instruction, UUP President Fred Kowal testified to the Assembly Higher Education Committee Oct. 21.

“One hundred percent online creates massive challenges for faculty to keep students engaged,” Kowal testified in the hearing on virtual learning at colleges and universities in New York. The hearing was called by Assembly Member Alicia Hyndman, who chairs the Assembly Standing Committee on Higher Education.

Several administrators from SUNY, the City University of New York and private higher education also testified. Kowal was the only higher education labor leader at the hearing, and he offered a considerably more measured view of virtual learning than several of the other experts who testified.

UUP-represented faculty at SUNY are “doing everything possible” to make virtual learning a high-quality experience for students, Kowal said, but challenges remain. If students are taking all online courses, they may be on campus rarely if at all, and they will miss the benefits of talking one-on-one with a professor during office hours. It can be equally difficult for students to attend in-person small-group discussion sessions on the course.

Kowal also told the panel that he has serious concerns

about the rapidly growing field of private vendors that manage online courses in higher education. Faculty and professional staff at SUNY are highly qualified to handle much of the work that outside vendors often supply, Kowal said. He is especially concerned about the sector of online education vendors known as Online Program Managers, or OPMs, which develop and deliver online programs, usually for a share of tuition revenue.

UUP members at Binghamton University have raised legitimate questions about the OPM hired to develop an online nursing program, including the OPM’s access to student data.

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***Kowal said he has serious concerns about the rapidly growing field of private vendors that manage online courses in higher education.***

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## UUP Oneonta, Indivisible, remember veteran neighbors with food drive

**I**n recognition of the fact that people face hunger this winter in New York, the UUP Oneonta Chapter teamed up with the Cooperstown/Oneonta chapter of the pro-democracy group Indivisible for a food drive to benefit the Oneonta Veteran’s Outreach Center.

The Dec. 6 food drive produced great results: two large table-tops’ worth of nonperishable items to help clients of the Outreach Center.

“In the wake of the federal government shutdown, and amid a broader cost-of-living crisis, those reliant on food-insecurity programs like SNAP and area food banks have found themselves in dire straits, facing emptied accounts and similarly barren pantry shelves,” Ethan Fox, a Delegate and the Political Outreach Coordinator for the Oneonta Chapter wrote in an account of the event.

The Oneonta Veteran’s Outreach Center is a division of the Utica Center for Development. The UUP-Indivisible food drive was part of a three-way effort Dec. 6 to help the Veteran’s Outreach Center food pantry. The Outreach Center accepted direct donations, and Indivisible members marched in the town’s Holiday Parade with shopping carts to accept food pantry donations. Oneonta Chapter member Virginia Kennedy leads Cooperstown Oneonta Indivisible.





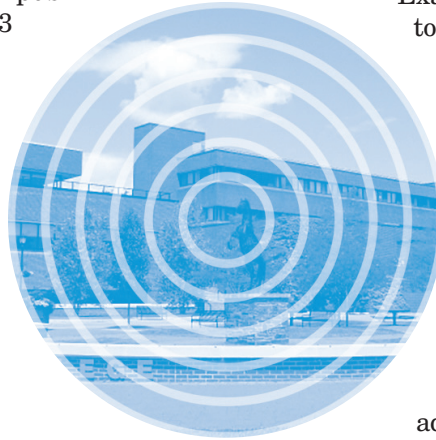
# Morrisville shooting: Lessons learned

**A** shocking first-ever shooting on the SUNY Morrisville campus highlighted gaps in the safety system that UUP Chapter President Steve Hinkle says may be at least partly due to funding shortfalls.

A 20-year-old man visiting the campus was shot in a dormitory in the Nov. 3 incident. No one has been arrested. State police said the shooting occurred between two people who knew each other. The victim's injuries were not life-threatening.

"The campus response was good, but there are a lot of things that could be improved," Hinkle said. "We're working to fix some of the problems."

Among the concerns raised during the lockdown after the shooting: Not everyone may have been aware of the emergency, despite a system that sends alerts to phones and email. Hinkle said at least one person was walking around the campus at the height of the police response, apparently unaware of how vulnerable he was. Hinkle expects the campus community to receive more training about lockdown responses, because, as he noted, not



everyone was sure what to do.

The shooting also served as a reminder that Morrisville is one of several UUP-represented SUNY campuses in the Upstate region that has struggled for years with inadequate funding. Hinkle described Morrisville's situation as "being cut down to the bone."

Examples of that strain: Some door locks need to be fixed and several residence halls still don't have key-card systems that lock out people who don't live there. The campus has key-card software for those buildings, but the locks needed to complete the installation have not yet been purchased.

Hinkle credited the administration with being responsive to the concerns that UUP and other members of the campus community have raised.

He plans to continue working with the administration to address security gaps, even as he also plans to work with UUP leaders to press for adequate funding to the many smaller campuses that are struggling financially.

**Read UUP President Fred Kowal's statement on the shooting:**  
[bit.ly/MorrisvilleShooting](https://bit.ly/MorrisvilleShooting)



## Call for candidate statements for spring election

**U**UP is issuing a call for candidate statements for its upcoming statewide election.

Delegates to the UUP Spring 2026 Delegate Assembly will vote to elect the UUP president, secretary-treasurer, membership development officer and half of the statewide Executive Board.

The deadline to submit a candidate statement is 5 p.m. Friday, April 3, 2026.

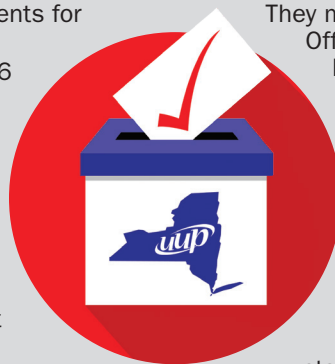
UUP will publish the statements on its website as soon as possible after the deadline and will widely publicize announcements that the statements have been posted.

### Candidate statements: guidelines

Candidates may submit a statement of up to 500 words and a photo for publication. If a candidate submits a lengthier statement, it will be posted in smaller type to give all candidates equal space.

Candidates are encouraged to submit statements and photos by email.

You can email or mail statements and photos to the attention of UUP Director of Communications Mike Lisi.



They must be received at the UUP Administrative Office—P.O. Box 15143, Albany, N.Y. 12212—no later than 5 p.m. Friday, April 3, 2026. Please send email versions to Lisi at [mlisi@uupmail.org](mailto:mlisi@uupmail.org); please cc to Darryl McGrath, managing editor, at [Dmcgrath@uupmail.org](mailto:Dmcgrath@uupmail.org). Email versions must also be received by 5 p.m. Friday, April 3, 2026.

Statements will be published by order of election and in alphabetical order in even-numbered years and reverse alphabetical order in odd-numbered years.

Note: UUP policy prohibits the use of UUP or state equipment or resources (including email) to produce or distribute campaign material for UUP elections.

**A copy of the policies on distribution of campaign materials can be obtained by visiting [uupinfo.org/elections](https://uupinfo.org/elections), at chapter offices or by contacting UUP Secretary/Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee at [jobryan@uupmail.org](mailto:jobryan@uupmail.org)**





# UUP vows to safeguard ESF's future

## *“Stabilization Plan” could undermine work, reputation of SUNY’s nationally renowned environmental college*

**W**ith a national reputation for environmental research and a focus on sustainability embraced by students and faculty, SUNY ESF plays a unique role in SUNY’s mission of providing a top-notch but affordable education

Why, then, is SUNY imposing a stabilization plan on this small but very special college that is clearly designed to weaken the school to the point where management can say it is no longer viable?

That’s the question that UUP has been asking for months, as the union urges SUNY, Gov. Kathy Hochul and the Legislature to not only adequately fund ESF but to make a solid commitment to retaining it as an integral but freestanding part of the SUNY system.

“UUP will fight to protect SUNY ESF and the groundbreaking, life-changing work that this college has produced for 114 years,” UUP President Fred Kowal has said in one of his many public and written statements about the college’s plight. “This is an opportunity for the state to step up and buck the federal government’s short-sighted attack on science and the environment by making a long-term investment in this esteemed institution.”

### **Long-running deficit needs to end**

At issue is a stability plan imposed on ESF nearly six months ago by the same SUNY central administration that UUP holds accountable for the college’s struggles in the first place. Under that plan, SUNY would cut spending (even though the college’s en-

rollment is projected to grow), and would also reduce services, courses and faculty.

ESF has a festering \$8.3 million structural deficit that UUP notes could easily be corrected. State operating aid to SUNY increased in the current budget by \$114 million, so the money is there to secure ESF’s future.

“This structural deficit must end,” UUP Chapter President Matt Smith has said in a written state-



ment. “The science and expertise produced by ESF is needed more than ever before to repair the damage to science and education from short-sighted federal funding cuts.”

Several state lawmakers have publicly pledged their support for ESF. The college will receive a special focus by UUP in the upcoming advocacy efforts for the next state budget.







# No immigrants need apply

**Federal policy  
on immigrants  
hits higher ed**

**By Leigh Hornbeck**

**F**atima\*, a graduate student at the University of Albany, already had two college degrees when she and her husband applied to study in the United States. She holds undergraduate and master's degrees in economics; her husband graduated from the top business school in Bangladesh.

Fatima had a good job working as a research project manager studying health care access for the urban poor. But for their careers to grow, Fatima and her husband needed advanced degrees from the U.S. or the United Kingdom. Fatima applied to eight schools and received the best offer from UAlbany.

Fatima lived in the UK as a child while her father was getting his graduate degree and she  
*\*UUP agreed to use a pseudonym to protect the identity of the interview subject.*





Multiple labor organizations, including UUP, CSEA Local 615, NYSUT and the Greater Syracuse Labor Council, rallied Nov. 10 in support of UUP member Alex Ramírez González and CSEA member Yan Vázquez, after federal immigration agents detained the two men Oct. 29.

speaks fluent English. She felt prepared to live in the U.S. when she moved in 2021 to pursue a doctorate degree in health policy with a focus on health care equity and accessibility. Fatima’s husband enrolled elsewhere in the state for a master’s degree in public policy.

“I’d always wanted to study abroad so I was surprised by how homesick I was. Living here was a huge shock and I felt isolated,” Fatima said. “I com-

## **A man from Pakistan who had just started post-doctorate work went home to see his children and wasn’t allowed back in the U.S.**

pared everything with home — the food, the water, the weather. I constantly felt different from everyone around me.”

At first, Fatima didn’t think the other students in her cohort would understand her feelings because they were from different countries, but as she got to know them, she learned they all had similar feelings in common because everyone was navigating a new

culture. Fatima gave birth to her first child in early 2022 and finally began to feel comfortable in Albany.

### **A chilling change with 2024 election**

Then came Election Day, 2024. Fatima said she and her network of fellow international students felt a sense of doom when Donald Trump was elected. Friends cancelled their plans for trips to visit family in their native countries. A man from Pakistan who had just started post-doctorate work went home to see his children and wasn’t allowed back in the U.S. Friends who had traffic or parking tickets were terrified the violations would lead to deportation.

“Every day we woke up to bad news and because I work in the health space, I also worried my research funding would be cancelled,” Fatima said.

Fatima is one of nearly 500,000 international graduate students in the U.S. facing uncertainty under the current federal administration. Amid attacks on immigrants in general, the Department of State revoked more than 6,000 visas in 2025 while making



## UUP demands release of Alex and Yan

**A**s The Voice went to press, Alex González, an Upstate Medical Chapter member, and his husband, Yan Vázquez, were still languishing in a federal detention center in Batavia following their Oct. 29 arrest by ICE agents.

Despite demanding answers, UUP has to date been unable to find out why these two immigrants from Cuba were arrested. They were legally employed at Upstate and were following the required immigration laws as they sought asylum in the U.S.

The men had nearly completed the process of legally emigrating to the U.S. from Cuba when ICE agents detained them Oct. 29. Vázquez is a CSEA member.

“Only in Donald Trump’s America could two union members who fled oppression in Cuba to seek asylum in the United States be swept up by immigration enforcement agents as they waited to attend a scheduled immigration hearing,” UUP President Fred Kowal said in a written statement. “Our member, Alex González, and his husband, CSEA member Yan Vázquez, are hard workers and good neighbors who share a dream to live legally in America. We stand with our union siblings and we will fight for their right to due process and to secure their releases.”



*Upstate Medical Chapter member Alex González (right) and his husband Yan Vázquez were detained by immigration agents as they arrived to attend a scheduled immigration hearing on Oct. 29.*

it harder obtain a student visa and limiting to four the number of years visa holders can stay in the U.S. The president has also tried to persuade colleges and universities to cap the number of international students allowed to enroll.

### **A national downturn in college enrollment**

The policy changes have a chilling effect on college enrollment.

Nationwide, nearly 1.2 million students traveled from overseas to attend a U.S. college or university in the 2024-2025 academic year, a 4.5% increase from the previous year and an all-time high. But the number of new international students enrolling at American colleges and universities decreased by 17% this fall, according to early data released by the Institute of International Education.

At SUNY, international enrollment dropped by 3.9% among undergraduates and 13.8% among graduate students.

The prevailing attitude by the Trump administration toward immigrants and asylum seekers affects not only students but the staff, as well.

Two Cuban-born men who work in janitorial services at Upstate Medical University were detained Oct. 29 when they arrived at a scheduled immigration hearing near Syracuse. The men, who are married, own a house in Syracuse. Alex Ramírez González is a member of UUP and his husband, Yan



Upstate Medical University Chapter President Mindy Heath speaking at the Nov. 10 rally in Syracuse in support of UUP member Alex Ramírez González and CSEA member Yan Vázquez, whom federal immigration agents took into detention Oct. 29.

The confinement of González and Vázquez illustrates the attack on immigrants of all kinds, documented or not. The men were working within the

system on a path to citizenship. They were following the law. They were arrested anyway.

from independent federal judges. In the years since, the political implications of yanking day care providers out of work, attacking protestors with pepper spray and putting zip ties on children might have kept presidents from exploiting these authorities, but not so much with the current president.

Fatima tries to be optimistic. She is expecting her second child in early 2026 and she secured funding for her research through the state. Her husband works at a think tank that sponsors his H-1B visa. Despite the stress and the separation from their families, the couple hopes to one day be granted permanent status. They initially planned to return home after they completed their degrees, but they

Before Trump was elected, Fatima applied for permanent residence and was told her chances were good because of her research topics.

Now, there has been no progress.

### AFT helps members plan for worst-case scenarios at demonstrations

UUP statewide secretary-treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee makes sure she has her red canvas backpack, which she keeps in her car.

O'Bryan-Losee is not a health care professional, but she has undergone training from the AFT on how to respond until medics arrive.

scenarios with sometimes harrowing realism.

She hopes she never has to open the backpack and apply her training in a panicked crowd at a protest, but if she must, she knows she can.

The backpack that Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee obtained at AFT training contains basic medical equipment that would help her respond to the most common injuries at a demonstration.





# ***“A very concerning time for democracy in our country”***

## **Immigration law clinic to open at UB School of Law**

**A**s both legal and undocumented immigrants face the strong possibility that they could be detained by ICE—a worry that even U.S. citizens now confront if their appearance or accent fit a certain profile—the need for new immigration attorneys is profound.

An immigration law clinic planned for the spring semester at the University at Buffalo School of Law could help aspiring attorneys decide if they want to pursue this specialty, said Bernadette Gargano, a clinical professor and the vice dean for experiential education and social justice initiatives at the school. As director of the clinical legal education program, she is overseeing the plans for the immigration law clinic.

The four adjunct clinical faculty members who will run the clinic are experienced immigration attorneys. They are affiliated with the Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, which provides free civil legal services to low-income clients and small not-for-profit organizations in Western New York.

“The reason for this clinic is to get students trained, because there’s a great need for immigration lawyers, and I don’t see that going away anytime soon,” said Gargano, who described the current climate of fear and dread among immigrants as “a very concerning time for democ-

racy in our country.”

That fear has been exacerbated by the fact that in many cases, immigrants – and even citizens – caught up in ICE sweeps have not been treated with the due process guaranteed them by the Constitution, Gargano noted. Several federal courts have tried to correct this omission, but as cases work their way through court, the detentions and the questionable practices continue apace.

The clinic is being introduced in direct response to interest by students, who will get a wealth of experience. They will work under the guidance of their supervising clinical faculty in the Buffalo Immigration Court, the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility in Batavia and the Batavia Immigration Court. Students will also assist unrepresented respondents in Buffalo Immigration Court by helping them prepare petitions and understand the court process, their rights and their obligations.

Around the very real needs that the clinic will meet, Gargano explained that there’s an additional satisfaction in knowing that the UB School of Law—New York’s only state-operated law school—is fulfilling its part of the mission of SUNY, in serving a public need.

Said Gargano: “I feel like we’re serving the state of New York in a very special way.”



**Bernadette Gargano**



# Reel life for contingents

## “Adjunct” film a realistic depiction of long-standing problem in higher ed

**T**he independent movie *Adjunct*, in which filmmaker Ron Najor draws on personal experience to depict higher education’s greatest controversy, resonated with UUP members who marked Campus Equity Week with watch parties and a forum on the film.

UUP and Higher Education Labor United made free links to the 2024 movie available in the days leading up to the Oct. 29 UUP virtual forum.

For that event, statewide secretary-treasurer Jeri O’Bryan-Losee moderated a discussion on the movie with a panel that featured Jaclyn Pittsley, full-time lecturer at Cortland and statewide executive board member and chair of the UUP Contingent Employ-

Pittsley, who is the first UUP member to exclusively represent academic contingents on the UUP Executive Board, said that UUP has been a leader in this area.

“We fight back to make sure all those adjuncts have job security and fair pay and health insurance, and that’s what I’m in UUP to do,” she said.

### Realistic depictions

Najor, an acclaimed independent filmmaker, is a former adjunct who drew on many of his experiences and observations for the movie. The film’s depiction of the ever-present hope that the adjunct position might lead to a permanent or tenure-track job; the reluctance to turn down requests for unpaid additional assignments so as to be perceived as a team player; the constant push-pull to meet the demands and needs of students—these scenes

would resonate with almost anyone who’s been an adjunct, the panelists said. (Within UUP, the term “contingent” refers to all academic and professional employees who are not eligible for permanent appointment or tenure. The term “adjunct,” as UUP and the movie use it, refers to academic faculty who teach semester by semester, with no guarantee that their employment will be extended to the next semester.)

Adding to the problems of most adjuncts: the overall stress of low pay and the ever-present worry about retaining health benefits. The movie’s protagonist—an adjunct English instructor at an unnamed college in southern California—works as an Uber driver to supplement his income, and he worries constantly that he will lose his health insurance.

“I never wanted to say what the college is because to me, this could be any college in the country,” Najor told the audience. “I’ve had multiple full-time and tenured and tenure-track professors come up to me

**“Universities have really built their budgets on the backs of adjuncts.”**

— Bret Benjamin of UAlbany, UUP chief negotiator

ment Committee; Ron Najor, the director and star of “*Adjunct*”; Bret Benjamin of UAlbany, the chief negotiator for UUP; and NYSUT Labor Relations Specialist Chris Sielaff.

“Universities have really built their budgets on the backs of adjuncts,” Benjamin said, reflecting a common theme among the comments and questions during the forum. Benjamin, Pittsley and Sielaff also noted, however, that UUP has set a national standard in addressing the issues of adjunct labor.

“I think our union has moved an enormous distance [on this issue] in the years I’ve been in it,” Benjamin said.





## ad•junct

/əˈjʌŋɡ(k)t/

noun

1. a thing added to something else as a supplementary rather than an essential part
2. a film by RON NAJOR

ATLAS BRAYE AND BETWEEN US FILMS PRESENTS "ADJUNCT"  
RON NAJOR KRISTIN ERICKSON ROSS TURNER NIKHOL BOOSHERY FRISSE SLAUGHT PHILIP ANDRÉ BOTTELLO  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: LUIS LOPEZ AND LUCAS WILLIAMS EDITOR: ANDREW HORNECK PRODUCED BY MARVIN NAJOR BENJAMIN HOWARD  
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY RON NAJOR



after watching the movie and saying, 'Wow, I had no idea' ... I didn't cover everything, but I feel I covered a lot."

Grace McGrath, an adjunct faculty member at SUNY Empire State University, was in the audience of the Oct. 29 forum, and she was struck by the contrast between her experience so far as an adjunct, and how the movie depicted the lead character's far more fraught experience.

McGrath is in her first semester as an adjunct and says, "It's been a great journey thus far." She previously worked at a private university—as a professional, not an adjunct—and there she saw a perspective of adjunct life that more closely mirrored the movie.

"I know how bad it can be," said McGrath, who also said she is grateful to be in a union.

» **At the SUNY Polytechnic Chapter,** VPA Alex Bulson, left, and Officer for Contingents Mike Green introduce the movie "Adjunct" to an audience of students and faculty before the Oct. 29 forum. Bulson wrote of the event that "the students were quite engaged, as most didn't even know what an adjunct was before the showing."

## Work to be done

Even in a higher education union that began prioritizing the needs of adjuncts a generous two decades ago, leaders recognize there is more work to be done. Adjuncts represent as much as 50% of the faculty at some campuses in the United States, and UUP is working to make sure that they continue to make gains in the terms and conditions of their employment at UUP-represented SUNY campuses.

McGrath and other adjuncts who started at SUNY after the implementation of the current contract are benefiting from the work of their predecessors in the past 20 years in UUP.

The existing agreement has, hands down, the strongest gains for adjuncts and other lower-paid UUP-represented employees of any time in the union's 52 years of existence.

That current UUP contract, which expires July 1, 2026, saw substantial increases in the maximum per-course payments for non-tenure-track members. The contract also saw increases in contractually set minimum salaries for full-time lecturers; on base retention awards for qualifying full-time contingent faculty; and increases in guaranteed appointment periods for qualifying part-time and full-time contingent faculty, among other gains."

"Adjunct" can be purchased or rented through Amazon Video, Fandango At Home and Apple TV online.







SUNY Morrisville students Connor Ashforth and Summer Billings drive a Belgian horse, part of the college's draft horse team, known as a "hitch."



# Riding off into history

**Morrisville  
cuts its  
draft horse  
team, the last  
of its kind in  
North America**

**By Leigh Hornbeck**

**D**raft horses are the original engine; the reason we measure mechanical might in horsepower.

Harnessed together, a team of two Belgians can pull about 16,000 pounds. Draft horses did all the work motor vehicles did and sometimes still do: they pulled plows, harvesters, mail wagons and fire engines.

Other than Budweiser's mighty Clydesdales, draft horses have mostly disappeared from public view. Still, there are places where the big horses are celebrated and the skills for handling them are taught. Walk through any county fair and you're likely to see a team surrounded by people admiring their dinner plate-sized hooves and placid demeanor. Multiple organizations in the United States and Canada celebrate draft horses and the people skilled enough to handle them, including the North American Classic Series and the North American Belgian Championship.

Until this year, SUNY Morrisville was home to the only collegiate draft horse team—called a hitch for short—in North America.





Citing cost and low enrollment in the program, the Morrisville administration has disbanded its team of Belgian horses, putting an end to a much-decorated program led since 1999 by the college's equine manager, UUP member Scott Seymour.

Interim Provost Jason Zbock said the administration considers "mission, market and quality" when evaluating classes. The school's hunt seat (a style of English horseback riding) elective has also been cut.

"We will focus on Western riding, equine rehabilitation and breeding," Zbock said. "We need to support the students in those classes and reduce costs and expenditures elsewhere."



«  
**Scott Seymour,**  
Equine Manager at  
SUNY Morrisville

### A special place on campus

The hitch never had a high enrollment, Seymour said, but he is proud of the excellent job placement, post-graduation, for the students who learned to drive the team. The team was special and allowed decades of Morrisville students a unique experience, he said.

"Working with Belgians has been my life's work," Seymour said at the New York State Fair this past summer, when he was recognized for his years of ser-

**"The money in the system is not spread equally across the board. It's sad that it's come to this."**

*Steve Hinkle, Morrisville Chapter President*

vice to draft horses, exhibitions and competition. "It was never just about me, it was about the students, the horses and the people who poured their hearts into this program."

Steve Hinkle, Morrisville's chapter president, said the loss of the hitch is a result of inequitable funding by SUNY and 10 years of flat budgets.

"The money in the system is not spread equally across the board," Hinkle said. "The hitch was a great marketing tool. It created a lot of exposure for the college at the state fair. No one else has one. It's sad that it's come to this."

The hitch was tucked into Morrisville's equine program and allowed students an opportunity to spend time with another breed of horses. Four students typically stayed at Morrisville in the summertime to care for the horses and travel to shows.

The college offers a bachelor's of technology in equine science and an associate's degree in equine science and management. Students have access to an equine rehabilitation center outfitted with a pool, treadmills that can be used dry or submerged in water, a TENS unit (a device that uses low-voltage



electrical currents to relieve pain) and stalls outfitted with infrared lamps for heat therapy. Horse owners in the area often bring their horses to Morrisville for rehab services. The adjoining stable has 40 stalls; another building houses a 40,000-square-foot arena. There are 120 students between the bachelor's and associate's equine programs.

### **A love of horses led back to Morrisville**

Raised around horses in Plattsburgh, Seymour, 53, chose Morrisville for college because of its equine program. He graduated in 1993 and returned in 1997 as an employee after the original hitch (1986-1995) had been disbanded. He helped put a new draft team in place in 1999. The hitch participated in numerous exhibitions and parades representing the college, often helping to attract prospective students to Morrisville, Seymour said. Students won prizes at several North American Belgian Championships and the National Belgian Show.

A team of six horses groomed for a show, with each horse weighing 1,000 to 2,000 pounds, is an impressive sight. After a bath, the horses' coats, which are typically blond or reddish-brown, are brushed to a gleam and their white-blond tails are gathered into buns and decorated. They wear ribbons in their manes and shiny black hoof paint on each huge hoof. The harness they wear is polished. The driver wears mandatory formal attire and a top hat is a must. Judges appraise the team on the driver's command of the horses at a walk and trot, reversing direction, lining up, coming to a stop and backing up.

Students put in hours of practice out of sight of the public. In driving practice, students circle Seymour, who watches for details the untrained eye sees only as fluid choreography: posture, hand and reins position and communication between team and driver.

Seymour has plenty of work to do without the hitch, but the team was his passion. He plans to

retire in 2027 and hopes to start a new career working with horses.

Sadly, Seymour traveled to Indiana this fall to sell the team's equipment at auction. The sale brought in \$63,000 for Morrisville Auxiliary Corporation, a nonprofit that provides non-academic services to SUNY Morrisville. The horses owned by the college will be sold privately and the horses on loan to the college will return to their owners as another chapter in equine history comes to a close.

✶ **Aubrey McClory-Ensell**  
SUNY Morrisville  
student





# UUP advances proposals for contract negotiations

**N**ow that UUP has a list of conceptual proposals to bring to the table when UUP sits down with the state for negotiations on a new contract, UUP also wants to help members understand as much as possible about their current contract.

With that goal in mind, UUP is hosting a series of virtual sessions that will explain key aspects of the contract, including leave provisions, job security and retrenchment, contractual benefits and provisions for contingent employees. The sessions will run through Jan. 29 (See link on next page.)

“The more that members—and especially our newest members—understand what UUP has already achieved for them in the current contract, the better

role in the development of a new contract asked questions and offered suggestions at the meeting. The three groups, authorized by the union’s constitution, are the Negotiations Team, the Negotiations Committee and the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee—which helps gather input from UUP chapters on members’ priorities for the next contract.

Once the Negotiations Team reaches a tentative agreement with the state, the Negotiations Committee votes to accept or reject the proposal. If accepted, the agreement goes to UUP’s membership for a ratification vote. Only UUP members can vote on the contract.

The union has opened many channels so that UUP-represented employees throughout the bargaining unit can continue to ask questions and offer comments about contract negotiations.

More than 13,000 UUP-represented employees responded to a survey from the union about what matters to them in the next contract. Employees in the bargaining unit also had the opportunity to attend forums during the summer, and they can discuss their concerns with their chapter leaders at any time.

Employees with questions can also email the Negotiations Team at [contract@uupmail.org](mailto:contract@uupmail.org).

## Important work at tough times

At the meeting, UUP President Fred Kowal reminded the gathering of the gravity of their task, especially at a time when thousands of federal employees in public-sector unions have had their contracts negated and their right to collectively bargain dismissed by the Republican-led administration—an action that federal courts have upheld. Unions face tough times, Kowal said.

“Day in and day out, in all the work we do, we forget the value of collective bargaining,” Kowal said before the committees began reviewing the final list of suggested conceptual proposals. “Without a union, without the right to collectively bargain, we’d all be on our own. The work that you’re going to start doing is so important—showing to your colleagues, and yes, the nation, what a union can do.”

Neither UUP nor the state discloses its proposals at this early stage. Once UUP and the state have ex-

**The proposals include revisions of existing provisions in the contract as well as new provisions the union seeks to add to the contract.**

they will understand what we hope to also achieve in the next agreement,” UUP Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin said. “The current contract was noteworthy for the real gains it attained for our lowest-paid members, and we want to build on that success.”

The Negotiations Committee unanimously approved the conceptual proposals Oct. 10 at the conclusion of a two-day meeting in Albany. The UUP Negotiations Team—which conducts the contract bargaining with the state—developed the list of conceptual proposals along with UUP President Fred Kowal.

“I came away super-enthused about the response we got,” said Benjamin, who led that meeting. “It was very positive—a great response by the committee.”

The conceptual proposals cover the top priorities upon which the union will base its bargaining. The proposals include revisions of existing provisions in the contract as well as new provisions the union seeks to add to the contract.

## A democratic process

All three member-based UUP groups that play a





Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin answers questions about the conceptual proposals in an October meeting at the Albany Hilton. The Negotiations Committee unanimously approved the conceptual proposals at the conclusion of the two-day meeting.

changed their proposals, UUP expects to share them with the membership.

The list generally covers issues at the heart of UUP's terms and conditions of employment: compensation; grievances; disciplinary procedures; appointments, evaluations and promotions; job security and paths to permanency for non-tenure-track faculty; retrenchment; work-life services and health insurance.

### How to stay informed

The union does not have a date yet for starting negotiations, but Benjamin said the goal is to begin talks as soon as the state is ready. The current contract expires July 1, 2026, but the key provisions for terms and conditions of employment will remain in effect by state law, even if a new agreement has not yet been reached by the expiration date.

Look for updates on negotiations in the UUP Members Only section of the UUP website (see link below) and also in the UUPConnect newsletter. If you are not receiving UUPConnect and would like to be added to the distribution list for this weekly update on UUP events and news stories, contact UUP Communications Director Mike Lisi at [mlisi@uupmail.org](mailto:mlisi@uupmail.org).

### Know Your Contract schedule and registration link

Workshops will be held just about each week through the end of January 2026. UUP's NYSUT labor relations specialists will lead the workshops.

The virtual workshops are open to members and nonmembers; feel free to attend as many as you wish. See below to register.

**Jan. 14:** Health Science Center Member Protections & Benefits, 11 a.m. – noon.

**Jan. 22:** Contingent Employee Provisions, noon - 1 p.m.

**Jan. 23:** Contingent Employee Provisions, 1 p.m. - 2 p.m.

**Jan. 28:** Job Security & Retrenchment, 11 a.m. - noon.

**Jan. 29:** Job Security & Retrenchment, 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

**To sign up for a seminar visit [bit.ly/KnowYourContractSeminars](https://bit.ly/KnowYourContractSeminars)**



## KEEP UP TO DATE ON NEGOTIATIONS

Members are encouraged to sign up for the UUP Members Only portal on the UUP website, where contract negotiations information and updates will be posted.

Members can access that portal and find instructions on how to create an account with a password by scanning the QR code at right or by going to [bit.ly/UUPMembersOnly](https://bit.ly/UUPMembersOnly)



# An unplanned path to leadership

*Leaders at Stony Brook, Oneonta stepped up ... and stayed*

**T**wo UUP chapter presidents who took office this year came to their positions in an unusual way — they stepped in when the previous presidents stepped away from the positions.

Shirley Clark is a longtime professional member from SUNY Oneonta in the financial aid department and Louise Melious is a professional in the Department of Central Services at Stony Brook University.

Melious has been a SUNY employee for 35 years. She is the assistant director of the Department of Central Services and provides oversight for three major areas: central receiving, mail services and property control.

Melious has a long history with unions. She belonged to CSEA from 1990 to 2019, and she was treasurer and executive vice president of CSEA Local 614 SUNY Stony Brook. Melious joined UUP in 2019. The Stony Brook chapter is one of UUP's largest, with more than 3,400 active and retiree members.

Clark started her career at Stony Brook, where she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees. She worked in the registrar's office and joined UUP. In 1996, Clark moved upstate with her family but stayed with SUNY and took a job on the Oneonta campus. She is the financial aid project manager at the Student Information and Campus Administration Systems Center.

The Voice spoke to both women about their approach to unionism and their plans for their terms in office.

## **Shirley Clark:**

**Q: A longtime member, you became active in the union recently. What inspired you?**

A: I started going to meetings shortly after the COVID pandemic and I saw there was a need for

people to become more active and involved. There were vacancies at the chapter. We changed the time meetings were held to lunchtime so more professionals could attend.

I wanted to look out for professionals to make sure they weren't becoming burned out, as was happening to me. I began to learn about the union. In June of 2022 I ran for election to become a delegate and I learned more. Then I became the vice president for professionals because there was a vacancy. I wanted to help people who felt overlooked, underserved and overworked. It was short-lived because shortly afterward, the chapter president went on leave and I

was appointed interim president in the spring of 2024. I learned about scheduling meetings and writing agendas for labor management. When the person who had been the president resigned, the executive board voted for me to serve the remainder of his term and I embraced it.

### **Q: How do you reach people?**

A: I couldn't believe how many people needed help for things like getting their health insurance set up, especially part-time faculty who are often given bad information. We moved our website to the statewide site because they host us for free and we produce two publications, UUP-date! once a month and The Sentinel once a semester. We hold sessions on campus and via video conference on various issues so people can learn about how to file a grievance or how to apply for college loan forgiveness.

### **Q: What worries you?**

A: It makes me nervous to see colleges close and see declining enrollment. No one is safe anymore.

### **Q: What are your goals?**

A: We have a diverse set of people in the chapter, both culturally and by job description. We represent more than 900 employees and 149 retirees. I'm looking for advocates to grow membership. Hard-working indi-



**Shirley Clark**



viduals are the backbone of whatever we create.

## **Louise Melious:**

### **Q: Why did you join a union?**

**A:** I'm an advocate for equality and fairness — particularly when it comes to women. I am active in campaigns for equitable pay, protection against harassment and work-life balance policies that improve women's experiences at work. By addressing systemic barriers and biases that hinder women's opportunities in the workplace, my leadership ensures that the union movement accurately reflects and represents its diverse membership.

### **Q: What are some accomplishments you've seen at Stony Brook because of work by unions?**

**A:** SBU is unique within SUNY because we have a campus-based fire department, which provides fire protection and fire safety services to the campus community. In addition to responding to fires and performing hazardous materials rescue, the department reviews codes across Stony Brook's campuses and the Calverton Incubator as well as University Hospital and Medical Center and the Long Island Veterans Home. The members provide fire education, inspect and test campus fire protection systems, conduct fire drills and offer automated external defibrillators.

There is now a memorandum of agreement between UUP and SUNY to represent professional titles within the Environmental Health & Safety department. UUP worked with Human Resources and SUNY to assist with defining new titles that belong with a fire brigade, such as captains and lieutenants.

The MOA went into effect in September, and the fire brigade is now operating around the clock.

### **Q: What are your goals as president?**

**A:** I am focused on building a vibrant, informed and connected membership base through thoughtful outreach and targeted investments. We want to meet immediate needs and lay the groundwork for long-term member satisfaction and organizational strength.

We are committed to member engagement, community-building and organizational cohesion. One of our top priorities is educating our members about their professional worth. We believe that every member deserves to understand the value they bring to SUNY and to the broader academic and professional community. Through workshops, communications

and targeted outreach, we aim to empower members with the knowledge and tools to advocate for themselves—whether it's during performance evaluations, promotion reviews or salary negotiations.

In tandem with this, we are actively collaborating with Labor Relations—specifically on HR classification and compensation issues—to conduct fair market salary analyses. This work involves a close review of position descriptions and a thorough examination of salary inequities across titles. Our goal is to ensure that compensation aligns with responsibilities, experience and market standards; and to correct disparities that have persisted for too long.

### **Q: What is your pitch to prospective members to convince them to join UUP?**

**A:** I keep it light-hearted. At orientations for new employees, I let them know membership comes at a cost and it's because UUP is amazing. I say, it's not just about protecting your paycheck, it's about having a voice at the table. It's about voting on the contract, voting in elections and having a say on what matters most to them

because they can become a delegate, a department representative, an officer. Being a UUP member means tuition waivers, professional development grants and access to discounted benefits. It's what makes UUP special and we're worth it.

### **Q: UUP's current contract will end July 1, 2026. The Negotiations Team is working toward meeting with state representatives on the next contract. What would you like to see addressed?**

**A:** I posted the survey and learned from our mem-

**We are committed to member engagement, community-building and organizational cohesion. One of our top priorities is educating our members about their professional worth.**

bership the top five concerns they have are: fair and competitive pay with raises, cost-of-living adjustments and solutions for salary compressions; clearer pathways to promotion and career advancement; support for professional growth; equitable remote work policies across departments; enhanced leave policies including better vacation, sick leave and parental leave options. Members also said they want more affordable and flexible health care benefits and extended coverage for dental, vision and mental health. I would like to see more job security for our contingent faculty.



**Louise Melious**



# Connecting with colleagues and community

**UUP members carry their union connections and their mission of working for a public university far beyond the boundaries of their campuses.**

*The following are four UUP members who have seen their union experience help inform other achievements.*



## Arnavut wins patent for data encryption method

Ziya Arnavut, the Fredonia Chapter's vice president for academics, has received a patent for a software invention that provides a cost-effective method of encrypting data during transmission.

The software is called CipherZip. Arnavut, a professor in the Department of Computer Information Sciences and also a former Fredonia Chapter president, developed the software with Fredonia 2012 graduates Basar Koc of Stetson University in Florida and Hüseyin Koçak of the University of Miami.

The software holds strong practical value for industry applications, allowing systems to generate encrypted and compressed data files while conserving computing resources.

"This software solves two of the biggest challenges in data transmission—security and efficiency—without requiring a trade-off between the two," Arnavut said.

**Read more at [bit.ly/Arnavut](https://bit.ly/Arnavut)**







## Glick: A call for surgeons to unionize?

Forty-five years ago, the idea of surgeons forming a union was unimaginable.

Buffalo HSC Chapter member and former chapter president Phil Glick has proposed this bold step in an article in the September issue of the journal *The American Surgeon*, titled “Should Surgeons Unionize? What Would Hippocrates Say?”

“What we need to understand is if we’re going to create the best care for our patients, the best outcomes for our patients, we have to create the conditions of employment that let us take care of surgeons and not neglect our Hippocratic oath for patient care,” Glick said in an interview.

Potential obstacles include whether the National Labor Relations Board will classify surgeons as supervisors or as a group of workers eligible to organize, but Glick thinks these challenges can be addressed.

“My union work was really important to this,” Glick said. “I was trained up by this union to do this role for surgeons and doctors. Times are changing; we need to be aware of it—we need to allow surgeons to organize.”

**“Should Surgeons Unionize? What Would Hippocrates Say?”**

Read more at [bit.ly/UnionizeSurgeons](https://bit.ly/UnionizeSurgeons)



## Citizen Action honors Brendan McGovern

Citizen Action of New York’s Southern Tier Chapter has honored Binghamton Chapter President Brendan McGovern with its Phoenix Award, which recognizes people who have worked to advance a more just and humane society.

In addition to his UUP chapter leadership, McGovern is a UUP delegate and serves on the union’s Negotiations Team for the next contract with the state.

He is active in several regional labor federations and the Upstate Progressive PAC, which helps advance progressive local political candidates.

At Binghamton, McGovern is program manager and an instructor in the Department of Geography. He chairs the Professional Staff Senate’s Financial Impact Review Committee and serves on the Communications Committee for Higher Education Labor United, a national coalition of higher education unions.

In his hometown of Cortland, he is the president of the Cortland Enlarged City School District school board, city committee chair of the Cortland County Democratic Committee and a member of the City of Cortland Planning Commission.







The student Sustainability Ambassadors have helped start a number of green initiatives on New Paltz's campus under the leadership of Lisa Mitten (below), the New Paltz Campus Sustainability Coordinator and founder of the program.

## New Paltz member marks 10 years of leading students in sustainability



The Office of Campus Sustainability at SUNY New Paltz is marking its 10th year of training students to work toward environmental reforms on campus, and the UUP member who founded this effort notes that it's also helped launch careers.

"It is an honor to mentor and guide students developing their voices and visions as change agents to integrate sustainability into the student experience and operations and then graduate to launch early career sustainability roles across industries and sectors," said New Paltz Campus Sustainability Coordinator Lisa Mitten, who created the program in 2015.

The Sustainability Ambassador Student Leadership Program has helped start a number of green initiatives. In 2019, the Sustainability Ambassadors were instrumental in getting the campus dining hall to convert from single-use disposable takeout containers to returnable containers that come with a refundable deposit.

In 2023, the Sustainability Ambassadors won the college recognition as a Bike Friendly University by the League of American Bicyclists. The students developed a bike master plan that included covered bike racks and expanded education about bike use.

Members who want to share a sustainability highlight from their campus can contact UUP's Environmental Issues and Advocacy Committee by emailing committee co-chairs Sue Fassler ([scfassle@gmail.com](mailto:scfassle@gmail.com)) or Brian Obach ([brianobach@gmail.com](mailto:brianobach@gmail.com)).

If you have a campus sustainability story to share, contact Delhi Chapter member Jack Tessier at [tessiejt71@gmail.com](mailto:tessiejt71@gmail.com).

« Lisa Mitten, *SUNY New Paltz*





# THE EASIEST WAY TO HELP HIGHER ED — AND YOUR UNION

**H**igher education has faced unprecedented federal attacks in the last year. But you can push back by giving to VOTE-COPE, the voluntary political action fund with UUP's statewide affiliate, NYSUT.

VOTE-COPE stands for “Voices of Teachers in Education-Committee on Public Education.” Dollars donated to VOTE-COPE are used to elect candidates who support UUP's legislative initiatives.

Bonus: When you contribute to VOTE-COPE (more on that in a moment), please remember that 40% of every dollar you give comes back to UUP's own political action fund, the Higher Education Action Fund (HEAF).

You can contribute to VOTE-COPE through payroll deduction, a cash or check contribution or by designating a donation on an expense voucher. Contact VOTE-COPE Coordinator Kelly Keck at [KKeck@uupmail.org](mailto:KKeck@uupmail.org) with questions.

“It's the easiest way to get involved in political action for UUP,” Keck said of VOTE-COPE.

“The most important thing is to talk about VOTE-COPE in every department meeting, every new membership meeting,” said Carolyn Kube, statewide vice president for professionals, who oversees the annual VOTE-COPE campaign.

VOTE-COPE and HEAF money is also used to help elect candidates who embrace UUP's goals:

protecting public higher education, pensions, tenure, contracts, academic freedom and collective bargaining.

VOTE-COPE funds have helped UUP achieve better funding for SUNY—such as the increase of \$114 million in state operating aid; \$450 million for a new emergency department at Upstate, \$159 million for new faculty in the last three years, \$1.1 billion for renovations to Downstate University



Bekkie Bryan



Kelly Keck



Pamela Malone

Hospital, and \$55.7 million for hospital debt service cost relief.

Bekkie Bryan, who co-chairs the statewide Outreach Committee along with Pamela Malone, noted that UUP takes a bipartisan approach to its support and will work with candidates and lawmakers across the political spectrum if they demonstrate concern for the issues that matter to UUP members.

“Our dollars do represent people power,” Bryan said.



Find out more about  
VOTE-COPE at  
[bit.ly/VoteCopeInfo](https://bit.ly/VoteCopeInfo)



Access the VOTE-COPE  
voluntary contribution form at  
[bit.ly/VoteCopeForm](https://bit.ly/VoteCopeForm)





# A SEMESTER TO REMEMBER

**T**he Fall 2025 semester called upon UUP members to demonstrate solidarity among themselves and with their communities and fellow unionists throughout the state.

Members more than met that challenge, in a semester where higher education—including the SUNY system—found itself under continued attacks by the federal administration. Chaos in grant funding, the threat of immigration sweeps that set students and faculty on edge, attacks on long-standing programs of inclusion and diversity and the detention of a UUP member seeking asylum in the United States all gave rise to a strong response by this union.

Chapters reached out to new members and they also rallied and marched and proudly celebrated Labor Day, Campus Equity Week and their role in their communities. Here's a retrospective of the semester, as seen in photographs of key moments.



**UUP MEMBERS STARTED THE SEMESTER** by reaching out to colleagues and their communities, as they did with an orientation breakfast for new faculty at Brockport (lower left), a welcome-back barbecue at Binghamton (top right and top left), and a fundraising bike ride by Geneseo members with friends and family to support the Geneseo Valley Greenway (above).



## Adjuncts Coordinate Statewide Events for Campus Equity Week

**U**UP has steadily increased the visibility of Campus Equity Week, which highlights the inequities of adjunct and contingent labor.

In keeping with that visibility, UUP's Contingent Employment Committee carefully planned this year's Campus Equity Week, which UUP observes in the last week of October. The Committee used the movie *Adjunct* as its centerpiece. The Committee secured permission to show the movie—which explores the precarious work of adjuncts—and hosted a panel discussion with director/star Ron Najor. (See Page 14.)

Numerous chapters held watch parties or hosted other events and activities—including forums and meet-and-greet gatherings—to mark the screening. Participating chapters included Polytechnic, Oswego, New Paltz, Old Westbury, Albany, Buffalo Center, Buffalo State, Buffalo HSC, Empire State, Geneseo, Oneonta and Cortland.

At Cortland, Officer for Contingents Mario Hernandez held a virtual introduction to UUP in which he explained why it's important for contingents to get involved.

This year's Campus Equity Week showed why this observance continues to illustrate the precarious nature of adjunct work.

*Annessa Babic, Old Westbury Chapter President, and Mike Green, Polytechnic Chapter Contingent Officer, coordinated CEW coverage for The Voice, along with Jaclyn Pittsley of Cortland, who represents academic contingents on the UUP Executive Board.*



## NYSUT Members of Color Conference

UUP Membership Development Officer Patrick Romain (third from left) met with members attending the NYSUT Members of Color Conference at the Albany Hilton Dec. 6-7.

Romain greeted, from left, Jude Jayatileke, Buffalo State Chapter MDO; Jie Zhang, a delegate from Brockport and member of the statewide Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee; and Jessie Simpauco, VPP at the Brockport Chapter. Zhang graduated in the inaugural class of NYSUT's BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) Leadership program in spring 2023 and was featured in *The Voice* a year ago.

Read that article at [bit.ly/JieZhangVoice](https://bit.ly/JieZhangVoice).





# LABOR DAY PARADES

## 9.6.25

As the extent of the federal administration's attacks on higher education and the labor movement became apparent, Labor Day observances around the state took on an added meaning in September. UUP members marched, rallied and sent the unmistakable message that they are union strong and union proud.

Among the places where UUP members gathered, clockwise from top right: in New York City; in Syracuse, with members from ESF, Morrisville, Upstate and Cortland; in Buffalo; more from New York City; and again in Buffalo (below).





# NO KINGS RALLY 10.18.25

By October, it was clear that the federal administration was taking its cues directly from the authoritarian playbook, by demonizing immigrants, attacking higher education and free speech and trying to make Americans afraid to protest and speak up for democracy.

That tactic didn't work; more than 5 million people turned in all 50 states and in other countries for the No Kings day of action Oct. 18. In Albany, UUP members from several chapters joined the throngs of protesters along Western Avenue.

Members can expect more such pro-democracy demonstrations on behalf of higher education, due process and the guarantee of constitutional rights as the founders intended them.





# Delegates firmly back free speech, academic freedom at Fall 2025 DA

**N**ever in UUP's history has higher education faced attacks like it is facing now—but delegates at the UUP Fall 2025 Delegate Assembly rose to the challenge by resoundingly endorsing free speech and academic freedom.

Delegates unanimously approved three resolutions that challenge the federal administration's unrelenting attack on higher education.

One resolution called on SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. and higher ed leaders around the country to reject the administration's "Compact for Excellence in Higher Education." Under the compact, campuses would receive preferential federal funding in exchange for complying with severe controls over academic freedom and independent decision-making.

UUP President Fred Kowal called this resolution emblematic of the unconstitutional and often illegal actions of the Republican administration, when he told delegates that the compact would "... kill the democratically necessary independence of higher education."

## Academic freedom, free speech major issues

The other two resolutions, also unanimously passed, reaffirm UUP's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of thought and expression; and call on King and the SUNY administration to protect freedom of speech and assembly on SUNY campuses.

A powerful video produced by UUP Communications underscored the intent of the resolutions. Delegates watched in appalled silence as images depicted ICE agents wrestling people to the ground

## One resolution called on SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. and higher ed leaders around the country to reject the "Compact for Excellence in Higher Education."

in the ongoing mass deportation sweep—which has also ensnared numerous U.S. citizens.

These tactics have become personal: UUP is rallying behind an Upstate Medical University member from Cuba, Alex Ramírez González, who is seeking asylum here and who was arrested by ICE as he attended an Oct. 29 immigration hearing outside of Syracuse. ICE also detained his husband, CSEA member Yan Vázquez.

## Members memorialized and honored

UUP memorialized two stalwart members who collectively served UUP for nearly a century and who both died earlier in the year: Jo Schaffer of Cortland, and Lorna Arrington of the Buffalo EOC.

Delegates also honored three longtime members for their service. Rich Veenstra, immediate past president of the Upstate Medical University Chapter, received the Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service. Beth E. Wilson, the longtime New Paltz Chapter president, received the Anne Wiegard Award for Courageous Service by Full-time Contingent Academic and Professional Faculty. Eric Russell, a Downstate Chapter retiree, received the Pearl H. Brod Outstanding Retiree Award.

Kowal also singled out Albany retiree Ivan Steen for his 25 years as chair of the UUP Scholarship Selection Committee.



Loretta Pyles and Bret Benjamin of Albany, and Lobna Kahek, Stony Brook, belt out a rousing rendition of Solidarity Forever.



## New delegates on the rise

The DA was notable for the attendance by newly elected or recently elected delegates. Every UUP chapter sent delegates, and more than 70 of those delegates—about 25%—were first-time attendees.

Among them was Lobna Kahek, a professional from Stony Brook serving her second term as a delegate. A Muslim, she wants to see the DA become more diverse, and felt she could contribute to that process by getting involved.

“I want to see how the union represents people, and I want to learn more about how it works,” Kahek said while attending a training workshop. She said she was heartened to “see a growth of young people” at the DA.

» Buffalo Center Chapter President Kat Kiar, center, donned a costume at the DA inspired by Margaret Atwood’s novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in a silent show of protest against suppression of free speech. Kiar is joined by Downstate Chapter members Natalie Baker and Downstate VPA Dr. Samuel Marquez.



## Members honored at the Delegate Assembly

For decades, UUP has honored outstanding members with its annual service awards, which recognize significant accomplishments in the labor movement, community service and service to UUP. These awards single out statewide activists—both academics and professionals—as well as contingent faculty and retirees.

Three such awards were presented at the Fall 2025 DA.

### **Eric Russell:** *The work of a great unionist doesn't always end when that person retires*

Many leaders in the labor movement have gone on to amazing second acts in which they have inspired the next generation, achieved personal goals and continued to live fulfilling lives, while also maintaining their ties to their unions.

**Eric Russell**, a retired member of the UUP Downstate Chapter, is such a unionist.

UUP’s Pearl H. Brod Outstanding Retiree Award was created for members like Russell, who gave to the labor movement during their careers, and then continue to give to their communities, their colleagues and their union for many years more. The award honors the late Pearl Brod of Farmingdale, a longtime academic delegate and retiree leader. The award was renamed for Brod in 2011.

Russell is a fitting match for the ideals of the award, said Redetha Abrahams-Nichols, the Downstate Chapter president.

“Even in retirement, Eric Russell remains wholeheart-

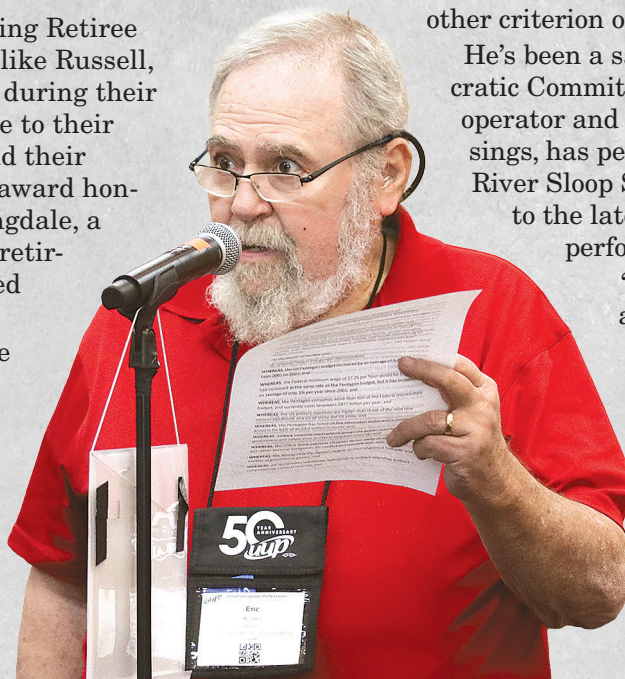
edly devoted to the UUP mission,” Abrahams-Nichols wrote in tribute to Russell.

Russell had a long career at Downstate in which he was also a delegate, a chapter committee member and a member of his chapter executive board. He has continued his UUP service as a delegate and a retiree regional representative, as well as a delegate to the AFT and NYSUT. He created the UUP Retiree email discussion group.

He has also been active in his community, another criterion of the Pearl Brod award.

He’s been a sailing instructor, a democratic Committee member and a ham radio operator and instructor. Russell, who sings, has performed with the Hudson River Sloop Singers, including as backup to the late Pete Seeger during stage performances.

“His remarkable leadership and mentorship continue to inspire, leaving a profound and enduring influence on the chapter he helped shape years ago,” Abrahams-Nichols said.





## **Rich Veenstra:** *A lifetime of service leads to Mitchell Award*

**R**ich Veenstra has spent his career helping others, which makes him the perfect choice for the Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service—UUP’s highest honor.

Veenstra has been a member and leader of the Upstate Medical University Chapter for more than 30 years. From 2019 to 2025, he steered his members through the coronavirus pandemic.

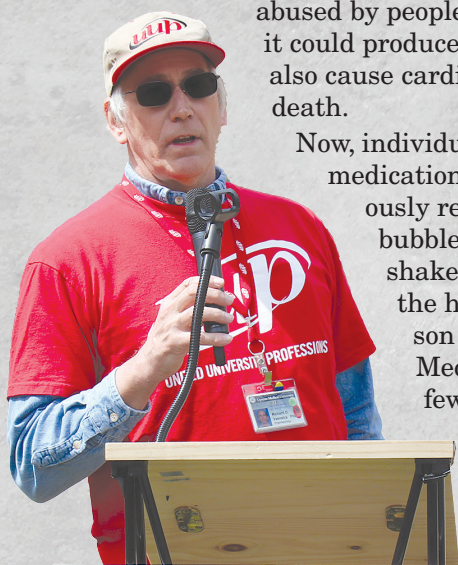
A professor of pharmacology, Veenstra is fascinated by the human heart’s functions, specifically by the part of the heart’s physiology known as a gap junction. Gap junctions connect cells into tissues by forming a tunnel between cells, so they function together and facilitate rapid electrical conduction of the heartbeat. Veenstra considers his greatest discovery the first-ever recording of two heart cells communicating electronically through a gap junction channel.

Mindy Heath, who succeeded Veenstra as Upstate Chapter president, described his “unwavering commitment to UUP, his embodiment of union ideals and his decades of leadership and service” in her nomination letter. He has long been active on the Central New York Area Labor Federation Executive Board and the Greater Syracuse Labor Council.

Veenstra is a unionist and a scientist who sees parallels between those paths. As a scientist, he’s often explained how different parts of the heart work together. In his role as a unionist, he sees workers united toward a common goal.

He remains proud of his effort with Upstate colleagues to achieve a change in the packaging of an over-the-counter drug that was being abused by people who believed that it could produce a high. Overdoses also cause cardiac arrhythmia and death.

Now, individual tablets of the medication must be laboriously removed from plastic bubbles instead of being shaken out of a bottle by the handful. The Poison Center at Upstate Medical now sees fewer cases of cardiac arrhythmia from misuse of this drug.



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**Rich Veenstra**

## **Beth Wilson:** *A career of leading and inspiring contingents*

**T**he Anne Wiegard Award recognizes contingent academic and professional faculty for courageous service, and in that role, Beth E. Wilson has been an unwavering force for good in her yearslong quest to improve the lives of contingents.

“Beth provides support to her fellow leaders, shares ideas often and gives her time generously and without requiring thanks for applause for

doing so,” wrote Jaclyn Pittsley, who chairs the union’s Contingent Employment Committee and who also represents academic contingents on the statewide executive board.



**Beth E. Wilson**

A full-time lecturer in the Art and Art History Department at New Paltz, Wilson has mentored younger activists in UUP. Her service

has included chapter and statewide positions and delegate positions with NYSUT and the AFT.

In 2006, she was on the UUP Task Force on Contingent Employment. She contributed to a report calling for equitable treatment of academic contingents in UUP, including representation on the statewide executive board and committees, and for greater job security.

While contingents have not achieved all the report’s recommendations, they have made considerable gains since its release. The executive board now has a member, Pittsley, specifically representing contingents; she is the first in that position. Academic contingents also have contractually guaranteed per-course minimum salaries, and the current contract established a path to term appointments ranging from one year to three years for qualifying part-time employees and non-tenure-track academics.

In an interview for UUP’s 50th anniversary commemorative book, published in 2024, Wilson deflected special credit for her role in advancing contingent employees. Instead, she credited her contingent colleagues for a movement that slowly, steadily gained traction within UUP and around the country.

“There was a concerted effort by a collective group of union contingents who moved the needle within the union,” she said. “I was proud to be there, proud to stand with those people.”

**UNITED  
FOR A FAIR**



A blue-tinted photograph of the Statue of Liberty against a cloudy sky. The statue is shown from the waist up, holding the torch in her right hand and a tablet in her left. The image is framed by a thin white border with decorative leaf motifs at the corners.

# FIGHTING FOR THE VALUES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR MEMBERS.

Democracy. Diversity.  
Equality. Compassion.  
Respect.

These are the ideals that have inspired  
our union since its founding.



UUP SUPPORTS THE VALUES THAT  
ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR MEMBERS.



## » MEMBER BENEFITS

### ***MetLife pet insurance can help with veterinary costs***

**P**ets can be wonderful companions and an integral part of your home life—and when they are ill or injured, they can also be a very expensive part of your home life.

That's where pet insurance can help. Now, UUP members and retirees have a good option with MetLife Pet Insurance, a new voluntary benefit only available to members.

MetLife offers a range of options with pet insurance, allowing you to customize your policy. Plans can include telehealth consultations 24 hours a day, medication coverage and coverage for emergencies and accidents. The telehealth service and the MetLife Pet app are available at no extra cost. A call center and live chat are available seven days a week.

The plan covers cats and dogs as well as exotic pets. The exotic pet category includes birds, reptiles, small rodents, amphibians, opossums, hedgehogs, pigs, goats, rabbits and ferrets.

MetLife Pet Insurance offers you the freedom to visit any U.S. veterinarian. Exam fees are covered for accidents and illnesses, and the coverage offers flexible plans with no breed exclusions.

Participants can access savings through the multi-pet policy, which offers a 5% discount for the second policy and a 10% discount for each additional policy.

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***The plan covers cats and dogs as well as exotic pets including birds, reptiles, small rodents, amphibians, opossums, hedgehogs, pigs, goats, rabbits and ferrets.***

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MetLife pet insurance offers you the freedom to visit any U.S. veterinarian. Exam fees are covered for accidents and illnesses, and the coverage offers flexible plans with no breed exclusions.



**Members can visit  
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