

Implementing Our New Agreement:

An Open Letter from the Harvard Union of Clerical & Technical Workers



November 2007

PROGRESS IN OUR RECENT CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS—CONGRATULATIONS!

In the Spring of 2007, HUCTW concluded negotiations with Harvard on a new three-year Agreement, effective July 1, 2007. In a ratification vote on June 19, more than 1,700 HUCTW members came out to express their opinion. A 90% ‘Yes’ vote made the new contract official. As you have probably learned by now, the important accomplishments in the new Agreement include solid salary increases, improvements in policies supporting professional development and career mobility, several innovative new benefit offerings, and changes that strengthen existing programs for assistance with Housing, Education, and Child Care.

We heartily congratulate all of the members of our Union and thank you for your thoughtful and energetic involvement in those negotiations. More than forty HUCTW members participated directly in the talks, at the central negotiating table and at issue-specific “side tables” where ideas and recommendations were developed. Many hundreds of members took part in surveys and meetings—articulating concerns and priorities, and generating creative ideas to fuel the negotiations. Our success in these negotiations was a large team effort involving most of our Union’s 4,800 members in thinking and planning for a better workplace. Below are some updates on the work being done to implement our new contract.

NEW AND IMPROVED WORK/LIFE PROGRAMS FOR HUCTW MEMBERS

Our new agreement resulted in several new and improved benefits programs. These include the **TDA vacation rollover** for longer service employees, **adjustment of tiers for health insurance premiums**, **Housing Hardship Loans**, and the **Transportation Fund**. In addition, a new Joint Working Group on Life-Cycle Programs will discuss and make recommendations for new programs in the areas of **tuition assistance for staff dependents**, **elder care**, and **student loan debt** for college graduates. Currently HUCTW is working on details of these new programs with various University administrative offices. When actual procedures are established for participating in these programs there will be lots of communication with the membership (e-mail/letters, web site) about the details, with opportunity to ask questions.

IMPROVEMENTS TO TAP AND THE EDUCATION FUND

In 1989 we negotiated our first Education Fund of \$25,000 and by 2006 we were able to increase that amount nearly tenfold. In view of the program’s huge popularity, and the University’s recognition of the importance of ongoing learning for staff, our most recent contract negotiations focused on completely restructuring the TAP and the Ed Fund programs, with dual goals of increasing our educational benefits and simplifying the way we gain access to them. TAP now covers a broader set of educational offerings and supports more types of learning. Some of the significant changes to TAP: non-Harvard courses are now reimbursed at 90%, tax-free, up to the annual limit of \$5250; non-Harvard graduate level courses are no longer required to be “job related”; programs offering certificates and licenses will now be covered by TAP; and the existing full-time student prohibition has been lifted so an HUCTW member may also be a full-time student. These changes will simplify the process by greatly decreasing the demands put on the Ed Fund, which will now be used only when TAP benefits are not applicable or have been exhausted.

THE CHILDCARE AND TEEN ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

The Childcare Fellowship was created in 1989 to support working families. Monetary assistance was preferred over on-site care because of the diversity of our co-workers’ childcare needs. The Fellowship has grown over time in both number of recipients and level of support. The original annual fund amount of \$50,000 increased in subsequent contracts to \$525,000 in 2006. In the first year of our new Agreement, the fund amount is \$1,150,000. This strong increase in funding allows for larger fellowship grants, especially for families with lower and middle incomes. This fall, HUCTW processed nearly 300 applications for the 2008 fellowship cycle.

HUCTW and Harvard worked jointly to develop a new mechanism for delivering the Childcare Fellowship awards, giving recipients the opportunity to receive these awards tax-free, up to \$5,000 per year. In addition to funds for childcare expenses, \$50,000 is earmarked for the Academic Enrichment Fellowship which covers a larger age group as well as more types of expenses: those with dependents between the ages of 5 and 18 who have academic-related costs such as tutoring, test preparation courses, exam fees, academic extra-curricular activities, or college application fees may apply for this fellowship during the application period in December.

MAKING HARVARD A BETTER WORKPLACE TOGETHER

In addition to wage increases and benefits improvements, the new Agreement creates new supports and structures to strengthen our efforts at Union-Management partnership. A new Joint Governance Coordinating Committee (JGCC), expected to begin its work in the next few months, will guide and oversee a host of committees and projects where Union and University representatives work jointly to improve the working environment. The JGCC will be staffed and funded to provide training, facilitation, and documentation to joint HUCTW-Harvard efforts such as Joint Problem Solving, Joint Committees on Reclassification, Housing and Transportation, Work Security, Education and Professional Development, and the definition of the Bargaining Unit. The JGCC will also support Joint Councils and projects at the school or department level, where local union and management reps consider departmental policy initiatives or new organizational designs.

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

Finally, in a time of meaningful progress and celebration, it is helpful to remember one of our Union's earliest slogans: "*We believe in ourselves.*" A belief in well-supported self-representation has been a driving force of HUCTW from the start, and it remains the philosophical basis for many of our efforts and opportunities. As skillful and committed adults, we want direct involvement in the decisions that affect our working lives, and we want the freedom and support to steer our own professional development. Over the years, we as a union have negotiated and implemented many programs and benefits designed to help each of us accomplish these goals. Whether it is paid release time for courses, policies on flexibility, or local problem-solving for workplace disagreements, our work is always based on the premise that when it comes to shaping working lives, our co-workers have the potential to be the best qualified experts and strategists.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUOUS SKILL BUILDING

However, potential is not always enough. This is where skill building and mutual support come in. To make the most of our working lives, we must constantly educate ourselves and each other, both informally by sharing experiences and stories, and more formally in workshops or seminars that expand our technical skills, teach us how to negotiate in everyday working life, and more. Individually and together as a union we need to determine what skills will help us achieve our goals—please consider this an invitation to begin thinking about this on your own, and to prepare for upcoming conversations with fellow HUCTW members.

As a postscript, HUCTW extends warm congratulations to new Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust. It is an important development for our community to have a woman in that primary academic leadership role. Even more promising is the graceful and progressive spirit in which Drew Faust has made her entrance. From the Harvard Yard ice cream party on her first day in office to the thoughtful and inclusive feeling of her installation events, our new President has sent a message of engaging and compassionate leadership. Members and leaders of HUCTW are looking forward to the unfolding of the Faust era, as a time of positive progress for everyone in the Harvard community.

The HUCTW Office is now at its new location, with the same phone, fax, and e-mail contact info. Come visit us!

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