

Trials and triumph

UUPer looks back on struggle to organize

A note that I recently read in *The Active Retiree* regarding a request for UUP history brought back so many memories. For some reason, the attempt to record the history and origins of UUP has been met with great resistance. Some members tried to do this, and their efforts died. And now, some of those who organized that effort have also died. Let me try once more to set the record straight on the formation of UUP.

In 1962, I was hired in the SUNY Stony Brook physics department as a U-grade employee, which meant that I was unclassified, nontenured and not covered by a contract such as the one available to CSEA employees. According to the policies of the SUNY Board of Trustees at the time, U-grade employees worked at the pleasure of their campus administration and could be terminated without explanation. When my department chair explained the status of U-grade employees to me, I responded, "That will be changed."

In 1967, a group of us in the Stony Brook Bowling League raised the issue of department chairs and their decision-making power. We felt that, too often, they were making problematic decisions without any input from employees. Four of us decided to join together and try to form an association that would allow us to have some input with the administration.

We met in the engineering department conference room for weeks and established a set of bylaws for what at the time we called the Stony Brook Professional Association. Our efforts were successful. The Stony Brook Professional Association had a bearing on many decisions that previously would have been reached without our input.

We then decided to contact a number of SUNY campuses and see if it would be possible to establish a statewide association. We contacted 25 campuses and found great enthusiasm for the idea. We scheduled a meeting and each campus sent two delegates. As a result, we formed a statewide association known as the State University Professional Association (SUPA).



Through SUPA, we made many of the needs of the U-grade employee known to the state. Our ranks grew. When the state of New York decided it was time to designate one bargaining unit for the 08 category, it was SUPA that coordinated meetings with the many unions seeking to represent this group.

We decided that we did not need an outside union to represent us. We had, within our ranks, the talent to know and meet our needs. SUPA formed a coalition with the Faculty Senate and from that came the very first group to be elected as the bargaining agent for SUNY. It was known as the Senate Professional Association (SPA).

In 1971, SPA negotiated the first contract between SUNY and the state of New York. This contract contained the Memorandum of Understanding and eliminated the term "working at the pleasure of" from the policies of the SUNY Board of Trustees.

A joining of SPA and an upstate organization then known as the State University Federation of Teachers (SUFT) followed. Initially known as SUNY United, this collaboration was eventually renamed United University Professions.

This is how UUP came into being.

I take great pride in the fact that our endeavors brought forth such a wonderful representative organization as UUP. We grew from nothing into the largest higher education union in the country.

In unity,
Charles C. Hansen

Charles C. Hansen 2000 Mitchell Award winner

"I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!"

That was the battle cry of Stony Brook's Charles Hansen long before Peter Finch bellowed it from an apartment window as Howard Beale in the 1976 film "Network."

Hansen was mad, all right. Mad because SUNY's professional employees were, by all accounts, hired and fired at the whim of managers. So Hansen, an assistant director of business management at the Graduate Physics Facility, fought for changes right from the start.

By the time Hansen began working to reform SUNY's unsatisfactory and unstable work environment, he was already known as a union leader. He had been a member of Local 1450 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in the 1950s and, by the early 1960s, was grievance chair for the Civil Service Employees Association. His colleagues tapped him to lead, and he soon became one of the pioneering members of UUP's predecessor organizations — State University Professional Association (SUPA) and the Senate Professional Association (SPA).

Hansen had an "unwavering agenda to make faculty and professionals equal partners in the eyes of SUNY and state managers," according to his nominating petition, submitted by the Stony Brook chapter.

In SUPA, he served as a delegate and on several committees. When SPA evolved as a hybrid organization to encompass both academic and professional faculty, Hansen was called on to serve as his chapter's first president and, later, as vice president for professionals. He is still a UUP delegate.

"No one worked harder for union issues than Charlie Hansen," his nominators said. "His vision of and for the union has led to a sense of importance and belonging that many members feel today. Every professional today has been positively affected by Charlie's vision three decades ago."

— Karen L. Mattison
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