

University Staff Association Calls Out Hiring Practices

[smclennan](#) April 29, 2021 Comments Off on University Staff Association calls out hiring practices



UMass Amherst has hit upon a trifecta of hiring practices that not only violates the contract it has with the University Staff Association (USA), but also profoundly disrespects the union's members.

USA is the union that represents classified and technical staff at UMass Amherst. Hiring temporary workers to do USA work, failing to properly advertise vacancies internally for USA positions, and claiming a "hiring freeze" yet using new contract workers while many members have been furloughed are contract violations that are preventing USA members from being promoted or returning to their jobs.

The USA's Collective Bargaining Agreement requires that the university advertise vacant USA positions to union members internally for seven business days prior to advertising for external candidates.

That practice, however, ended when the university changed its application procedures and began using the Page Up online application system. Despite USA's efforts to change the procedures, the university still uses an application process that allows external candidates to apply for jobs before the required 7-day period for internal-only posting has expired.

It has taken until this semester for UMass to purchase the module for Page Up that has an intranet function (as opposed to the internet) that will allow union members to apply for vacancies. USA members were told that this module costs \$5,000. The module should be up and running by this summer, a welcome remedy for USA members who want to be

considered for upcoming vacancies. This change will benefit current employees, and the proof will be in the pudding.

Analysis of biweekly hiring reports since December 2018 shows that UMass is consistently hiring external applicants into 75% of USA positions. Perhaps when USA members have a 7-day window to apply, and to be prioritized for interviews according to the contract, there will be a shift in the percentage of USA members who are promoted over the hiring external applicants. While cost savings are not supposed to be a consideration in hiring decisions, they appear to be playing a role. According to the salary rates effective July 7, 2019, a newly hired Clerk IV, for example, will earn a biweekly salary of \$1,590.21 compared with a seasoned USA member at the top step of the 14-step range who earns \$2,158.93.

A hiring freeze was put in place last March when the pandemic hit. Of the 266 employees who took advantage of an attractive incentive package, 96 USA members retired or separated from the university. Most of those positions have not been refilled with permanent staff; in fact, many departments rehired the same people who accepted up to \$25,000 to separate into temporary positions.

Of the 90 USA members who were furloughed during the pandemic, 55 have been recalled. That means that 38% are still on furlough or reduced hours while the university continues to hire temporary workers to do USA work. For those few vacancies that are advertised, our members are not likely to get a promotion.

This is demoralizing for members. The culture at UMass doesn't seem to value the institutional knowledge and experience of USA members, denies promotions, and increases the workload of remaining members when so many colleagues have separated or retired. We deserve better.