An Adjunct Union and Shared Governance

A Template for Change in the Gig Economy
The Disappearing Middle Class
In American Universities and American Society

- Steep declines in full-time jobs paying a middle-class wage

- 40% of US work force: contingent, part-time and freelance work – the Gig Economy (Source: Intuit)

- In universities, the number of contingent workers is even higher.

- Full time, tenure-track professors, the middle class of academia, are disappearing.
Faculty Composition, 1969–2009

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
The decline of the middle class is paralleled by the decline in union membership.
A Broken Social Contract

- Contingent workers have lower job satisfaction, lower pay and few, if any, benefits.

- Some workers like the flexibility, but gig work often leads to exploitation.

- ¼ families of PT faculty are enrolled in at least one public assistance program.  
  (Source: UC Berkeley Labor Center)

- “The social contract between gig economy workers and employers is broken.” – Robert Reich
Repairing the Social Contract

• Across the nation, contingent faculty are seeking change.

• In 2014, Adjuncts at Dominican University and 4 other Bay Area schools voted to unionize with SEIU Local 1021.

• Unionization has resulted in higher wages, job security, academic freedom and funds for faculty development.
Can The Union Foster Greater Contribution to Shared Governance?

- Union organizing techniques have the potential to reach many adjuncts.

- Contact through organizing can combat isolation and sense of not belonging.

- Academic freedom crucial to meaningful participation is written into our union contract.

- Adjuncts compensated for service to the university.
Barriers to Adjunct Participation in Shared Governance

- Practical – multiple teaching jobs or other careers
- Structural – some committees are for FT faculty only.
- Cultural – adjuncts do not always feel welcome or wanted.
Making Progress

• Since contract ratification, Adjuncts more inclined to participate in shared governance.

• New policy for adjuncts to become voting members of the forum in works

• Campus union meetings and online forms – recruitment opportunities and tools

• At contract implementation meetings with Administration, adjuncts’ concerns are addressed.
Adjunct Unions and the Bigger Picture

• Adjuncts joining a larger movement to change the way low-paid, low status workers are treated in the gig economy.

• SEIU’s Fight for $15 minimum wage has turned low-wage work into a national issue.

• SEIU: the struggle for workplace justice is tied to the struggle for immigrant, environmental and racial justice.
What Could a Well-Run University Teach Businesses in the Gig Economy?

• In past 40 years universities have increasingly adopted business principles – is it time for a reversal?

• All workers deserve fair wages, respect and a voice in their workplace.

• With our Union, Dominican is moving closer to these goals. With our shared governance model, Adjuncts have a role in shaping our institution.

• Can this model of sharing governance and power within academia become a template for workers and employers in the wider economy?