Dear Colleague,

When several people responded to my letter last Thursday with various versions of, "What are you talking about?" I was reminded again how large and diverse the University is and how issues that loom large in one corner of our institution are not nearly so visible elsewhere. With that in mind, let me add some additional context to my earlier note.

In January, the Service Employees International Union Local 284 filed a petition with the Minnesota Bureau of Mediation Services to organize 1,600 Twin Cities faculty who are members of Unit 8. In Minnesota statute, our Twin Cities faculty is referred to as "Unit 8," and you'll hear this term used in the context of this election. Unit 8 does not include the Law School or Academic Health Center.

Union elections happen from time to time at the University. There have been, in fact, several unsuccessful efforts over the years to unionize the Twin Cities faculty, and overall, about a quarter of University employees across all five campuses are represented by 10 unions. We respect the right of any employee group to choose whether collective bargaining is right for them and their families.

What makes this election different is that the SEIU has asked that 10 job classifications currently in the Professional and Administrative employee group (in the law this group is called "Unit 11") be added to Unit 8. Those classifications, all P&A positions with teaching responsibilities, include:

1. Teaching Specialist
2. Senior Teaching Specialist
3. Lecturer
4. Senior Lecturer
5. Extension Professor
6. Associate Extension Professor
7. Assistant Extension Professor
8. Extension Educator
9. Associate Extension Educator
10. Assistant Extension Educator

By way of background, everyone who works at the University, whether represented by a union or not, is a member of one of the bargaining units that were created by the Minnesota Legislature, some dating back as far as 1981. The law clearly defines Unit 8 as the Twin Cities faculty positions that are governed by the University's Tenure Code, a definition that has existed since the law was adopted and that reflects the unique role of the faculty at the University in carrying out its three-part mission of teaching, research, and engagement.

As I wrote last week, we have no issue with the fact that the SEIU has filed an election petition for Unit 8. To the contrary, it is our desire that the election process move forward as quickly as possible. However, as a result of SEIU's efforts to add these 10 classifications of P&A to Unit 8, there is a question that must be addressed first: specifically, the composition of the group that should be included in that vote. We strongly believe that the answer is clear in statute, and that the faculty comprise a distinctive Unit 8 that should not include P&A employees who can organize as Unit 11 and who have never been included in Unit 8, even in prior organizing efforts. Unfortunately, the decision last week by the Bureau of Mediation Services—the topic of my
letter last Thursday—seemingly contradicts that statute. Resolving this issue is critical to our institution and to respect the rights of all our colleagues.

This position is not a commentary on the importance or value of any individual, any position, or any body of work at the University. The University's faculty and staff who come to the University each day are among the best of all our peers and make contributions to its excellence each and every day. It is rather a function of the reality that under the law, by long-standing precedent, in the Tenure Code and in the daily operation of the University, the faculty, regular and term, are a distinct entity with unique responsibility for the breadth of the University's mission.

I hope this letter gives you helpful background into this complex topic and encourages you to learn more. Whether you are a faculty member or an employee in the Professional & Administrative group, this election has the potential to affect your job, your prospects, and your relationship with the University. As such, it is something worth your attention. We will keep you apprised of any developments in this matter and will continue to post new information on the Office of Human Resources' website.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kathy Brown
Vice President, Office of Human Resources