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Majority of the University of California's 5000 Postdoctoral Researchers Choose Collective Bargaining

San Francisco, Calif. — As a result of an ongoing, state-wide grassroots organizing campaign, a majority of the 5,000 Postdoctoral Researchers (Postdocs) working at the University of California (UC) have signed cards authorizing their Union, Postdoctoral Researchers Organize/United Auto Workers (PRO/UAW), to represent them in collective bargaining. Based on this majority mandate, PRO/UAW has filed a petition with the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) to get the Union certified. Under California law, when PERB verifies that a majority have signed up, the Union can be certified, which would legally obligate the University of California to engage in collective bargaining with the Postdocs' Union — PRO/UAW. Postdocs will be able to bargain over issues like wages, health insurance, vacation and sick leave, as well as other important workplace issues.

“This is very exciting for us,” said Dilnawaz Kapadia, a Postdoc who does research in immunology at UC San Francisco. “A majority of us have spoken and are eager to move forward so that for the first time we will be able to sit down as equals with the UC administration and bargain over things like wages, getting better access to childcare and improving maternity leave.”

Approximately 5,000 Postdoctoral Researchers play a critical role in fulfilling the University's research mission, helping to make UC a world-renowned institution. Postdocs perform basic research that includes working on cures for major diseases, new technologies, and other path breaking scientific breakthroughs. Postdocs also publish scholarly articles and write grant proposals, all of which helped bring hundreds of millions in grants and contracts to the University last year.

“Having a Union is about respect,” said Zhiyong Fan, an Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Postdoc at UC Berkeley who works on improving semiconductors. “We work hard and make a major contribution to this University – and collective bargaining is the only way we get the meaningful voice we deserve.”

After receiving a PhD or equivalent degree, researchers work as Postdocs at UC and other institutions for up to five years in a faculty supervisor's lab, making up a large and influential portion of the nation's non-tenured academic research workforce. A recent survey found that Postdocs were the primary author on 43% of the articles in Science magazine. The UAW represents workers at more than 40 universities and colleges nationwide, including 25,000 Academic Student Employees (ASEs) – Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Graders, Tutors, and others – at the University of California, California State University, University of Washington, and University of Massachusetts.

Pesach Lubinsky, a Postdoc in Botany and Plant Sciences at UC Riverside and former member of UAW 2865, the Union that represents Academic Student Employees at the University of California, said, “I'm glad we'll be part of the same Union that already represents 12,000 Academic Student Employees at UC. The UAW has a proven track record of getting better wages and benefits for Academic Student Employees, and their knowledge and experience with UC will give us a significant advantage when we sit down to negotiate our first contract.”

“We're excited that Postdocs have formed their own Union so they can have a stronger voice in their workplace. These workers make significant contributions to biomedical and other scientific advances, and deserve the same voice that other workers have,” said UAW Secretary-Treasurer Elizabeth Bunn, who directs the union's Technical, Office and Professional (TOP) Organizing Department.

“We always welcome workers who want to stand up for themselves and join thousands of other workers who have chosen representation under the UAW” said Jim Wells, director of UAW Region 5, which includes California and other states between the West Coast and Missouri. One of the nation's largest and most diverse unions, the UAW has more than 1 million active and retired members, with active members working in manufacturing as well as public service, higher education, health care, gaming and other industries.

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