

## *Union Professors: Framing Processes, Mobilizing Structures, and Participation in Faculty Unions\**

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This study traces the development of union loyalties among community college professors. Assuming that activism is motivated by contextual and ideological factors, the paper analyzes the ways that social networks, collegiate workplaces, and framing practices transform political bystanders into committed union members. Using data from a study of junior college professors in Kentucky ( $N = 329$ ), the study finds that union participation is strongly linked to a distrust of campus administrators and having pro-union friends and colleagues. Likewise, perceptions of union efficacy, a liberal identity as well as the professor's education level predicted the actual joining of their campus' faculty union.

Every workplace generates hardships and insecurities among its workers. Some of these hardships add minor inconveniences while others foster enormous strain and fatalities. The life of an academic is not immune from different forms of employee hardships. Simply acquiring and maintaining a full-time position is an arduous task. Future professors must deal with a long apprenticeship during graduate school while knowing that the proportion of tenure track positions jobs has shrunk in the last decades. For example, from 1976 to 2001 the percentage of full-time faculty grew by 27 percent while the total number of contingent faculty mushroomed by 94 percent during that same time period (Jacobs 2004). This shift to a greater reliance on part-time faculty has enormous financial consequences. The salary gap between full- and part-time averages over \$40,000 dollars a year (Jacobs 2004; Toutkoushian and Bellas 2003) with the typical part-time professor getting paid \$2,125 per class at master's degree granting institutions in 2003 (AAUP 2006). For the fortunate job applicants who acquire tenure-track positions, their daily workday is not free of tension. While job requirements differ by institutional type, most faculty members are told to excel in publishing books or articles, become great teachers, teach a wide range of classes, garner high teaching evaluations, show deference to tenured professors and deans, constantly sound articulate-informed, endure tedious meetings, display middle-class etiquette in

public, and so on. Excelling in one of these tasks can be difficult in itself, but simultaneously excelling at all of these expectations can produce great strain and stress to the assistant professors in academia. On top of these requirements, tenure-trackers as a whole have seen a loss of real income because pay increases have often lagged behind inflation in the last 40 years. From 1971 to 2005 the annual salary increases for assistant professors have surpassed the consumer price index for only 5 years while this occurred only four times for associate professors (AAUP 2006).

In most cases aspiring and current professors try to address these difficulties through individualistic means. Those who want to improve or keep their current jobs can try to meet or surpass common faculty standards (e.g. receiving high teaching evaluations, publishing in esteemed outlets, volunteering for difficult committee assignments and being extremely friendly and deferential to university personnel). Faculty can also challenge the prevailing policies as well. Some professors may turn to hidden resistances that privately counter the status quo (i.e., pilfering, foot dragging, shirking, mocking administrators). However, disillusioned faculty may also turn to collective mechanisms such as faculty senates or union organizing.

The dynamics and history of union organizing varies from industry to industry. While massive industrial union drives started in the late 1800s, it was not until the 1970s that professorial unions fully mobilized and created a significant presence among faculty members (Garbarino and Lawler 1979). Moreover, this growth did not remain constant and the proportion of unionized professor for the entire nation has barely expanded in the last 25 years.

With around 25 percent of full-time professors in faculty unions, it is clear that higher education can experience dramatic spurts in unionization (Aronowitz 1997). Empirical works suggest that certain college types are more conducive to faculty unionization efforts (Monks 2000; Neumann 1980; Rey Castro 2000). Moreover in the last two decades the largest proportion of successful unionization attempts have originated in community colleges. Accordingly, studies have found that community college professors are more amenable to collective bargaining than professors at other sorts of colleges (Gress 1976; Ladd and Lipset 1973; Monks 2000; Rhodes 1977).

This paper explores the issue of union activities among professors who teach in Kentucky's community colleges. In asking why these professors did and did not join their campus faculty union, this paper looks into the possible antecedents of these behaviors. Traditionally, studies on union membership have focused on economic and demographical precursors (Cornfield and Kim 1994; Elmuti and Kathawala 1991; Ladd and Lipset 1973; Ponak and Thompson 1979). However, social movement studies suggest that political participation is driven by a wider set of social-psychological and contextual

factors (Della Porta and Diani 1999; Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1997). In combining these literatures, this work implements a multivariate analysis that discerns the ways that social statutes, social networks, and collective action frames can facilitate involvement in a faculty union.

### **Literature Review**

Systematic studies on professor's attitudes toward faculty unions have been relatively rare (Borstorff, Nye, and Feild 1994; Hemmasi and Graf 1993; Klaas and McClendon 1995) and mostly completed in the late 1970s and 1980s (Ladd and Lipset 1973; Ponak and Thompson 1979; Zalesny 1985). The majority of this research focuses on professors who teach at large research universities or regional 4-year colleges and the few studies on union attitudes among community college professors have analyzed few predictor variables (Finley 1991; Gress 1976; Rey Castro 2000; Rhodes 1977). To counter these shortcomings, this paper analyzes the relevance of independent variables that stem from the empirical literature on faculty unions and social movement participation.

### ***Socio Demographic Statuses and Union Membership***

Union membership rates seem patterned among status hierarchies. Studies of all U.S. workers find that class, race, and gender cleavages exist in union involvement (Chang 2003; Cornfield and Kim 1994; Cotton and McKenna 1994; Dixon and Roscigno 2003; Mellor, Bulger, and Kath 2007; Piven and Cloward 1977). These "immiseration" studies generally find an inverse relationship between social classes and pro-union actions (regardless of how class is measured). In general, unions seem more appealing to disadvantaged workers who have less access to income, benefits, and prestige. Similarly, stronger union sympathies often emerge among women or racial minorities who receive smaller paychecks or encounter systematic discrimination.

How these findings translate into the academic workplace is far from settled. A few studies find that women professors are more supportive of faculty unions (Elmuti and Kathawala 1991; Nakhaie and Brym 1999) while most do not (Blader 2007; Bornheimer 1985; Cotton and McKenna 1994; Hammer and Berman 1981; Magney 1999; Ng 1991; Rodriguez and Rearden 1989). Only a few studies insist that faculty unionists are single and younger (Elmuti and Kathawala 1991; Gress 1976; Ng 1991). The role of occupational differentiation is equally unclear for professorial unions. When exploring division of rank and salary disparities, several studies argue that union membership is higher among the untenured (Elmuti and Kathawala 1991; Magney 1999; Nakhaie and Brym 1999; Nixon 1975; Ponak and Thompson 1979; Wagar and Chisholm 1995) and the faculty who are paid the least (Gress 1976; Hemmasi

and Graf 1993; Karim and Ali 1993; Ladd and Lipset 1973; Magney 1999; Nakhaie and Brym 1999). Conversely, studies found no connections between a professor's rank, salary, and their union membership (Blader 2007; Bornheimer 1985; Borstorff, Nye, and Feild 1994; Rodriguez and Rearden 1989; Hammer and Berman 1981; Klaas and McClendon 1995; Ng 1991).

This inconsistency for class standing and union membership can be explained by two different theories. "Professional identity" theories argue that the traditional precepts of professionalism may mute any rebellious tendencies among the lowest standing faculty (Abbott 1991; Leicht and Fennell 1997; Park, McHugh, and Bodah 2006). For those who embrace conventional stances on professionalism, the reverence for autonomy, expertise and personal striving may make professionalism and unionism seem incompatible. Additionally the class paternalism of professionals may deride union tactics as being uncouth, rude, or too confrontational (e.g., not the "civilized" middle-class way of solving problems). Some studies confirm that professors who believe that unions are inconsistent with genteel "middle-class values" are generally against union representation for faculty (Blader 2007; Bornheimer 1985; Hepburn and Barling 2001; Karim and Rassuli 1996; Magney 1999; Rodriguez and Rearden 1989; Zalesny 1985). Likewise other quantitative works contend that professors from upper- and middle-class backgrounds were more likely to consider union membership as a break from proper professorial conduct (Hemmasi and Graf 1993) or that that academics with professional fathers were less supportive of unions (Ladd and Lipset 1973; Nakhaie and Brym 1999).

These contradictory findings may also be explained by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) Socio Economic Statuses (SES) model of political participation. The SES model reverses the direction of the class-activism relationship. When addressing voting and protest behaviors, this model asserts that political participation is higher among the most affluent and educated people in any group. Their logic is that the most advantaged groups have greater access to the types of resources that trigger greater political activism (be it more money, wider educational opportunities, greater amounts of free time, more chances to lead people in day-to-day scenarios). Or, in the words of Zipp et al. (1982) "Due to less education, more restricted occupation-related learning experience, greater social isolation and higher alienation, lower status persons are less interested in politics, are less aware of the need for or possible benefits of participation, feel less politically efficacious, less often possess those social and political skills, and have less time, money, and energy to expend in political participation" (p. 1141).

While the SES model might sound reasonable, its support within the faculty unionization literature is very spotty. In essence, a few studies find a

minuscule amount of educational effects on faculty union membership (Bornheimer 1985; Hemmasi and Graf 1993; Ng 1991). The contradictory nature of these findings suggest that issues of occupational level, salary, and class backgrounds are far from settled on this topic. It is the goal of this paper to potentially resolve this uncertainty.

### ***Mobilizing Structures and Union Participation***

The “resource mobilization” or “mobilizing structures” highlights the importance of social contexts in non-electoral activism (McAdam and Paulsen 1993; McCarthy 1996; Passy 2001). Every social network conveys a set of beliefs, values, norms, and identities. Most institutions and networks praise the righteousness of the social order and emphasize conformity to a person’s assigned social roles. However some networks contest conventional routines and suggest political challenges are necessary, important, and worthwhile. It is in these conversations within these radical networks that a willingness to join a social movement is developed. Della Porta and Diani (1999) write “people seem more likely to join a protest movement if they are connected to others who are highly sensitive to particular causes ... It is through these links that potential activists develop a certain vision of the world, acquire information and the minimum competences necessary for collective action, and learn from the example of those already involved” (pp. 113–14).

Studies of white-collar workers suggest that the issue of peer expectations is pertinent (Fullagar, Clark, Gallagher, and Gordon 1994; Mellor, Bulger, and Kath 2007). Other professors can act as key referents since college instructors seem more receptive to unions and less likely to cross a picket line when they imagined that most of the professors at their college back unions (Borstoff, Nye, and Feild 1994; Deshpande 1995; Klaas and McClendon 1995; Park, McHugh, and Bodah 2006; Zalesny 1985). In contrast the role of union contacts in familial networks is not as clear (Fullagar et al. 1994; Hester and Fuller 1999). Klaas and McClendon (1995) and Blader (2007) found that having a union parent or sibling lead to greater union sympathies while another study did not get the same results (Borstoff, Nye, and Field 1994). Thus it seems that the union sentiments of academic peers may have a greater bearing than those of family members (Park, McHugh, and Bodah 2006).

### ***Collection Action Frames and Union Support***

Mobilizing structures convey a set of interpretations or “frames” that function as individual guides for action. Frames are generally conceived as cultural tools or schemas that provide “tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin 1980, p. 6). While conservative frames prioritize deference to conventional standards, collective action frames do the

exact opposite. Collective action frames are the set of beliefs that motivate people into joining collective efforts that publicly seek social change.

Movement theorists have noticed three elements of collective action frames (Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1997; Noakes and Johnston 2005). First, collective action frames must initially render some practices as improper, unacceptable or unjust. These injustice frames often focus on violations of fairness or equity norms (e.g., expectations of how rights, privileges and resources are distributed in societal hierarchies). Second, movement frames must convince a person they should use a social movement to stop these violations (this phenomenon is sometimes termed “agency” or a “sense of efficacy”). In the case of this study, collective action frames must assure professors that unions are an appropriate and viable response to problems in the academic workforce. Finally, frames must provide a collective or shared identity among the aggrieved (that a person is affiliated with a group that is threatened, deprived, or treated badly). These collective identities enhance a sense of solidarity and loyalty for the people who share the same problems and some distrust or contempt for the people or institutions that supposedly created these problems.

Empirical works have identified two major sources of professorial grievances (economic disparities and administrative practices). Union activism is often attributed to the perceived grievances in the immediate workplace (Cornfield and Kim 1994; Dixon and Roscigno 2003; Fullagar et al. 1994; Kelly and Kelly 1994; Park, McHugh, and Bodah 2006). Even though researchers generally agree that the allure of faculty unions is tied to issues of overall job satisfaction (Allen and Keavney 1981; Bornheimer 1985; Hammer and Berman 1981; Rey Castro 2000), few of these works agree as to what sorts of university grievances matter the most (professors may be bothered by numerous dimensions of their workplace).

Many empirical studies stress the importance of economic frames. In highlighting the importance of perceived exploitation, professors were less inclined to want a union when they deemed their salaries fair and reasonable (Blader 2007; Borstorff, Nye, and Feild 1994; Hammer and Berman 1981; Hemmasi and Graf 1993; Hepburn and Barling 2001; Wagar and Chisholm 1995). Conversely collective bargaining seems sensible when professors believe they are underpaid (Bornheimer 1985; Feuille and Blandin 1974; Hammer and Berman 1981; Karim and Rassuli 1996; Zalesny 1985) or they feel that their pay raises are inequitable (Allen and Keavney 1981; Blader 2007).

While most studies connect union support to issues of faculty salaries, some studies prioritize other economic concerns. Some works contend that worries of promotion are especially important in academic circles. With academic livelihoods being so closely connected to matters of tenure, some

studies have concluded that worries over biased or misguided tenure decisions are a primary motive behind seeking faculty unions (Elmuti and Kathawala 1991; Gress 1976; Hemmasi and Graf 1993).

Though most studies concur that perceptions of economic fairness play a crucial role in the formation of union attitudes, some works have found no connection between economic concerns and union impressions (Elmuti and Kathawala 1991; Hammer and Berman 1981). For example, a study of Ohioan community college professors (Finley 1991) and one of professors from 200 colleges found no correlation between income and union membership (Rhodes 1977). Thus, there still is some debate as to whether perceptions of unfair salaries inevitably lead to pro-union stances.

Unionization efforts are sometimes associated with the decision-making processes of organizations. Blue-collar workers often join unions when they perceive their bosses as being biased, capricious, condescending, and grossly undemocratic (Cornfield and Kim 1994; Kelly and Kelly 1994; Park, McHugh, and Bodah 2006). Since professors often expect greater levels of respect and deference than their working-class counterparts, issues of worker autonomy, democratic processes, and power sharing may carry even greater salience for this crowd (Leicht and Fennell 1997). Furthermore, universities are publicly portrayed as institutions that epitomize the ideals of free speech, rational dialogues, respect for diversity, the joys of intellectual growth, etc. Hence, when it appears that campus administrators abandon or show indifference to these lofty principles, unions might become an attractive counterforce to arbitrary, biased or boorish provosts (Hemmasi and Graf 1993).

In empirical works, many studies suggest that professors often see no need for union representations when they believe their campus presidents and deans were open to input (Magney 1999; Zalesny 1985), treated faculty with respect (Klaas and McClendon 1995), and made fair decisions (Hammer and Berman 1981; Hemmasi and Graf 1993). Conversely, professors who saw rigid and unreasonable administrators are more likely to want a campus union (Ladd and Lipset 1973; Neumann 1980) or vote for a strike (Blader 2007; Ng 1991).

While universal impressions of administrative legitimacy seem tied to union attitudes, issues of shared governance seem to hold even more weight (Kater and Levin 2004). Some studies suggest that professors who thought university supervisors were autocratic or capricious were decidedly more pro-union (Elmuti and Kathawala 1991; Karim and Rassuli 1996; Lipset and Ladd 1973) as were professors who see stunted or feeble faculty senates (Allen and Keavney 1981; Bornheimer 1985; Gress 1976; Lee 1979; Zalesny 1985). Likewise, some studies suggest that the desire for increased participation in governance was the primary motivation for unionization (Finley 1991;

Gress 1976; Hepburn and Barling 2001; Karim and Rassuli 1996; Lee 1979; Magney 1999).

The absence of inclusive decision-making processes seem especially salient to community college professors. A study of Midwestern community college professors found that a primary basis of seeking unions were complaints over a lack of involvement in policy deliberations (Finley 1991) while national studies conclude that community colleges with the weakest governance processes were the most prone to form unions (Rey Castro 2000).

While collective action frames offer a diagnosis of social problems they must also offer a prognosis of how to correct these problems. To many scholars the “sense of union efficacy” seems pertinent since humans supposedly are more likely to engage in behaviors when they think that their behaviors will produce positive results (Borstorff, Nye, and Feild 1994; Fullagar et al. 1994; Hemmasi and Graf 1993; Hester and Fuller 1999; Klandermans 1997; Mellor, Bulger, and Kath 2007). Conversely, aggrieved workers may turn to individualized responses to workplace problems if they fear that unions are impotent (acquiescence, changing schools, quitting the profession).

Many studies concur that professors back union initiatives when they believed that unions could alter campus policies (Blader 2007; Hepburn and Barling 2001; Magney 1999; Zalesny 1985) or improve work conditions (Borstorff, Nye, and Feild 1994; Hemmasi and Graf 1993; Rodriguez and Rearden 1989; Wagar and Chisholm 1995). Hence works by Bornheimer (1985) and Karim and Rassuli (1996) conclude that professors are more likely to vote for a union when they think unions offer greater faculty power, decreased favoritism in promotions and make salaries more equitable. In contrast, some studies suggest that union inclinations and deliberations on efficacy are unrelated (Gress 1976; Klandermans 1984). For instance, crossing a strikers’ picket line at Temple University was not governed by considerations of union strength (Klaas and McClendon 1995), nor was a vote to strike at a Saskatchewan university (Ng 1991).

Finally, some studies have found that liberal identities can influence union membership (Mellor, Bulger, and Kath 2007). In assuming that collective action can be an expression of a person’s commitment to a group or political ideology, professors who embrace the label of liberal or leftist have often sided with faculty unions, while faculty who call themselves conservative often refrain from union membership (Blader 2007; Ponak, Thompson, and Zerbe 1992).

In synthesizing this literature we identify several sorts of potential correlates of union membership among community college professors. We have focused on six personal qualities that may inspire greater activism (education, academic rank, parental social class, gender, age, and marital status). We also



noted that union membership might be influenced by two contextual forces (union contacts, pro-union networks) and six framing processes (career discontentment, job satisfaction, administrative trust, faculty efficacy, union efficacy, and liberal identities). It is the goal of this paper to ascertain the degree to which these variables influence union membership among community college professors in the 1990s.

## **Data and Methods**

### *Sampling Unit*

This research explores the perceptions of Kentucky's community college instructors. All of the respondents belong to the statewide community college system that was restructured in the 1990s. At the beginning of the decade, all public community colleges were under the auspices of the University of Kentucky. By 1998, the year this data was gathered, 13 of Kentucky's 14 community college districts were placed under the control of an independent statewide system (Kentucky Community and Technical College System—KCTCS).

When our survey was distributed, KCTCS served 45,000 students and had 937 full-time and 1,039 adjunct professors in 1998 (KCTCS 1999). The teaching load for the typical full-time professor was 15 credit hours per semester and the average 1998 full-time professor salary was \$36,709 a year (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education 2004). With such figures in hand, it is clear that our study contains the lowest paid professors in a state that is infamous for suppressed salaries (full-time professors at Kentucky's public regional universities averaged at least \$6,000 a year more than community college professors while the University of Kentucky professors netted \$58,660 a year).

The arrival of unions to Kentucky's community colleges also came in the 1990s. In March 1994, several Jefferson Community College professors informally began unionizing activities on their Louisville campus. After embracing the goal of union formation, this cadre began a membership drive. During the next several months their steering committee made several crucial decisions: (i) the professors aligned themselves with the American Federation of Teachers; (ii) they decided to organize the entire KCTCS system in order to be legally recognized; and (iii) they decided to restrict union membership to only full-time faculty members. After several months of recruiting, nearly 500 professors signed union pledge cards. By early 1996, a union vote was conducted and KCCFA was ratified and chartered as AFT local 6010.

The union has faced tough political and legal obstacles. Since Kentucky bans the right to collective bargaining for professors in state colleges, the union initially focused on changing this restriction. In doing so, the union

hired two lobbyists and occasionally endorsed public demonstrations in the state capital (the statute has not been changed to date). However, with issues of shrinking state budgets on the legislative agenda, the union has mostly worked on defending the rights that have been accrued in the past (fully funding the state teachers pension and preventing the proposed cutbacks in state allocations to higher education).

### *Sampling Procedures*

During the Fall semester of 1998 this research team visited all 13 campuses in the KCTCS system. In mirroring the eligibility stipulations of this union, this study limited its population to full-time professors. While at each site, a survey was placed in the departmental mailbox of every full-time professor at that college ( $N = 937$ ). Attached to the five-page instrument was a cover letter explaining the purpose of this study and a pre-stamped return envelope. As expected, the IRB (Institutional Review Board) approved cover letter mentioned that participation was voluntary, anonymous, and that the primary investigator was a doctoral government student who was not affiliated with KCTCS. It was hoped that these stipulations relieved fears about the project having a partisan or hidden agenda and that worries about any retaliatory responses for participating in the study were unfounded. In the end, 329 professors returned completed questionnaires (a response rate of 35%).

The sample contains a majority of females (61.5%) with most respondents (52.4%) falling within the 35–49 years age range (38.7% are 50 years or older while only 8.8% were between 20 and 34 years old). Seventy-five percent of the respondents hold bachelor's or master's degrees while 4 percent are ABD (but dissertation) and 21 percent have a PhD. Along academic ranks, 24 percent are full professors, 48 percent associate professors, 22 percent assistant professors and 6 percent instructors.

### *Measures*

To ascertain *union membership* a single item asked: "Are you a member of the Kentucky Community College Faculty Association/American Federation of Teachers (KCCFA/AFT)?" An affirmative response of "yes" received a 1 while a "no" met a 0. Since KCCFA does not have a "union security" clause, professors have no legal obligation to maintain union membership or pay dues. In the end, 36 percent of the 937 respondents reported being a union member (this rate is slightly lower than the percent who signed union cards during the unionization vote).

The demographic variables mostly deal with a professor's background prior to their current job (e.g., gender, age, marital status, highest degree earned, and parental socioeconomic status). *Gender* and *marital status* are a

set of a dummy codes (females = 1, males = 0; marriage or marriage-like relationships = 1, others = 0). *Age* consists of a three-category variable (people under 35 = 1, 35–49 years old = 2, 50 plus = 3). *Highest degree earned* was coded in lowest to highest values (BA or MA = 1, ABD = 2, Ph or Ed = 3) as was *Academic rank* (instructor = 1 to full professor = 4).<sup>1</sup> *Parental SES (socio-economic status)* was detected through the Hollingshead (1958) two-factor SES scale, which combines their parent's occupational prestige and education levels into a single composite score (the possible range of values for the SES scale is 11–77, while the actual range was 11–70).

The variable *Pro-union Networks* came from Deshpande scale (1995). In presenting three prompts, respondents were asked whether their colleagues, relatives, and friends are fond of unions and encourage one's involvement in such groups (for verbatim item wording, please see Appendix A). When using a seven-point scale, the high approval netted a 7 while the low approval received a 1 (Cronbach's alpha for the scale is .792).

To address the extent of *union contacts*, respondents were asked three questions. The prompts asked whether their spouse, parents, other family members, or close friends were current or former members of a union. Respondents were given a code of 1 for union contact if they knew a union member for any of the relationship types.

Impressions of work conditions came through a mixture of variables. One variable dealt with universal regrets over their occupational choice. *Career discontentment* was handled through the item: "If you were to begin your career again, would you still want to be a college professor?" (definitely yes = 1, probably yes = 2, probably no = 3, definitely no = 4). The *job dissatisfaction scale* dealt with possible grievances of the most immediate kind. On a four-point Likert scale, respondents were asked if they felt content with: (i) salaries and fringe benefits; (ii) opportunities for scholarly pursuits; (iii) teaching loads; (iv) working conditions; (v) autonomy and independence; (vi) professional and cordial relationship with faculty; (vii) job security; (viii) personal conversations with administrators; and (ix) overall job satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = .841).

The next variable dealt with perceptions of campus governance and campus power imbalances. *High faculty efficacy* was developed from responses to the statement: "Faculty members have too little say in the running of my institution" (strongly agree = 1, strongly disagree = 5). Another variable evaluated the amount of faith in administrative officials. The variable *high administrative trust* was an additive scale that ventured into matters of trust for both system-wide and local campus presidents and provosts (Cronbach's alpha = .687).

*Union efficacy* consists of a modified version of Deshpande's scale (1995). Respondents were asked to appraise the effects of the KCCFA/AFT's efforts regarding 12 job-related items (such as improving job salaries, maintaining small class sizes, and protecting pension funds). The possible responses were limited to "improved, no change, gotten worse and not applicable" (improved = 3, no change = 2, gotten worse or not applicable = 1). The Cronbach's alpha for the *union efficacy scale* was .877.

*Liberal identity* was identified through explicit self-characterizations (Jacoby 1991). In reflecting upon political matters, people were asked to rate themselves on a seven-point continuum of extremely liberal to extremely conservative.

### Findings

In doing a multivariate analysis, we ran three binomial logistical regressions (this approach estimates the probability of successfully predicting an outcome of a dummy variable such as union membership). The odds ratios are used to assess the associations between union membership and each predictor variable (OR). Odd Ratios can be positive or negative and an OR score closer to 1.0 suggests minimal relationship between the independent and dependent variable. Since odds ratios assess the likelihood of joining the union for a one unit change in an independent variable, an OR of 3.03 for gender would suggest that women are about three times more likely to join a union than men. The rules of probabilities and statistical significance are the same as other regressions. By addressing the overall effects of the entire model, we report the log likelihood and the model chi-square. As expected, the data has an absence of multicollinearity and outliers.

Table 1 displays the results of the three logistical regressions. When limiting the analysis to only demographic factors only two variables reach statistical significance (see Model 1). The professors with higher degrees are more likely to join the faculty union (OR = 1.527,  $p < .01$ ) while the professors who were married were less likely to sign the union card (OR = -.512,  $p < .01$ ). The remaining socio-demographic factors of academic rank, parental SES, gender, and age offered no unique contributions to the model.

When adding the mobilizing factors into the mix, some interesting changes appeared (see Model 2). The significance of marital status was muted while the impact of educational attainment grew a little (OR = 1.818,  $p < .001$ ). Both network variables reached significance. Knowing a union member outside of work increased union membership (OR = 1.334,  $p < .01$ ) as did thinking that their colleagues, friends, and family members condoned union activities (OR = 1.259,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1**  
Logistical regression predicting the odds of being a union member

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Social demographics			
Highest degree earned	1.527**	1.818***	1.976***
Academic rank	1.304	1.160	1.241
Parents' SES	1.009	.997	1.011
Female gender	.876	1.142	1.221
Age	1.223	1.316	1.301
Currently married	-.512**	-.733	-.709
Mobilizing structures			
Union contacts		1.334**	1.337*
Pro-union network		1.259***	1.186***
Collective action frames			
Career discontentment			1.479*
Job satisfaction			-.979
High administrative trust			-1.629***
High faculty efficacy			-.883
High union efficacy			1.763***
Liberal identity			1.378**
Model chi-square	24.52***	134.06***	166.29***
-2Log likelihood	387.82	252.71	206.17
Percent cases correctly predicted			
	64.76	79.52	85.71
<i>N</i>	315	293	280

\* $p \leq .05$  \*\* $p \leq .01$  \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

In the full model, eight variables stood out as crucial. Four of five newly added framing variables reached significance. Professors who trusted the college administration were less inclined to join the union (OR = -1.629,  $p < .001$ ). Conversely professors who did not enjoy their profession (OR = 1.479,  $p < .05$ ), called themselves a liberal (OR = 1.378,  $p < .01$ ) and perceived greater union strength were more likely to join the union (OR = 1.763,  $p < .001$ ). In a bit of a surprise the job satisfaction scale failed to reach significance. This means that concerns over workplace conditions like job security, salaries, and teaching loads did not directly lead to greater union

participation. The mobilizing factors of union contacts and pro-union networks maintained their significance as did education level.

### **Limitations**

Before concluding this paper, we want to warn about some possible methodological shortcomings. Our response rate of 35 percent warrants caution since selection biases could be present. Generally methodologists assume that reluctant respondents were more likely to think that research has little value and that completing a survey is unpleasant, boring or too time consuming. Hyman (2000) suggest that college faculty is prone to hold these opinions since studies of professors typically have response rates of 28–47 percent. Moreover, workplaces with controversial reputations and hostile relationships are more likely to have workers who fear self-disclosure and are skeptical of promises of anonymity (Rogelberg et al. 2003; Tomaskovic-Devey, Leiter, and Thompson 1994). Issues of generalizability and external validity can also be of concern. The proportion of females and Euro Americans in this sample was slightly higher than the national average for faculty in community colleges (Huber 1998) and Kentucky's restricting the right of professors to unionize does not reflect the majority of states outside of Kentucky (Kater and Levin 2004). Additionally, the lower salaries, statewide governing structures, and the political history of KCTCS may also limit the representativeness of our findings. For example, KCTCS allows for faculty input in tenure decisions compared to only 33 percent of other community colleges (Kater and Levin 2004). Alternatively KCTCS faculty have no formal impact on budgetary, disciplinary, sabbatical and curriculum decisions while between 26 and 55 percent of faculty at other community colleges have such power. As for measurement errors, every survey has potential problems of item wording, social desirability and over-demanding recall. For example, respondents may not recognize or remember if their friends or family member belong to unions. Also, the definitions and operationalizations of variables may influence a study's results. This study may have generated different results if our dependent variable focused on the way faculty participates in unions or if we used a different measure of a person's social class.

### **Conclusion**

This work attempts to achieve two tasks. First, we explore the degree to which community college professors in Kentucky decided to join a recently established faculty union. Next, we attempt to discern the key factors that nudge professors into such actions. In doing so, we assembled variables that dealt with personal qualities, mobilizing structures and collective action frames.

This paper confirms much of the basic tenets of social movement theorizing. Mobilizing structures were crucial since union activism was higher among the faculty who were embedded in union networks. Moreover, both the structure and messages of these networks made direct contributions. That is, simply knowing a union activist will lead to greater union involvement (regardless of what that union member says to a professor). Likewise, there were notable positive effects of hearing family, friends or colleagues praise unions. This suggests that union membership is closely tied to the political encouragement of significant others (even if these referents have never joined a union themselves). However, future research might find even stronger mobilizing effects if researchers measure the effects of being actively recruited by a union organizer.

Similarly this paper highlights the significance of several framing processes. Faculty turned to unions when they believed they made a wrong career choice and believed that the established avenues of power sharing and problem-solving were inefficient, corrupt or absent. The impact of governance factors may be especially pronounced for two reasons. First, the recent restructuring of Kentucky's community college system could have augmented and solidified a fundamental distrust of administrators among union leaning faculty. In effect, governance concerns may have gained greater importance since faculty would remember that these changes were initiated, planned, and implemented without much faculty input. Second, governance issues may be especially important to faculty because of the stated goals of academia. Both public narratives and college brochures often tout the professorial career as an enriching enterprise that pursues knowledge and that campus policies will be grounded fact-based arguments. However, the daily work routines of the professor may not come close to these lofty notions. That is, professors may run into autocratic leaders and unforeseen pressures that totally counter the idealized version of a college being a place of civility, honor, and respect of faculty opinions. Moreover, faculty may encounter administrators who are openly hostile to unions and this resistance may impact the trajectories of unionization efforts (future researchers must look much closer at the role of repression and political opportunity structures in studies of this sort). Subsequently, the disappointments over a lack of democratic processes may hit professors harder than other occupations since many for-profit companies never pretend that they value worker input during the decision-making process.

Matters of political identities seem relevant as well. Comfort with liberal and left orientations encouraged union enlistment while people refrained from such behaviors when they lacked such identities. Likewise, a vision of ample union clout netted greater union membership. Thus the willingness to join faculty unions is partially contingent upon the expected success of achieving

instrumental goals. When synthesizing these results into a whole, it appears that union activities partially arise from the fusion of a general progressive orientation with the belief that unions evoke change and that one's peers are equally pro-union.

Some other framing practices did not seem as pertinent. Complaints about pay or benefits did not facilitate greater union affinities. In contradicting some earlier findings, it seems that concerns over economic inequities did not guide membership in this union. This atypical finding could be an accurate assessment of the situation or be an artifact of methodological decisions. If these findings are correct, the irrelevance of economic grievances may mean that faculty unions embody some New Social Movement goals that prioritize the "politics of recognition" over the "politics of redistribution" (Fraser 1995; Pichardo 1997; Taylor and Whittier 1992). In doing so, faculty unions may minimize or depart from the classic belief that unions are about the allocation of scarce material resources. Instead, the primary goal of faculty unions may be conceived as an entity that pushes for greater levels of direct democracy and cooperative decision-making styles. Moreover, faculty membership may also be mobilized around the notion that political struggles should revolve around the expression, reclaiming, and affirmation of identities that have been demeaned or stigmatized by authority figures.

While this finding may accurately depict this phenomenon in our sample we want to caution that our sampling technique may have minimized the effects of this variable. It is likely that salary and job security factors would gain importance if the sample went beyond full-time and incorporated contingent faculty in the analysis (union leadership decided to keep adjunct faculty out of the union). Likewise, the timing of the study could alter the importance of economic worries. Economic factors might have been more or less pressing to faculty members before the union was formed (this cross-sectional study explored respondent impressions after the union came into existence).

When exploring personal qualities most of the ascribed status proved to be inconsequential. Neither men nor women joined unions faster and union advocacy was not confined to the stratum of younger junior faculty. Also, the act of being married did not intrinsically dampen union membership rates. That is, when controlling for some mobilizing factors, the apparent link between marital coupling and union participation disappears. This suggests that marrying into a pro-union family can mitigate the generally conservative effects of getting married.

Finally, our measures of social class variables had mixed results. The educational component of the SES model reached statistical significance. In essence, professors who had finished their doctorate degrees were more likely to join the union than the professors who had not achieved this goal. This



effect of educational attainment might exist for two reasons. There could be an initial selection bias among faculty who start and finish doctorates. Faculty who enroll in Ph programs may start off with greater activist tendencies than those who do not initiate such efforts. Second, doctoral programs as a whole may reinforce or augment these initial activist inclinations. Further education may cultivate stronger analytical skills, a better grasp of political processes and a greater sense of civic responsibilities.

Other aspects of social class matters seem less crucial in this study. With topics of faculty rank and current salaries failing to reach significance, it seems that the immiseration thesis does not automatically apply to this group of white-collar employees. And while it may be correct that being untenured and paid less does not inspire greater levels of union participation among the full time faculty, we want to reiterate the point that our sample does not include any adjunct professors. Additionally, elements of class backgrounds did not seem to matter in this union drive. Professors who were raised in working-class families were not predisposed to greater union support, nor were professors from affluent upbringings quicker to chide unionism. However, this does not mean that childhood class locations are automatically irrelevant to faculty unions. It is possible that our parental SES measure missed some key aspects of class standing. Moreover, the class biases of educational systems probably ensure that the most class-conscious working-class children never become professors. That is, school systems rarely reward the radical sentiments of children who come from poor or blue-color jobs (be it the obstacles of an insidious hidden curriculum, attending underfinanced public schools, lacking academic mentors, etc.).

In the end, the findings confirm the value of framing and mobilizing arguments in the participation in faculty unions. Membership seemed dependent upon being embedded in social networks that provide a wide mix of material, purposive and solidarity incentives for activism (e.g., the belief that unions deliver collective goods and let activists reap the benefits of doing the right thing and gaining communal enjoyment). However, this study rejects the premise that these material conditions focused on tangible economic benefits. Respondents were more likely to join unions when they worried about issues of shared governance and administrative malfeasance rather than their concerns over salaries or benefits. It seems that union membership partially depends upon the residency in union-friendly milieus, perceptions of union accomplishments, and a desire for a greater voice in shaping campus policies. Thus, recruitment strategies for union activism might want to prioritize issues of improving faculty governance and not focus on issues of salaries or everyday teaching conditions (at least among full-time professors). The data also alludes to a cruel irony in that some of the reasons for unionization are also

some of its greatest obstacles. For example, the campus administrations that deserve the least amount of trust are probably the same ones who would resort to vindictive and unscrupulous union-breaking techniques. They may make sure that progressive faculty never get hired and take steps in lessening the chances of faculty openly talking about unionism with their colleagues. Likewise, it is difficult for skeptics to reconcile the belief that unions are powerful with the belief that autocratic administrators are ruling one's campus.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>KCTCS has a four-tiered system of full-time faculty (instructor, assistant, associate, and full professor). Instructors are never offered tenure while assistants must apply for tenure after they have taught for 6 years at their college.

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**Appendix A**  
Description of Measurements in Scales

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Variable Name	Survey Items
Parental SES	What is the highest level of education for your mother and father? As a child, what was the primary occupation of each of parent? (open ended questions converted to Hollingshead prestige score).
Pro-union networks	Faculty at this college favor a union. My relatives would support my joining a union. Close friends approve of my joining a union.
Union contacts	Are any of the following persons current or former members of a union? (spouse, parents, other family members, close friend).
Career discontentment	If you were to begin your career again, would you still want to be a college professor? (definitely yes = 1 to definitely no = 4).
Job dissatisfaction	How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job? (salaries and fringe benefits; opportunities for scholarly pursuits; teaching loads; working conditions; autonomy and independence; professional and cordial relationship with faculty; job security; personal conversations with administrators, overall job satisfaction) (very satisfied to very dissatisfied).
Faculty efficacy	Faculty members have too little say in the running of my institution (strongly agree to strongly disagree).
Administrative trust	To what extent do you trust your college administration to promote the interests of faculty? How much do you trust the KCTCS board to promote the interests of faculty? (complete distrust to complete trust).

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*(Continued)*

**Appendix A**  
(Continued)

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Variable Name	Survey Items
Union efficacy	How has the Kentucky Community College Faculty Association affected the following? (pay, job security, health and safety problems, educational benefits, tenure process, chance of job advancements, recognition of your work, fringe benefits, protecting benefits during the KCTCS transition, treatment by supervisors, opportunities to participate in decisions making, voice with policy makers) (improved, no change, worse).
Liberal identity	We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Where would you place yourself on this scale? (extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate–middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative).

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