Provost Peter Lennie, on behalf of the University of Rochester
Joseph Holt, on behalf of the Service Employees International Union
Highland Edelman, on behalf of the Service Employees International Union

In response to the recent efforts by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to form a union among “contingent” (non-tenure track) faculty members at the University of Rochester, a group of part-time and full-time lecturers and senior lecturers at the River Campus met in April 2016 to voice and discuss our perspectives on these efforts. Other meetings followed with non-tenure track full-time and part-time faculty at the Eastman School of Music. In what follows, we—the undersigned—give formal voice to our perspectives on unionization at the University of Rochester.

In their efforts to form a union among non-tenure track faculty members at the University of Rochester, the SEIU has approached a broad spectrum of faculty members, including—but not necessarily limited to—full-time, part-time, and time-as-reported instructors, lecturers and senior lecturers, and adjuncts. As part-time and full-time lecturers and senior lecturers at the River Campus and as non-tenure track full-time and part-time faculty at the Eastman School of Music, we endorse the value of healthy working conditions, the prioritization of teaching and scholarship, and the importance of voice in our profession, and we express sympathy—and support—for any faculty member at the University of Rochester who believes that her or his voice is not heard.

Given the heterogeneity in the non-tenure track faculty members approached by the SEIU, however, we believe that part-time and full-time lecturers and senior lecturers at the River Campus and non-tenure track full-time and part-time faculty at the Eastman
School of Music are not in the same community of interest as time-as-reported instructors and per-course adjuncts. Moreover, we expect that we will lose more through unionization than we will gain, and we believe that the touted benefits associated with unionization are already built into our contracts. As a result, we respectfully request that the University of Rochester and the SEIU not include part-time and full-time lecturers and senior lecturers at the River Campus and non-tenure track full-time and part-time faculty at the Eastman School of Music in the proposed bargaining unit in the event that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) commences an election.

In what follows, we give formal voice to our perspectives on unionization at the University of Rochester.

1. In the SEIU’s efforts to empower non-tenure track faculty members, we believe that part-time and full-time lecturers and senior lecturers will lose much of our voice and sense of choice through unionization.
   a. Each contract held by part-time and full-time lecturers and senior lecturers is unique and idiosyncratic, including features that are specific to the faculty member and/or the department in which that faculty member works. It is unreasonable to assume that any party existing outside of the contract itself understands fully the needs and conditions around that contract.
   b. Over years (even decades), many of us have developed relationships with our department chairs and/or with senior administration, and it is through these relationships that we negotiate contracts and working conditions that are optimal for us and in the best interest of our students. In the event of unionization, all subsequent negotiations will occur between the University of Rochester and the SEIU, thereby severing our ability to negotiate successfully on our own behalf.

2. We believe that unionization will threaten the ability of smaller departments (especially in the arts) to attract talent on a semester-by-semester basis and to expand course offerings in an optimal way.

3. We believe that our working conditions are not particularly problematic. Of course there is always room for improvement in any working conditions, and we believe
that the best way to bring about positive change is by voicing any concerns that we may have to our department chairs and/or to senior administration without mediation by the SEIU. Interestingly, the recent efforts by the SEIU to form a union among non-tenure track faculty members at the University of Rochester may provide a useful catalyst for discussion of how working conditions can be improved for all faculty members.

Minor Points:

1. We believe that there is a real potential for the union to become “bigger” than the faculty members that the SEIU purports to represent, and that any gains in salary are likely to be offset by union dues, reductions in non-salary compensation, and/or compromised current and future employment prospects.

2. We have felt uneasy (to put it mildly) about the (unsolicited) contact that we have had with the SEIU, and we believe that such aggressive tactics are not likely to change as the process of unionization proceeds.

In light of our perspectives on unionization at the University of Rochester, we respectfully request that the University of Rochester and the SEIU not include part-time and full-time lecturers and senior lecturers at the River Campus and non-tenure track full-time and part-time faculty at the Eastman School of Music in the proposed bargaining unit in the event that the NLRB commences an election, as the aforementioned faculty members are not in the same community of interest as time-as-reported instructors and per-course adjuncts.

Sincerely,

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