

Undergraduate Research Award Application Essay

“Toward a People’s History of the UMCP: AFSCME Local 1072” tells the story of how workers at University of Maryland, College Park organized and won collective bargaining rights starting in the late 1960s until their win in the early 2000s. Nearly all the sources of evidence for the paper came from the excellent resources at University of Maryland libraries, including primary sources in Hornbake Special Collections, books in McKeldin library, newspaper archives, and secondary scholarship through the University’s WorldCat service.

For the four years I was a student at UMCP, I worked as an organizer for AFSCME Local 1072, which as you will learn through my paper is the union which represents workers on campus, including housekeepers, dining staff, bus drivers, administrative assistants, health center workers, and more. I was inspired to write this paper for two main reasons. First, many of the campus union members did not know the history of their own union. The history had never been recorded in depth, and therefore I too was left in the dark about the institution for which I was recruiting members. And second, as I learned from my experience talking with thousands of University staff, the people who make this campus run have often felt overlooked and underappreciated. In *A History of the University of Maryland*, the most well-regarded history of the University, George Callcott hardly mentions the University workers at all, and there is nothing about a union forming on campus. As I completed more and more research, this fact became increasingly absurd, since workers have been organizing at UMCP for more than fifty years. I hoped that writing this paper could help to shine a light on the struggles and strategies of UMCP campus workers who fought for better working conditions.

Extensive information about UMCP labor history is stored at the University of Maryland Special Collections at Hornbake Library. Gathering this evidence was the most important part of my research process, because secondary scholarship about public employee organizing is limited – much less scholarship about workers at UMCP. I had to rely almost exclusively on primary sources not just to

understand the story at UMCP but also the context and background in which UMCP workers were operating.

The *AFSCME in Action* newsletters, written and published by University of Maryland workers starting in 1973, are kept at Hornbake, along with hundreds of AFSCME pamphlets, news articles, petitions, and other materials. These newsletters were crucial to understanding the goals of AFSCME Local 1072 and the issues that UMCP staff faced. For example, a 1977 newsletter included a printed sign which employees could cut out and put at their worksite and which read “Men Work Here, Not Boys.” The graphic asked the reader to ponder why their managers called Black or non-white employees “boys,” despite the fact that many of the workers were over thirty years old and were working to feed a family. Correspondingly, female workers made signs which read “Women Work Here, Not Girls,” protesting the fact that male supervisors would also commonly refer to them as “girls.” These documents, along with many others, demonstrated that part of what the union was fighting against was racial and gender discrimination.

I was also able to find documents from the Maryland Classified Employees Association in Hornbake Library. An organization which I had no idea existed before starting my research, it was an “association” for higher status white staff and managers which threw a wrench in AFSCME members’ plans to win collective bargaining. Racial divides ran deep on campus and this was one of the main reasons workers on campus struggled to win collective bargaining rights. As I explain in my paper, it was the organizing work AFSCME members did that eventually brought secretarial staff into the union and then won them official union status in 2001.

Along with AFSCME and MCEA documents, I spent dozens of hours in the library poring through old newspaper clippings from *The Baltimore Sun* and *The Diamondback*, which helped me understand the context of public employee organizing in Maryland. There was such a large amount of research involved that I would not have been able to complete the paper in one semester had I not completed another research paper about Maryland public employee strikes the previous semester. I learned about the sanitation workers’ strike in Baltimore in 1968 and the Garrett County Workers’ Strike

through *Baltimore Sun* clippings in the AFSCME box in Hornbake library. These events were central parts of my previous paper that ended up also being crucial background for my AFSCME 1072 paper. The other relevant secondary sources which I was able to find I mostly accessed online through the University's WorldCat service or by checking out books at McKeldin Library.

The most rewarding part of the research process was the oral history I conducted with Sally Davies, a retired clerk typist who began working at UMCP just as staff began to organize in the early 1970s. She was the president of the union when University of Maryland workers statewide won collective bargaining rights in 2001, and was able to provide me with detailed accounts of the complex dynamics between campus staff for decades. Through my interviews with her, I got to know her deeply and developed a meaningful relationship. I was very impressed by all the work she had done and was honored that she agreed to be part of my paper.

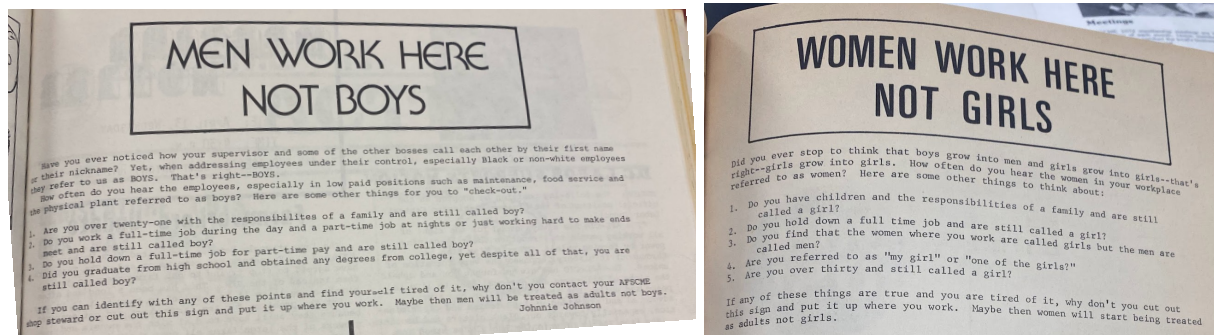
What I am most proud of is how excited union members were about the research. When the paper was complete, I presented my research to union members as well as interested students and faculty about the history of worker organizing at UMCP. After seeing my presentation, the chief shop steward of AFSCME 1072, Saul Walker, who has worked in maintenance for more than two decades, suggested taking a trip together to look through the Hornbake archives in person. He returned multiple times to page through old newsletters and documents. At the most recent AFSCME event at UMCP, union members suggested putting together an "AFSCME History" table where they displayed the tri-fold board I made for the presentation of my research. The board included photos and clippings from the Hornbake Archives. The table garnered a lot of interest, especially for new employees who wanted to learn more about the union.

I believe students, staff, faculty, and administrators could all find value in this history. Were it not for the comprehensive services of University of Maryland Libraries, it could have been forgotten. I would love for the library to use my paper to promote its resources, because though I am proud of what I accomplished, even more credit is owed to the University and its library workers for taking great care to

preserve these important historical documents. I hope you consider my paper for the Award for Undergraduate Research!



From right, Ben Blake, Sally Davies, Saul Walker, and me with the poster board of clippings from Hornbake I made to present my project to union members. AFSCME members wanted to display it at one of their events for UMCP staff.



Examples of documents created by staff from the AFSCME in Action Newsletter, stored in Hornbake Library.

Citations:

Johnnie Johnson, "Men Work Here, Not Boys," *AFSCME in Action*, vol. 7, no. 4, Apr 1977, UPUB A46, University of Maryland Special Collections and University Archives at Hornbake Library, College Park, MD.

"Women Work Here, Not Girls," *AFSCME in Action*, vol 4, no 3, Mar 1976, UPUB A46, University of Maryland Special Collections and University Archives at Hornbake Library, College Park, MD.