Dear PLU Alumni, Friends and Supporters:

You may have heard or read reports about attempts by the Service Employees International Union to organize contingent faculty members at PLU. I’m writing to give you some important background information and direct you to some sources where you can explore this issue further.

Contingent faculty (known in some universities as “adjunct faculty”) are necessary in all universities. At PLU we must frequently provide extra sections of courses to meet enrollment demands, or cover the release time for our regular tenure-line faculty as they pursue their scholarship or take on short-term administrative duties. Consequently, not all faculty positions can be permanent tenure-line positions.

Ballots were cast in a union election last month, but the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in Washington, D.C., has impounded the ballots while the board considers two key arguments brought by the University:

- First, PLU believes that the NLRB does not have jurisdiction over the University and has based that position on legal precedent established in several federal court decisions involving other religiously affiliated colleges and universities; the NLRB decided that PLU’s request for review “raises substantial issues warranting review.”

- Second, the NLRB also accepted PLU’s request for review on whether our full-time contingent faculty should be included in the bargaining unit.

While we await the ruling of the NLRB and the outcome of the vote, we think it is important that you have all the facts and understand the administration’s position. First and foremost, we are concerned about losing our culture of collaboration with and among our faculty—a culture that is increasingly rare in higher education today. If the union succeeds, our faculty will be legally divided into two separate groups. Contingent faculty would be represented by the SEIU and governed by a union contract, while our tenure-line faculty would continue to be governed by PLU’s Faculty Assembly and the Faculty Handbook. Dividing the faculty will weaken the shared governance system we cherish at PLU. Earlier this month, The Chronicle of Higher Education published an article on this subject that may be found at [http://m.chronicle.com/article/How-Unions-Weaken-Shared/142625/](http://m.chronicle.com/article/How-Unions-Weaken-Shared/142625/).

We also believe union dues and fees would be very real costs to our contingent faculty and would work against our current efforts to improve faculty compensation while keeping the cost of higher education affordable for our families.

Perhaps most importantly, our faculty have been working very hard on policies that will address many of the concerns of our contingent faculty colleagues. Having an outside organization that does not understand our University is not going to be helpful to a collaborative approach on the issues, nor to the quality of teaching and learning on campus. Unfortunately, all of that work that was underway last spring...
has legally been put on hold since April 2013 when the union filed its petition with the NLRB. However, a separate faculty-driven initiative aimed at improving compensation for all faculty that resolves to achieve pay parity with peer institutions and which was supported by a historic resolution of the Board of Regents will continue to move forward.

From the student perspective, about 67% of student credit hours are taught by tenure-line faculty and about 84% of student credit hours are taught by full-time faculty (both tenure-line and contingent). Both of these figures are well above the national average. At PLU, less than 1% of student credit hours are taught by faculty who are paid on an hourly basis, and all of this is in private music lessons. PLU pays $52 an hour to part-time faculty teaching such lessons. Salaries for contingent faculty range from $4500 for a single course up to $100,000 annually for full-time contingent faculty in some fields. These are very competitive salaries in the marketplace.

In addition, depending on class load, many contingent faculty also receive health benefits and tuition benefits not generally offered at other universities, or indeed, at many companies. PLU is already a leader among universities in pay and benefits for part-time and full-time contingent faculty.

Finally, you may hear or read that our contingent faculty should receive “equal pay for equal work” with tenure-line faculty. The fact is we have higher expectations for our tenure-line faculty in the areas of scholarship and service than we have for our contingent faculty. We always strive to put the best teachers in the classroom to serve the instructional needs of our students, but tenure-line faculty have many obligations and must meet many expectations that contingent faculty do not.

Regardless of the eventual outcome of the union election, you can be assured that we will continue to provide a high quality education for our students and will strive to maintain a community of excellent teachers and first-rate scholars. The PLU faculty, administrators and staff will continue to be committed to providing our students with an education that is rigorous, diverse and engages the world. If you have additional questions, or would like further information please visit www.plu.edu/unionfaq.

Sincerely,

Steven P. Starkovich
Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies