



July 2023 Newsletter

SPECIAL EDITION



A couple months ago we began a column titled, "My Story." My Story is meant to highlight members of Local 1890, not because of what they have or have not been through, but because each member is important. Together we make up the whole of Local 1890, and the majority of the office staff on campus. Your story may not be the same as my story, which may not be the same as a co-worker's story. But we all have a *story*. And your story might just impact someone else by helping them get through a tough time or situation, or help simply by knowing someone else had a similar occurrence and you can relate.

My Story also is meant to bring to light *how* our members are faring while working at NIU. Our bargaining team is hard at work negotiating with NIU administration FOR YOU. And because of this, publishing your story helps administration understand how their lack of action on important matters impacts the very same employees they say they respect.

Most who have sent in their story have done so anonymously. If you want to send in yours, anonymously or otherwise, we can feature it in another newsletter.

email us at afscmelocal1890niu@outlook.com and tell us YOUR story.

Food Banks & the Dean

Last Thanksgiving, after paying utilities (gas, electric, water, insurance) there was not one red cent for groceries, I went to a mobile food bank. It was raining outside, I sat in my car with the engine off because I could not afford to fill up my gas tank. As I crawled through the line, I realized Dean Brinkman was handing out food, I was worried he would recognize me, but he didn't. After all, I am a nobody at NIU, I don't even deserve a living wage by NIU standards. I am truly thankful that DeKalb provides assistance. NIU is proud of the fact that there is the Huskie Pantry, but does the administration realize how many single employees are required to "shop" at a food bank?

15 Years and 0.15 cents

I've been with NIU for 20 years. I came from the public sector making \$20/hr. NIU lured me in with promises of free tuition for my children, pension, insurance, etc. I was excited to start this new chapter in my life at this great university. I started here making 9.50/hr.

Slowly, over the years, NIU has taken away the perks. No more free tuition. After 15 years, it is partial tuition. No more community colleges included, they are no longer covered in the partial tuition. The program my child wanted, dissolved several years prior to their graduation. Now, I had to send my child to community college and pay for their education out of pocket. I was told that I was locked in and that these benefits would not change, but they did!

The first couple of years here I received a pay increase from the university. Then they stopped. For almost 10 years, there was no pay increase, but that didn't stop the cost of living from increasing. This made it hard to make ends meet. My paycheck only covered daycare and nothing more. I was married, so the second income helped. However, during this time I also went through a divorce. Now I was down to my NIU income and had to find a way to pay bills, daycare, and put food on my table. Still no pay increases so I moved to higher positions on campus to make more money. I found cheaper daycare. I also found a second job.

Also, how unfair was NIU, neglecting the workers that have been here the longest and are the foundation of this university. A coworker, who had only been here for 6 months was given a \$2.00/hour pay increase. I was given 15 cents (not even a penny for each year I was here). The reason given was that I made over the wage they were raising everyone up to. It did not matter that I moved positions and worked my way up to what I was making (which still wasn't much for as long as I have been here). Why did they not do something like a tier so everyone would get something? I thought, how unfair to everyone who was like me. Why were we ignored? Remember, we hadn't received a raise for almost 10 years. Now I get 15 cents...what a slap in the face and for people who were here longer than me...they received nothing!

The ones that care the most are our coworkers who sit at the bargaining table and try to negotiate on our behalf. They know our struggles more than NIU, but they have an uphill battle. It shouldn't be so hard for people to see all that we do for NIU, above and beyond what is in our job descriptions. We don't need to be told to stop and ask people if they need help, we already do that. We don't need to be told to help out the new people starting, we have already offered our help. If "Hate has no home here", then why do I feel hated by the very organization that I work for? Why do I feel our feelings do not matter? It is sad to be treated this way!

I love my department, my students, my coworkers, and my job. But for the time I've been here, I feel used, abused, sad, and counting my days to retirement!

"You can commit injustice by doing nothing."

~ Marcus Aurelius

Wander Woman

My name is Sarah Lindell and I have worked at NIU for 20 years. I started off as what was then called a Secretary III, making somewhere around \$9 an hour. After a year, when that person left, I moved up to Secretary IV making maybe a dollar more. When the Secretary V left, I took that position too for maybe another dollar more! I was in that department about 6 years before a lateral transfer to another department. I stayed there for 3 years and I really liked it but there was no way to earn more money unless you moved up the secretarial food chain, so to speak.

And move I did, to where I am currently an Administrative Assistant for the Division of International Affairs. I have been here almost 12 years and I love what I do! The need to move up was especially important because we had so many years without ANY raises. The raises I remember were very small, 1.5% here, maybe 3% there and it just wasn't enough.

Over the years, I have seen many instances of inequity, in between people in the same classification or people in the same department or division. The injustice of it makes me so angry. I especially feel for the staff in our union in our entry level positions. I remember how low I was paid when I first started, and the pay has not increased much in all those years. It is NOT a living wage. Our union has worked really hard to get where we are now, and we are still working hard to achieve what our members deserve. Our members deserve to be paid equitably for the jobs they do and for their years of service.

Still Needed Help

When I started in my department in April 2011, I had already been a student worker since September of 2006. As a student worker, I was making more than the \$10.32 wage I started at as an employee. I was rather disappointed when I found out that in July of 2011, I would not be getting the raise that everyone else was, only because I started after December 31, 2010. At that time, my husband had a hard time finding a job, so he came back to NIU for a second degree and was able to get his student job back.

Once he graduated, he was in and out of jobs due to downsizing. In the meantime, I had ended up taking help from all members of my family for the student loans, car payments, car repairs, normal bills, and medical bills I found myself stuck with.

I have investigated grocery assistance but found that on my pay alone I made too much for a 2-person household to qualify for food stamps.

I was finally able to get a raise...by taking a different position within my department. I got about a dollar more... four years after starting in my department. It felt like a slap in the face that there was nothing for those like me that started too late to get that first raise. Which amounted to like 10 cents.

Now, jump forward to Christmas 2022. I found that I could not afford to get anything for several members of my family. I hand craft things for my husbands' family. When the OSC Newsletter came out offering help to employees who could not afford presents, I did not jump at the offer, but I thought why not. I work hard and I was struggling. I thought there

would be one gift per person that I put in for...I got more than I ever thought I would get. I was blown away and so thankful. I was also a bit embarrassed; I had not told my husband that I did it and I thought he would be so mad and embarrassed about needing the help. He ended up being ok with it.

It's been nice getting at least something every July, but when I got part of that 'bringing up the lowest paid employees' money', I was slightly shocked. I did not think I was that far down the ladder. It really opened my eyes; we NEED to get this step plan in place if we are to ever have any hope of fixing the wage issues that are compounding year after year.

If we don't fight for ourselves, who will? We deserve better! We need better. We must get this University to see that while they continue to give raises to the higher ups, the little people that keep this place running are getting stepped on. We are not their doormat! Administrators come and go, but WE are still here! Stand up and fight with us, this University works because WE do!

Union Updates

Clerks

I started at NIU in an extra help position in the fall of 2012. As a recent undergraduate, I didn't have any job prospects and I was thankful to have a steady job paying \$12.00 an hour. I worked as extra help for two years before I was able to test into a civil service class.

I tested the entire year of 2014, and finally was able to move into a clerical assistant role, at \$9.76. This was a very challenging adjustment, having such a drastic pay cut, especially as I began to pay back my student loans.

Then I followed the Clerk series and moved to the role of Clerk. This job did not fit the work I was doing, which was basically being the administrative assistant to more than 10 directors, on top of my regular work assignments. I thought that was normal. I thought it was normal being the admin assistant to any new member that was being hired to the department, even though I was a clerk.

In 2015, I was able to test into a program assistant. And then in 2018, I became a program coordinator. If it weren't for my admins, I would never have been able to get through the process of testing, desk audits, and interviews. They knew the HR secrets. One's ability to move through their position and receive yearly wage increases should not rely on one person having all the knowledge. It shouldn't take a "good boss" to be seen and promoted for doing good work.

If you need help with a work situation, please contact a steward.

I began at NIU as a student worker in 2015. I graduated NIU in 2017, and had to stay in this area due to my husband's job. Commuting to Chicagoland was out of the question since my vehicle was not reliable, and 1/3 of my husband's paycheck went to child support. What we were left to live on was the equivalent of \$17 an hour.

So I went to work for the university that gave me a degree. I was hired in at \$11.88 an hour as an office manager, and I could not negotiate HR into paying me more because I had a degree. Their words were, 'the position doesn't require a degree, so we don't pay for a degree.'

Maybe not, but you should! A new employee with a degree has additional critical thinking and analytical skills, higher communication skills, and is adept at time management, organization, and multitasking. All things which make an employee good at their position with less training required.

Except, NIU doesn't train their employees. They allow an employee to figure it out as they go along. A 'trial by fire' if you will. To be honest, if that is how NIU keeps 'training' employees, having a degree would make them even *more* valuable.

After being in my position for a very short time, I tried to get upgraded to an Office Administrator. The desk audit was performed. I heard nothing for four months. I found out later it was denied, not on merit, but at some college level negotiation where I ended up on the losing end.

I found another position on campus as an administrative aide. My pay went up by 34% when I switched departments which happened at the same time as a union-negotiated salary increase for my new position.

I did well in this new position, but again, no training. I figured things out as I went along, not knowing what was to come.

After seven months, a desk audit brought me up to Business Manager and another raise. Meanwhile, my supervisor would periodically come into my office, slam both hands onto my desk, and yell at me about why I did or didn't do something. Every time I tried to answer, I would be interrupted with another outburst on my supervisor's part. I sat there, stunned. This supervisor used multiple tactics meant to keep you off-balance, confused, and unsure which leads to mistakes which are then used against you so a paper-trail can be built to fire you. This supervisor apparently was (and still is) known for tormenting employees. No one ever dared file a grievance against this supervisor for fear of retaliation. If that is how this supervisor behaves now...imagine what would happen if you filed a grievance? Fear kept me from filing. I couldn't lose my job!

I used to ask my supervisor clarifying questions so I understood what was being asked. That's when a coworker told me, 'You challenge the supervisor.' I had no idea asking questions was challenging! Still, I was miserable. I knew I was not going to make it in that division. I began looking for a way out. ANY way out.

That's when covid and the layoffs hit.

I was still on probation in my new position and was one of the first laid off. I could not have been happier! Plus, I had bumping rights. I had to bump back down to Office Manager, but I was free of that supervisor and their reign of terror. My pay didn't change because I was within the 'range' for the new position. Two more union-negotiated raises and I am now in one of the best departments on campus with an amazing supervisor.

Now I feel it is my duty to help others navigate NIU; from grievances to raises to desk audits and training- I want to make things better for all employees.

After all, an organization is only as good as the worst behavior it overlooks.

Manage the cause, not the result. Manage the system, not the people. Because people don't leave bad jobs; they leave because of bad leaders, poor management and a lack of appreciation for their worth. It's up to us to change that paradigm.

~Rave Meyer

Next Membership Meeting

Tuesday, July 18, 2023 at Noon via Zoom

A link to the Zoom meeting was sent to eligible voting members on July 14.

- All members who attend Local 1890 membership meetings in 2023 are eligible to win in a Rolling \$25 Cash Drawing.
- Each month, the name of one winner is selected from all Local 1890 dues-paying members. A member must be present at the meeting to win if their name was drawn.
- Any amounts not awarded roll over to the next monthly general meeting.
- The current prize amount is \$175.

NOTICE: Bargaining has gone beyond June 30, 2023. What does this mean for you? It means that any raise you may receive is **still being determined**. Until a new contract is agreed upon, ratified by our **eligible voting members**, and signed by the Board of Trustees, you will not see a raise on your pay advice. You will eventually receive one. But a contract must be finalized first.

To the non-voting, represented employees- if you want a stronger voice in our union, to be eligible to attend meetings and vote on important matters like accepting our contract, raises, expenditures, or whether or not a strike happens, please consider **joining**. Dues are only \$20.55 a pay period or approx. \$10 a week.

**Tell us about YOUR pets
here!**

Save the Date!

Are you ready for Lagoonapalooza 2023?? The date has been tentatively set for **Wednesday, September 13th**. There is still time to join the planning committee....help us plan the best party of the year!

**Click to Join the Palooza
Committee!**

Your Local 1890 officers and stewards remain accessible to help you with information and support.

Should you have questions or concerns, contact us at

Local 1890 Officers

President

Rave Meyer*

Vice President

Sarah Lindell*

Recording-Secretary

Lesly Schoo

Secretary-Treasurer

Daksha Patel

Members-at-Large

Jacklyn Egolf

Krystyna Kamla

Bryan Lutes

Membership Chair

Sara Finnigan

Chief Steward

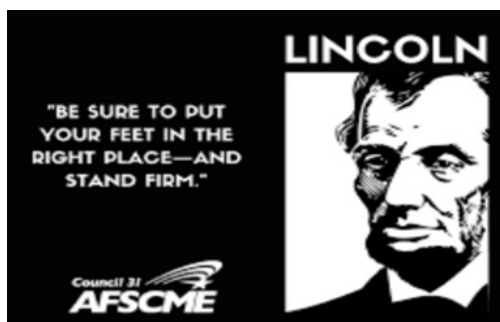
Heidi Carlson*

Trustees

Rebecca Rahe

Joe Gruber

*Certified Stewards



Contact List

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[Exclusive union member benefits](#)

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General questions

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You can easily join YOUR voice to
OUR Local 1890 voice today!

[Join NOW!](#)

[Local 1890 Website](#)
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**KNOW
YOUR
RIGHTS**

I'm being disciplined? What do I do?

WEINGARTEN RIGHTS

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working condition, I respectfully request that my union representative or steward be present at the meeting. Without representation, I choose not to answer any questions."



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