UW—Madison Campus Voices
TAA Strike
Podcast Script
April 2010

Introduction:

Announcer/Reeves: UW—Madison's Campus Voices' mission is to capture, present, and preserve some of the strongest historical stories and memories of UW—Madison, through the people who lived them. Campus Voices, a project of the UW—Madison Archives & Records Management Services, consists of presenting extant archival material in 21st century publishable formats, such as a podcast, mini-movie, and iTunes album.

Reeves: This is the UW—Madison Campus Voices podcast; I'm Troy Reeves, head of the oral history program at the UW—Madison Archives and today's host.

Possible change: I really, really wanted some cool Ira Glass-esq introduction here, capturing my wit and wisdom and setting the stage for our first podcast, which is our interpretation of the 1970 Teaching Assistants Association or TAA Strike. I even recorded some takes, and let me tell you, in my mind, they were all destined for the podcast introduction Hall of Fame.

But, what I found is a story that tells itself, plus a story with so much depth that my words only detracted from this piece and added to its length. So, maybe next time podcast listeners will get a chance to hear me in my full throat.

One group I do need to laud before we embark: The Brittingham Fund, whose generous support made this podcast, as well as our current TAA strike iTunes album and soon-to-be published mini-movie possible.

Some of their generosity helped me to hire 3 current and former graduate students here to repackage and present our TAA Strike archival material in the 3 aforementioned ways.

So without further adieu here's the producers and presenters of this podcast: Katie Gleischman, recent Library School graduate, Ellen Jacks, current Library School student, and Megan Falater, current history graduate student. **And now to discuss the seeds of the TAA Strike, here's Ellen.**

TAA Strike

For academics at UW—Madison, the title of TA offered a mark of honor, a training opportunity, and a means of financial support.

After clip starts with: "Well, we had some ideas about the TAs. Our ideas about the TAs are, I think, probably still shared by many members of the faculty." Then we say this: "This is C. William Loomer, former professor of Agricultural Economics."

Loomer_TAshipIsAward

Loomer_TAsLikeJuniorFaculty

A TA position would certainly keep a graduate student in school for the duration of their academic careers, but in the mid-1960s, graduate students faced the responsibility of possibly ending other students' college educations. Male students who received failing grades from their TAs could lose student draft deferment status and be sent to Vietnam. In May 1966, 35 grad students at UW—Madison organized the Teaching Assistants for Re-Evaluation and Renewal of Education (TARRE) and "threatened to withhold grades until they were no longer a life or death issue." Henry Haslach, a Mathematics TA, explained:

Haslach_UndergradsAndDraft

The graduate students soon acknowledged that they faced other problems as TAs, and re-organized as the Teaching Assistants' Association on June 28, 1966. In November of that year, the TAA drafted a general statement detailing their primary demands, which included educational reform and "bread and butter" issues such as job security, evaluation and firing procedures, and wages. According to Patricia Russian, a TA in the German Department, TAs did not receive sufficient compensation for their work:

Russian_L&S_Pay_Scale

Administrators knew of these issues for graduate students. In 1966, the University set up a committee to review the working conditions of the TAs; the committee distributed their findings in 1968.

The report, named after committee chair and Associate Dean in the College of Letters and **Science, also known as L & S,** Edward Mulvihill, identified some of the problems that TAs faced in the mid-1960s, such as wide differences in working conditions and expectations among departments. The Mulvihill Report also offered specific recommendations to improve TAs' experience and training at the University. Despite these efforts, few administrators and professors seemed willing to take action on the problems faced by the TAs. Dean Mulvihill:

Mulvihill_MulvihillReport.mp3

Yet in 1966 and the beginning of 1967, members of the TAA did not recognize the indifference of some faculty and administrators to their

concerns. The Association underwent fast political and ideological changes in its first years. Again, Henry Haslach:

Haslach_LeftistsJoinTAA_wAntiTradeUnion

TAA members soon used these labor techniques to support educational reform, or educational planning, the most controversial of their platforms. TAA members wanted graduate students to have some control over course content, not only in discussion sections but within entire courses and departments. This control was normally within **faculty purview.**

Haslach_TAAIsReformOrg68To69

The politics and platform of the TAA kept it very small, with as few as 10 members as of January 1969. But this changed with the news of legislation proposed by John Shabaz, the Republican Assistant Majority Leader of the Wisconsin State Assembly.

Haslach_ShabazProposal

Blaming out-of-state students for the protests occurring on UW campuses in the late 1960s, Shabaz and his conservative supporters hoped that this legislation would also reduce protests on campus.

This proposal frightened graduate students whose studies depended on the financial support provided by assistantships. The TAA responded quickly to the Shabaz Proposal:

Haslach_ShabazStrikeVote

Facing a booming TAA membership and a strike vote at his University, Chancellor H. Edwin Young found it increasingly difficult to dismiss the

Association. Yet this is precisely what he wished to do; a former professor of Economics and director of the School for Workers, he cared less for the graduate students' demands than he did for the broader population. Chancellor Young:

Young_UWRelationshipWithLabor

In March 1969, the TAA sought to begin collective bargaining with the University. Young refused to grant the union University recognition, but eventually agreed to do so if the TAA underwent an election sponsored by the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission, also known as WERC. This election would determine whether the entire population of TAs at the University, and not just its members, wanted union representation.

Young_TAAIsNotBoneFideUnion

More than half of the University's TAs voted in the election in May 1969; the TAA received 1,209 valid ballots with 931 voting for union representation. The 931 students were not only a majority of the students who voted, but also a narrow majority of the entire TA population that year. With this election, the TAA gained a Structure Agreement that allowed the union to form a collective bargaining relationship with the University, which **Katie**will continue.

No unionized graduate students had successfully bargained with their university before; what the TAA attempted was a departure from the traditional relationship between students and universities. Not surprisingly, then, TAA members had no experience in bargaining. Their Leftist politics encouraged them to structure their union as a participatory democracy, so the members of their negotiating team changed frequently; some students attended a majority of the bargaining sessions, but others filtered in and out. Graduate students

from industrial relations joined the TAA following the WERC election, however, and greatly improved its bargaining talent. The University, in contrast, created an advisory Council of Thirty, which represented each department on campus with 15 or more TAs, and a Council of Ten, which represented the L&S departments that relied heavily on TAs as well as representatives from the Schools of Education and Engineering, to engage in the bargaining process with the TAA. The Council of Ten included *some* faculty and students trained in labor negotiations as well as other faculty members.

Negotiations soured as early as July 1969. That month, UW—Madison sent a memo to all department chairs that directed them to not negotiate with the TAA. Union members complained that the University was engaging in "bad faith organizing."

TAA members brought "bread and butter" as well as educational reform demands to the bargaining table. While the former was the less controversial of the two, TAs' request for resources such as sufficient office space also created upset among some faculty who lacked the same resources.

Yet the TAA lost most support for its call for educational reform. Professor James Stern, a former member of the Industrial Relations Research Institute, argued that the TAA's focus actually hurt students' cause:

Stern_TAALostSupportOfUnions

The TAA lost not only labor allies, but also support from faculty for its call for educational reform. Pat Russian:

Russian_EdPlanningClauseImpossible

The University and TAA bargaining teams met through the Fall 1969 semester. Robert Doremus, former professor of English and Associate Dean of L&S, participated in these negotiations.

Doremus_NoteTakingAtBargainingSessions_TAA_want_evening_meetings

Faculty and administrators at the University also criticized TAA bargaining tactics. Most of the members of the Council of Ten were faculty, rather than trained negotiators, and some were shocked by their interactions with bargaining graduate students.

This is Professor Stern:

Stern_FacultyFirstNames

Professor Doremus also complained that TAA members used abusive language during bargaining sessions; other faculty defended the students, however.

Stern_FacultyMisinterpretAbusiveBargaining

The bargaining teams did not reach an agreement in 1969. The TAA decided to end negotiations on January 8th, 1970, and later set a strike deadline for March 15th. In early March, the TAA held a vote in which a majority of members expressed their willingness to strike. On the day that the ballots were tallied, March 9th, the union asked the University to renew negotiations. At this point, bargaining had already resolved many issues, and the TAA received more concessions from the University in the days and hours leading up to the strike deadline. Professor Stern:

Stern_EducationalPlanning

[Call/response from Stern clip:] Yet former Physics TA David Burress believed that there was much to gain through a strike:

Burress_GainedMoreFromStrikeThanIfSettled

Some faculty resented the very idea of a strike, and argued that it did not originate with ordinary graduate students. Here is Lester Seifert, Professor of German:

Seifert_TAARunByProfessionalOrganizers

University administrators argued that the TAA strike was illegal; they terminated bargaining sessions on March 16th and sought a legal injunction against the strike. The TAA did not receive support from many local unions. The UW blue-collar workers' union, for example, did not join the strike. The Teamsters did, but withdrew support after two weeks.

Leaders of the TAA did not organize this strike on a whim; they wanted a greater role in educational reform but also fought for TAs' security as workers. Again, David Burress:

Burress_TAIsPatronage

TAA members picketed campus during the weeks of the strike. The University did not centrally track attendance or confirm whether its TAs held discussion sections or office hours, though it did confirm a large reduction in the number of rooms used for section meetings. But some rooms were still used. Not all graduate students went on strike, and many other members of the University continued with their work during these weeks. Even some of the picketers held discussion

sections for their students, both on and off campus; the strike did not affect TAs' concern for their undergraduate students.

This is Pat Russian.

Russian_OneToOneSupport

As with most strikes, pickets were not always pleasant for strikers and other members of the University. Some who crossed picket lines complained that the TAs were abusive; TAA members also reported negative experiences on the picket lines.

Russian_AttacksOnPicketLines

On March 24th, a total of five TAs were arrested at 2 locations for blocking deliveries to campus buildings, but the strike continued throughout spring break, which **Megan** will continue.

Before the strike began, the legal representation for the TAA had requested that Nathan Feinsinger, a professor from the mediation center of the UW—Madison School of Law, work with the union and University. During the weeks that followed, he brought the TAA and University administrators back together, though not in formal bargaining sessions. Just before one of these informal talks, the mediator and an unnamed representative of the TAA suggested that the contract could simply ignore educational reform. Remember that educational reform or planning referred to TAs' desire to gain greater control over the curricula of individual courses and entire departments. The University drafted such a proposal, **but the Stewards' Council of the TAA rejected it on March 30th and recommended that union members reject it at a forthcoming meeting**.

The two sides could not find a mutually-satisfactory outcome. As the strike continued, some faculty went public with their opposition to the TAA's position on the issue. Pat Russian:

Russian_EdPlanningFoughtByProfessors

Yet some faculty remained sympathetic to the strikers, though their support had clearly defined limits. Professor Stern:

Stern_FacultyOfferLimitedSupport

The TAA faced greatly increased pressure following the Stewards' Council's rejection **of the drafted contract**. On April 1st, the University gave over 300 TAs reduced pay, and reported that other TAs might face the same fate following the next pay period. The Teamsters withdrew support, and the circuit court ruled in favor of the state's petition for an injunction on Friday, April 3rd. Although TAs could still exercise their right to protest, this injunction ordered them back to work on April 6th, the first day of classes following spring break.

The TAA membership met on April 5th, voting to reject the drafted contract already reviewed by the Stewards' Council and to continue the strike. Faculty from throughout the University met to discuss educational planning; their meeting extended into two days from April 6th to 7th. **This resulted in a statement allowing each department to address students' role in educational planning through its own "mechanisms," as endorsed by Council of Ten Representative Mulvihill. T**his wording left individual students to negotiate curricular control in their departments, without the support of their union.

Even following the court injunction, the University had no centralized method for determining whether TAs were still on strike. Nevertheless, administrators targeted individual TAs from four departments,

including German and History, and physically confirmed that they were not in their classrooms during section meeting times. They then contacted the chairs of these TAs' departments. One of these chairs was Morton Rothstein of the History Department:

Rothstein_AffidavitDesc

The next day, 21 students were served contempt citations for violating the injunction by continuing to strike. The TAA had already considered these departments to be among the most abusive to TAs prior to the strike, and the contempt citations only reinforced their position. Rothstein, however, defended his signing of that affidavit:

Rothstein_AffidavitReflection

At a meeting on April 8th, the same day that students received the contempt citations, the ideological differences among the TAA members were laid bare as they met to discuss whether to continue, escalate, or end the strike. Some TAs suggested that picketers use physical force to prevent others from crossing their picket lines, while others suggested that the union should damage property in order to pressure the University into making concessions in bargaining. Disagreements over these suggestions did not fall along gender lines, but did push into charges of sexism within the TAA; some female TAs believed that, while the union was organized so that all members had a say in the organization, men still limited women's voices.

Lasting for over four hours, the meeting eventually concluded with a vote to end the strike several days later, on April 13th. On that day, TAA members would vote by paper ballot on whether to accept the new contract, which contained the faculty-proposed language on educational planning.

Despite TAA members' decision not to escalate the strike, individual faculty and administrators reported isolated instances of violence and property damage in the days that followed. The home of Professor Rothstein, for example, was damaged in the early morning of April 12th, a little more than one day after his attendance at a faculty party celebrating the strike's conclusion:

Rothstein_BrickThroughWindow

Individual acts of violence notwithstanding, the strike reached its end. On April 10th, the Board of Regents approved the contract's language; on April 13th, the TAA voted to accept the contract. Many throughout the University and state were uncertain as to whether the University or the TAA had won this conflict. While some administrators counted the contract as a victory, both sides seemed battle-weary and compromised. Individual faculty, including Professor Charles Scott, former chair of the English Department, believed that their relationship with graduate students was forever changed:

Scott_ContemptDistrust

Others, such as Chancellor Young, believed that the TAA was powerless by the end of the strike:

Young_TAAVulnerabilityPostStrike

[call/response from preceding clip:] Spared, in Chancellor Young's mind, from destruction, many TAA members were in fact disappointed with the language of the contract:

Burress_FeelingsAfterStrike

Yet the strike ended with the first contract between a graduate student union and a university. TAA members accomplished something entirely new, and did so with little support other than their own resources. Professor Rothstein:

Rothstein_OrganizationalFeat

The TAAs did not gain concessions as a result of the strike, but the University conceded on several issues, such as health insurance, in the days leading up to the strike deadline. TAA members did not gain collective control on educational planning through their first contract, however. The TAs' ability to follow through on their threat of a strike demonstrated the seriousness they brought to their work, which strengthened their relationship with the University in future years.

Troy?

Conclusion:

Reeves: Well, that's it, our first podcast. Thanks, to Katie Gleischman, Ellen Jacks, and Megan Falater for their research on and creation of this podcast; thanks to Laura Smail, who conducted these interviews back in the late 1970s as part of her job as UW—Madison Oral Historian; again, to the Brittingham Fund for their generosity; and to some of my colleagues for their advice and support, including folks at UW—Madison Libraries, our History Department, and Wisconsin Historical Society.

If our story of the TAA Strike piqued your interest, you can access the full interviews, both the audio and the transcript from the Campus Voices webpage at the UW Digital Collection Center's website. And look for our album on iTunes and our upcoming mini-movie on YouTube about the TAA Strike. For full information on how to access the recordings, transcripts, iTunes album, and or mini-movie, go to

http://archives.library.wisc.edu, then click on Oral History Program, then click on Campus Voices. Easy cheesy.

And last as with my wishful introduction, I hoped to have some cutesy conclusion here capturing our work in a neat bow! But that didn't happen either. So, until podcast number 2, I wish all who listen to this podcast and then go and read/listen/view our other TAA strike material the best. Bye!