



SUMMER 2025

# THE UNION CHIRP

*Riverhawk Educators United Newsletter*



## In this issue:

Since winning certification in April, REU members have hit the ground running. From organizing new members to negotiating our first Memorandum of Understanding with the college, we've laid a strong foundation for the work ahead. This first issue of our newsletter reflects on what we've accomplished so far—and previews what's next as we gear up for a powerful return this fall.

In this issue you will find:

- A letter from our colleague, Jamila Barton (pg. 1, 4-5)
- A timeline of milestones since certification (pg. 2)
- A Beginners Guide to REU: FAQ and Glossary (pg. 3)
- Key upcoming meetings and events (pg. 6)

## Dear colleagues,

My name is Jamila Barton, and I was fired from my position as an ESL instructional specialist at Anne Arundel Community College on June 18th. I believe stories influence our thinking about ourselves and others. So, I am going to tell you my story – who I am, how I started at AACC, and how anti-black bias, assumptions, lack of communication, and the college's tendency to ignore its own policies eventually got me fired despite doing great work and spearheading innovative program changes.

I have over 15 years' experience teaching ESL to immigrants, refugees, and international students at community colleges, and 10 years' experience training English language teachers domestically and overseas. I am a black neurodiverse queer woman from Seattle. I live on a farm in Southern Maryland. I enjoy building and creating things, and I am an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy. *(Continued on page 4 and 5).*



## REU Timeline April 2025 – Present Day



### April 16

REU is certified with 66% membership across our bargaining unit

### April 21

REU starts a petition to bring Matt Patton back

### May 21

During a General Membership meeting we worked on a plan to transition leadership of TFO

### May 29

A TFO Special Election was held to elect Heather Riordan, Zoe Farquhar, and Cameron Caswell as President, Vice President, and Recorder, respectively.

### June 12

During a General Membership meeting we voted on an interim leadership structure for REU

### June 15

Last day of 10-month faculty contract for AY 2024-2025

### June 18

REU's bargaining committee had its second and final bargaining session with the college, achieving a 5% raise and more equitable payment for independent studies and honors contracts.

Scan this code to read the signed MOU.



### May 8

REU starts "Fight against 15" to demand transparency in data-driven decision making



### June 10

REU's bargaining committee had its first session to bargain a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for compensation for the next fiscal year



### June 16, 17, 18

REU members escorted faculty and IS members to disciplinary meetings with supervisors. Members of sibling unions also showed up to support Jamila Barton at her meeting with HR.

### June 18

Jamila's employment at AACC was terminated.

### July 5

AACC student Mary Reusen starts a Fight Against 15 Petition

Scan this code to read and sign the petition.





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## Beginners Guide to REU



# REU FAQ ?

### Who is in charge here?

REU is led by faculty and IS who know and care about working conditions at AACC. We voted on an interim union structure in June and will have an election soon!

### What's the plan?

There is no set timeline yet, but we will start developing proposals for the CBA early in the fall. Negotiations with the college will start soon after.

### How will a CBA impact the college manual and/or policies?

Once we successfully negotiate a CBA, the agreement will supersede the college manual and/or policies

### How can I get more involved and stay up-to-date on all things REU?

We will send regular newsletters but there are other ways to be involved and informed! See our contact information and upcoming events.

**Have more questions?** Visit [aaccru.org/faq](http://aaccru.org/faq)

## Glossary

### Bargaining Unit

A set of employees who are recognized to bargain a contract together (collectively). Even if you are not a member of REU, you are a part of our bargaining unit!

### Collective Action

Any action taken together by members of REU in order to achieve a common goal by putting pressure on the administration.

### Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

A ratified contract, recording negotiations with administration over salary and the terms and conditions of our work.

### Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

A brief contract recording negotiations with administration over one or a few subjects. An MOU is time-limited and does not set precedents for our CBA.

### Proposal

A written expression of needs and demands relating to work. The CBA is made up of proposals covering various topics (e.g. wages, benefits, grievance procedures, workplace policies, etc.) REU and AACC will both bring proposals to bargaining.

Get informed







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## Letter from Jamila Barton (cont'd)

I took this position at AACC because I was excited to return to teaching and work with teachers again. Initially, my supervisor and I had a positive working relationship. We met weekly, and she set the agenda for my work. In a virtual meeting on March 11, my co-worker challenged me about my responsibilities and dismissed my program suggestions, so I clarified my role and suggestions about the program. I was not rude, disrespectful, or loud. I did not attack her personally. In a meeting on March 25, my supervisor accused me of being intimidating and aggressive in the previous meeting even though she was not in attendance. The other two people in the meeting disagreed with that characterization.

So, I emailed my supervisor that the co-worker might have made assumptions about me based on bias and provided a link to a Harvard Business Review article about the "angry black woman" stereotype. Both my supervisor and co-worker are white women. In my email to my supervisor, I asked her to confer with the other attendees of the meeting because black women are often seen as 'intimidating, and aggressive' in the workplace when they express their opinions or act assertively. The problem with the 'angry, black woman' stereotype is the assumption that black women are angry by nature, so they need to be managed and controlled. I believe that my supervisor did not investigate because she had already made up her mind about me.

On April 9, after bringing my concerns to my supervisor, she provided me with an unreasonable task list to complete by May 14, the date of my 6-month coaching conversation and the end of my new employee introductory period. She stopped meeting with me weekly to discuss work and started reprimanding me by email for small mistakes. When I emailed her to ask questions, I was provided with a disciplinary warning for insubordination (Employee Perf Mgmt Policy, Section VI.A) because I was "trying to negotiate my workload." I have never refused to do assigned tasks. In fact, I worked overtime for several weeks to complete the task list I was assigned.

**“I used every process in the college policies to get help...”**

I used every process in the college policies to get help with my supervisor's unreasonable demands, and reduce my workload, including talking to Human Resources, filing a bias incident report, requesting mediation, and filing a formal grievance. These processes ultimately failed me. A day before my May 14th coaching conversation, my supervisor emailed me to cancel and extended my probationary period indefinitely. I was told that the extension of my probationary period was not disciplinary by a staff member in Human Resources.

A month later, on June 10, I attended the REU and AACC bargaining session and I testified publicly that the workload from that list required me to work several 60- to 70-hour work weeks. The AACC Executive Director of HR and VP of Learning were in attendance. The next day, I received an email from the Executive Director asking me to attend a disciplinary meeting with the Dean of CEWD. I was wrongfully terminated on June 18 even after providing evidence against erroneous supervisory concerns related to missed deadlines and insubordination. I was denied my right to a timely 6-month coaching conversation, where we could have discussed these issues, and my supervisor never tried to involve me in a conversation about these concerns, violating the principles behind the Employee Progressive Discipline Procedure, Section IV.E. Instead, she dismissed my concerns, ignored meeting requests, and made false assumptions about my work.



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## Letter from Jamila Barton (cont'd)

**“I am not the first who has had a supervisor weaponize college policies against me...”**

Not rescheduling in good faith and keeping me in the probationary period allowed my supervisor to bypass rules related to progressive disciplinary procedures and terminate me directly. The Director of Human Resources told me that it is permissible not to follow these policies. The college compliance officer told me later that college policy language can be written using language that is deliberately open to interpretation. If college policies are open to interpretation, employees cannot expect college processes to address their difficulties in good faith. Therefore, what happened to me can happen to you.

My story started with assumptions made about me because of bias against black women. This incident is not the first time someone has made assumptions about me in the workplace because of race, gender, or sexual orientation. It is the first time that I was not able to get help using policies and procedures. In *Inclusion on Purpose*, Ruchika Tulshyan defines equity as “identifying and dismantling systemic barriers to the representation and inclusion of... historically marginalized communities,” and inclusion as the “actions taken to represent, welcome, and value people from historically underestimated marginalized communities...” Anne Arundel Community College states equity and inclusion as its values. If that is truly the case, the college community needs procedures to address interpersonal conflict.

In one particularly unpleasant email, my supervisor suggested that I was having problems ‘fitting in’ to the college culture. I find that surprising since I have been working in colleges and universities my entire career. I also find that comment disappointing in light of the college’s stated values. If we only want people who have historically been a ‘good fit’ for this community, then we are not committed to equity or inclusion. Tulshyan writes that “hiring for a culture fit is one of the most widespread and exclusionary hiring practices today... Rather than focusing on culture fit, organizational leaders must concentrate on culture add to be inclusive”. A commitment to equity and inclusion requires us to consider the value people add to a community despite their differences.

My time at AACC is over. This story is no longer about me. This story is about what faculty want from the collective bargaining process regarding fair workload, collegiality, and supervisory relationships. This story is also about what we should all want for the AACC community. I still believe that the collective bargaining process is the best way to ensure equity, inclusion, and accountability. I am not the first who has had a supervisor weaponize college policies against me this past year, and I won’t be the last.

**“... and I won’t be the last.”**

The administrators at AACC view collective union action as a threat because the status quo suits them. They won’t change unless faculty are willing to stand up for what’s best for themselves and their students. I hope that you get involved with REU so that this situation does not happen to anyone else.

**In Solidarity,**  
Jamila Barton, MA TESOL



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## Upcoming Events

### July 25, 2pm, Zoom: General Membership Meeting

Agenda items include updates on the summer's activities and planning ahead for next year.

### September 4, 3pm, Zoom: REU Reads

Join us in reading Dean Spade's *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis and the Next*. (**Part 3: Working Together on Purpose**)

This text provides a framework for organizing groups that create a culture of collective care, uphold accountability for leadership and participation, and avoid recreating oppressive conditions that burn us out and distract us from what's important.

### September 5, 10am–3pm, Hybrid: Charting Our Course

We are inviting all full-time faculty, instructional specialists, and instructional staff – members or non-members – to come to the REU retreat to make your voice heard as we chart the course to our first collective bargaining agreement. You will have opportunities to:

- Connect with other faculty and instructional specialists and find out what's going on in their corner of the college.
- Learn about REU membership, the collective bargaining process, and the role of REU's committees and working groups.
- Get updates on this summer's MOU (memorandum of understanding) with AACC's administration.
- Collaborate on proposals for common issues related to college policies, workload, salary, benefits, and leave.
- Discuss what we can do to achieve meaningful improvements through bargaining and collective action.

### October 9, 4pm, Zoom: REU Reads

Join us in reading Dean Spade's *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis and the Next*. (**Part 4: Working Together on Purpose**)

### November 6, 5pm, Zoom: REU Reads

Join us in reading Dean Spade's *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis and the Next*. (**Part 5: Pitfalls & Conclusion**)