



Reduce harmful work stressors.
Improve job quality and health.

Healthy Work Strategies

Collective bargaining agreements (contracts) designed to improve working conditions and job security for Brown University dining services workers

Brown University Dining Services staff have communicated their concerns to Brown administrators for years about very hot working conditions and understaffing. A heat-related seizure and subsequent hospitalization of one employee may have been caused by such hot work spaces.^{1,2} In addition, while understaffing appears to be a year-round issue for Dining Services staff, it is particularly pronounced in the summer months, in which there are more students on campus compared to the traditional academic year. Understaffing can contribute to overexertion, a problem during hot summer months.^{1,2}

In 2018, the Brown Student Labor Alliance engaged in a series of protests on behalf of the Dining Services workers. This included placing fans on the steps of Faunce House, in order to raise awareness of the issue.^{1,2} In addition, Brown University students made direct demands for workplace improvements, on behalf of Dining Services staff, to administrators and Dining Services management. Following the protests and other student activism, on September 28, 2018, Brown University agreed to spend \$3 million for air-conditioning in the main dining hall as well as agree to additional infrastructure and administrative improvements to better the working conditions of its dining hall staff.¹⁻³

In addition, dining hall staff re-negotiated their collective bargaining agreement (contract) with Brown through their union, the United Service and Allied Workers of Rhode Island (USAW RI), in October 2018, effective November 1, 2018 to November 1, 2021.¹⁻³ As of August 2019, USAW RI has 806 members, and 196 of them are Brown University dining service workers.

Improvements in the new contract to staffing, job security, paid time off, and job control through training, and an improved grievance procedure

In their new 2018-2021 contract they were able to achieve³:

- Hiring of two full time cooks at Sharpe Rectory
- Hiring of one full-time cashier in Verney-Woolley Dining Hall and two full-time cashiers at FSW Dining Hall
- Transition six 79% of time FSW dining staff to full-time and five 63% of time staff to 79% time
- Promote one FSW staff to work full-time at Sharpe Rectory
- Promote a Cook's Helper to full-time at Verney Woolley Dining Hall and two additional Cook's Helpers transition to full time
- One Driver's Helper and one Light Truck Driver will transition from 79% time to 100%
- Creation of per diem summer jobs
- Training staff in their respective job descriptions
- Paid days off, improved vacation time and pay increases.
- Updated grievance procedure to enforce the agreement and in the case a grievance cannot be resolved, binding arbitration as the next step.

Conclusions

Efforts by unionized dining service workers at Brown University and their student allies to reduce work stressors and improve working conditions were negotiated into their labor-management contract. In addition, pressure on the University led to the installation of air conditioning in hot food service facilities. Follow up is needed to determine whether improvements in working conditions will be maintained, the effectiveness of the grievance procedure, and what impact the new contract will have on employees' health.

References:

1. Larson LS. How Brown University Students and Dining Workers Got Better Working Conditions-Together. The Nation. <https://www.thenation.com/>. Published November 15, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2019.
2. Bennett K. Sharpe Refectory to gain cooling abilities in 2019. <http://www.browndailyherald.com/>. Published April 13, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2019.
3. United Service and Allied Workers – RI. 2018-2021 [Memorandum of Agreement](#) with the United Service and Allied Workers – RI. <https://www.brown.edu/>. Accessed July 15, 2019.