

Campus rally supports unionization

More than 50 percent of workers agree to unionize, enabling them to officially present plans to Sodexo

By [Leah Askarinam](#) | Section: Mar 26th, 2010 [Issues](#), [Lead Story](#), [March 26th Print Edition](#), [News](#) [ShareThis](#)

Tulane's dining services employees presented Sodexo with a request to form a union without intimidation from management Wednesday.



Tulanians marched from Gibson to Lavin-Bernick Center in a show of solidarity for the Sodexo unionization effort. PHOTO | HANNA LIPMAN | ASSOCIATE PHOTOGRAPHER

A crowd of students marched with workers to Dining Services General Manager Phoebe Cook's office to present a document with their demands. Anthony Thomas, who has worked with Sodexo for approximately five-and-a-half years, presented the document with a plea for better working conditions. Cook, however, said that though she respected workers' rights, she did not have the authority to accept the papers, so the workers left the packet on the floor of her office.

The workers joined the group of students as they left, marching through the Lavin-Bernick Center chanting "shame on Sodexo."

"Basically, that is a really blatant slap in the face because it's a statement from her that Sodexo doesn't respect workers' right to organize," said Brian Ford, member of the Tulane University Solidarity Committee.

Tulane Public Relations Director Michael Strecker said that Tulane supports workers' efforts to unionize, a right guaranteed by the National Labor Relations Act.

“We expect our vendors, like Sodexo, to accord their employees the respect and dignity that all people deserve,” Strecker said. “We recognize that there are Tulane faculty, staff and students who are supportive of various positions in the ongoing discussions. Their interest and involvement are indicative of the culture of community engagement that Tulane highly values.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77p4YvJIwXM>

We expect a rational, reasonable and respectful exchange of viewpoints between all parties that is rooted in facts, openness and civility.”

Before presenting Sodexo with the documents, two members of TUSC and two professors went to President Scott Cowen’s office proposing that he adopt a Labor Code of Conduct. TUSC said it expects Cowen to address its request by April 8.

“Tulane University recognizes that, while according to U.S. law workers have the freedom to choose for themselves whether to have a union, the reality is that workers across the nation are routinely denied that right,” the proposed code states. “By implementing this code, Tulane University recognizes the freedom to form or join a union as a fundamental human right.”

They also presented two petitions: one with 1,092 student signatures and the other with 110 faculty signatures.

“Faculty are part of the Tulane community,” said Justin Wolfe, associate professor of history and the Suzanne and Stephen Weiss presidential fellow. “We need to be involved in the life of the university. That means being involved in the life of students and that means being in the life of staff, and vice versa. So at a fundamental level, if the university really thinks of itself as a community, that means bringing everyone together and thinking about the common good of the university and the common good of everyone who’s a part of it.”

TUSC organized a rally Wednesday supporting the workers’ right to unionize. Kevin Henry, president of Tulane’s African American Congress, delivered a speech to students, who were brandishing signs reading “we expect more for our workers,” “integrity,” and “stop in the name of Bruff [Commons].”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLEpG8USBhY>

“The Sodexo workers have been dissuaded from organizing,” Henry said. “They are in horrible conditions. The university has used their bodies and their time and their energy. There has been a cavalier disregard for them as people. We have to remember what this education is all about. We have to remember what our duty is as students, as citizens and as humans.”

Barbara Ehrenreich, Newcomb College’s 2010 Spring Powerhouse lecturer, spoke with Sodexo employees, students and professors Tuesday to discuss unionization efforts.

“This place is supposed to be teaching mathematics, and you don’t have someone to figure out that \$8.50 an hour is not enough to live on in New Orleans?” Ehrenreich said.

Joynell Henderson, a Sodexo employee at Dillard University, attended the talk. Dillard University's Sodexo employees unionized last year.

“I'm glad to be here to help others organize and get the same benefits and everything — to get the same things we got out of our union at Tulane University,” Henderson said.