

## A Message from Our New Adjunct Committee Chair

Greetings to *All* Faculty!

Now that I am officially a member of the WCCFT Executive Board and Co-Chair of the Adjunct Committee, I'd like to introduce myself to you, and to share with you what my goals are in this position at this critical time for faculty and higher education at WCC. My name is Kathleen Collins. I've been an adjunct in the English Language Institute (ELI) for 19 years. During these past 19 years of experience, I've come to painfully realize the inequity and plight of adjuncts. Colleges nationwide, including WCC, have come to heavily rely on adjuncts to fill the void of full-time faculty lines in order to reduce their operating costs. In my opinion, this practice has created a burden on *all* faculty. Adjuncts who teach the majority of our courses have low compensation, no security and no benefits. The relationship between the professor and student is vital. Students are frustrated when they are not given the appropriate time and assistance they deserve. Because adjuncts do not have office hours, full time professors have to provide that extra support for students who have questions and needs pertaining to their studies. These issues undermine the quality of education that we should be providing to students. This crisis shows how *vital* good union leadership must be for ALL faculty!

How did I become interested and involved in the WCCFT? My interest began after I was assaulted by another teacher in Repro on October 10, 2007 just for asking her if she would be long. I was shoved, my book thrown at me twice while she tried repeatedly to incite me to strike her. When I asked for her name, she gave what turned out to be an alias. Once the ELI Assistant Dean had corroborated my story he was in earnest to find the teacher immediately, for she was a danger to others. There was no such name on the teaching staff, however. Two weeks later I discovered who she was: a recently hired ELI colleague whom I had never met.

It was then that *everything* changed. Rather than follow *The Zero Tolerance for Violence Policy*, the ELI Assistant Dean kept her on for the rest of that semester. According to ELI, she wasn't "deemed a threat." In 2012, I personally asked Dr. Hankin if he had known anything about the 2007 incident; he said it was the first time he had ever heard about it. After the 2007 incident and how it was handled, I realized that I could no longer rely on the ELI Assistant Dean and Director to do the right thing for teachers and students even though WCC already has policies to follow when an employee is acting in any way violent or causing harm to another individual. It was then I knew I had to turn my vision to the Union, for I had lost any faith I had in ELI leadership.

As a result, I decided, going forward, that if there were to be another incident that was harmful to any colleague or student, I would act immediately regardless of any backlash. That day came for me in December of 2009 when the ELI Assistant Dean yelled at and humiliated professors in front of their students, an outburst that caused students to be concerned for their teachers' well-being at a time they were also worrying about doing well on an exit exam.

Since then, I have dedicated myself to mobilizing a core of brave senior adjunct teachers to stand together with the WCCFT to improve the ELI faculty's working conditions and morale. There are also non-seniors working behind the scenes, fearing backlash from the ELI administration. We've been raising issues and getting them addressed and rectified. Some are still ongoing, but WCCFT President Mel Bienenfeld and Vice-President Judy Langer are as tenacious as we are. We've given up asking ourselves the question of why college administration has turned a blind eye to the Assistant Dean and Director's damaging and hurtful behavior all these years. We are now doers who are encouraged, affirmed, and confident in our strength to make things better collectively via our union. Here are some issues that we have successfully accomplished with the WCCFT's help since 2012:

- All ELI Intensive English Program (IEP) faculty can now attend the monthly union meetings during common hours.
- One senior adjunct was paid in full for courses she was unjustly denied from teaching because she was improperly bumped.
- ELI policy is now more in tune with college policy for snow/weather related make-up days as WCCFT continues making sure that WCC policy for inclement weather is being followed.  
ELI's policy pressured teachers to come in and do a 'physical' make-up rather than make up the curriculum. Just last year, some teachers had no spring recess for all the snow make ups that they had to do! Some had to even make up a makeup!
- WCCFT fought for yours truly, Kathleen Collins, not to have my union rights denied by the Assistant Dean in order to attend the 41<sup>st</sup> NYSUT Representative Assembly as a WCCFT delegate last year. I went!
- Contracts are no longer being held up for 4-6 weeks before going to payroll; teachers can now be paid in a more timely manner.
- The ELI now informs all new faculty at orientation meetings that they can open a WCC e-mail account with directions enabling them to conveniently get campus e-mails.
- The union can now distribute membership forms and information about the benefits of joining the union after ELI orientation meetings.
- Progress reports that took ELI faculty 2-4 hours per class depending on class size have been modified. Now teachers spend no more than thirty minutes per class. Before this modification, teachers with four classes were spending a minimum of 8-16 hours on these reports!

I believe that in such a short period of time, the above record deserves a round of applause. The first step is never easy, but it is the most important. I'd like to extend my gratitude and a special thank you to my senior colleagues- Jim Cyborowski, Lisa Hochstein, Irina Rudnev, and Patricia Torres for their continued courage and action in the face of all odds!

As Co-Chair of the Adjunct Committee, my immediate goal is to reach out to *all* WCC adjuncts. My Co-Chair, Dr. Gwen Roundtree, and I want you to know that we are here

for you, to listen to your concerns, complaints and ideas. Even if your situations in your Departments are not as dramatic as mine have been in the ELI, being involved in the Union, going to meetings, keeping abreast of important issues that can affect you are crucial. You will shortly be hearing from us with some dates to meet. Stay tuned. In the meantime, if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me or Gwen at [kathleen.collins@sunywccft.org](mailto:kathleen.collins@sunywccft.org) or [gwen.roundtree@sunywccft.org](mailto:gwen.roundtree@sunywccft.org).

Another goal of the union's Adjunct Committee is to try to increase WCC Union Membership and involvement. I will be asking *all* WCC Faculty for help with this. If you work as an adjunct you are already paying union fees. But to belong to the union, to have a voice at union meetings, to vote, and to take advantage of a variety of union resources, you must fill out a membership application. Find one on the Membership page of the WCCFT website.

I am proud to be part of this WCCFT Executive Board. I extend my gratitude to Mel Bienenfeld and Judy Langer for all their dedication and efforts to attain justice in the workplace, for without their encouragement and support these past two years, my colleagues and I in ELI could not have accomplished what did. Without a strong union and member involvement, higher education, educators and students are at risk. We need, therefore, to be involved, be active, take charge and use our positions and voices to make a difference.