



# Connect

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERATION OF TEACHERS / Nº 8 / MARCH / APRIL 2018



## STRONGER TOGETHER! WCCFT LAUNCHES MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

**I**N Washington, DC, on February 26, the Supreme Court heard opening arguments in the case of Janus vs AFSCME. In Valhalla on March 8, WCC full-time faculty paychecks reflected the first salary increase since August 2011. On March 22, adjunct faculty paychecks also reflected higher pay rates, and most faculty will soon receive signing bonuses and/or retroactive pay. There is a direct connection among these closely timed events.

At stake in the Janus case is the right of states such as New York to authorize public employee unions to collect fees from all workers whom they represent, whether or not they are union members. Often called "fair share laws," these statutes allow unions like WCCFT to access the financial resources

needed to fight for fair pay and benefits, decent working conditions, and professional respect. In questioning the attorney representing plaintiff Mark Janus, Justice Sonia Sotomayor put the matter succinctly: "You're basically arguing 'do away with unions.'"

Labor organizations across the country have rallied to defend union rights and fair-share laws. A WCCFT delegation joined thousands of unionists in New York's Foley Square on February 24 under the banner "I'm sticking with our union!"

Back in Valhalla, WCCFT has launched a membership drive to enroll hundreds of mostly adjunct colleagues who have not

# WCC STUDENTS TALK UNION PART 2

BY PATTI SEHULSTER

Continued college studies and future careers ranked high on the agendas of the four students who won WCCFT scholarships in 2017. Consequently, Juliana Macias, Nattoina Miller, Hannah Culliton, and Timothy Kohany were well-prepared to submit admirably crafted, well-researched essays in last year's competition.

Hannah planned to use her scholarship to transfer to Liberty University and study marketing, while Nattoina set her sights on becoming a registered dietician at CUNY Lehman College. Timothy and Juliana, however, are finishing their A.S. degrees here at WCC. Timothy studies engineering, while Juliana is pursuing a degree in writing and journalism.



2017 Scholarship winners (L – R) Nattoina Miller, Hannah Culliton, Timothy Kohany, and Juliana Macias. Photo credit: Stephen Sewell.

When asked if they thought having unionized professors whose needs are protected through collective bargaining made any difference in their educational experiences, all four scholarship winners had strong opinions. Juliana noted that until she learned of the scholarships, she had not even known her professors were part of a union, but once she discovered that, she was “impressed because I can fully trust them now.”

For Nattoina, the matter was moot. She explained that she had “never really thought about it before,” but contended that, “Who they are as people and their willingness to help me succeed in life probably has more to do with them” as teachers than unions do.

Hannah, on the other hand, thought that “Happy professors who enjoy their jobs and feel supported in all areas ... means that I will be a happy and productive student.”

Timothy also believes that if teachers “are in a happier, more comfortable environment to teach, then that will directly relate to a happier, more comfortable environment for students to learn.”

Applicants for the 2018 Richard Rosell and Rafael Rodriguez Memorial Scholarships will choose between two topics: “The Value of Unions in the Workplace” or “The Union’s Role in Current Social Justice Issues.”

The closing date for applications is March 30. Full details are at <http://researchguides.sunywcc.edu/unionscholarship>

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yet joined the union. Our message is simple. Whether junior or senior, fulltime or part-time faculty, we are all stronger together. We have one union for all faculty; teaching, counseling, librarian, and academic support. We all pay 1% of our gross pay to enable WCCFT to provide:

- Collective Bargaining for fair contracts
- Protection of members’ individual rights
- Equal Membership Rights for all faculty
- A Commitment that all future contract campaigns will fight to improve job security, pay rates, and the professional status of adjunct faculty.

Full contract details are at <http://www.sunywccft.org/2017/09/memorandum-of-agreement/>

Our membership campaign is working from the bottom up. Nearly thirty faculty, fulltime and adjunct, from departments across the College have begun providing information on how and why to join WCCFT and soliciting colleagues’ views on how the union can better serve all faculty.

We are finding many who are simply unclear about their status. To verify your membership, check your pay statement. A deduction labelled “Agency Fee” means you are NOT a member. You may also contact union secretary Rowan Lindley at [rowanlwccft@gmail.com](mailto:rowanlwccft@gmail.com). The membership enrollment form is available at <http://www.sunywccft.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/MEMBERSHIP-ENROLLMENT-FOR.pdf> and should be returned to WCCFT, TEC32, or scanned and emailed to Rowan.

# Message from the **President**

**Mel Bienenfeld**

What lessons can we draw from the West Virginia teachers strike? Most of the time, all of us are too busy getting by to think about what we can do to fix things -- even those things that make our individual lives more difficult.

At WCC, overworked department chairs and curriculum chairs, full-time faculty worried about promotions and rising healthcare costs, and underpaid adjunct faculty who may have no employer-paid health insurance at all, complain about their situations but have a hard time imagining any way to improve them.

There are times, however, when circumstances create the opportunity to do something. A contract campaign is one of those times (and, believe it or not, WCCFT is already working on our proposals to begin bargaining for a contract that should start on 9/1/18). It's not too early to consider our methods and tactics.

Sometimes things become so desperate that ordinary people take things into their own hands. After years of enduring salaries on which they could barely get by, and cut after cut in their health benefits, West Virginia teachers began meeting in their districts, using social media and whatever means of communication were at hand, with no central direction from union leaders or others. Over a period of months, some realized they were amassing the strength to unify teachers across the state. Eventually, the illegal strike and the teachers' inspiring show of strength at the State-

house led to one of the most important US labor movement victories in decades.

To see how ordinary, non-"expert" people did this, I recommend you look at this video of a panel of three West Virginia teacher leaders. Long, but worth your time: <https://www.facebook.com/jacobinmag/videos/2087299477963409/>

No, I am not saying we should go on strike! Public sector job actions are illegal for us as well. But the actions of union leaders, politicians, lawyers, etc., are never what wins real change. What does win is the collective power of people with common interests who can unite and are not afraid to take a stand. The courageous students at Douglas High in Florida discovered this, too, as their local efforts quickly turned into a national movement with the potential to make real change on gun safety after so many years of failure.

What WCCFT members do will not be the same as either the West Virginia teachers or the Parkland students. We will use our own creativity and intelligence to develop our own tactics. But I ask you to consider: are you willing to think differently about how you can participate in union activities and make this next contract one we can all be proud of?

Here's 16 seconds of inspiration: <https://www.facebook.com/jacobinmag/videos/2080325185327505/>

In solidarity, Mel

## WCCFT NEWS

**GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE** chair Jim Werner reports that WCCFT successfully defended members' rights in two recent cases. In one instance, a full-time faculty member was fired pursuant to an incident which took place at a location not on the main campus or any extension site, for actions which had nothing to do with instructional duties or the College. Arguing that there was no just cause for the firing, the Union was successful in reinstating the faculty member with full pay and benefits, as well as compensation for wages and benefits lost while the case was pending.

In the other case, a part-time faculty member at an extension site was removed from instructional duties because of a student allegation of inappropriate conduct during class. The instructor was represented by WCCFT during the ensuing investigation, which determined that the allegation was baseless. The instructor was returned to the classroom, and the language on due process in investigating such cases was significantly tightened.

WCCFT is committed to fighting for our members' rights. If you feel you have been treated unfairly or your contractual rights have been abridged, please contact Jim Werner at [jimwwccft@gmail.com](mailto:jimwwccft@gmail.com).

# TO THE EDITOR:

Growing up in a union household, I always felt that working men and women need a voice. In this day and age when corporations are clearly favored over working people, we need to ensure that our voices are unified. It is likely that the Supreme Court will soon vote against us in the Janus case and attempt to weaken our collective voice. They think that members of public employee unions will sacrifice long-term security for short-term savings on union dues.

Having taught at both union and non-union institutions, I can tell you that a union protects employees' rights and gives us greater stability.

As an adjunct instructor, I am already in a precarious semester-by-semester employment situation. Many times in a non-union institution, individuals get sacrificed for spurious reasons, to say the least. It is only through the union that we can ensure that the greatest number of us are protected.

Let me be clear. I do not fault institutions when I lose a course because enrollment is low or my schedule prevents me from teaching at a certain time. However, a union is the only way to ensure fair and consistent treatment of all faculty.

There are many other benefits that have been negotiated in our favor in the new WCCFT contract. We must ensure that going forward our rights are maintained. The only way to do this is to ensure the strength and survival of our union.

In short, my parents were union members, and I am a union member. As union membership declines throughout our country, we must make a last-stand effort to ensure the rights of all workers are maintained. Anecdotally, I know of family members who work for big corporations and are sent home if there is not enough work to do and are not paid for their time! I don't think it is hyperbole to say that this could happen to any of us.

Please think through what union membership means for you and your family. We need to ensure that we are treated fairly and compensated equitably. The union is the only way to accomplish this goal.

David Fritz (English)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS TEC 107

April 4, May 2

### EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

April 18, April 26

### NYSUT REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

April 27-28, 2018, Buffalo.

FT Connect strives to keep you informed about significant events affecting you as a WCC faculty member, to advocate for your rights, and to provide a forum for your views.

Please send your feedback, ideas for articles, or letters to [richardwccft@gmail.com](mailto:richardwccft@gmail.com).

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