



Connect

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERATION OF TEACHERS / Nº 15 / NOVEMBER 2019



Professional Staff Congress/CUNY demonstration on September 8, 2018.

UNITY AND SOLIDARITY: KEYS TO A STRONG UNION

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A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT

JIM WERNER



WCCFT President Jim Werner and Adjunct Representative Raji Karve at AFT Education Leadership Conference in October 2019.

UNITY is key to the power of any union. No matter how different our everyday experiences of our work environment may be, we must stand together. Our strength depends on our collective commitment to watch out for and fight for one another—especially for those whose labor, and concerns, might be less visible.

My last President's Message highlighted our diverse membership constituencies and their needs. Laura Milhaven's piece, "A Day in the Life of an Academic Counselor," drew attention to the critically important work performed—and the many challenges faced—by counseling faculty. Perhaps some readers were surprised to learn the depth and scope of their outstanding contributions to student success; we thought it was high time to spread the word about these deeply dedicated colleagues.

In this issue, I want to focus on another constituency: adjunct faculty. Campus Equity Week was observed at the very end of October, a reminder of the pivotal role part-time faculty play in the lives of our students and the struggles they face here and at higher educational institutions across the country. They make up the majority of faculty in our colleges and universities, yet they are

paid a mere fraction of what full-time faculty earn, and most receive no benefits at all. It is a burden borne by millions of workers nationwide, part and parcel of the increasing "gig economy" that keeps countless Americans in a state of perpetual upheaval, living paycheck to paycheck.

I recently travelled to Maryland to attend the American Federation of Teachers Higher Education Leadership Conference, "Navigating the Trump Years and Beyond." One lively, well-attended session discussed a recent AFT national survey of contingent faculty. The results were stark but—sadly—not surprising:

- Three out of four adjuncts who responded have no idea whether they will be employed by their institution beyond the current semester, a source of chronic uncertainty and anxiety.
- A full one-third of respondents indicated they earn less than \$25,000 per year; that's below the poverty line for a family of four.
- Many put off essential healthcare—skipping doctor visits, cutting doses of medication, postponing dental work—because they cannot afford it, and their employer provides no healthcare benefits.
- Almost two-thirds of them are 50 years old or older, but more than a third cannot imagine how they'll ever be able to retire.

Another panel featured faculty members from the City University of New York and University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Both spoke forcefully about dynamic campaigns to improve the conditions of adjunct faculty. The representative from CUNY's Professional Staff Congress described their multifaceted and highly visible drive for "7K" -- \$7000 minimum pay per three-credit course for adjuncts. We have just learned that a tentative deal has been reached that increases adjunct salaries to a maximum of \$6750 (and a minimum of \$5500) per three-credit course.

WCCFT can learn a lot from CUNY PSC about focusing attention on the value part-time faculty bring and the long-overdue changes they deserve in pay and working conditions. The contract campaign by LEO -- the (adjunct) lecturers' union at the University of Michigan -- likewise sparked ideas about how to build broad-based support for meaningful change (LEO won a 30% pay increase for adjuncts). Two additional sessions centered on

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how local unions can forge alliances and coalitions with other organizations to advocate for the kind of changes we in higher education want to see.

But the highlight of the conference for me was a moment at the end of a plenary address (via Skype) by AFT President Randi Weingarten. When she finished her speech and asked for questions, silence hung in the air for a few long moments; it seemed all were ready to move on to the breakout sessions. But just as Randi was getting ready to sign off, a hand went up. It belonged to Raji Karve, a WCC adjunct colleague who has taught Math and Biology for years and is now the elected adjunct representative on our WCCFT Executive Committee. Raji wanted to know what Randi would do to make life better for adjuncts, beyond simply seeking more equitable pay scales. Randi responded by offering a concrete next step: she introduced Raji to NYSUT staff who were sitting several rows in front of us and directed them to work with us to identify strategies for our statewide affiliate teachers' union to advocate for adjuncts not only at WCC, but across New York.

Here on our campus, we continue to ramp up our fight to make conditions better for adjuncts: insisting on more equitable pay, compensation for mandated trainings and other work done outside the classroom, accrual of sick days, and guaranteed pay for non-teaching adjuncts on weather closing days, among other negotiation items; greater involvement in the academic life of their departments and implementation of the observation pilot and

professional status provision from the 2017 MOA; and exploring the possibilities for a reappointment process and multi-semester teaching contracts. Outside of negotiations, we are also continuing our long-standing fight to have the College change its method of reporting adjunct teaching hours to the Teachers Retirement System, which would enable them to build their pension and vest at an earlier date. Raji and I have met with Associate Dean for Adjunct Services Hector Graciano, pressing him to make a comprehensive study of the space and facilities designated for adjunct use across campus, and investigate new ways to create professional development opportunities. I also attended the First Friday Adjunct Gathering on November 1 and met with the Faculty Senate's Ad Hoc Adjunct Issues Committee.

One final thing struck me about PSC-CUNY's highly successful campaign: its consistent message that this fight for adjunct rights came from a UNITED membership, with full support of both full-time and part-time faculty, under the banner "WE ARE CUNY." The gains they—and we—are fighting for speak to basic principles of fairness and equity, and none of our colleagues deserves any less. I'm encouraged by what I see happening at institutions like CUNY and University of Michigan, and confident that we can bring about the same kind of changes for our faculty here at WCC. They are LONG overdue indeed.

In solidarity,

Jim



JOHN TORRIERI RECEIVES OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

At the November 6 membership meeting, President Jim Werner presented the WCCFT Outstanding Service Award to John Torrieri, adjunct instructor of mathematics, noting that John's "depth of commitment and generosity of spirit have inspired and won the admiration of colleagues across the faculty." He further described John as "a driving force on the WCCFT Adjunct Committee, where he has been a key organizer of the monthly adjunct First Friday gatherings and a reliable volunteer who steps in when not many would."

"John has also been a stalwart on the Union-Administration committee addressing the TRS reporting problems since 2018. He spoke forcefully about this issue before the College's Board of Trustees last fall, then joined the latest version of the committee last spring. His keen intelligence, eye for detail, and dogged persistence were invaluable assets marshalled on our behalf as he worked with IT to identify the correct method of calculation, and to check over the trial runs for errors."

Jim added that "Prof. Torrieri has also served as adjunct representative on the Union's Executive Committee, providing useful analysis of the Janus decision's financial impact on the union budget. He brings together colleagues from among both adjuncts and full-timers with his calm and balanced approach to adjunct equity."

ADJUNCT COMMITTEE:

Raji Karve reports that successful "First Friday" gatherings for adjunct faculty were held on October 4 and November 1. The next takes place on Friday, December 6, at Valhalla Crossing from 6 to 9 pm. These gatherings are an opportunity to meet colleagues informally over snacks, hear occasional guest speakers, and get more information about the union and related matters. Several attendees have joined WCCFT or signed up for VOTE-COPE. At the November membership meeting, Adjunct Committee stalwart John Torrieri received this year's WCCFT Outstanding Service Award in recognition of his "tireless efforts on behalf of adjuncts."

CONSTITUTION/BY-LAWS COMMITTEE:

Joyce Cassidy reports that the committee has met and begun reviewing the 2004 WCCFT Constitution <http://www.sunywccft.org/2004/09/constitution-09232004/>. The four sections (out of eight) that will likely be the primary focus are Membership, Structure, Elections, and Amendments.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT FUND:

WCCFT provides professional development funds to both full-time and part-time faculty for activities conducted during each academic year. Applications for AY 2018-19 closed for full-timers on September 30 and for adjunct faculty on October 31. Rowan Lindley reports: "Adjuncts applied for 2018-19 reimbursement for a wide range of activities including: a research trip to Copenhagen for a book about comedy in film, participation in the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Albuquerque, a meeting of the Westchester Rockland Dietetic Association, a course on "Why Calories Count: From Science to Politics," a speech writers' conference in Washington DC, and an art/science conference called 'Consciousness Reframed' in Porto, Portugal." The full report on funds disbursed for 2018-19 may be read at <http://www.sunywccft.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Faculty-Development-Fund-Report-2018-19.pdf>

POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE:

Ellen Zendman reports: "The recent election cycle was a busy several months for our Westchester County Board of Legislators. Some legislators ran for office unopposed while others faced tight races. As previously reported, Jim Werner, Deirdre Verne, and I met in September with

several candidates who sought WCCFT endorsement. These interviews helped us understand the extent of their support for public education, labor rights, and our own union.

As a result of this process, WCCFT endorsed four candidates: Catherine Borgia, Terry Clements, Chris Johnson, and David Tubiolo. Each of these candidates received campaign donations from the NYSUT VOTE-COPE fund, and each of those we supported won! We are thrilled and look forward to working with them."

"In the future, we would like to be able to continue to support candidates in the political arena who share our values and support our union; however, we can only do this with your backing through VOTE-COPE. All VOTE-COPE funds are voluntary donations, completely separate from members' regular union dues.

The suggested VOTE-COPE donation is \$4 per pay period and requires completion of a payroll deduction authorization card that will be sent directly to NYSUT, which then informs the WCC payroll office. If you already are donating, we thank you. If not, please consider it. Every contribution makes a difference! In the Union office, TEC32, are Vote-Cope Contribution Cards that are easy to fill out. Please stop in to pick up a card."

SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE:

The Scholarship Committee needs your help! Due to budget cuts, we currently have \$500 in scholarship funds to award. We will be fundraising until the end of the fall semester in hopes of raising that amount to \$2000. An email with further details will be sent to all faculty after the Thanksgiving Holiday. In the meantime, donations in any amount can be forwarded to the union office (TEC32), and checks should be made out to WCCFT. If you have questions, please email robingwccft@gmail.com.

SICK LEAVE BANK:

Sick Leave Bank trustee Rowan Lindley reported at the November membership meeting that the balance as of 10/31/19 is 154 days. "Since that exceeds the required minimum balance of 150 days," Rowan explained, "it is probable that no additional donation from current members will be required this year." The full report may be read at: <http://www.sunywccft.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Sick-Bank-Report-2018-2019.pdf>

IN THE LIFE OF AN ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

Our “Day in the Life” series is intended to build solidarity throughout our ranks by sharing information about the day-to-day working lives and challenges of colleagues in the different constituencies that make up WCCFT. Our last issue described the work of academic counselors. Conveying the experiences of part-time teaching faculty is more difficult because they are such a large and diverse group. Some travel to WCC from full-time jobs in public schools or private businesses. Some work part-time by choice while focusing on their families, creative endeavors, or community service. Others struggle to support themselves through teaching at WCC and part-time employment elsewhere. Some are retired from various positions, including fulltime employment at WCC. We invited several dozen adjunct instructors from different departments and with a variety of employment situations and years of WCC service to contribute their thoughts. Fifteen wrote back, and this composite portrait of adjunct life is the result.

A common theme among our contributors is deep commitment to teaching and to enabling students to realize their full potential. **Jeannine Baart** says she is “passionate” about “exposing students to new ideas and information [from psychology], seeing them connect what I teach with their own lives.” Teaching geography is “a labor I love” for **Enid Lotstein**. English instructor **Kimberly Mallory** feels “a deep sense of accomplishment when a former student reaches out just to tell me how much of a difference I’ve made in his/her life.” **Diane Urban** has taught psychology since 1980. “Many students have kept in touch,” she reports, “so I know that at least two have gone on to earn PhDs in psychology, two have earned medical degrees, and many have earned advanced degrees in occupational therapy, physical therapy, nursing, and other fields. I have been proud to be a part of their educational journey.”

Some contributors cite the diversity of WCC’s student body as a particular source of satisfaction. “My students typically range in age from recent high school graduates to grandparents,” writes **Dawn Bartz**. “They bring a wide array of life experiences and goals. Many have lived in other countries and speak multiple languages.”

Sometimes the source of satisfaction is discipline-specific. Both Dawn and her fellow Speech Communications instructor, **Kevin McGill**, take pride in drawing out the shyest of their students, the ones who tell Dawn that “they ‘might have a heart attack’ when they have to get up in front of their classmates.” Kevin vividly recalls one student, “who was terrified of speaking in front of a crowd, as we all are at one time or another.” After the semester ended, he received an email from the student “to tell me that not only was she taking public speaking the following semester, but she was also considering eventually going to a four-year college and joining her local Toastmasters Group! She was also asked to do a speech/toast at her aunt’s wedding in addition to several presentations on her new job.”

Some adjuncts, like **Brian Monahan** (English) and **Claudia Jacques de Moraes Cardoso** (Art and Design), are WCC graduates. Some, like **Paul Donatich**, graduated from other community colleges. Brian recalls that “When I was 18, I came to WCC as a rudderless student. Here I discovered great teaching and saw how it could transform lives.” Paul sees himself in his students’ faces. “In 1990, at the age of twenty-seven with a wife and two young children and working full-time, I enrolled part-time in Nassau Community College without a clue of what I wanted to study. All I knew was that I wanted something better for myself and my family.... I decided to major in English and never looked back. Now at WCC, I am honored to give something back by sharing my love and knowledge of writing and literature.”

Some contributors describe their “typical day” as paradoxically combining the pleasures of teaching at the college level with the insecurity of life as an adjunct. “After teaching for four hours straight,” **Ellen Wasserman** leaves campus “exhausted, but exhilarated ... high on the satisfaction of having connected with so many students, and the feeling that I’ve

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helped them in some way." BUT "As I drive to the grocery store to buy provisions for the four adults living in my home, that wonderful feeling of accomplishment gives way to reality. How am I going to swing this again? The mortgage is due, the groceries are expensive, and I've got 80 essays to grade this weekend."

Alongside the problem of low wages is the problem of managing multiple places of employment. "A typical day in [Enid's] life involves driving all over Bronx and Westchester counties to teach at community colleges and to tutor secondary level students. It's far more effort and more taxing having 3 part-time jobs than 1 full-time job." For Claudia, "Teaching four 4-credit courses a semester at two different institutions, running my own business, consulting for other institutions, and pursuing my own artistic life leaves me very little time to savor the joy of being in the classroom."

Economic insecurity becomes especially acute at certain times of year. "Every December and May," writes Kimberly, "a sense of dread comes over me because I don't know how I'm going to continue putting food on the table. After December, we don't get paid again until February. My family members are in shock when I tell them that after May, I won't get paid again until September."

Exacerbating these challenges is the unpredictability of course assignments, even for senior adjuncts in some disciplines. **Eva Suchow** has taught health and fitness courses for 18 years but reports that "I was assigned 3 classes this semester and was bumped on Labor Day evening from a course that was to begin the next day after I had done all the work involved in setting it up." **Donna Castellano** derived "great satisfaction" from teaching medical billing and coding every semester for fifteen years and "took the initiative in 2011 to get certified as an online instructor." More recently, however, her program moved to another department, her classes were changed from online to hybrid, and she has "only been assigned two classes over the last eight semesters while all the junior faculty have been working steadily."

Some contributors echo the story of chemistry instructor **Joan Lederman**, who writes: "When I first started at WCC in 2002, I was just placed in a teaching position with no training or orientation on how things work. I had to ask a lot of questions. One glaring example is that adjuncts can contribute to a retirement system. Well, no one ever told me that." **Don Rittner** (anthropology) notes the absence of "a good faculty handbook for adjuncts. I had no idea that I could get free WCC courses and missed two years' worth. Not sure what else I am missing."

The comments quoted in this article are drawn from much longer statements written expressly for this article. If you would like to read those statements in their entirety, please follow this link: <http://www.sunywccft.org/category/a-day-in-the-life-of-an-adjunct-instructor/>

PLEASE SEE PRESIDENT'S NOTE ON PAGE SEVEN

Waiting for the Bus: Another Day in the Life

by Rajashree Karve

*I have been waiting at the stop,
Watching the buses go by,
Praying one of them is for me--
The bus to take me where I want to go.*

*I see one come by;
It looks half empty.
I take a step towards it,
But it just zooms by,
Leaving me still stranded.*

*Time can't be pushed or cajoled;
It is as slow as can be.*

*I see another bus approach,
Raising my hopes again
As it slows to a stop.
Nobody gets off, nobody gets on.
It leaves as full as it came.*

*Today feels like half-eaten ice pop
In someone else's hand
At the top of a hot high noon
When your throat is bone dry.*

*Taxis, Ubers, Lyft's go by;
Their wheels whirr noisily.*

*Time can't be pushed or cajoled;
It is as slow as can be.*

*For now I can do just this:
Quietly wait, patiently wait
For that darn bus to come.*

JOIN WCCFT!

SUPPORT YOUR FACULTY UNION

ENROLL ONLINE AT [HTTP://WWW.SUNYWCCFT.ORG/MEMBERSHIP-FORM/](http://www.sunywccft.org/membership-form/)

UNSURE OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP STATUS? CONTACT ROWANLWCCFT@GMAIL.COM

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

I'm deeply grateful to the adjunct colleagues who shared their experiences honestly and openly for Richard Courage's article, "A Day in the Life of an Adjunct Instructor." And I want them and all our readers to know that your Union has heard you, and we're working to make things better. Among other things, we are:

- Proposing in our contract negotiations a 2.5% salary increase across the board, along with an Adjunct Professionalism Stipend (over \$600 per course) to provide compensation for work outside the classroom;
- Proposing that the first installment of that stipend be paid to instructors BEFORE class cancellations on "Bloody Tuesday," to ensure that they receive some compensation for the work involved in planning a course, getting a Blackboard page set up for it, etc.—even if they are subsequently "bumped" by a more senior colleague;
- Proposing three sick/personal days for non-teaching adjuncts, and pay for weather closings;
- Proposing accumulation of up to three sick days for adjunct faculty;
- Working with our State affiliate NYSUT to arrange for the availability of financial advisers who can offer guidance to adjuncts in selecting a retirement plan when they are first hired at the College;
- Putting together a series of workshops on issues of concern and relevance to adjuncts, including course assignment under section 3.9 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, how to apply for unemployment if you ask for courses but are not assigned any, guidance on classroom observations, and discipline and the grievance process;
- Working with adjuncts and department chairs to finally implement the Adjunct Observation Pilot from the 2017 Memo of Agreement, which would pay some senior adjuncts to observe junior colleagues;
- Collaborating with Associate Dean of Adjunct Services Hector Graciano's office to survey adjunct facilities at the College, and expand Union presentations/materials for new adjunct faculty; and
- Exploring (with the Faculty Senate) the possibilities for an adjunct reappointment process that parallels the current one for full-time faculty, which could lead to longer-term contracts that connect to the ranks laid out in the Professional Status clause from the 2017 MOA.

I thank everyone who was involved in creating this article and telling our readership of the many joys, challenges, and tribulations of daily life as an adjunct instructor. The College owes its adjuncts a debt of deep gratitude for the terrific work they do on a daily basis—and the Union is working to make sure that debt is paid!

UPCOMING EVENTS

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS TEC 107

Dec. 4, 11am

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

Dec 5

FIRST FRIDAY ADJUNCT GATHERINGS

Dec 6, Valhalla Crossing 6-9pm

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.

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