



Connect

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERATION OF TEACHERS / Nº 19 / DECEMBER 2020

**IN UNCERTAIN TIMES,
YOUR UNION HAS
YOUR BACK!**



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA JACQUES

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A MESSAGE FROM WCCFT PRESIDENT

JIM WERNER



I hope this message finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy, as we enter the final few weeks of our Fall semester and a holiday season most of us could not have imagined just a few short months ago.

These days, it comes as no surprise if we find ourselves longing for the comfort, gratitude, and good cheer that usually accompany this time of year—while also feeling beset by uncertainties and unanswered questions about the pandemic, our economy, the state of higher education, and our College. As a WCCFT member, you don't have to face these uncertainties alone; we are all in this together. In times of trouble like these, you can find some solace in the strength that comes from that unity, and from knowing your Union is working hard on your behalf:

Protecting Jobs While Maintaining Member Safety: All signs continue to point to an extension of the current remote teaching arrangement into the Spring and Summer 2021 semesters. Your Union leadership has revised the current Remote Teaching MOA and submitted it to the College's senior administration; we hope to present it for ratification at our December membership meeting. Extending this MOA means our faculty (full-time and part-time) are in the best possible position to continue providing outstanding service to our students, without risking anyone's health or well-being.

Ensuring a Safe Workplace When We Return to Campus: By now you have all seen the College's mandatory COVID-19 testing plan for all students and employees currently accessing the campus. We've drafted an additional Memorandum of Understanding to address a number of issues not covered by this plan (e.g. testing at no cost to the employee during regularly scheduled work hours, ability to work remotely if testing positive, etc.). We have also reached out to all 32 faculty members (full-time and part-time) who will be affected by this through the Spring semester, to make sure the College's plan won't cause any substantial inconvenience or problem for them. And our Special Committee on Pandemic Response and Campus Re-entry continues to review the College's Pandemic Recovery Plan, to identify areas that need more clarity or stronger measures to protect our health and safety when we return to campus in greater numbers.

Fighting for Member Rights While Addressing Structural Challenges: We have been holding meetings with counselors, department chairs, and curriculum chairs regarding issues related to their work requirements. Many of these have emerged from the review of job descriptions mandated by our 2017 MOA, and from the ongoing work of the advisement redesign core group (where we were able to secure seats for the Union leadership, as well as an additional academic counselor spot). We will continue to work with these groups to resolve any and all contractual issues that arise.

Defending Contractual Health Benefits: As you know, the College has switched healthcare plans from UMR/Pomco to NYSHIP, effective January 1, 2021. If you have logged onto the NYSHIP site, or if you attended one of the informational webinars in November, you are probably aware that the NYSHIP Empire Plan lists copays for doctor visits and pharmacy charges that are substantially different from those we negotiated in our 2017 MOA. We have filed a grievance with the College administration on this issue. While we await the outcome, we urge you to keep careful records of all your health-related expenses, especially once we move to NYSHIP.

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GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE:

WCCFT Vice-President and Grievance Committee chair Deirdre Verne reports: "We are investigating the recent email from BenefitsInfo concerning NYSHIP copays. As many of our members have noted, the NYSHIP copays are higher than the copays negotiated in the collective bargaining agreement signed in 2017. We expect that this investigation will take time, and we ask that members save all receipts and records of payments for medical visits and prescriptions."

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT FUND:

Committee chair Rowan Lindley submits the final 2019-2020 Faculty Development Fund Report:

In the fall of 2019, the WCCFT Executive Committee authorized an additional application period for adjunct faculty in the spring semester. This was intended to encourage more part-time colleagues to apply for funds by enabling them to get reimbursement with a shorter waiting period.

Applications from adjunct faculty for activities during the period September 1, 2019, to February 28, 2020, were accepted during March 2020. The original deadline for such applications was March 31, but this was extended due to campus shutdown. Some faculty had to resubmit their applications electronically.

The total amount for professional development contractually allocated to WCCFT by the administration is currently \$35,000 per year. WCCFT has traditionally divided that sum into \$25,000 for full-time faculty, with a maximum of \$1,500 reimbursement per person, and \$10,000 for adjunct faculty with a maximum of \$750 per person.

In Spring 2020, there were seven approved applications from adjunct faculty members of the WCCFT totaling \$4,764.25.

In Fall 2020, there were 22 approved applications from full-time faculty members of the WCCFT totaling \$20,085.62. There were also six approved applications from adjunct faculty members of the WCCFT totaling \$1,874.00, bringing the total adjunct funding for both semesters to \$6,638.25.

Due to the pandemic, requests were lower than usual. Many conferences were canceled, or they were held online making them less expensive to attend. There is \$8,276.13 remaining of our annual \$35,000 allocation. We expect the same to happen this year as the pandemic continues. That means there will be an additional sum available for 2021-2022. The Faculty Development Committee recommended to the Executive Committee that we roll over the money until the pandemic ends and then consider raising the limit for each person. The Executive Committee voted to roll over the money to next year.

The Faculty Development Committee also recommended and the Executive Committee voted that the adjunct pilot be continued for at least two more years since it cannot be properly evaluated during the pandemic.

POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE:

At the October 22 meeting of SUNY community college local presidents, it was announced that for the second consecutive year, WCCFT has won the Lou Cammarosano Award for most VOTE/COPE contributions in 2019. President Jim Werner thanks "everyone who contributed and especially Ellen Zendman, who so ably chairs our Political Action Committee and leads our VOTE/COPE drives."

Ellen writes: "As the holiday season is upon us, I am hopeful that this long and difficult period will soon end. More than ever, we look to our family strengths to enable us to move forward. We have so many blessings to count, and this is the perfect time to commit to supporting VOTE/COPE, NYSUT'S nonpartisan political fundraising arm, which allows our voices to be heard as we navigate through uncertain times.

"As the world changes and we continue to face significant challenges in our own small community, your VOTE/COPE support through voluntary donations is not only appreciated, but absolutely necessary. Your ongoing contributions enable us to support local and state legislators who are pro public education and pro labor and have a commitment to the mission of our College."

To Contribute: please go to <http://wcc.votecope.org/> and complete and submit the form. If you have any questions, please contact Ellen Zendman at ellenzwccft@gmail.com.

SICK LEAVE BANK REPORT

2019-2020

NOVEMBER 4th, 2020

Balance as of 10/31/2019:

Balance

154 days

Days awarded to seriously sick members of the bank who have exhausted their own days:

For one person	-45 days	109 days
Six (6) new members (enrollment period Sept/Oct 2020)	+6 days	115 days

Current Balance (10/31/2020):

115 days

Since this is below our required balance of 150 days, an additional donation of one day per current member will be required this year. The new members will only donate the one day upon joining. This will give us an additional 191 days.

(New members donate one day upon joining. Then, days are only taken from members if the balance falls below 150 days due to days being awarded to sick members who have exhausted their own sick days.)

The bank has 185 current members and 6 new members, for a total of 191 members. There are 207 full time faculty members.

There is not enough data to know how often we might expect to donate to the bank. The sick bank trustees are collecting data so eventually we will have a better idea. Sick bank usage is very variable so the calculations below are only an approximation.

The last time days were donated due to the balance falling below 150 days was in 2016. Over the last 11 years, we have awarded approximately 42 days per year. With 191 members, this means we may donate about one day for each member every 4.5 years. During that time each person will have earned 45 sick days so we would be donating 1/45 th or about 2% of our days to the bank.

Rowan Lindley, Sheela Whelan, Janet Ranucci
Sick Leave Bank Trustees

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. This issue includes a letter from **Sheldon Malev and an opinion piece from **Scott Zaluda**. Please send your own feedback, ideas for articles, or letters to editor Richard A. Courage at richardcwccft@gmail.com.**

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

This is my 50th year at WCC. I have been here for half-a-century, although it does not seem like it to me.

When we lose track of time, it is often said it is “because we’re having so much fun,” and I have to admit that I have enjoyed most of my time here, where I have been deeply involved in teaching, departmental activity, and college-wide organizations such as the Faculty Senate and our union, the WCCFT.

I’ve always appreciated our beautiful campus, the collegiality among faculty, and our diverse student body, and so I remained somewhat oblivious to the accelerated passage of time. I suspect that many who are reading these words are reminded just how fast the semesters fly by; faster and faster with each successive academic year, and before we know it, we too are “graduating,” just as in our earlier years of education, to a newly beckoning chapter in our lives; **RETIREMENT**.

Just as we are now “active” full-time or adjunct faculty, we are destined to also be “retirees.” We are all “just passing through.”

We all will eventually face this reality, one which responsible people plan for in advance. However much some of us may have made retirement plans, in the form of annuities, pensions, or personal investments, or have considered our future health insurance options, additional considerations remain. Among them are the following:

1. Maintaining Friendships and Associations: In retirement, there is more time for reflection and communication. Retirees often want to maintain friendships and continue contact with former colleagues who are still working at WCC.

2. Sharing Information: Change is inevitable, and there will be ongoing changes at the college that may have consequences for retirees. Such changes could involve the cost of health insurance or terms of medical coverage, things that would normally be discussed at union meetings.

3. Communication between Retired and Active Faculty: Continuing faculty appreciate hearing from those who have retired, so that they can learn what and what not to expect, and how to prepare for it.

4. Unanticipated Events: What does this mean? Paradoxically, if it could be explained in advance, it wouldn’t be a consideration. There are always unexpected or unforeseen events that occur with consequences for retirees and those about to retire. The switch to remote teaching as a consequence of the COVID19 pandemic is just one example.

Therefore, I would like to propose that the WCCFT form a Retired Membership Committee to address the above-mentioned points and to act as a liaison between active and retired WCCFT members. Such a committee could also provide information from, for, and about one another, address pertinent questions, offer helpful advice, and build increased support for the active union organization from its retired members.

This Retired Membership Committee could take responsibility for a regular column in the union newsletter devoted to answering questions from and providing information to retirees and those considering retirement in the near future. The column might also include a Social Chat section to inform active union members about events and life-experiences of their friends and colleagues of many years, who have since retired.

The purpose of this Letter to the Editor is to elicit discussion about my proposals for a retirement-focused WCCFT committee and a regular newsletter column. I have made similar proposals at membership meetings, and I am now asking for feedback from fellow members who will, sooner or later, be retirees. I would like to know just how much support there is for these two ideas.

Most of all, I would like to know who would volunteer to serve on a Retired Membership Committee, who would be willing to serve as its chair or co-chair, and who would be willing to write this monthly newsletter column. Please send me your thoughts and tell me whether you would be willing to volunteer in some capacity. Thank you.

In solidarity,

Sheldon Malev
Professor of Psychology

by Scott Zaluda

Reappointment, Tenure & Promotion: A Call to Adopt Better (No, Best!) Practices

As my department's DC chair, I've recently steered my full-time colleagues through the first stage of reappointment for three non-tenured faculty members. In the wake of that effort, I want to say what I've thought and said many times before: something is terribly wrong with the way we do reappointment, tenure, and promotion. I think what's most wrong is this: our objectives are narrow. Second most wrong: our objectives are largely unarticulated. Third most wrong: we get little if any benefit for the enormous efforts we put in—we candidates and we faculty committee members. I can't see how they, administrators, benefit either, or how our students do.

First, a couple of personal anecdotes.

In October 2018, after multiple attempts, I finally received notification that I had been promoted to full professor (though the president delayed rank and salary elevation until September of the following year). Of course, I was happy to finally achieve the promotion. But I still can't say why I got it when I did or why I didn't get it on prior occasions. I can't say either that I knew then or know now precisely how these decisions are made. Possibly the closest I got to understanding was when, during my final attempt at promotion, an administrator told me that I hadn't been working hard enough lately. My PIF, my portfolio, and my Chancellor's awards clearly spoke to long-term industriousness, and I was promoted subsequently. But had that administrator given away a secret? **Work hard, work very hard!** Second. As I said, I happen to be the current chair of my Departmental Committee. My sympathies go out to all DC and CC members who have had to cope with reappointment and promotion during the pandemic. Hunkered down in our individual homes, a massive amount of emailing went back and forth among members of my department in an effort to work with a new system of e-portfolios to which, incidentally, DC's do not have access. To take one example, numerous messages circulated among candidates, members of my DC, and the CC

chair that were focused on the question of what constituted a valid remote signature and how to produce one. This was a technological challenge that I am delighted to say I think we finally overcame.

But I am not delighted to say that we spent far more time deliberating about the technological requirements of remote signatures than we did in deliberation about any single candidates' teaching, service, and professional growth. My department is rightly proud of our excellent non-tenured faculty members. Our DC met in Zoom to quote from sterling classroom visitation reports and reiterate impressive lists of service activities, justifying an assumed consensus about the definitions of good teaching and valuable service. In the end, though, we knew what required the most attention: getting acceptable remote signatures onto our letters to avoid candidate disqualification. Indeed, from the start, our DC knew what was most important: doing everything the way we always have.

I know I'm not alone in scorning our reappointment, tenure, and promotion practices. I also know that many colleagues across the curriculum have asked (or have given up asking) why the college sustains practices that so many disparage. I suppose that's a complicated question. Here are my own speculations. I don't expect others to share them. Like everything, it starts in the past. We had a long-time chief administrator who did not believe in shared governance. We had a faculty that seemed, for the most part, to share his views—or if not to share them exactly, to see no use in trying to change them, even, in some cases, to fear advocating change. I also believe that over time, an insular campus culture developed that saw itself as exceptional and, therefore, not in need of modification.

Is WCC's culture any different today? It's true that many new faculty have fairly recently come to us from other

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article focuses on personnel policies for full-time faculty, asserting that they should be improved. Although this article does not discuss them, personnel policies for part-time faculty are also greatly in need of improvement.

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schools, other regions, sharing ways of seeing and thinking that cannot help but enrich and renew WCC. Our current chief administrator, also relatively new to the college, claims to be an enthusiast for innovation. For example, she has introduced initiatives aligning WCC with student-success enterprises developed and, in some cases, sold by Ed.D graduate programs, community college institutes, and educational think tanks. I assume that when she arrived here Dr. Miles hoped to nudge us out of our long-nurtured conservatism. Alluding to WCC's response to the pandemic, one of her recent Friday afternoon messages praises the collective college for having "learned in recent months that rigid structures and adherence to static policy and past precedence are no longer optimal.... Each day we are witnessing our transformation into a dynamic, agile organization." She goes on:

Collectively, we are already engaged in the key principles of agile organizations. We are adapting processes; continuously learning; engaging next generation technology; working in smaller, cross-institutional, and highly networked teams; and holding true to our "north star" strategy of uncompromising focus on helping our students.

If any component of our organization fits the bill for rigid structures and static policies and past precedents that are no longer optimal, if ever they were, that would be our faculty personnel policies. In the inspirational words of our president, if we are serious about "holding true" to an "uncompromising focus on helping our students," it is well past time for WCC to transform those policies. Such a transformation should start, I believe, by articulating specific objectives for faculty development and faculty assessment that complement and strengthen the goal of helping our students.

Failing to articulate objectives for the careers of its faculty holds the college back from being the dynamic and agile organization our president claims we are. It cannot possibly help students when their teachers' work is assessed arbitrarily (at least seemingly so since there's so little transparency involved) rather than consistent with a published set of expectations reflecting the college's mission.

Our insularity, that culture dedicated to preserving the WCC-way-of-doing-things, has over the past few years been disrupted somewhat by a variety of initiatives fo-

cused on student success. Among initiatives that our administrators have promoted are some developed within units of the City University of New York. In fact, our own homegrown "First-Year Experience" initiative back in 2009-10 was triggered initially by site visits some faculty and administrators made to LaGuardia and Kingsborough Community Colleges and later by news reports concerning CUNY's "New Community College," later to be renamed Guttman Community College. More recently, certain of our efforts to help students succeed have been stimulated by dialogue with Guttman faculty and administrators. Guttman, LaGuardia, and Kingsborough are among the CUNY two-year colleges that have led the nation in educational innovation.

I am not going to argue that WCC should simply reproduce CUNY's faculty development and assessment practices. Again, I am arguing for clear and transparent objectives and practices that correspond to WCC's "uncompromising focus on helping our students."

Try this: type "reappointment" into the search box for WCC's website. This is what comes up: "Sorry, but you are looking for something that isn't here." No kidding! Now, search the same word on the Guttman CC website. Here is a brief excerpt from a much fuller page:

Guttman Community College seeks to identify and develop exemplary faculty who in their professional activities, accomplishments and practices, work to support student academic success, degree completion and a promising start towards a baccalaureate degree or a career.... [T]he College seeks to be an innovative laboratory which enhances teaching and learning through active pedagogical strategies that are sensitive and relevant to the culturally, academically, linguistically and economically diverse communities it serves. This work is continuous and ongoing, and relies on strong systems of development, practice, feedback and refinement.

Guttman's transparency about the relationship between its faculty's development and the college's overall mission is illuminated further along the page by a description of reappointment practices. A few of those sound similar to our own. But instead of making lists on a personal information form like we do, each year Guttman's junior

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faculty produce “narrative reflections” that “describe and reflect on patterns of achievement and growth” aligned with the college’s goals. To repeat, unlike our own procedures, Guttman’s have a transparent purpose: to support the college’s mission.

<https://guttman.cuny.edu/academics/faculty-resources/reappointment-promotion-tenure-rpt/#1531840461419-9e90e13c-f91f>

Lacking transparency, at WCC we are left to guess the objectives of our own reappointment and promotion practices. For example, what objectives might be inferred from the practice of requiring 20 classroom observations during the first five years of full-time faculty service, 10 of those observations to be done by the same two people, the department chair and associate dean?

What specific objective is achieved by such an extravagant regimen of classroom observations? Of course, to answer that question, one would have to also take into account our standard classroom visitation report form—what we are looking for, in other words, when we observe a colleague teaching. The standard report is made up of a set of assumptions about ideal pedagogy and the nature of student learning. If it even exists, who has ever seen the professional literature about best teaching methods from which those assumptions were drawn? We tell our junior faculty that a dean, a chair, and two senior colleagues are going to observe them as teachers four times during their first year and four times every year thereafter until they are tenured, but we do not, and apparently cannot, provide any kind of document explaining the college’s philosophy of effective teaching and learning.

Nor can we explain the purpose of doing a total of 20 observations over five years with additional groups of four to come when faculty members aspire to higher ranks. Why 20? Why four per year? Why not one per year? How many observations does it take to verify a teacher’s abilities? Why any observations? Shouldn’t we be asking what those think tanks, Ed.D programs, and community college institutes are saying these days about new faculty success? We ask that question regularly about student success.

Looking beyond the WCC way of doing things, I was surprised to run across a 2004 report by the “SUNY Pro-

vost’s Advisory Task Force on Faculty Development.” The 50-page document juxtaposed ongoing SUNY campus practices with recognized “best practices,” concluding with 19 recommendations. Three of those particularly stood out for me because they had been on my own wish-list for quite some time and in a variety of forums had been brushed off when I proposed them.

- Establish clear institutional expectations, definitions, and incentives for faculty service, especially at institutions in which this activity plays a significant role in faculty personnel decisions.
- Provide periodic follow-up sessions on the reappointment, promotion and tenure process on a regular basis, especially for more junior faculty members and make every effort to provide them with the necessary tools and resources for professional success.
- Establish a peer mentoring culture to ensure that every junior faculty member has an informal, easily accessible and confidential advisor/counselor.

<https://system.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/faculty-senate/FacultyDevelopmentReport.pdf>

Possibly someone on campus remembers the report. In any case, might it not be a place to begin? Might we not juxtapose our own university’s 2004 recommendations with more recent statements of best practices and see what comes up? And isn’t this the right time to do that? Taking the president at her word, we now have an administration committed to the notion “that rigid structures and adherence to static policy and past precedence are no longer optimal”—presumably, not merely in the context of a pandemic. I assume that our current administration would support a philosophy of faculty professionalism that would mark this college, like Guttman, as “an innovative laboratory.”

With or without direct encouragement from Hartford Hall, we can decide to stop right now being complacent about our longstanding, irrelevant customs. Our faculty leaders, both union and senate, can and should make it their priority to advocate strongly for faculty personnel policies designed to help the college more fully achieve the goal of elevating its students’ educational and career success by means of helping its faculty to thrive.

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT JIM WERNER

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In times of uncertainty, it's a great comfort to know that we are not alone—and that our Union has our back (a message that's spreading nationwide: the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions reports almost 120 new labor union locals representing more than 36,000 faculty were created over the last seven years). With the debilitating sense of isolation accompanying this pandemic, such community has become more precious than ever. We need to remember this strength, and draw on the most important resource we have-- each other—to fight that

feeling of loneliness and powerlessness, even in small, everyday ways. If you're feeling overwhelmed, don't hesitate to reach out to a colleague and ask for help... or offer it to someone else in need.

There are glimmers of hope on the horizon. This may very well be the dawn we've all been waiting for, an end to this long darkness. So stay strong, stay positive, and stay safe. We will get through this, and see the return of happy holidays, together.

In solidarity,
Jim

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](mailto:rowanlwccft@gmail.com)

UPCOMING EVENTS

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS ZOOM

December 2, 11am-12:45pm

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

December 3

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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2020-2021

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