



# Connect

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERATION OF TEACHERS / Nº 2 / MARCH 2017



**NO** CONFIDENCE IN ADMIN  
SHARED GOVERNANCE  
CONTRACTS

## THE **REAL** STATE OF THE COLLEGE

Although President Belinda Miles acknowledged "the people who make WCC thrive," including faculty and staff, very few of us were present to hear her February 17 State of the College Address. Evidently, WCC employees have decided that the story emanating from Hartford Hall does not reflect our experience

in an increasingly untenable work environment, where shared governance, respectful treatment, and fair remuneration have all but disappeared. Commenting on the plans of staff and faculty to boycott the event, WCCFT President Mel Bienenfeld stated: "We have no reason to expect that Dr. Miles' speech will have much to do with the

real 'State of the College.' The boycott is a statement to the public that this speech means little to us."

One particular source of discontent has been the two-year--ostensibly "Interim"--reign of Vice President of Academic Affairs Peggy Bradford. On February 8, the Faculty Senate met in closed session to discuss operations



# THE REAL STATE OF THE COLLEGE

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in Academic Affairs. Free of Administration scrutiny, faculty representatives frankly described a wide range of problems, including:

- » radical restructuring of Academic Affairs without a clear rationale, authentic consultation with faculty, or adequate follow-up;
- » breakdown of communications between Administration and faculty;
- » opaque and seemingly arbitrary criteria for reappointment and promotion and personnel decisions unaffected by faculty recommendations;
- » inconsistent, sometimes incoherent, management of class scheduling and cancellations.

One senator pointedly summed up the discussion: "If we can't have inspiring leadership, could we at least have competent management?"

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That unprecedented closed meeting was followed on February 22 by a public Senate meeting that considered a Resolution of No Confidence in Vice President Bradford. Presiding Officer Heather Ostman reminded the audience of how persistently Senate leaders had communicated faculty concerns to the Vice President and President. "Yet little has significantly changed."

Tension was palpable as President Miles appeared briefly and urged senators to withdraw the motion. Nevertheless, the resolution was presented, debated, and approved. Senate Secretary Chad Thompson described its goal as "a stable, respectful working environment that values academics and professionalism, ... [and] shared governance."

The No Confidence resolution passed by a large margin (76% in favor). One senior professor commented: "This is the first time in more than two years that I feel I have a voice. This faculty has lost its voice, not for want of speaking, but for want of being heard."

## WCCFT NEWS

**SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE** chair Joanna Peters announced: "WCCFT has established FOUR \$1,500 scholarships to be awarded to three continuing students and one graduating student. The scholarships are given in memory of Professors Richard Rosell and Rafael Rodriguez. The deadline for submission is March 31." Further information is available at <http://researchguides.sunywcc.edu/union-scholarship>.



SENATORS COUNTING BALLOTS

The following day, Staff Council considered a similar resolution and approved it with 80% in favor. That resolution cited "drastic change with inadequate management, failure to communicate properly, clouded policies.... unmanageable workloads," adding "Staff feel they've had their suggestions stifled and had ideas pushed aside during key decision making processes."

Two votes of No Confidence in two days despite the direct intervention of the president -- clearly something is changing. Administration's story is unraveling at the seams. Heather Ostman noted at the Senate meeting that "While the easy narrative is to claim that the faculty are angry about not having a contract, this narrative does not fit today's concerns." From the union perspective, we would add that six years without a pay raise, disrespectful treatment at the bargaining table, Administration's intransigence on improving working conditions for adjunct colleagues COMBINED WITH absence of shared governance, institutional instability, and incompetent management in Academic Affairs do indeed fuel the anger of faculty and staff.

In her weekly message on February 24, President Miles commented on the No Confidence Resolutions: "the person targeted -- the interim vice president of academic affairs -- was not responsible for many of the items noted." If this is true, we are forced to ask: WHO exactly is responsible?



# Message from the President

Mel Bienenfeld

As WCCFT President, I'm usually one of the first people informed when colleagues experience changes in working conditions that they consider unfair, detrimental to students, and/or in violation of the collective bargaining agreement. Unfortunately, such occurrences have become far too common as the Miles Administration implements its agenda, often without any prior faculty knowledge, consultation, or input.

Sometimes WCCFT members hesitate to speak up about such problems, fearing retribution by Administration, but recent developments show that this wall of fear has begun to crack. Public attention to the results of last spring's anonymous "Great Colleges to Work For" survey (including Viking News coverage and an article in the February issue of Westchester Psychologist) provides encouragement to those willing to stand up and speak out. The successful faculty/staff boycott of the President's State of the College Address shows that even our absence can have a powerful impact. Finally, the closed meeting of Faculty Senate, followed by passage of two resolutions of No Confidence, suggests that the discontent of faculty and staff is boiling over into increasingly assertive action.

Black History and Women's History months serve to remind us that many leaders of those movements recognized the labor movement as a partner in the fight for social justice. They also remind us that fulltime college professors – especially straight white male professors like myself – have a relatively privileged position in the workforce. Nevertheless, we too face challenges in the workplace and need to learn to pull together and fight to improve things for ourselves and our students. In doing so, we do not just pursue self-interest; we create better teaching and learning conditions for those who succeed us in the coming months and years. For that, we should feel proud!

In solidarity, Mel

## CONTRACT CORNER

Judy Langer, Vice-President

**NEGOTIATIONS?** I am not usually at a loss for words, but this time I am at a loss for different words. We are working as hard as we can and making progress down this long road, but it is inch by painful inch! Five full-team negotiation sessions were scheduled in January and February, and I held additional one-on-one meetings with the College's lead negotiator. There is light at the end of this tunnel. Hang in there.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Since we do not yet have a new contract, I will continue to highlight issues from our current contract.

**Overload and Adjunct Payroll:** Your pay rate is determined by the number of semesters that you have taught. In the case of fulltime faculty, if 1/1000 of your salary is greater than the pay rate by semesters, you will get the pay rate closest to that fraction of your salary.

Please note that the summer is always counted as one semester even though you may have taught multiple courses and/or multiple sessions. The winter session also counts as one semester. Now that the College is offering 7.5 week sessions, how those will count has not yet been determined.

## UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR ADJUNCT FACULTY?

For many adjuncts, summer is a time of heightened financial insecurity. Courses are few and far between and often assigned to fulltimers. With support from state and national teachers organizations, however, adjuncts without summer course assignments have been increasingly successful in securing Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits.

Adjuncts who are unemployed between semesters may file UI claims with the NY State Department of Labor:

[https://labor.ny.gov/ui/how\\_to\\_file\\_claim.shtm](https://labor.ny.gov/ui/how_to_file_claim.shtm)

Each claim is individually reviewed to determine eligibility. Some are approved immediately. If denied, the applicant has the right to a hearing before an administrative law judge. The college employer may also opt to appeal when a part-time instructor is awarded UI.

"Many adjuncts have a good chance to win at a hearing," emphasized Jon Bloom of the Workers Defense League, a Manhattan-based workers rights organization specializing in UI. "The word should get out to adjuncts that they may be entitled to benefits." Advocates for adjuncts' rights argue that they are like workers in theater arts, construction, or seasonal resort industries, who can collect UI benefits during periods when they are without work.

Determination of eligibility often turns on whether the "tentative teaching agreement" adjuncts receive at semester's end meets the legal standard for "reasonable assurance of performing services in a similar capacity" the following semester. Hearing judges, described by Bloom as "generally fair-minded," often find for the applicants. In the recently concluded case of a WCC adjunct, the judge reviewed the circumstances of semester-to-semester rehiring, including cancellations and bumping rights and determined that this did not constitute "reasonable assurance." The claimant's benefits were restored.

Legal precedents, guidelines, and practices differ from state to state. In California, for example, the 1989 Cervisi decision has made it quite common for adjuncts without teaching assignments to collect UI benefits over the summer. Faculty handbooks in that state frequently contain helpful information about filing.



Our friend, colleague, and union brother Rafael Rodriguez passed on Sunday, January 22, at the tragically young age of 49. He had long served WCC students as an academic counselor and, since 2007, served his colleagues as a WCCFT leader. We paused at the February 1 meeting to pay him tribute.

Don Weigand, former Vice President of Student Affairs, informed members that "Rafael had been an EOP student at SUNY Binghamton, where he earned both his bachelors and masters degrees. He also worked at SUNY Potsdam and Binghamton prior to being hired by Dr.

Hankin some 15 years ago." He added that "Rafael was responsible for building out all the academic programs in PeopleSoft when the college made the transition from the previous system. He took on the major responsibility for producing the Advisement Guide, which would later serve as the model for today's electronic version, Degree Works."

Fellow counselors Robin Graff and Ellen Zendman remembered Rafael as "a loyal and trusted friend who always had



## IN MEMORY OF RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ 1967 - 2017

our back and was always the 'go to' person." They added that "His daughter, Briana, was the love of his life."

Lynette DeBellis, who preceded Rafael as WCCFT secretary, described him as "a kind, generous and extremely supportive individual. As both a union leader and a counselor, his giving, friendly personality was infectious to everyone he encountered." President Mel Bienenfeld noted that "Rafael was devoted to his work as union secretary. His conscientiousness was only exceeded by, if anything, his willingness to work hard and go the extra mile."

Former Executive Board member Scott Zaluda writes: "You always felt things would work out when Rafael was around. He was not just a big guy. He was a strong and reassuring presence. He took seriously the trust we've all been given to educate and guide our students toward the best lives they can have, so it made him angry when those in power did self-serving things that could be of no use to the students. For Rafael, it always came down to the students."

The WCCFT Executive Board authorized a contribution and encourages members to donate individually to the Education Fund established for Rafael's daughter Briana and administered by Wanda M. Rodriguez, 111 Admiral Lane, Bronx, NY 10473 (917-548-4543). We have also named one of the union scholarships in his memory.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS TEC 107

March 1, April 5, May 3

### EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

March 9 & 29, April 6 & 19

### NYSUT HIGHER ED. LOBBY DAY

Albany, March 2

### NEA HIGHER ED. CONFERENCE

Dallas, March 17-19

### NYSUT REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

New York Hilton, April 7-8

### AFT HIGHER ED. CONFERENCE

Detroit, April 28-30

## 2016-2017

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