



Connect

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERATION OF TEACHERS / Nº 3 / APRIL 2017



**PROUD TO TEACH
PROUD TO BE UNION**

THE FACULTY SPEAK

One of the goals of FT Connect is to provide a forum for faculty views. By publishing a letter from Scott Zaluda and a feature article by Patti Sehulster, we take a step in that direction. Patti's piece, in turn, showcases the views and voices of full-time and adjunct colleagues from several departments. Further insight into what our colleagues are thinking may be gleaned from the WCC Employee Comments Report of the 2016 "Great Colleges to Work For Survey"—now available at www.sunywccft.org. In addition to numerical scores, most of the 73 full-time and 15 adjunct faculty respondents opted to

write individual comments about what they "appreciate most about working at [WCC]" and about "what would make this institution a better place."

These frank and unscripted comments support our contention that, despite the ongoing crisis in senior leadership and our anger at the lack of respect and fair treatment, WCC faculty remain deeply committed to and proud of our students' successes in academics and life, our role in supporting those successes, and our professional contributions on and off campus.

A PROUD "COLLECTIVE BODY"

BY PATTI SEHULSTER

We have heard a lot lately about the startling downward shift in the WCC results in the Chronicle of Higher Education's "Great Colleges to Work For Survey."* That our results have plummeted so far in just three years concerns all of us. Yet, amid those falling numbers that demonstrate rising dissatisfaction with many elements of the College, two categories remain consistently rather high: pride in work and pride in professional development. As a faculty, we do have a strong sense of satisfaction about what we do. We asked a variety of our colleagues what exactly they take **pride in**, and they offered the following replies.

"To be a part of the diverse community that is WCC; to teach, tutor, and mentor students from all walks of life, age, and ethnic and language backgrounds and be part of a faculty of talented, knowledgeable, accomplished, active, committed educators."

Ellen Wasserman (English)

That teaching here "enables me to know students individually so that they become my teachers."

Heather Ostman (English)

"I can feel proud of the positive impact I can have on individual students. Nothing is more rewarding than hearing back from students about how a class they took with me made a significant difference in their lives -- whether it was by showing them how to think in different ways, motivating them to continue their studies, or inspiring them to change some personal aspect of their lives for the better."

Kamil Hamaoui (Psychology)

"Writing a letter of recommendation for a non-U.S. citizen student for an ultimately successful scholarship application."

Stephen Sewell (Art)

"That all of the library resources and services can improve students' information literacy skills, a critical literacy for the 21st century and for the realization of many personal, academic, and professional goals."

Beth Seelick (Library)

When we asked, **"What makes you proud of our union?"**, they provided the following comments.

"It is engaged and committed to the College."

Heather Ostman

WCCFT strives to "ensure fairness for faculty and staff. I trust the integrity of the union to work for the most positive environment possible for students, staff, and faculty."

Ellen Wasserman:

It works "as a collective body to preserve and promote teaching as a 'profession' and the College as an 'academic' institution. Teaching is more than a job. It's a vocation. We are called to share knowledge, guide learning, and seek truth and to contribute to the good of society through the mission of education."

Kamil Hamaoui

Inclusion of adjunct faculty is "a welcome opportunity, particularly because it means I get to be a voice in shaping the language and substance of future contracts. The contingent faculty, a stratified and alienated workforce, seeks equilibrium and must turn to organized labor as a way of securing stability for themselves. Those involved in the union have nothing to lose and much to gain."

Stephen Sewell

"The union works hard to ensure that our compensation and benefits reflect the cost of living in Westchester County and are commensurate with faculty salaries at comparable institutions."

Deirdre Verne (Business)

At WCC, we have already consistently gained a deep sense of pride in our work. As proud union members, too, we continue to strive for that ability to maintain the joy we take in that endeavor and to do so while moving back into the realm of great colleges for which to work.

* See the 2010, 2013 and 2016 results of the "Great Colleges to Work For Survey" at <http://www.sunywccft.org>.

Message from the President

Mel Bienenfeld

Hardly a week goes by in which Administration does not announce another new initiative. In late March, it was the Institutional Change Assessment Tool of the Achieving the Dream program. No doubt, many of these initiatives incorporate valuable research insights, but they are uniformly introduced without significant prior consultation with faculty, with little or no solicitation of our opinions, and with little discussion of the changes in our work lives that might be necessary to test their effectiveness.

If Administration truly respected faculty dedication and expertise, it would not introduce major changes this way. In her Friday messages, Dr. Miles sometimes praises individual faculty accomplishments. But until she routinely solicits and seriously considers our ideas on academic improvement before announcing her own, we have to assume that by and large she considers us an inconvenient obstacle to implementation of her largely hidden agenda.

We have dedicated our careers to supporting student success. We do not shrink from the hard work or the willingness to embrace innovation that this demands. Our students know this, and we feel their appreciation every day in our classrooms. Someday, perhaps, we will feel similar appreciation from Administration.

In solidarity, Mel

CONTRACT CORNER

Judy Langer, Vice-President

NEGOTIATIONS? It wasn't always like this.... Once in the 1990s, we were almost three years without a contract. "OUTRAGEOUS!" we all thought and wore big buttons that read "999" to signify the nearly one thousand days elapsed without a new contract or pay raise. Can you imagine if we counted the days this time? Those buttons would need to be gigantic!

Our current contract is what it is because of the hard work, collective strength, and determination of faculty who came before us. They demanded respect and fair treatment and were not afraid to fight for it. The union once hired a skywriting plane to fly over our outdoor, on-campus graduation ceremony with the message: "WE WANT A FAIR CONTRACT NOW!" We had strong support from grateful students and their parents. At another time, faculty demonstrated en masse, marching behind a casket that bore a sign asking "Is Collective Bargaining Dead?". We were truly a union family.

We continue to work as the dedicated professionals that we are. How long will it take the Miles Administration to recognize that? Faculty Appreciation Week produced coffee and donuts. If we were truly appreciated, it should have produced a fair contract!

DID YOU KNOW? Full-time members of the bargaining unit and their immediate families can receive tuition waivers for courses taken at the college. This does not include fees or other costs- just tuition. Senior adjuncts have the same benefit but are limited to eight credits per semester.



WCCFT NEWS

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WCCFT secretary Rowan Lindley announced that faculty development forms will be available on September 1. Full-timers may apply for up to \$1500 reimbursement for a maximum of four professional activities between September 1, 2016, and August 31, 2017.

Adjunct faculty who have completed at least six semesters may apply for up to \$750 for a maximum of two professional activities. This may include \$50 paid for participation in one CTS workshop.

Applicants must submit all receipts, and adjuncts must also verify WCC employment history through the pertinent School Dean.

TO THE EDITOR

When, in her letter to the Faculty Senate, Dr. Miles questions the vote of no confidence as being "primarily about actions and situations not necessarily about or caused by the interim vice president," I think she has a point. As FT Connect noted in its March issue ("The Real State of the College"), Dr. Miles' criticism of the vote begs the question of **WHO EXACTLY IS RESPONSIBLE** for actions taken by Academic Affairs.

Prior to the no-confidence vote, my department's senators invited our comments. I said at the time what I will say again now: it's obvious that responsibility lies with the president of the college.

Dr. Bradford was hired by Dr. Miles without a proper search, to fill an interim position that in spite of regular complaints has gone on for quite some time. Whatever anyone thinks of Dr. Bradford's performance in her position, she carried out her responsibilities with the support and confidence of the president. It was not Dr. Bradford who decided not to replace Dr. Bradford after a thorough, time-consuming, and expensive search. That was Dr. Miles' decision.

Indeed, Dr. Miles might very well feel relieved by the Senate's resolution on Dr. Bradford. Had there been a vote of no confidence in the person Dr. Bradford reports to, the Senate would have made a more pertinent statement of the problem.

Scott Zaluda

APPLYING FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

A number of adjunct colleagues have received unemployment insurance (UI) benefits for time periods (usually summer) in which they were unable to secure teaching assignments. UI claims may be filed with the NY Department of Labor (DoL) at: https://labor.ny.gov/ui/how_to_file_claim.shtm

Applicants must provide complete and accurate information and supporting documentation. The DoL site includes filing instructions and FAQs. Additionally, former adjunct committee chair Donna DeCosa offered guidance based on members' experiences.

1 Applicants have the option of printing their completed online forms, a step which is actually quite important. Donna reports: "Once completed, we found that you cannot retrieve your application again, even just to view it online."

2 "The most difficult part" is that the form has only one answer box / drop-down menu to indicate the place of employment. "As we know," writes Donna, "many adjuncts teach at multiple colleges." The way colleagues fully informed DoL of their employment history was to include in the supporting documentation "ALL pay-stubs and 1099s and an additional letter specifying ALL employers."

3 The DoL form does not differentiate between public school employees who have secure positions but work on nine-month contracts and adjunct college faculty. "We believe that the form's reference to 'a regularly scheduled break of work' describes the situation of many public school employees, but not contingent college faculty." Increasingly, this position has been upheld by DoL administrative law judges.

4 Donna reports that "We understand that we should list 'Lack of work' as the reason we are claiming benefits. We also understand that a Tentative Teaching Agreement is not really a GUARANTEE of future employment. DoL is grayish in this area." Increasingly, however, judges hearing contested UI claims have ruled in favor of adjuncts who "explain that employment is not guaranteed from semester to semester. Any offer of work is subject to budget, enrollment, class / program offerings, 'bumping' rights, and seniority."

Donna also underscored the importance of applying for UI benefits immediately after the semester ends and the period of unemployment begins. Further information: Workers Defense League (212 627 1931) and the WCCFT office.

"The contingent faculty, a stratified and alienated workforce, ... must turn to organized labor as a way of securing stability for themselves."

UPCOMING EVENTS

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS TEC 107

April 5, May 3

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

April 6 & 19

NYSUT REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

New York Hilton, April 7-8

AFT HIGHER ED. CONFERENCE

Detroit, April 28-30

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 editor Richard A. Courage at richardwccft@gmail.com.

2016-2017

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

Richard Courage

richardwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6106 SCI-362

Donna DeCosa

donnadwccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Norma Katz

normakwccft@gmail.com
914-606-8804 HSC-31

Joanna Peters

joannapwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6234 Lib Ground-41

Gretchen Sancher

gretchenswccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Rosemarie Serrano

rosemarieswccft@gmail.com
914-606-7707 HAAB-114

Stephen Sewell

stephenswccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Don Weigand

donalddwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6572 STC-209

WCCFT OFFICERS

President:

Mel Bienenfeld

melbwccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Vice-President:

Judy Langer

judywccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Secretary:

Rowan Lindley

rowanlwccft@gmail.com
914-606-8584 TEC-124

Treasurer:

Donald Shernoff

donswccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

WWW.SUNYWCCFT.ORG



Like us on
Facebook

Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers

Westchester Community College | Technology Building, Room 32, Valhalla, NY 10595
WCC System: 914-606-8421 | Independent WCCFT: 914-345-8856