



Update on PSC Negotiations on the Status of Adjuncts

What's in a name? If you're an adjunct at CUNY, everything! Inequity seems to be built into the title. According to Webster's College Dictionary, one of the meanings of the word "adjunct" is "something added to a thing but not essential to it." How interesting, considering that about half (nearly 7,840) of all CUNY undergraduate courses are taught by adjuncts.

The attitude of blatant disregard and ingratitude towards this particular group of part-time instructors has been present since the inception of the title and still plagues CUNY management in their dealing with adjunct issues during the current round of contract negotiations. While Vice Chancellor Malone (and the other CUNY big-wigs) treat all faculty with a degree of contempt, she seems to reserve an especially cold place in her heart for adjuncts.

Besides poverty-level wages, crazy hours at multiple campuses, and the lack of comprehensive and accessible health care that adjunct lecturers are forced to put up with, job security seems to be even more precarious than usual these days. A large percentage of these adjuncts happen to also be CUNY graduate students attending classes at the Graduate Center. As students providing education-related services to the university – and as a matter of equity with SUNY and other graduate students – these instructors have been fighting for tuition remission for years. In 2003 the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) organized a trip to Albany to put pressure on officials to include tuition remission as a line item in CUNY's budget.

Instead of addressing this serious issue, CUNY management and the Graduate Center found a loophole: they decided to offer tuition remission as part of recruitment packages for select entering graduate students without addressing the problem for the multitude of CUNY adjuncts ones currently slaving away throughout the city. These are the Graduate Adjunct Fellowships (GAFs) and the newly restructured Graduate Teaching Fellowships (GTFs), which incorporate both the Provost's Fellowship and the Chancellor's Fellowship. As part of a five-year financial package, both the GAF and the new GTF provide a guaranteed three-year teaching appointment with two courses per semester at a given campus as well as two "free" years – the first and the fifth – during which the student receives free in-state tuition and is not required to teach. If you are thinking "sign me up," think again: current students are not eligible for these packages. In fact, there are no longer any GTF packages available to current

students.

This is a laudable effort on the part of GC to offer competitive recruitment packages that include teaching opportunities, but such measures should not take financial assistance and steady employment opportunities away from students who have already shown a commitment to the university by continuing to study and teach here. While only about two-hundred entering students a year can qualify for these new fellowships, these still constitute a significant number of teaching positions that may become unavailable to current adjuncts, some of which had been teaching at CUNY for decades.

PSC leadership identifies job security is one of the key issues in this round of negotiations, and is seeking to establish a university-wide system of seniority or hiring preference for part-time and contingent faculty.

Some of union's other demands include: prompt and accurate notification of the adjunct by the university of her exact rank and pay rate; a way to accrue sick days; access to professional development resources; and, of course, pay equity.

After months of heated negotiations, CUNY management made the following economic offer on December 1, 2004:

- Initial \$400 lump sum paid to full-time employees, pro rata for part-timers;
- 2.5% salary increase over four years broken down as follows: 1st year - 0%; 2nd year - 1.5%; 3rd year - 1% funded by productivity savings; 4th yr - 0%.

In addition to rejecting the PSC's financial demands, the management also refused to meet most other needs, such as the establishment of a system of hiring preference for contingent staff, the promotion of long-term adjuncts into full-time positions, and so forth. The management also expressed the opinion that there is no inequity in the pay scales of adjuncts vs. full-time instructional staff. They noted that they hold a fundamentally different conception of part-time labor from that of the PSC. They seem to believe that part-time instructional staff is nothing more than a bunch of unqualified temps, to whom the university owes no recognition of service or merit, no job protection, and no opportunity for professional growth.

The union leadership has spent hundreds of hours stating their case, explaining their position, and repackaging their demands in terms acceptable to CUNY management. To succeed, however, attitudes will need to be changed: the attitudes of Malone and her colleagues not only about part-time instructors but also about public education in general. The PSC negotiating team understands this and has already laid a foundation for this effort. Their commitment to full-time as well as part-time faculty issues and the ability to frame their demands in terms of what's good for CUNY is a tactic that will prove worthwhile given the Chancellor's current efforts to improve and promote CUNY.

But the PSC cannot single-handedly change the minds of the management. This is the time for the members to stand united and to demand a better contract for all of us, full-timers and part-timers alike. The PSC Delegate Assembly passed a State of Emergency in Contract Negotiations resolution unanimously on January 27 (it can be found on the PSC website). Also, for the next few weeks, Wednesdays have been designated "Contract Wednesdays." The PSC is urging all union members to contact a target Board of Trustees member every Wednesday. And for those who aren't sure what to say, they have even provided a basic script. For further information about the ongoing negotiations or to join the fight for a better contract, visit www.psc-cuny.org.

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