

Contingent Faculty Committee Report

This past year has been a highly active one. Starting with a cocktail party during the national meeting that was widely attended, we began discussions about some of the unique circumstances facing adjuncts across the country. This continued in San Diego at the 2008 meeting of COCAL. At that meeting a group gathered to start a Northeast COCAL with the help of Fall's keynote speaker Vinny Tirelli and about 25 others. However, not enough progress has been made. Part-time instructors have many stresses to attend to across the region and the country due to the stress of multiple jobs, and the economic downturn.

From a sunny outlook for California public higher education on both the community college and four year level, including an increase in the number of sections allowed to be taught in community colleges to save travel expenses and fill classrooms, to Arnold Swartzenegger declaring a state of economic emergency, virtually voiding any wage related agreements at least potentially, it has been a rollercoaster year.

Some good news: Progress is being made on a national COCAL. April is a month that will and has already included many marches, some of which you may be aware of such as the death march of higher education in Tennessee. Despite the push backs these valiant workers continue to fight for justice despite a recent law bringing an end to tenure track positions.

However, contingent faculty have been inspired, not deterred. They participated in widespread public action against Weber University in Utah who reported to the press that adjunct faculty would be facing a 7% pay cut. Due to a widespread email campaign to the university president from across the country organized by John Hess in California, the university is reconsidering. The actual workers are afraid to speak out, but this campaign proves that collective action from the outside and national press coverage does have an impact.

Likewise there was an extensive campaign in support of Hilda Solis, the Fair Pay Act, and the Fair Tax initiative in New York State (all successful), and work to ensure the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

Despite our best efforts many adjunct jobs are in jeopardy under the guise of economic exigency. Ironically perhaps the lowest paid faculty members will likely have more than their fair share of suffering. Meanwhile the administrations at colleges across the country have continued to grow and are paid at a higher rate with greater wage increases in most cases.

What we need to recall is that it is not a zero sum game. What benefits the least of us, benefits the most privileged. As fellow faculty we must be vigilant to protect gains in job security, wages, working conditions, and academic freedom; and jointly work for the increase of tenure, and to keep states from outlawing a vital part of our academic lives.