

Education**Metro Organizing Campaigns Yield Gains For Adjunct Professors, Researcher Says**

Adjunct faculty at four universities where unions have pursued organizing campaigns aimed at multiple institutions in a metropolitan area have stronger language in a significant contract provision than elsewhere, suggesting that the metro approach may be yielding economic gains for contingent academic employees, a researcher and past faculty union official said April 20.

Gary Rhoades, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona and a former general secretary of the American Association of University Professors, said, in a draft research paper, that adjunct faculty members, now accounting for half of all academic employment, can be seen as being “at the vanguard of organizing.”

Their numbers are growing, they are organizing unions in new places and they are seeking new contract language adapted to the 21st century workplace, he suggested.

He spoke at a session on contingent faculty at the 42nd annual conference of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, based at Hunter College, City University of New York.

Rhoades looked at one contract provision—class cancellation clauses—as emblematic of several concerns of adjunct faculty: pay, job security, due process rights, educational quality and the relationship to tenured faculty.

In a national National Education Association database of collective bargaining agreements at four-year and two-year institutions, Rhoades said, the 61 contracts that provided some pay for part-time faculty whose classes are cancelled required only limited compensation and allowed last-minute timing and broad rationales for cancelling classes.

‘Unpaid Labor’ Claimed. Some offered a percentage or prorated amount, others a flat fee, but none paid much, resulting in “unpaid labor” for course preparation work from the adjuncts, he said.

Courses can be cancelled after the semester has begun, and while some contracts mention low enrollment as a reason, little rationale is required beyond invoking

management rights, he said. In general, he said, the contracts allow “almost unlimited management discretion” in cancelling adjuncts’ classes.

The database covers contracts with the American Federation of Teachers, the NEA and the AAUP, or 81 percent of agreements found in a 2012 directory compiled by the Baruch center, Rhoades said.

By contrast, he said, four institutions where adjunct faculty contracts were negotiated as part of Service Employees International Union metro campaigns conducted since that time had better terms for class cancellation

They are American University, Georgetown University and George Washington University in SEIU Local 500’s Washington-area metro campaign, and Tufts University, one of the targets of SEIU Local 509’s Boston-area metro campaign.

Higher Cancellation Fees. All those institutions offered significantly higher cancellation fees, with GWU’s offer of 20 percent of full pay well above the highest rate offered in the 2012 database, 8 percent, Rhoades said.

Georgetown offers \$300, while AU offers a one-time cancellation fee of 75 percent of what the faculty member would have earned in the course, he said.

Georgetown and GWU offer 21 days’ notice, Rhoades said, calling it better “but still limited.” Contracts there also require a “much more specific rationale” from the administration for cancelling a course, he said.

At Tufts, in Medford, Mass., the cancellation fee is \$750, Rhoades said.

That applies to adjunct faculty with less than six years of service, while adjunct faculty with more than six years of service receive full pay for a cancelled course, SEIU Campaign Director Larry Alcott told Bloomberg BNA after the session.

The Tufts contract hikes the per-course adjunct pay from \$6,000 to \$7,300 over its four-year term, Rhoades said, calling the pay level “a significant benchmark” that is “well on the way” to the goal of the SEIU Fight for 15 drive, \$15,000 in salary and benefits per course.

More important is the job security language in the Tufts agreement, which offers adjunct faculty members one-year contracts if they have up to four years of service, two-year contracts for those with four to eight years of service and three-year contracts for those with more than eight years of service, Rhoades said.

Adjunct faculty at Tufts ratified the contract in October 2014 (207 DLR A-5, 10/27/14).

The metro campaign contracts also set improvements in due process and access to institutional support services, he said.

Benchmarks Set? Rhoades acknowledged that the four institutions are private and “quite well resourced,” compared with the largely public institutions in the Baruch database, but said they nonetheless “make for good benchmarks for other locals and institutions.”

Buoyed by its success at GWU, he said, the SEIU has launched a series of metro campaigns “from coast to coast,” while the AFT is pursuing a metro campaign in Philadelphia and the United Steelworkers has one in Pittsburgh.

“The idea is to organize where the employees are, and by the ways in which their work is structured,” he said. “To the extent that significant numbers of adjunct faculty work at multiple institutions, it makes sense to think about organizing across a metropolitan area.”

Appearing on a panel with Rhoades, Susan J. Schurman, dean of the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, the state university of New Jersey, said metro campaigns help “take labor costs out of competition” across a geographic area.

While rivalry among unions shouldn’t be “a blood sport,” Schurman said, “the SEIU approach shows the value of competition.” Some unions “have been very slow to change” to broaden their focus to “the whole faculty,” not just the tenure track, she said.

With the SEIU approach, “we’ll see a lot more contingent faculty organizing,” Schurman said, calling for unions to recognize that “all faculty are in this together.”

Cooperation Cited in California CCs. Offering an example of cooperation from the audience, Lynette Nyagah, president of the Community College Association in Sacramento, Calif., said three recent contracts with California community colleges have funded raises for contingent faculty by setting pay freezes for full-time faculty.

“It’s up to us to create a culture where we share the same values and care about each other,” she said. “That’s what unions are about.”

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