

UF/CCCCD Ratify 2010/2011 Agreement

By a vote of 306 (yes) to 20 (no), the United Faculty ratified our 2010/2011 contract agreement, and the CCCCDD Governing Board unanimously voted last Wednesday to ratify the agreement as well. Not all of the provisions can be implemented retroactively, but the Agreement itself is retroactive to July 1, 2010. Parity payments for fall of 2010, according to District Payroll, will be paid in "special run" on or about the middle of March. If you have questions about the new agreement or its implementation, please contact the UF office.

Negotiations for 2011-2012 Set to Begin

Negotiations for 2011-2012 are set to begin in March, with Friday meetings scheduled throughout April and May. A number of articles have opened automatically this year or by mutual consent, including: Article 25 ("Part-Time Faculty Staffing Preferences"); Article 17 ("Evaluation of Faculty," to keep improving our forms); Article 26, ("Duration," to extend our current contract for another three years); Article 10 ("Working Days - Calendar," to make some changes in flex reporting and tracking); and Intellectual Property Rights (held over from last year). The District has also opened Article 21 (Benefits), and has the right to open one more article this year. The UF has the right to open two articles, but we have not yet announced any. We will also be negotiating again this year over compensation, including part-time parity pay. We'll have more to say about all the open articles in the next issue of *Table Talk*. If you have suggestions for any changes to the contract, please email Jeff at ufjeffmichels@gmail.com or contact your UF VP or the UF office.

Health, Benefits and Retirement Conference Registering

We are nearing full capacity for our Health, Benefits and Retirement Conference, co-sponsored by the UF and FACCC, at DVC on Friday, March 18, 8am-4:30pm. We've scheduled 12 workshops on three tracks (with faculty welcome to move between tracks and pick any four sessions or to come for just part of the day). Go to the UF website www.uf4cd.org to register. The conference is free for CCCCDD faculty and includes breakfast and a hot lunch, but registration is a must.

Track one covers Health Benefits for Full-Time Faculty; Long-Term Health Care; Social Security and Medicare; and "Know Your Contract": Leave Options (including banked load, maternity, personal necessity leave, family leave, etc.). Track two covers Part-Time Health Benefits; Part-Time Retirement; EDD/SDI/PFL; Reemployment Staffing Preference and other PT contract issues. Track three is our STRS track, covering CalSTRS Fundamentals for FT Faculty; STRS Pension2 (financial planning and investment strategies); Attacks on Public Pensions; and a STRS Primer: "Getting Ready to Retire."

The Keynote Speaker at lunch will be Sharon Hendricks, the Retirement Liaison from LA Guild/CFT and a member of the FACCC Retirement Committee. She will speak on the current state of the STRS system and the current attack on public pensions. A number of vendors will also be attending and setting up information tables, including: STRS, STRS Pension2, Keenan & Associates, Kaiser, VSP, Delta Dental, HealthNet, Managed Health Services and FACCC.

District Offers Points-Based Retirement Incentive

With the concurrence of the UF, the District is offering the same retirement incentive this year that was offered last year: an additional six points towards District benefits for any who retire this year. While this plan offers no incentive for those already at 80 points, the response last year was quite good (nearly double the usual number of employees retired), and the incentive is inexpensive and easy to administer. We will certainly be discussing different kinds of incentives in the future, but we caution faculty not to plan on any real "golden handshake," as the District's team has consistently analyzed the numbers to find that a STRS incentive or cash-based incentive would not be cost-effective for our group. For details on the current retirement incentive, please contact Human Resources or the UF office.

President's Message: Saving Faculty Jobs

As our colleges implement plans to cut hundreds of sections next year, we are all suffering and making sacrifices. As faculty, of course, we must be concerned for our students and for the integrity of our classes and programs. These are certainly being threatened, and the UF is working however we can to press for cuts away from the classroom (to overhead and administration) and for the District to use reserve dollars to mitigate the need for cuts. But as a union, we must also be concerned for our colleagues, and especially for those part-time faculty members who are losing sections, benefits, in many cases their jobs. We have a number of plans in the works that might save jobs, but for right now, we have a couple of suggestions faculty should consider, informally and voluntarily.

First, full-timers might consider forgoing or reducing overload for next fall and spring, if they can afford it. Clearly, many faculty rely on overload for income. But as we are scheduling the fall and spring, it is worth pausing to consider whether some of us can reduce our assignments to protect jobs in our areas.

Second, we should establish a District-wide hiring pool, and departments with vacancies should check for qualified candidates within the District before interviewing new candidates from outside. Vacancies do come up, of course, due to retirements or attrition, and we could do a much better job connecting established faculty members in search of sections with departments looking for good professors. We may seek a way to institutionalize this idea more formally, but for now, part-timers members who have lost sections or have been laid off should send a resume with a cover-letter describing those subjects they are qualified to teach to the UF. We will keep a file, and departments looking to fill vacancies should check in with the UF to review our pool.

We are a community of educators, and to the extent that we can, we need to take care of one other. And this extends to classified staff as well, upon whom we all rely.

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Table Talk

The Newsletter of the United Faculty of
Contra Costa Community College District

March 2, 2011

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Public-Employee Unions Under Attack

With legislation that would curtail collective-bargaining rights now pending in seven states (Wisconsin, Ohio, Tennessee, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa and Kansas) and more such proposals in the works (including two mostly-symbolic bills in California that would restrict public unions from bargaining over pensions), the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a warning last week that faculty are now facing "what can only be described as a full-on, coordinated attack on public employees."

AAUP President Cary Nelson summed up the Ohio legislation as follows: "Gone would be the faculty right to negotiate wages and working conditions. Gone would be the faculty authority to assure fair due process in adjudicating grievances against the very administrators who imposed them. Gone would be the faculty role in defining merit. Gone would be negotiated rights to one's own intellectual property. Gone would be historic guarantees of academic freedom. All this would be replaced by administrative fiat."

Clearly, collective bargaining is about more than money, and although tough economic times may provide some context for the current debate, there is more at stake than any budget battle. In Wisconsin, where the State budget deficit is estimated at roughly \$3 billion, the savings from curtailing collective bargaining would amount to little more than \$300 million. In Ohio, only nine percent of the state budget is spent on public employees. So the imagined saving from breaking the unions would not do a lot to fill budget gaps. (Plus in both cases, the unions have already agreed to consider concessions that would result in the needed cost-reductions, so really there are no savings.)

Rather than cost-cutting, today's controversy seems to be mostly about power and politics. Following the 2010 midterm elections, and in the wake of the US Supreme Court's "Citizen's United" decision, which

removed limits on the amount of money corporations can spend on political communications, AAUP reports that “shadowy, well-funded groups . . . have emerged,” including Karl Rove’s American Crossroads and Americans for Prosperity, that “have poured millions of dollars into campaigns to roll back the advances that working people have made in the past half century.”

Not all states allow collective bargaining for public employees. According to CBS News, only two in five public employees nationwide have the type of collective bargaining rights that have drawn fire in Wisconsin. But the differences are telling! “Nine of the 10 states with the lowest percentage of public employees eligible for collective bargaining are in the south,” CBS reports. And “those workers have fewer protections and generally less generous compensation and benefits than public employees represented by collective bargaining.”

Collective bargaining and the negotiated agreements and due process that come with union representation also provide clear protections against abuse and against the sometimes short-sighted policies driven purely by politics. “While pay and perks vary greatly among states, the primary benefit [of collective bargaining],” according to CBS, “is that governors and lawmakers cannot unilaterally impose changes, such as pension reforms, without going to the bargaining table, nor can they impose lay-offs without following union tenure rules.”

Many politicians, like many business owners and corporate CEOs, would like the power to make changes without consulting workers, but however much consultation and bargaining may create a balance-of-power, they need not necessarily impede change. The recent political depiction of unions as somehow working against the public’s interest has been particularly frustrating for faculty leaders, who have long seen their role not as adversaries fighting against administrations in a zero-sum game over money but as partners working to allocate limited resources and to create the best learning and teaching environments possible. “Unions and their members have been problem-solvers for cities and schools when it comes to reducing costs,” says AFT Michigan President David Hecker. “If you undercut collective bargaining, you’re going to lose that problem-solving approach that collective bargaining is all about.”

UF President Jeffrey Michels made a similar statement at last week’s CCCCD Governing Board meeting, reminding trustees that collective bargaining in our district has resulted recently in numerous positive changes, including improved evaluation procedures. Our most recent agreement reflects the willingness of the Union to make concessions in bargaining when needed, as we added a banked-load cap and gave up Medicare Part-B reimbursement for retirees except for those in coordinated plans. Michels noted that the process itself leads to better decisions with broader buy-in, which results in a better environment for faculty and for students.

Collective bargaining in California may be comparatively safe for now, since almost all state employees here are covered by collective bargaining, and our governor is a union supporter, but faculty will still need to stay vigilant and engaged, as events throughout the country will certainly affect us in the long run.

UF Responds to Attacks on Unions: Sends Support to WI

Recognizing that Wisconsin has become the center of a fast-expanding battle over collective bargaining rights, the United Faculty Executive Board voted last week to send a public letter of support to AFT Wisconsin, and to contribute \$1000 from our Political Action Fund to support ongoing efforts to protect collective bargaining in Wisconsin. UF President Jeffrey Michels sent the following letter to local and national newspapers:

“As President of the United Faculty of Contra Costa Community College District, representing nearly 1500 community college faculty at Contra Costa College, Diablo Valley College and Los Medanos College, I am writing to express solidarity with Wisconsin’s teachers and public employees, whose rights and freedoms are under attack. We are all of us victims when propagandists pit workers against workers and when politicians and corporate leaders exploit economic conditions to consolidate power and restrict liberty. Teachers, firefighters, policemen and street workers did not cause our recession. Nor will we rescue our economy by robbing them of their pensions or silencing their voices. Collective bargaining stems from the rights of assembly and free speech; it balances corporate power and improves public decision-making. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker’s attack on unions is little more than a cynical power-grab, and we must all stand together in opposition.”

Debate Heats Up Over Pensions: UF Debunks STRS Myths

In a recent email to all faculty, UF Part-Time Advocate and STRS expert Deborah Dahl-Shanks sought to debunk many of the myths and misleading statistics that have marked recent reports on the California State Teachers Retirement System (CalSTRS). Most importantly, Dahl-Shanks notes, “STRS is NOT headed towards insolvency. It is one of the best managed and funded public pensions in the nation.”

Although recent reports seem to paint the picture of a “pension crisis,” in fact the numbers can be misleading. “Most defined benefits plans are NOT fully funded,” writes Dahl-Shanks, “and it is considered by investment bankers and fund managers that a well funded plan is over 80% funded. STRS, like most financial institutions, was hit by the recession and fell below 80% to 76%. But it consistently makes gains to regain its funding each year and is NOT in fear of not making its commitment to faculty now or in the future.”

CalSTRS CEO Jack Ehnes, in response to a recent report by the California Legislative Analyst’s Office, affirmed that the “current funding problems facing public pension plans generally, and certainly CalSTRS in particular, [are not the result of] the benefit structure, but the unprecedented financial turmoil the world has faced in the last ten years.” Ehnes notes that CalSTRS is about average in terms of pensions paid, compared to other plans nationwide for public education employees, and he argues that if private sector employees have inadequate retirement security, that should be fixed “by increasing the financial security of those other Californians, not by reducing the security of public employees.”

The UF has compiled several of the recent reports on STRS and public pensions in general, including a recent study by the “Little Hoover Commission” calling for pension roll-backs for current workers, the LAO Report, Jack Ehnes’ response, and the full letter of STRS facts by Deborah Dahl-Shanks on our UF Website: www.uf4cd.org. We have also invited STRS expert Sharon Hendricks (from the LA Faculty Guild) to be the keynote speaker at our UF/FACCC Health, Benefits and Retirement Conference on March 18 at DVC. Hendricks will speak about STRS and the Attack on Public Pensions. All faculty are welcome (up to our 125-attendee limit), but pre-registration is required. For more information or to register, go to the UF website.

Proposed Cuts to Pell Grants Threaten Thousands in 4CD

As part of the national budget discussions now underway, the House of Representatives voted on February 19 to reduce Pell Grants by \$5.6 billion by reducing the maximum award by 15% (\$845). This would affect about 8 million students across the country. The impact in California would be a loss of about \$204 million, with CCCCD students losing nearly \$4 million. An estimated 7,851 students in our district would lose a portion of their financial aid if this cut becomes part of the final budget. The Senate and House are seeking a deal this week on a Continuing Resolution that may include the cut to Pell Grants. But there is still time to influence this decision! Go to “dontcutpellgrants.com” to email your legislators (or phone your representatives) and tell them to protect our students by opposing the Pell Grants cut.

CA’s Budget Battle Approaches Critical Showdown

The next several weeks will prove critical to the financial future of our colleges, as legislators decide whether to put on the ballot for a special June election an extension of temporary taxes, as proposed by Governor Jerry Brown. We encourage letters-to-the-editor this week with the basic message: let the voters decide (and the corollary that a cuts-only budget threatens the future of our state by devastating our schools and colleges). You may also go on-line to www.faccc.org and use FACCC’s point-and-click tool to email your legislators.

UF Supports Student Advocacy: March in March

As proposed funding cuts threaten to shut out thousands of students and raise fees, student (and faculty) activism and advocacy this month is crucial, and the UF is doing all we can to support and encourage our students (and one another). We’re co-sponsoring a student rally at DVC on Wed., March 2, from 12:30-1:30pm. We have also reached out to student governments at LMC and CCC and offered support for local advocacy efforts, including voter-registration drives. We’re supporting a Celebration of the Arts at DVC that will culminate in a public show with performances on Wed., March 9, in the DVC Art Gallery, from 6-8pm. We’re bringing student representatives with us to the FACCC Advocacy and Policy Conference (including “Lobby Day” where we make the rounds of our local legislators), March 6 and 7. And we’re helping provide transportation to the student-sponsored “March in March” on March 14 in Sacramento. The March in March is a particularly important event, so please encourage your students to attend (and allow them to make up missed classes if necessary).