

**Why Go To COCAL XI?**  
**The Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor conference**  
[www.cocalinternational.org](http://www.cocalinternational.org)

Having spent many hours talking to folks about coming to the COCAL conference, both this upcoming one in New York City August 4-6, 2014, and previous ones, I am moved to list the most common reasons that seem to resonate best with people. It helps that they are all true as well. We are not trying to sell something for profit here and since COCAL is not a very structured organization, we are certainly not into political empire-building. So here goes. Use this list as you see fit, but mainly circulate it widely, with my email [joeberry@igc.org](mailto:joeberry@igc.org) on it and add your own if possible.

1. This is the only national grassroots, up-from-the-bottom, gathering of contingent/adjunct/precarious higher ed faculty in the US (and now including folks from Mexico and Canada). It should be supported because it represents what we can do as a movement on our own, outside the structures of the unions and disciplinary organizations, which we do not lead or control (though we certainly work with and in them as well). It is also our continuity – COCAL started in 1996 – and tracks the rise of our movement.
2. COCAL is the only gathering that draws contingents from all geographic regions of the three countries, and also from all levels of higher education, from non-credit adult ed to community colleges to liberal arts colleges, to 4 year universities, with and without grad schools, from public to private non-profit and for-profit institutions, from all disciplines taught in higher ed, from all unions that represent us on campuses and from the 80% (in the US) who have not unionized as yet. We gather because of what we have in common, not on the basis of anything that divides us.
3. COCAL is a completely volunteer effort, organized, planned and set up with volunteer contingent leadership, with just a small amount of donated staff time from the host union (usually). It is organized by a local organizing committee advised by the COCAL International Advisory Committee, with folks from all three countries on it. Its only goal is to build the movement among contingent faculty and ultimately abolish contingency, thereby improving both our teaching conditions and the students' learning conditions.
4. No other gathering on this scale has abolishing contingency as its main goal.
5. It is hugely valuable to put faces and direct conversation together with the emails, phone calls, social media and other communications that hold the movement together during the two years between conferences.
6. It is also great fun! Ironically, coming together to talk about a massive problem that oppresses us all very directly results in an atmosphere full of hope, solidarity, personal affection, and tremendous learning. I don't fully understand it myself, but there it is. People who come always go home more committed to the struggle and better equipped to engage in it and organize others.

7. Unlike many other conferences, this one is neither a fully academic one where people are partially focused on building their individual careers nor a union convention where often much that happens is heavily scripted and controlled to eliminate any open displays of disagreement. This year especially, an attempt has been made to link plenaries to smaller discussions in such a way that we can best have continuing conversations on the major topics affecting us and also come out at the end with a clearer vision of what we all need to do next, individually, but especially collectively.
8. COCAL, since the first gathering in 1996, has spawned many tools that have helped to build the movement. These have included: the COCAL listserv (ADJ-L), Workplace, an online journal of academic labor, the COCAL UPDATES news aggregator for activists and our allies, a number of local and regional COCALs that have played important roles in many areas in organizing and activating contingent faculty. Perhaps most importantly, COCAL has been the site for extended discussions that led eventually (4 years ago) to the founding of the New Faculty Majority, the first national membership organization focused on contingent faculty. NFM will be present at COCAL XI. This record should help to convince all activists to try to come and be part of what comes next.
9. Q: But, I have no organization to fund me and travel and housing in NYC is expensive!!!  
A: True, it is not free, but nothing valuable ever is, really. We urge you to pursue all possible organizational funding, but don't stop there. Movements have been built in the past by very creative fundraising by local groups who thought it was important. House-parties, help from families and friends, and all the sorts of fundraising that people do for anything that our austerity-society does not now provide as a matter of public right (admittedly a long list, starting with quality, accessible education for all). Think about bike rides and marches: "Send so-and-so to COCAL XI!" If you communicate to those around you that this trip is important to you and can help you get the tools needs to change our lives, many people and groups we are in contact with will contribute. But you have to ask. This is not charity. It is enlightened self-interest, often called solidarity.