

REPORT OF COCAL XI INTERNATIONAL AT JOHN JAY COLLEGE IN NEW YORK AUGUST 4 – 6, 2014



[Abstract](#)

COCAL XI was held August 4-6, 2014 at John Jay College in New York City

The conference started with a lunch. The main discussion was on a collective bargaining agreement to be signed in Argentina. They want no more contingent workers and demand to have labor stability.

PLENARY 1: WHAT'S GOING ON HIGHER ED? A TRINATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The afternoon plenary had a panel of speakers moderated by Maria Peluso (CUPFA). The first was Cindy Oliver who is President of the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia (BC). The issue is the imbalance of power. She remarked that BC has an employer bias. They have organized 70 colleges with 400 faculty. They have one salary scale with 11 steps. They provide contingent to full time employment with a conversion from contingent to full time. (See Vancouver Community College agreement).

The second speaker was Sylvain Marois (Laval University Quebec) and is representing 12,000 part timers. He discussed the fact that universities are "sick"; public funds are used more for administration, more teachers are made into contract workers and believes that neo-liberalism is the source. He is in favor of having a free university and believes that faculty needs to work with students to achieve that goal.

The third speaker was Stanley Aronowitz (Distinguished Professor CUNY). He noted the corporatization of education and that 26% of the faculty are full time with the other 74% part time. He noted that many places do not have the right to strike and that collective bargaining is collective "begging". In four years they have had no salary increase and the part time salaries have stagnated. Private colleges pay more. He stated that the denial of strikes is a denial of first amendment rights. Unfortunately many faculty have defeatist attitudes. "Walmart workers have shown the way" according to Stanley. "We grew up believing in the law but it's about power". His recommendation, "Don't act like teachers in the school, act like auto workers".

The fourth speaker was Maria Teresa Lechuga (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico) whose state that the working conditions were defined by neo-liberalism and that the state policy is to keep faculty in this condition. We are "mercenaries" selling a product (education). We have gone from 78,000 faculty in the 1960's to 300,000 in just fifteen years. Now neoliberalism is suppressive and is changing education illegally. We can negotiate salary but not evaluations, working conditions, etc.

The fifth speaker was Maria Maisto (President of New Faculty Majority) who has testified before the U.S. House of Representatives on contingent faculty which initiated the "Just in Time Professor" study. She recommends supporting organizing and collaboration with other organizations.

The plenary was followed by a Q & A session. One of the questions was regarding the fact that B.C. has had public and student support for strikes. How do you get that kind of support? The answer is to frame your argument. Another question addressed adjuncts as inferior quality. The answer is that if the college is representing itself as a world class school then saying its adjuncts are inferior is fraud. Go to the public and point this fact out. Negotiate agreements so that employers cannot make a distinction between adjunct and full time. British Columbia has a contract where there is a two year contingent to full time conversion depending on good evaluations. If there is no evaluation then it is assumed that the work is satisfactory. Another suggestion was to use CFA as a model. Lectures are part of the same bargaining unit as the tenured. Also support fellow workers (hotel maids, etc.) and organize yourself, build alliances.

Other thoughts were that there is a need to organize within the unions. Canada operates on a “public interest” which is conservative. The moral imperative is to understand the public interest. Currently in Detroit the “mantra” is that public pension (all of \$200,000) has destroyed Detroit. This is coming from a conservative governor. We need to elect more progressive governments and not be afraid to bring these issues up in the classroom. We need to reclaim our profession.

PLENARY 2: INSIDE THE ACADEMY: THE CUTTING EDGE OF SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZING

The second plenary was moderated by Susan DiRaimo (PSC/CUNY). The first panelist was Malini Cadambi Daniel (Campaign Director for SEIU) representing 400,000 educators. The second panelist was Donna Nebenzahl (CUPFA Concordia) representing 23,000 full time undergraduate faculty, 13,000 part time undergraduate faculty, 7,000 graduate faculty, 8,000 staff, and is a founder of Inter-union Council with a focus on students. During Campus Equity Week they had micro talks where 10 adjuncts presented six minute bits on current research. *Concordia Magazine* now highlights research activities by adjunct. The third panelist was Alyssa Picard (AFT Higher Education) who noted the struggle with CCSF. The fourth panelist was Arturo Ramos (UNAM and President of the Union of Academic Workers of the Autonomous University of Chapingo STAUNCH) who has worked in the globalization of higher education. He noted that profitability increases when contingency increases. Susan Michaelczyk (AAUP) was added to the panel and she promotes organizing and working on best practices for higher education such as due process.

Alyssa Picard stated that as a staff person when she walks into a local union’s meeting and hears the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, etc. reports that it tells her what the focus of the local is on as opposed to walking into another meeting and hears about organizing reports which tells her the focus of that union. She prefers the latter.

Other comments made were that there is a repression of adjunct in Argentina. We need to preserve higher education for the next generation.

Q & A session:

Q: Does the AFT have plans to meet goals in the publication regarding part-timers. How the part time have citizenship in their locals?

A: AFT does not affect locals from above.

Q: To Donna regarding a \$240,000 professional development fund.

A: Faculty can apply for funds up to three times per year. All the money is used and it is very competitive.

Other questions that were not completely answered were: How do you take on shared governance? How is AFT supporting CCSF and the rhetorical question of ageism; that new professors that are hired in Mexico are under the age of 38 and older professor are treated as waste and are forced to retire with only a few hundred per month? There is no solution, currently.

PLENARY 3: OUTSIDE THE ACADEMY & IN THE COMMUNITY: LESSONS FROM ORGANIZING CONTINGENT WORKERS IN OTHER INDUSTRIES

This panel discussion was moderated by Michael Fabricant (PSC/CUNY). The first panelist was Edgar Belmont (Electricians' Union SUPAUAQ) who discussed reform in the public sector. In 2009, Mexico closed public electric companies. There were 44,000 employees who were fired and 16,000 are in resistance. There is a commercialization of public service but modernization requires public will. The second panelist was Lilia Abarca (CNTE and journalist). Lilia noted that teachers are either being killed or are disappearing in South America (Argentina). Education is being privatized and the image of teachers is declining due to the media. They have had neo-liberalism since 1982. Teachers' rights have become administrators' rights. They now have partial one-year contracts. Firing teachers is now legalized. Social inequity is the cause of the crisis. The third panelist, Dougal MacDonald (FPSE) was with Hamilton Steel Workers in Canada. In 2007 it was taken over by US Steel which closed in 2013. He notes that all negotiations should be public and that the public should be kept informed. "They" say we (adjunct) are a cost and yet we bring income wherever we teach. In Canada the push is to privatization. They want universities to fund themselves. The fourth panelist, Larry Goldbetter (National Writers Union/UAW) notes there is no collective bargaining or grievance procedure. Inkwell publishing closed its doors owing \$360,000 to its employees. They finally won a judgment for the \$360,000 three years later. They had misclassified workers. He noted that they went after the Huffington Post. Contributing writers were not being paid for submissions. "Heart and Soul" publication owed \$127,000 to twelve black female writers. After two years a judgment of only \$60,000 was collected and they had to use legal means to collect the money.

Q & A:

Q: How does a writers union help academics?

A: it is building an academic caucus

Q: How do we name ourselves?

A: Every group has a different name in Mexico but share unions/syndicates. We are diverse. We seem to be confronting workers with workers in Mexico.

Q: Why public negotiations?

A: It is for transparency.

Q: How to build solidarity?

A: It has to be person-to-person.

RESULTS OF INTEREST GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The convention was broken into five interest group sessions with the intent of having some goals and actions set.

Legal Issues and Legislative Advocacy

Legal Issues and Legislative Advocacy was facilitated by Dr. Joe Berry (author of “Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education”) and Eric Marshall (Labor Relations Specialist with New York State United Teachers).

The group decided the following criteria for choosing issues:

- 1) It must have political appeal across borders and lines
- 2) That there is concern felt by many
- 3) It is winnable
- 4) To have action possible on regional, state, provincial, etc. levels
- 5) Will unite unions and non-unions
- 6) It will interest the broader public
- 7) It will promote organizing of the unorganized
- 8) And it has to benefit the students.



The group decided that the issue to pursue was stabilization and professionalization of contingent work through equal access to rights and benefits (such as pay equity, collective bargaining, intellectual property, academic freedom, medical insurance, pensions, unemployment insurance, student loan forgiveness, reasonable notice of appointment/reappointment, seniority rights, access to social services, and retaliation) and to have just cause protection.

The goals of the group are to abolish the presumption of at will employment. (The U.K. abolished at-will employment. Montana has passed legislation on at-will employment. “The rich and poor both equally have the right to sleep under the bridge”).

Student Issues

Starting from the fundamental insight that teacher working conditions are student learning conditions, we seek to restore dignity and humanity to the educational process by making common cause between students-who are in many cases *also* worker-and the contingent academic workers of our institutions.

Our goal is to facilitate mutual education between students and faculty, fostering cooperative political action around concrete issues, informed by the larger structural issues framing our common situation, always with the understanding that quality, accessible education is a human right and a public good.

We will work together to generate hope for a more equitable future.

Core Principles and Practices

- 1.) Talk to other adjuncts! Organization is key, and isolation is the enemy. Build a culture of connection through casual events. Make sure to reach out to diverse groups of contingent faculty, especially faculty of color, women of LGBTQ faculty, with the recognition that they are over-represented among adjunct faculty. Ask each person what his or her concerns are, and listen.
 - a. One-on-one conversations are key
 - b. Host coffee hours

- c. Adjunct appreciation days
 - d. Any excuse to get together!
 - e. Identify classes of educators, like civics professors, who might be particularly amenable to being active on and connecting with students about adjunct issues.
 - f. Hold open roundtables to discuss adjunct issues-announced and frequent
 - g. Connect with committed and/or sympathetic tenured faculty
 - h. Host parties
 - i. Use visuals to attract new participants and members-don't under-estimate the power of a balloon (or a puppet)!
 - j. If you feed them, they will come.
 - k. Generate hope: be prepared to tell stories of adjunct successes, either local or from somewhere in North America.
 - l. Survey all contingents about issues that are most important
 - m. Be cognizant of "invisible" adjuncts, i.e., those who teach remotely. Develop methods for connecting with remote/web-based adjuncts, such as virtual conferences, door-knocking where possible, emails and listservs, #adjuncttalk
- 2.) Connect with students and existing student associations-both formal and informal-around shared concerns. Ask students what their concerns are, rather than telling them what the issues are. Listen; don't just talk. Build trust through one-on-one conversations, and respect and support student issues. At the same time, inform students about adjunct issues by pointing out connections between the two. Support existing student work, and work together on joint actions. Always be sensitive to imbalanced power dynamics and attempt to mitigate them-or better yet, to share authority as much as possible-wherever possible.
- a. Again, one-on-one conversations are key.
 - b. Reach out to formal student organizations (like government) but also informal and underfunded student organizations, which are more likely to be amenable to coalition work
 - c. Reach out especially to mentor groups, etc. for students of color, women's groups, LGBTQ groups, 1st-gen college student groups
 - d. Integrate actions with those of the students, for example by being an advisor to student government and student activity
 - e. Be proactive in thinking about and understanding the issue of student debt
 - f. Issues in which students and faculty may have a mutual stake:
 - i. Unpaid office hours
 - ii. Make education free!
 - iii. Abolish student debt!
 - iv. Need for more academic support
 - v. General quality of public education
 - vi. Reject budgetary austerity
 - vii. Quality of general education courses
 - viii. Diversifying the university
 - g. Identify and connect with regional, national and off-campus student groups
 - i. For example: United Students Against Sweatshops and National People's Action, United States Student Associations
 - h. Host informal, open lunches for student activists; provide pizza; publicize what was discussed
 - i. Connecting with or helping to build student newspapers and other media such as radio—this can function as pressure on the administration

- i. Potentially add an Adjunct corner to the student newspaper, depending on the relationship with the student publishers of course.
 - j. CFA and others have developed paid, student internship programs. If you have a progressive union leadership, this is an excellent tactic to consider.
 - k. Pre-professional organizations
 - l. Develop easy actions that empower people to be a part of the process—something simple such as wearing a union pin.
 - m. Build and enhance relationships with international allies, specifically indigenous groups, for example: ASSE, Idle No More
 - n. Connect with “invisible” students, i.e. remote/online students
- 3.) Build for the long term—generate and sustain momentum. Conversations, both with fellow faculty and with students and student groups, should be the first of many. Follow up. Saying hi or working together once is not enough.
- a. Many one-on-one conversations, over years
 - b. Form a coalition organization that has memory beyond particular individual participants (with written records)—this helps to address the issue of student transience, since they will only be at the university for four years
 - c. Build a steward system with regular, expected activity—such a leadership structure can be built even in a non-union context.
 - d. Strategic planning through scenario building and making concrete plans on five- and ten-year timelines—act rather than react.
 - e. Develop roles for people at all levels of time and skill level—even someone with 30 minutes per week should have a role to play.
 - f. Organization should arise out of concrete activities, rather than as a prerequisite for them.
- 4.) Think strategically about framing and visibility. Be thoughtful about what to disclose and when and how to disclose it. With that in mind, work to create visibility for adjuncts and student concerns on campus. Hold our institutions responsible for things they say out loud. Be transparent about what goes on campus inside and outside of the classroom, both generally (structural issues) and specifically (your personal experience).
- a. Campus Equity Week: Using classroom as way to educate and learn from students about what’s happening in higher education, but students could do teaching
 - b. Use social media, but use conscientiously and in the context of face-to-face interaction and organization-building
 - c. Class announcements
 - d. Teach-ins
 - e. Stamps or stickers for graded papers
 - f. Engage students in arts activities, such as guerrilla theater and performance art
 - g. Attend board of trustees meetings—faculty and students can do this together
 - i. Work to get student and contingent representation on boards and other formal university entities whenever possible—seek positions of power at the university
 - h. Recruitment and orientation centers are sites of potential actions
 - i. Creatively, sensitively educate students in the classroom about the conditions of contingent faculty labor
 - i. Note: some people think this is an unwise tactic, especially if not done delicately.
 - j. Learning to discuss neo-liberalism/capitalism—transforming personal problems into public issues.
 - k. The contradiction between rising student tuition and lowered faculty salaries

- i. Graphically represent this with a pig!
 - l. Push for open negotiations and/or conversations with administration
 - m. Analyzing university institutions—this is a form of research from below
 - n. Attaching non-helium balloons to adjunct cars, so that the proportion of contingent laborers is visually represented in public
 - o. Littlesis.org—a tool for “following the money” at universities
 - p. Push for open contract negotiations, in the case that a formal union is in place
- 5.) Always seek to learn more about the changing conditions of Adjunct labor and the changing student experience.
- a. If you have a union, stay informed about and involved with internal activities; understand your contract
 - b. Connect with adjuncts in other places via national and international listservs
 - c. Study regional labor law
 - d. NFM, COCAL are essential to staying informed and not feeling isolated— connect with and learn from activists via these formal networks
- 6.) Identify other parties to work with in the community, including parents, unions students—who again are often also workers—might already be in, houses of worship, and other civically-minded, socially-conscious organizations.
- a. Identify ways of connecting with students’ parents
 - i. Someone has created an app for parents that shows them how their tuition dollars are used.
 - b. Working to build long-term relationships in the community is key to having an actual labor *movement*. Don’t reach out until you are willing and able to build for the long term (see item 3!)

Media Organizing and Narratives

Media Organizing and Narratives was facilitated by Sally Cooke (Concordia University Part-time Faculty Association) and Susan Michaleczyk (Boston College of Arts and Sciences).

The group identified a number of strategies and tactics which they propose incorporating into an Action Plan to achieve the goal.

Strategies:

- Employ a broad, multi-faceted media campaign
- Follow the lead of states, provinces or countries which have been successful to similar campaigns
- Engage in an active defense of those rights already “on the books” (laws, CBAs, etc.)
- Emphasize stabilization and professionalization in rhetoric and propaganda
- Stress returning education to the “public trust” where it belongs
- Overcome the passivity and fear of our own members and leaders, as well as of those in the public and political arena who are otherwise inclined to support us
- Build coalitions, and find common ground, with groups of non-education workers (including those on our own campuses)

Tactics:

- Lobby through academic unions and professional organizations and associations
- Anticipate and respond to opposition to this campaign (including oppositional legislation, bills and campaigns)

Building National Agendas

Building National Agendas was facilitated by Weldon Cowan (staff representative for the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia), Maria Peluso (Concordia University, Montreal) and Bob Samuels (President of UC-AFT and is at UCSB). The following statement was created by the session group:

Building on the ideals embodied in the political statements of past COCALs, we commit to a trans-national agenda whose goal is to shape an equitable and democratic future for higher education by continuing to build networks, coalitions and alliances across discipline, campus, international broader and industry sector, in order to democratize the workplace, the classroom, and the broader community. To achieve this objective, COCL will develop a “democracy index” using the following criteria which include but are not limited to:

- Shared governance and efforts to achieve political democracy;
- Pay equity and progress toward affordable or free higher education;
- Commitment to the common good, understood as cultural and social democracy that values the critical role of intellectual inquiry and the essential value of work.

By September 15, 2014, COCAL will have formed a tracking committee to oversee this project, and will encourage local entities to collect data by which institutions (including unions) can be evaluated. This index can be used for actions such as publicizing the indexed data, taking action against undemocratic practices and documenting violence against, and defending, academic workers.

Bargaining for Equity

Bargaining for Equity was facilitated by Dr. Dougal MacDonald (University of Alberta) and Niloofar Mina (New Jersey City University). The group developed the following group statement:

Bargaining for equity will be strengthened by these strategies:

- 1.) Democratization of the bargaining process
- 2.) Proportional representation in the university governance and union structure
- 3.) Work stoppage, strikes, and creative strategies
- 4.) Membership mobilization efforts that employ multiple and direct contact
- 5.) Vigilance against contract language that leads to undesirable consequences such as a threshold for obtaining regularization rights or late course cancellation fees in the absence of seniority rights.

Bargaining for equity will embrace the following topics: parity in pay and benefits, job security, and seniority rights. Pay parity is better attainable through fixed dollar increases in addition to across the board raises as is advocated in the current U.S. campaign for a MINIMUM of \$5,000 (this minimum was later raised in a resolution that was presented to the body) per 3-unit course (or its equivalent).

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

- 1) COCAL resolution on CEW 2015
Continuing COCAL's history of support for Campus Equity Week, and considering the success of Campus Equity Week 2013, COCAL endorses Campus Equity Week 2015.
COCAL also encourages all of our activists to participate in Campus Equity Week 2015 and solicit the endorsements of our affiliated organizations, along with the resources needed for there to be central, national coordination in 2015.
- 2) RESOLVED that COCAL XI endorses the call in the U.S. for achieving or surpassing a MINIMUM starting salary of at least \$7,000 per 3-credit course (or its equivalent) for all contingent academic employees in the U.S. combined with real job security and a seniority system; that this objective despite being modest is long overdue and needs to be implemented now, and that we support the struggle for this to be achieved in current contract negotiations. *(A similar call has been made by NEA/AFT and has been endorsed by several other organizations.)*

AFTERTHOUGHTS

There were several issues addressed by the body. One of the issues was language. There is a missed opportunity and translation is very important. There needs to be a plan for requests for information.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Chan

