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It's All About the Work All the Time:
Commonality of Interests in a Common Bargaining Unit

The title of my presentation, “It’s All About the Work All the Time: Commonality of Interests in a Common Bargaining Unit,” was not my first choice. I preferred “It’s the Work, Stupid,” which is shorter but may be a little too sarcastic. Whatever the title, my argument in this presentation is that ideally the *work* of the faculty should define the faculty bargaining unit—to get as broad a unit as possible. The California Faculty Association, the faculty union of the California State University system, is a broad unit representing the tenured and tenure-track faculty, the coaches, the counselors, and the librarians. The unit also includes all full-time and part-time Lecturers, who are the faculty on temporary/contingent appointments in the CSU.

Lecturers, who are more than half of the 23,000 faculty in the CSU, are committed to their work but are not deluded as to their actual status in the system. Despite some success in encouraging the use of the professional term “Lecturer,” there are plenty of labels—the temps, the adjuncts, the part-time people—to remind contingent faculty of their lack of status. Perhaps the saddest but most accurate label for contingent faculty comes from the term used by academic union leaders in Mexico. Joe Berry used this term—in English, the “precarious” faculty—in a speech he made last January to a large group of contingent faculty in Los Angeles. This term instantly resonated with the audience, who knew all too well how precarious their employment status is, but also saw, with the clear eye of the outsider, the precariousness of the situation of all faculty and indeed of higher education.

Like all marginalized outsiders, Lecturers stay sane by seeking support amongst themselves, sharing stories of outrageous situations they have encountered and developing a darkly comic view of their world. One line always gets a laugh in Lecturer circles: “No Lecturer is ever more than fifteen seconds away from complete humiliation.” Of course the line isn’t funny at all. It speaks to the terrible waste when the *work* of more than half of the faculty is not respected.

My personal best in the “complete humiliation” genre is the time I got a teaching award. Unfortunately, I didn’t know about this official recognition of my work until I was walking across campus and was stopped by an administrator who expressed his displeasure that I had not bothered to show up at the reception to be honored. I was pretty confused, and after checking around, learned that the announcements and invitations to the reception had not been sent to Lecturers. As a staff member explained to me, “The invitations were a four-color format and were just too expensive to send to everybody.” It’s actually pretty hilarious to be a honoree at a reception for which you are not good enough to make the cut for the invitation list.

If only contingent faculty could follow the advice of Groucho Marx, who famously said, “I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member.” But contingent faculty do keep trying to join the academic community club, because that club matters. Integrating *all* faculty into the club is crucial to maintaining faculty power and protecting the academic freedom that defines a university.

Those who feel that contingent issues do not impact the university at large should take warning from recent trends in higher education. As has been pointed out in other presentations at this conference, half of the faculty at most institutions of higher education are part-time, temporary employees. Another insidious trend is that in recent years, half of all the *full-time* appointments in higher education have been off the tenure-track, meaning that despite their academic qualifications, these employees are churned through the system instead of being put on the path to permanency. A startling example of what the future may bring is the case of the Community College of Vermont, where all the faculty are part-time contingent employees, supervised by “site coordinators.” This model may be accepted practice at private for-profit operations such as University of Phoenix, but not at our public institutions. Public institutions flourish only in an environment of academic freedom, where teachers and students collaborate in seeking and sharing knowledge that contributes to the common good of society. Such an environment exists only with adequate professional respect and support, along with job security, accompanied by appropriate hiring and evaluation procedures. Protecting this environment must be the common interest of *all* those who provide resources for public higher education and serve on the campuses.

Fortunately, such a commonality of interest is a legal foundation of my union, the California Faculty Association. Having a union that represents both tenure-line and contingent faculty has brought challenges but has resulted in a union with the strength to fight back against the negative trends in higher education.

In 1981, the California Public Employment Relations Board included both tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty in the same bargaining unit, having determined that all CSU faculty share a “community of interests” and “perform functionally related services or work toward established common goals.” In a 1998 article, “Protecting Common Interests of Full-and Part-Time Faculty,” in the NEA’s Thought and Action, the commonality of interest existing between tenure-line and Lecturer faculty was analyzed by Jane Kerlinger, then a CSU Lecturer and now a CFA staff person, and Scott Sibary, a CSU tenured faculty member. According to Kerlinger and Sibary, in 1998, fifteen years after PERB’s statement, the CSU central administration was “still trying to undermine these community of interests and divide the faculty.” The authors point out that conflict between the different groups of faculty is “senseless,” given our commonality of interests. In 1998, 48% of the CSU faculty were off the tenure-track, and the authors argue that, given this statistic, improving job security for Lecturers is in the interest of all faculty because doing so increases faculty power. Those tenure-line faculty who do support improved job security for their Lecturer colleagues, Kerlinger and Sibary suggest, “may see that what happens to Lecturers may later happen to all faculty.”

In 2006, faculty hiring trends show a continued dismantling of the profession: now more than half of the CSU faculty have non-tenure-track appointments. The faculty as a whole are being treated more like Lecturers, as everyone faces increased workloads, stagnant paychecks, threats to benefits, and decreased power over their professional lives. Our popular early retirement program, which honors the wisdom and years of work contributed by senior faculty, is under attack. It’s not just about Lecturers anymore; it’s the whole profession at risk.

As a result, affirming our commonality of interest and acting collectively has never been more crucial for the faculty; the American Association of University Professors has taken the lead with an important policy statement, “Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession.” This 2003 policy statement—at once both visionary and pragmatic—states in the introduction that its recommendations are “necessary for the well-being of the profession and the public good.” This statement offers guidelines for planning and implementing “gradual transitions to a higher proportion of tenurable positions,” along with “intermediate, ameliorative measures by which the academic freedom and professional integration of faculty currently appointed to contingent positions can be enhanced by academic due process and assurances of continued employment.”

It is important to note that the actions of my faculty union influenced the recommendations of the AAUP’s statement. CFA has received considerable attention for our political action work, which successfully uses the

legislative process to get more resources into the CSU system, improve due process rights, strengthen benefits, and mandate that the statewide administration, statewide academic senate, and the union jointly develop a plan to increase tenure-track density. Our bargaining agreements show what collective action can achieve: contracts trending in a more positive direction with a two-track strategy based on an increase in the number and percentage of tenure-track faculty that still protects incumbent Lecturers. The due process rights CFA has won for Lecturers have improved the stability of the CSU workforce, but we still have a long way to go; such large numbers of contingent appointments weaken the entire bargaining unit and the profession as a whole.

Of course, a union such as CFA, which represents both tenure-line and contingent faculty, is not without challenges. CFA has not always been Lecturer friendly, and in the early 1990's the union leadership abandoned a contract provision giving Lecturers multi-year appointments in order to settle a contract. Our union has many different constituencies, including department chairs and the Lecturers whom the chairs hire and evaluate. Our most recent collective bargaining contract, ratified in 2002, significantly improved Lecturer job security, including multi-year appointments and preference for work provisions. This contract was criticized by some union members as a "Lecturer contract," a divisive attitude that was encouraged by certain administrators. Lecturers have had to work hard to hold their own in the union—employing the inside/outside organizing strategy that Joe Berry describes in his book "Reclaiming the Ivory Tower." Tenure-track faculty had to be convinced that, as Berry states, "We should try for the broadest unity possible. After all it is the only source of our power to change anything" (pp.124-125).

In achieving this "broadest unity possible," CFA had some lucky breaks, beginning with the decision of the California Public Employment Relations Board to put all faculty in one bargaining unit. That's another story, and there was plenty of controversy about the decision, but it worked out well for CFA. CFA also made sweeping changes in the late 1990's that brought union leaders into office who believed in the power of unity and were committed to fair representation for all CFA members. Our past president and current vice-president had both been Lecturers in the CSU before getting tenure-line positions; our current statewide officers continue this commitment to unity. Last fall, Governor Schwarzenegger called a special election in California threatening funding for public education and the political rights of public employee unions. This Special Election initially seemed very unlucky. But faculty learned the power of unity—not just with other teachers but with students, other public employees and private sector unions—all of whom worked together to achieve a stunning victory in the election.

Now CFA is the middle of protracted and difficult bargaining that could be divisive but has brought the faculty together and brought them out in unprecedented numbers at every one of the 23 campuses to support the bargaining. Our bargaining campaign is called Unite to Win, and the union's resolutions include as a first priority "negotiating a fair contract with salary gains for all faculty and no takeaways." Some of the most serious takeaways proposed by the administration are against job security and due process for incumbent Lecturers. The administration's lack of respect for Lecturer work shows a fundamental lack of respect for all faculty work; therefore, the union has framed its defense of the contract not as "save the Lecturers," but as save tenure, save academic freedom, and ensure a stable and committed workforce.

To conclude, it will take the broadest possible collective action to fight back against the relentless corporatization of higher education, the erosion of academic freedom, and the loss of faculty control over curriculum. Fortunately, we in CFA are brought together in this collective action by our commonality of interests: commitment to our students, respect for knowledge, and a belief that protecting faculty work protects the university's mission to fulfill the common good.

This presentation, "It's All About the Work All the Time: Commonality of Interests in a Common Bargaining Unit," was adapted from "Humiliation, Commonality of Interests, and the Future of the CSU," by Elizabeth Hoffman and John Hess in California Faculty, Fall, 2005.