

VANGUARD

Official Newsletter of the Adjunct Faculty Association at Nassau Community College
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WELCOME! FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

PAGE 2

THE INSIDE SCOOP

PAGE 7

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE-PRESIDENT

PAGE 4

*WE CARE
About Our Students,
Our Members,
Our College!*



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From the President's Desk



Stefan Krompier

WELCOME

It is my pleasure to welcome both our newly hired and seasoned adjuncts to our classrooms, labs, library, service centers and offices for the 2019/2020 college year. On and off campus I, your Officer Team, Executive Board, Representative Assembly and Committees – Health and Safety, Members, Grants, SUNY Chancellors Awards For Excellence in Adjunct Teaching, Scholarship, Retirement, Constitution/Bylaw Revision - are ready to continue the good works we do to serve your best interests and by extension the best interests of the students we teach, counsel, remediate, and advise throughout the year.

As we start this new college year, I must say that I am especially thankful for and extremely grateful to the courageous adjunct leaders who founded the AFA forty-six years ago. Because of their efforts and the efforts of those who followed, the AFA has grown to where it is today-- **the premier independent union, throughout our nation, representing adjuncts.**

Five years ago, when our newly elected leadership team took office, we declared it to be a “New Day, A New Way”. This mantra continues as we move into the 2019/2020 college year. We will, as we have done over the past four and half years that we have been in office, work with college leadership in a collegial and professional manner to resolve issues and to offer advice as to how the college might grow and prosper.

We will continue to:

- Provide grants to AFA members who attend conferences and workshops related to their work.
- Bring the opportunity to win the SUNY’s Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching to nominated adjuncts. Should SUNY one day offer a Chancellor’s Award for adjunct non-classroom faculty, we will likewise promote that. We will continue to provide a workshop to nominated AFA Members that enhances their ability to win the award.
- Provide Departmental AFA Offices where our adjuncts help students solve course related problems.

...continued on page 3

...continued from page 2

- Provide the President's Hotline and our general email account where constant monitoring takes place and members receive a response to their concerns in under 24 hours.
- Make significant contributions to NCC's efforts to comply with Middle States so that our accreditation stays in place.
 - o AFA members served on many Middle States' committees bringing their knowledge and expertise to these committees in a collective effort to enable NCC to restore accreditation. We will continue to do so as the need arises.
- Serve on NCC's Leadership Council that meets monthly and as needed to tackle issues that are important to the college's well-being.
- Serve on college committees such as the Sexual Harassment Awareness Committee, the Marketing Advisory Committee and various Search Committees.
- Produce professional videos that focus on the exemplary credentials of our members and illustrates the high quality education and services our members deliver to students. In addition to being screened at AFA events, these videos have been distributed through social media, targeting audiences whose cohort was focused on potential new students. One such video had almost 70,000 views on Facebook.
- Actively support college wide initiatives/organizations such as the NEST, the Greenhouse and Veteran's Affairs.
- Work with off campus constituency groups and public servants in effort to enhance your ability to serve the students who pass through your doors each day.

Again I welcome you to or back to Nassau Community College. I assure you the AFA's efforts on your behalf will continue and grow. Please check your college and personal emails daily for important messages from us and the college as well. I humbly thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President.

Stefan Krompfer
President
Adjunct Faculty Association

Message from the Vice-President



Scott Stark

Welcome back for the 2019 - 2020 academic year. At the beginning of each semester, I ask our members to know our contract and make us aware of any issues. Many of you will be hearing from your department chair soon regarding fall 2019 adjunct assignments and you may encounter a serious issue. Unfortunately, enrollment is down, yet again. Due to this decline, there will be fewer assignments. Those with low seniority and/or limited availability may not receive the same amount of hours as in the past. Please be in touch

with your department and be aware of their assignment process/timeline. As always, if you believe that your seniority has been violated, contact your department representative as soon as you become aware of the issue. If you do not have your representative's contact information, it is available on our webpage www.myafaonline.org.

It is no secret that enrollment continues to decline. This coming academic year could see a decrease to below 16,000 students. It is important that we do what we can to turn the tide. Each and every one of us can, and should, serve as an ambassador of the college. Every chance we get, we should be extolling the virtues of a Nassau Community College education because it truly is a jewel of the county. If not for that reason, then for the basic fact that more students equals more jobs for us. I am sure you are aware of these facts, but it doesn't hurt to state that Nassau Community College delivers:

- **A HIGH QUALITY – LOW COST EDUCATION** – Tuition is \$2,800 per semester. On average, two years at Nassau will save the average student approximately \$40,000 over residing at a SUNY college or university.
- **DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS** – Nassau offers more than 70 degree and certificate programs; many of which are not available to students of many four-year institutions.
- **TRANSFERABILITY** – Many times when students transfer from Nassau, they find themselves accepted at colleges that would not have accepted them immediately after high school.
- **AWARD WINNING FACULTY** – We are first among the community colleges in New York State for the number of faculty members who receive the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. We hold doctorates at twice the national average for community colleges.
- **FLEXIBLE DAY, NIGHT AND WEEKEND COURSE SCHEDULES**
- **ONLINE AND HYBRID COURSES**
- **HONORS PROGRAM** – For excelling students, we should highly recommend the Honors Program that offers:
 - ▶ Superb preparation for transferring to a four-year institution

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- ▶ Reasonable costs for the first two years of college
- ▶ Personal attention through individualized counseling in planning an appropriate academic course of study and through small classes with Nassau's finest professors
- ▶ Extra activities designed to enrich the entire educational experience and sense of belonging to a community of scholars
- ▶ Recognition at Awards Night ceremony for all participants
- ▶ Personal satisfaction derived from participating in a special quality curriculum
- ▶ Access to the Honors Student study space which includes a comfortable seating area to study or relax, tea, coffee, a mini-fridge, computers, and printers.
- ▶ All courses are denoted as Honors courses on your official transcript. You also have the ability to earn the official Honors designation when you graduate.

Many of us also have personal stories about our experiences here as faculty, and many as students. Any time Stefan speaks about why he is so pro Nassau Community College, we hear him say he would be "living in a box under a bridge if not for Nassau." While my experience is not as drastic, if not for Nassau, I would have been unable to change careers 25 years ago to become an educator. I am sure many of you have similar experiences. Please, make it a point to extol the virtues of Nassau Community College. When I first began here in 2005, our enrollment was approximately 10,000 students more than it is today. AFA members promoting the college won't get us back to those numbers but it can help.

As I said in the past, it is the AFA membership, individually and collectively, who are the true leaders of our association. It is your brilliance and the collective brilliance of all adjuncts who are taking the AFA to new heights. I look forward to meeting more of you and hearing from you. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any issues or questions. You can call me at 516-859-0250 or email me at ScottStark27@gmail.com, or at Scott.Stark@NCC.edu.

Thanks, once again, for the honor and privilege of serving as your Vice President.

Scott Stark
Vice-President
Adjunct Faculty Association



September 11, 2001, a beautiful sun filled morning; a day whose beginning would lend no clue to the profound suffering that would quickly follow. A group of devious individuals set out to inflict pain and suffering on countless innocent individuals and their families.

The acts that were perpetrated on that day, eighteen years ago, run counter to all that we stand for here at

Nassau Community College and in our great country. The doors of our college are open to all who choose to pursue and continue their education. Our college family is comprised of individuals from all different backgrounds, races, religions and/or beliefs, ages and gender.

The indelible acts of September 11, 2001 were committed in the hopes that our way of life would be forever destroyed. Here on our campus, we are reminded daily that our freedoms will never die by the despicable actions of those who attempt to force their wills upon us. We witness the strengths of our democracy each day on campus when: religious clubs hold a meeting; a professor teaches a controversial subject; we challenge the decisions of those in charge and we have the ability to voice our own opinions in our classrooms and our conference rooms.

The acts that sought to divide and conquer us as a nation on 9/11/01, did just the opposite. The days and months that followed that tragic day saw a reunification of our great country in ways that could have never been anticipated. Let us keep that sense of unity forever in our hearts and minds. Our strength is found in our ability to find the commonality among one another. We should never lose focus of whom we are collectively...Americans.

Stefan Krompfer
President
Adjunct Faculty Association

Richard Erben
Chief Information Officer
Adjunct Faculty Association

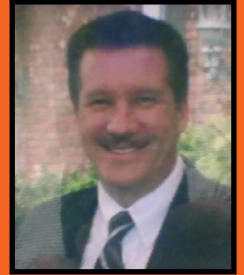
The Inside Scoop

For the past several years at a number of events you might have heard me, while introducing Stef, use the phrase that he “*has taken the adjunct faculty out of the shadows and integrated them into the fabric of our college.*” While it might be a catchy sentence, its meaning runs far deeper than a simple slogan. This month, I am devoting my column to delving deeper into the meaning of this sentence and the substance that has turned the words of this sentence into a reality that each one of us should be proud of.

We always knew that our members made (and continue to make) a substantial contribution to our students, our college, and our union. The problem for many years was that this was a guarded secret that never saw the light of day. In 2015, we knew that the collective talents and brilliance of our members should no longer be hidden but rather put forth for everyone to know. The first step in the plan of getting this word out was to have a professional video shot that would describe who we are and what we do. This video is in our Video Archives page on our website. The video was distributed through our website and social media platforms. It was then made

available to state and local elected leaders.

Once it became evident how much every one of our members has to offer, we began to find ourselves participating actively, on campus, in ways that were never seen before. We were very active on a number of the college’s critical Middle States’ committees in a collective effort to maintain our accreditation. Likewise, we are represented on the college’s Leadership Council and have a seat and vote on the Academic Senate. Moreover, we meet monthly with the college president to discuss issues of concern. We also serve on a number of search committees including the Presidential Search committee. In 2018, for the first time in the history of our college, we brought the ability for adjuncts to apply for the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching and we were most proud of our first 8 recipients. We have also been very active in our support of organizations



Richard D. Erben

...continued on page 8

The Inside Scoop

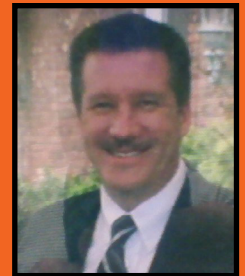
on campus. Together with the NCCFT we raised over \$12,000 for the college's food pantry, the Nest. Since the inception of the AFA scholarship program we awarded well over \$300,000 to part time students. Likewise, we have supported NCC's veterans with awards, scholarships and donations. Similarly, we have supported the efforts of the Greenhouse to raise money and we have worked to raise their visibility with elected officials. We have an active Health and Safety committee that works with the college to have potentially dangerous situations rectified in a timely fashion. Our president, Stef Kromprier, attends numerous college and political events where he continually emphasizes the great work that all of our members do for the college and the great education that the college offers our students. We have also established the President's Hotline where members can reach us in an emergency. The hotline is monitored 7 days a week/ 24 hours a day. Most recently, we have brought a discount dental, vision and prescription plan to our members and we are continuing to work on other discount plans.

Indeed, these are a representative

sampling of how we have become a part of the college's fabric. There is so much that goes behind this simple sentence. It is having a membership of such distinction, talent and brilliance that has made this possible. Each one of our 1,731 members brings a unique talent to NCC. When these talents come together, a beautiful picture emerges. That picture is the education of our students and how you have impacted their lives, in ways you might never know.

To each of you, Thank You!

Richard D. Erben
Chief Information Officer
Adjunct Faculty Association



Richard D. Erben

Around the Region

The Revenge of the Poverty-Stricken College Professors Is Underway in Florida. And It's Big.

By Hamilton Nolan

“Two half-time adjunct jobs do not make a full-time income. Far from it,” Ximena Barrientos says. “I’m lucky that I have my own apartment. I have no idea how people make it work if they have to pay rent.”

We are not sitting on a street corner, or in a welfare office, or in the break room of a fast food restaurant. We are sitting inside a brightly lit science classroom on the third floor of an MC Escher-esque concrete building, with an open breezeway letting in the muggy South Florida air, on the campus of Miami Dade College, one of the largest institutions of higher learning in the United States of America. Barrientos has been teaching here for 15 years. But this is not “her” classroom. She has a PhD, but she does not have a designated classroom. Nor does she have an office. Nor does she have a set schedule, nor tenure, nor healthcare benefits, nor anything that could be described as a decent living wage. She is a full-time adjunct professor: one of thousands of members of the extremely well-educated academic underclass, whose largely unknown sufferings have played just as big a role as student debt in enabling the entire swollen College Industrial Complex to exist.

As Barrientos chatted with another adjunct in the empty classroom, the conversation turned to horror stories: the adjuncts forced to sleep in their cars; the adjunct who was sleeping in classrooms at night; the adjunct who had a full mental breakdown from

the stress of not being able to earn a living after all of the time he had put in getting his PhD. Such stories are common, from campus to campus, whispered by adjuncts who know deep down that they themselves are living constantly on the edge of personal, professional, and financial disaster. Other than academic credentials, most adjunct professors don’t have much. But recently, Ximena Barrientos, and her 2,800 colleagues at Miami Dade College, and thousands of others just like them throughout the state of Florida, have acquired, at shocking speed and on a grand scale, something of great value—a union. And they want nothing less than dignity.

When thinking about the struggles of thousands and thousands of people who are both employed as college professors and hardly able to pay their own bills, it is useful to keep in mind the fact that, as a rule, none of these people are supposed to exist. The accepted story of what an “adjunct professor” is—the myth that has drawn so many hopefuls into the world of professional academia—is that adjuncting is not a full-time job at all. It is something that retirees do to keep themselves busy; something that working professionals do on the side to educate people in their

...continued on page 10



Around the Region

field; something that, perhaps, a young PhD might do for a year or two while looking for a full-time professorship, but certainly nothing that would constitute an actual career in itself.

In fact, this is a big lie. The long term trend in higher education has been one of a shrinking number of full-time positions and an ever-growing number of adjunct positions. It is not hard to see why. University budgets are balanced on the backs of adjunct professors. In an adjunct, a school gets the same class taught for about half the salary of a full-time professor, and none of the benefits. The school also retains a god-like control over the schedules of adjuncts, who are literally laid off after every single semester, and then rehired as necessary for the following semester. In the decade since the financial crisis, state governments have slashed higher education funding, and Florida is no exception. That has had two primary consequences on campus: students have taken on ever-higher levels of debt to pay for school, and the college teaching profession has been gutted, as expensive full-time positions are steadily eliminated in favor of cheaper adjunct positions. Many longtime adjuncts talk of jealously waiting for years for a full-time professor to die or retire, only to see the full-time position eliminated when they finally do.

Students at Florida's enormous community colleges (Miami Dade College alone has more than 165,000 students) may not be conscious of this dynamic, but they sit at its center, and they pay the price—not only in their student loan bills, but by sitting in classes taught by teachers who are overworked, underpaid, given virtually no professional resources or continuity of scheduling, and who are often forced to rush from job to job in order to make ends meet, leaving little time for helping students outside of

classroom hours, much less for publishing work in their fields to advance their careers. Now, Florida's higher education system sits at the center of another trend as well: the unionization of those well educated but miserably compensated adjunct professors.

It has long been common for full time college faculty members to be unionized. Over the past decade, adjuncts (and grad student workers) across America have begun unionizing in earnest as well, as they come to realize that their stories of woe are not unique. In just the past few years, one union has organized close to 10,000 Florida adjuncts, in what is one of the most remarkable and little-noticed large scale labor campaigns in the country.

Carolina Ampudia was a practicing physician in Mexico. She moved to the U.S. for health reasons, and in 2009, she became an adjunct professor at Broward College in Fort Lauderdale, teaching pre-med science classes. She was told that she would have a full-time position in two years. Ten years later, she is still an adjunct. She makes around \$18,000, with an M.D. While the number of full-time jobs never seemed to grow, the sheer number of other adjuncts at the school has become overwhelming. "We have been growing in numbers of adjuncts these past 10 years. It's become very, very crazy, to the point that you start the semester and there's a bunch of people there you don't know," she says. "It's almost like a first day of class, when you're like—OK, what happened here?" "If it hadn't been for the union effort, I would have just walked away in disgust."

Even though a large majority of teachers at Broward, as at other schools, are adjuncts like Am-

...continued on page 11

...continued from page 10

Around the Region

pudia—67 percent of the Broward faculty in 2015 was reportedly part-time—she still felt isolated and neglected after a decade in the same job. Five years ago, the school had formed an adjunct committee to advise it on improving conditions. (“The provost that the college had back then came in the room and said we could come up with any idea we wanted, as long as it didn’t involve any money,” Ampudia laughs.)

She continued looking for ways to improve the lot of adjuncts. In the summer of 2017, an organizer from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU’s) Faculty Forward higher education campaign showed up at her house. She was ready.

Five months later, 92 percent of Broward’s 1,700 eligible adjuncts voted “yes” to unionize. The SEIU’s Florida higher ed campaign was rolling.

In April of 2018, contract negotiations began. Little progress was made for the rest of the year. This year, the negotiating climate has gotten a bit more positive, but the two sides haven’t gotten to money issues yet. And for adjuncts everywhere, money is the issue above all else. The scramble to earn a minimal living wage is what forces thousands of professors to live lives of constant desperation.

“I would work morning, noon, and night. That is my problem—to be able to make a living, that’s what I had to do,” says Renee Zelden, who adjuncts at both Broward and Miami Dade Colleges. “I teach more than full-time faculty.” Indeed. This summer, Zelden is “only” teaching five classes at two schools—fewer than her usual six to eight classes at three schools per semester. Most schools cap adjuncts at four classes per semester, hence the multiple institutions. The gas money Zelden spends to commute from her home to Miami can eat up more than the \$50 she is paid for a single hour of class, so she must be sure to get mul-

tiples classes on the same day just to make teaching worth her time. Fifty dollars for an hour-long class sounds decent, until you break down the time it takes to prep for class, commute, teach, and then grade papers for 25 or more students. “If I figured it out, I’d be afraid I’m only making like five dollars an hour,” says Zelden, “so I don’t want to figure it out.”

She needn’t be so negative. Other Florida adjuncts who have figured it out told me that, factoring in all of the time they spend on teaching and related work, they make as much as seven dollars an hour—less than Florida’s minimum wage.

Even as a popular, well-established, well-qualified college-level writing instructor and member of the Broward faculty senate, whose record gives her a much more stable inside track than most adjuncts, Zelden is still obligated to wait anxiously for her new schedule at each school, each semester, with no guarantee that she will receive the exact classes or schedule she wants, and with no guarantee that a full-time professor won’t snatch a class away after it has already been assigned to her, which is their right. Adjuncts simply take what they get, like it or not. “More and more, there are people that, we rely on our three or four classes a semester, or we don’t eat. We don’t pay our rent. We could end up living in our car,” Zelden says. “It’s really hard to live like this. Every January, I say to myself, when I have no income coming in because of the holidays... I’m going crazy. I’ve got to change.”

The overwhelming victory of the union vote at Broward came with little formal opposition. At Miami

...continued on page 12

Around the Region

Dade College (MDC), on the other hand, the school did its best to scare its adjuncts away from SEIU. Between the time that the adjuncts filed for a union election in July of 2018 and the time the election was held in March of this year, the administration sent a stream of ominous anti-union warnings, culminating with a multi-page letter mailed to everyone's house urging them to vote "no," offering rationales such as "The SEIU would certainly want every adjunct to pay union dues," and "The SEIU organizers do not know academia. They have never been faculty." By this logic, college professors should also never allow themselves to be represented by attorneys or accountants—they have never been faculty.

Miami Dade is known as "Democracy's College," a title that purports to capture the school's noble mission of educating everyone, no matter who they are. The hugeness of the student body certainly backs up this characterization. The hugeness of the underpaid and stepped-on academic work force—which includes 2,800 adjuncts—seems to undercut the message. At MDC's Wolfson campus downtown, a hunk of the Berlin Wall is on display. The school says that this symbolizes how it is "Walking the walk as 'Democracy's College' in each and every one of its endeavors"; several adjuncts, on the other hand, brought it up as a tangible, irony-drenched reminder of the gulf between the school's lofty rhetoric and its determination to block their own democratic organizing if at all possible.

Susan Peterson has lived a colorful life. She married and divorced a rock star. She's been a champion collegiate swimmer. She was at UC Berkeley during the legendary Free Speech protest movement. She's worked as a mime, and ran a successful company offering mermaid-themed birthday parties to

Florida children. She also taught English as a second language off and on for years, both at colleges and in public school systems. In 2012, she began teaching at Miami Dade College.

During her time at the school, Peterson has endured workplace injuries with little recourse to healthcare, unstable scheduling, and long drives to teach classes for pay that barely makes it worth the effort. (She's not teaching this summer, because she was offered classes with fewer than 15 students, which means that the school pays less—a class with 10 students, for example, pays only two-thirds the standard salary. Classes with more than 15 students, however, do not pay any extra.)

Peterson had always felt she had a good relationship with MDC president Eduardo Padrón. She had even recorded a song celebrating him when he won the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2016, which earned her a nice letter from him in return. But when Peterson got involved in the unionization effort at the school, the cordiality seemed to disappear. Padrón oversaw the school's anti-union campaign, accusing the SEIU of "intimidating faculty" and personally signing multiple emails to staffers telling them not to unionize. "I was really shocked at the attitude of Eduardo and the trustees at 'Democracy's College,' that they would be anti-union," she says. "If it hadn't been for the union effort, I would have just walked away in disgust. But I feel like, with Miami Dade College, it's sort of unrequited love. I've come to love the college, love the students. I don't love the way I've been treated."

The sheer size of the MDC adjunct union cam-

...continued on page 13

...continued from page 12

Around the Region

paing would have made it difficult even under ideal circumstances. And the circumstances—in Florida, a “right to work” state with unfriendly labor laws, in a city full of conservative-leaning exiles from Cuba and elsewhere who often associate unions with their left-wing political nightmares—were not ideal. In addition to the scare campaign by the administration, the union had to deal with nightmarish logistics: MDC is spread across multiple, far-flung campuses, each staffed by a shifting group of adjuncts who often are not even provided office space that might allow them to get to know their coworkers even if they wanted to. Most adjuncts say the union campaign was the first time they actually got to know their fellow professors. “The first time I was ever acknowledged by the university was when I got a letter saying the union would interfere with our relationship. I was like, what relationship?”

Ironically, the union campaign itself provided the collegiality, communication, and sense of community that so many adjuncts craved when they entered academia, but could not find at their huge, impersonal institution. The seemingly universal feeling that they had been conned by the higher education industry—which dangled a full-time position just out of reach, a mirage that never seemed to get closer—has been perhaps the single biggest motivation for organizing. “As an adjunct, it just feels like the institution’s made it harder for me to be promoted. I definitely don’t feel respected here, or recognized for what I do,” says Steven Chapman, a full-time MDC adjunct English professor. “I’ve applied for and been interviewed for full-time positions, but [got] no feedback as to how my qualifications don’t meet the standards or the requirements for being hired full-time. So it’s all a mystery. There’s no transparency whatsoever.”

Chapman, a high school dropout who turned his own life around, got a master’s degree, and went into teaching with a mission to help forgotten kids, has been disillusioned by the gulf between what he sees as his own commitment to the profession and the school’s disinterest in investing the resources it would take to provide not only a decent life for teachers, but for students. “If you have an institution that only hires and focuses on adjuncts, you don’t have opportunities for mentorships with students during office times... if that [teacher] isn’t available, or if they’re not supported by the administration and the school, then there’s a huge gap in the relationship between the professor and the student,” he says. “I think that really does more to exacerbate the inequality in education.”

In March, the SEIU won its union vote at MDC by a margin of just 14 votes. Democracy’s College is now home to the “largest single-school adjunct collective bargaining unit in the country.”

Anchored by its two gargantuan wins in South Florida—MDC and Broward boast a total of around 4,500 unionized adjuncts—the SEIU’s higher education campaign has taken on a steamroller quality in Florida. These wins join existing SEIU unions at Seminole State College in Sanford and at Lake-Sumter State College in Leesburg, along with two big units in the Tampa area: one-thousand adjuncts at Hillsborough Community College, who unionized in December of 2016, and 900 at the University of South Florida, who voted to unionize in March of 2018.

Pay for Florida adjuncts varies depending on their credentials, but tends to be a few hundred dollars higher per class at big universities than it is at

...continued on page 14

Around the Region

the community colleges. Still, though USF is a full-on four-year university, right up to the football team, teachers there were afflicted with the exact same set of obstacles.

“I’m teaching all the time,” says Jarad Fennell, an adjunct English professor at USF. “It’s not feasible.” Fennell has been teaching around the country for 15 years; three years ago, thinking that he needed a terminal degree in order to find a stable career in higher education, he got his Ph.D at USF. Today, he is still adjuncting. He has taught as many as eight classes per semester at multiple institutions in order to pay the bills. The total lack of support he’s gotten from his employers has him considering leaving higher ed altogether. Getting involved in the union campaign at USF, and in the ongoing contract negotiations, is the only thing that has given him any hope for the future of his profession.

Sitting in the clubhouse of a tidy apartment complex in Clearwater, Angela Edwards-Luckett, a friendly and thoughtful woman, tells a story that encompasses nearly every pitfall inherent in the way that we learn in, teach for, and fund our higher education system. Born in Baltimore, Edwards-Luckett got her associate’s degree in 1991 and began working on her bachelor’s, but was forced to drop out after family responsibilities—from her own family, and then from extended family members whose health declined—interrupted her education. A devout Christian, she felt called to become a minister in 2006, and left her stable job at the Social Security Administration to go back to school. She finished her bachelor’s in 2009, at the age of 42, and by 2013 had earned two master’s degrees—one in theology, and another in church ministry. Besides the holy calling, she was driven by a desire to be a role model for her two daughters. “I felt

like I needed to show them that in life, there’s always an opportunity for change,” she says.

Edwards-Luckett achieved her degrees at the price of six figures of student debt. Her work at church was not especially lucrative, and she loved to teach, so she got an adjunct job at St. Petersburg College in 2015. She has been teaching World Religions there for four years now. With two master’s degrees, she earns about \$2,000 per class. The school usually only gives her two classes per semester. In a good year, she might make as much as \$11,000.

Teaching and preaching, two callings of the heart, have left Angela Edwards-Luckett mired in poverty. She has Obamacare, and still must sometimes choose between paying her premium and being able to afford her medication. During summer and winter breaks, when teaching income stops, she must sometimes go to food banks in order to feed her family. She cannot afford a car, so she takes three buses to commute to her teaching job in Tarpon Springs. This commute is two-and-a-half hours each way. In order to teach for three hours, she must spend five hours on the bus. Health conditions mean that she must get on and off the bus with a cane. Once, a student saw her on there wearing her college ID, and told her she must not be a very good professor if she was forced to ride the bus.

Edwards-Luckett’s father was in a union in Baltimore, and she was in a union when she worked for the government. She is a true believer in the ability of unions to help working people—and black people in particular—overcome discrimination and win a toehold in the middle class. When she got wind of a

...continued on page 15

...continued from page 14

Around the Region

union drive at St. Petersburg College about a year ago, she jumped at the chance to help. She even joined an SEIU “Free College Now” bus tour around Florida, to highlight the “vicious cycle” of student debt—a cycle she knows well, as her own debt will prevent her from paying for her daughter’s college tuition.

The adjuncts at SPC are hoping to hold a union election in late summer or early fall. Meanwhile, the school has been busy rolling out the anti-union scare campaign that is so standard by now that it seems to spring fully formed from a box. In one “FAQ” sent to adjuncts, the school administration argues that a union would interfere with the existing “Community of Care”—and also warns ominously that “the union cannot even guarantee that employees will receive the same wages and benefits that they enjoy now,” and that “The law does not require that the College ever reach a contract with the union.” These warnings against people pursuing their right to collective bargaining are a fair representation of what a “Community of Care” looks like for Florida’s adjunct professors. Union drives have woken colleges up to the suffering of adjuncts, and the schools’ typical response is to threaten them with further suffering.

“I had to admit this to myself about five months ago: I’m part of the working poor,” says Edwards-Luckett, who is confident the union will prevail. Tears well up in her eyes as she speaks. “I’m educating future leaders, and I’m part of the working poor. Is that not an irony?”

SEIU can reach 10,000 unionized adjunct faculty in the state of Florida if it wins several ongoing campaigns. Besides SPC, another hotbed of organizing is Santa Fe College in Gainesville, which acts as a major feeder school for the University of Florida. Josh Braley, a soft-spoken Presbyterian minister with

a Ph.D in religion, has been an adjunct at Santa Fe for 15 years. He saw it as “a good way to get your foot in the door,” before the full-time job offer; as usual, the full-time job never materialized.

When he was still actively searching, Braley was told that there were about 80 qualified applicants for every single full-time professorship. In a decade and a half, he can recall getting a single raise. He now makes \$2,000 per semester per class. “Of all the people that I went to graduate school with [at Vanderbilt], I think I know only one who ended up with a tenured, full-time teaching position,” he says. In the spring of 2018, an SEIU organizer showed up in his classroom and asked him to sign a union card; he was skeptical, and put them off. A few weeks later, another organizer showed up at his house. He figured that if they were that persistent, there must be some support behind it. Now, he’s helping organize his coworkers himself.

When he was hired at Santa Fe 15 years ago, an administrator told him that a lot of adjuncts were just people who loved to teach, and who didn’t do it for the paycheck, and who were supported by their spouses; just last year, he read an interview with the college president in which he said the same thing. Yet Braley has never, in his 15 years, met an adjunct who fit that description. “What this tells me is that they don’t actually believe this, but they’re saying it because it’s a convenient fiction,” he says. “Or, what’s even more alarming is if they think this is true. They’re so out of touch.”

What is actually true, at Santa Fe College and across Florida and across the United States, is that adjunct professors do indeed love to teach—so much so

...continued on page 16



Around the Region

that they often sacrifice everything for the chance, a fact that schools understand very well and take full advantage of. Rather than the mythical carefree part-timer, most adjuncts are more like Kate Murray, who has taught art at Santa Fe for a decade. She moved to Gainesville to set up an art studio with her husband, and has stuck with teaching, like many, because of her commitment to the field and to her students—even though she bluntly states that “the money sucks,” and that she has put in “immense” unpaid hours of work keeping the school’s ceramics studio in working order, with little to no institutional support. She’s a widow now, and “to keep the wolf from the door financially,” she spent years working at a Publix grocery store deli on the side. It did not escape her attention that when she got her employee evaluation at Publix, the store used the exact same point-based evaluation model that the college did.

At its core, the plausibility of having a dignified career in higher education has eroded for the same reason that everyone from skilled manufacturing workers to cab drivers to writers have woken up and found that their slice of the American dream has been canceled: if money is everything, and everything is a business, then full-time jobs must be taken off the books as fast as possible. Absent any countervailing impulse to assign value to these jobs above and beyond their raw labor cost, this trend will only continue. At Santa Fe College, and at colleges throughout the country, “they are governed by people who look at higher education as business management heads would look at any operation,” Kate Murray says. “Of course they hire more adjuncts. They get it for cheaper. That’s the smart thing to do if you look at it according to a business model. In my humble opinion, there’s a lot more to it than pooping out employees for

local industries.”

I grew up in Florida. It is now considered a purple state, but its red roots run deep. Large scale successful labor organizing in such a place is a sign that the situation has gotten very, very bad. Many of the adjunct professors I spoke to in Florida are not particularly radical people. They are normal people who are able to see that things have gotten out of control. Their students are too busy with their own lives; their full-time colleagues are desperately trying to hang on to what they have; their schools are trying to slash teaching costs, consequences be damned; their elected officials will not stop worshipping at the altar of tax cuts. Yet in a world of growing inequality, the value of a college degree remains high. The students will keep coming, but the job of teaching them will get ever more dispiriting. It is a system that is balanced on the backs of adjuncts—highly educated, poorly paid idealists. That is a recipe for 10,000 new union members. When the Ph.D’s can’t make a living, what hope is there for the rest of us?

Adjuncts are well aware that they sit at the bottom of a sprawling academic food chain. They are well aware that the rational solution would be for them to join with the administrators, and the full-time professors, and the students, and the parents, and head to Tallahassee and to Washington to demand more funding for their schools. But for now, all they can see are the feet of everyone above them, stepping on their heads.