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Improving Job Stability and Career Pathways for Lecturers Through Collective Bargaining at the University of California

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From the Delphi Project database of

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University Council-American Federation of Teachers (UC-AFT)/University of California (UC) Unit 18 faculty achieved a historic win with their new collective bargaining agreement effective for 2021-2026. Their efforts focused on improving lecturers' job stability and career pathway revisions. Their bargaining campaign theme was "faculty equity — student success," drawing an inextricable link between faculty working conditions and student learning conditions. Before the establishment of the new contract, the annual turnover of pre-continuing faculty (lecturers that have not yet completed the equivalent of six years or 12 semesters of service to the same department) at the UCs averaged around 30% for all bargaining unit members and nearly 50% for pre-continuing faculty. The UCs have experienced a low continuing status attainment rate of 8% for lecturers across ranks since 2004. The new contract is an attempt to retain lecturers, move more part-time lecturers toward full-time status, and improve their livelihood. Successful changes to the contract sets the basis for future contracts. The process that led to the historic win is the focal point of this case study and serves as a model for other unions and non-tenure-track faculty who aspire to unionize nationwide.

Example Best Practices

Multi-Year Contracts with Preferential Rehire Rights

The new contract enhances job stability for pre-continuing lecturers with multi-year appointments and guaranteed appointment percentages after the initial year. Pre-continuing lecturers will be reviewed at the end of each multi-year appointment. Multi-year contracts expand protections against layoff/reduction in time and also give more lecturers access to the Unit 18 Professional Development fund.

Preferential rehire rights allows lecturers to keep their positions and no longer compete against the pool of outside applicants.

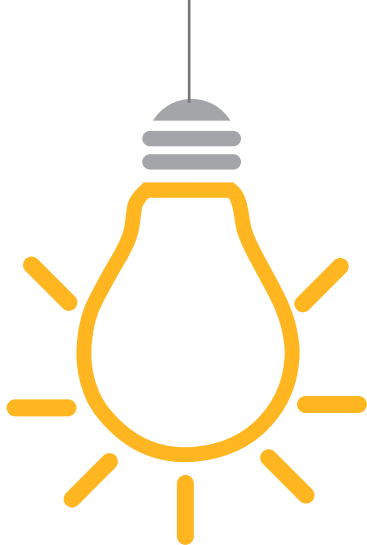
Preferential rehire rights afford lecturers early consideration for available work for which they are qualified and eligible. Historically, the UC system considered all lecturer positions de facto vacant even when they were occupied by current lecturers, thus asking current lecturers to apply for their own jobs and be considered in applicant pools with hundreds of new applicants. Preferential rehire rights allows lecturers to keep their positions and no longer compete against the pool of outside applicants. The new preferential rehire provision requires a more robust review process, including built-in 3% (minimum) merit increases upon reappointment. These reviews, along with longer commitments under multi-year appointments, will encourage administrators and department leadership to work diligently to recruit and retain effective lecturers and to think more critically about the contribution and value of the lecturers in their department. Multi-year appointments help departments reduce time spent searching for future employees, while also offering security to lecturers.

Salary Adjustments

The UCs are known to compensate their lecturers better than most other universities in the US on a per-course basis. To continue this momentum in the new contract, lecturers will receive guaranteed yearly salary increases and a new salary scale. The new salary scale sets the 2022-2023 minimum annual full-time salary at \$64,329 and uses a point-based scale for merit and promotion increases (each point is 3% higher than the previous point). The minimum salary rate for Continuing lecturers will be at least four points (12.5%) higher than the minimum salary rate for pre-continuing lecturers, and the minimum salary rate for Senior Continuing lecturers will be six points (19.4%) higher than the minimum salary rate for Continuing lecturers. Salary scales for lecturers will increase by 10% in 2022, 3% in 2023 and 2024, and 4% in 2025. Each lecturer also received a one-time ratification payment of \$1500. After combining cost of living adjustments with merit increases, the salary of the average lecturer in the bargaining unit will increase 30% over the life of the contract.

Instructional Resources

With the new contract, faculty are now offered office and desk space (a step up from only telephone equipment), a desktop computer or laptop computer, storage for secure files, books and student work, and a faculty web page. Lecturers are, thus, moving closer to having equal instructional support as their tenure-line colleagues in an effort to advance student success.



Example Best Practices in Process

The changes mentioned above, among a host of other changes, were achieved through collective bargaining by lecturers who are union members. The overall bargaining campaign was built on three conceptual pillars: job stability for teaching faculty, ending unpaid work, and wages in line with experience and qualifications. While their best practices were centered around job stability and career pathways, the steps taken to achieve the new contract, with various new provisions beyond those previously stated, are described below:

Aligning Contract with University-Stated Commitments

UC-AFT aligned their bargaining priorities for job stability and career pathways with the UC's education mission and stated commitments for diversity, equity inclusion, and high-quality instruction. For example, the UC's principles of community pledge a "safe, responsible, supportive and equitable environment." The UC's diversity statement commits the university to foster diversity within the student body, staff and faculty. The new contract aligns with these ideals by stabilizing lecturer appointments that are more likely to be held by women and people of color than are tenure-track positions. Also, the contract places investment on those faculty members who are most likely to teach and support first-generation students, students of color, and other students from historically-disadvantaged populations. UC-AFT successfully used university-stated commitments as leverage to best meet their lecturers' needs and desires and improve student learning in the process.

What changes to our working conditions (e.g., salaries, benefits, instructional support, advancement and promotion, etc.) would generate more dignity and respect for lecturers and other non-tenure-track faculty?

Pre-Bargaining Questionnaire

UC-AFT worked with its members to ensure that the priorities for bargaining were determined by union members. To do so, they circulated a pre-bargaining questionnaire to lecturer leaders to bring a range of issues to the surface. The questionnaire asked key questions, including:

- What do you like about your job? Which aspects of your work bring you the most satisfaction?
- What do you dislike about your job? What aspects of your work cause you the most stress?
- What changes to our working conditions (e.g., salaries, benefits, instructional support, advancement and promotion, etc.) would generate more dignity and respect for lecturers and other non-tenure-track faculty?
- What changes would make the most difference in improving your students' education?
- What changes would benefit our entire campus community and the University of California?

The pre-bargaining questionnaire provided guidance and definition for the subsequent membership survey.

Committee Formation and Action

A bargaining survey committee was formed to sift through the pre-bargaining questionnaire data. Alongside the data from the questionnaires, the committee hosted several town halls and listening sessions, monitored the grievance record, and created and updated an issue tracker. With all of this data, the committee crafted the membership survey.



Membership Survey

The confidential membership survey assessed how broadly and deeply felt expressed issues were in April 2019. The responses assisted UC-AFT in setting campaign priorities and negotiating changes. All UC-AFT members were asked to rank issues (e.g., salary, benefits, workload, job security, instructional support) according to how important it was for their union to pursue. Ranking an issue with the number 1 indicated that it was very important for the union to pursue and that they would fight with a “by-any-means-necessary” approach to win it; the number 2 indicated that the issue was important and that it was a priority worth fighting for; the number 3 indicated that the issue was less important and would be helpful, but not necessarily a priority. The issues that members ranked were teased out as specifically and pointedly as possible. Some issues included:

- Fair pay for committee work and other service duties;
- Salaries that better reflects the high cost of living around UC campuses;
- More parental leave and better access to on-campus and/or affordable child care;
- More full-time and multi-year appointments;
- Fewer quarters/semesters needed to reach Continuing appointment;
- Less crowded office space;
- More professional development funding;
- Clearer boundaries to avoid workload creep.

Members were also provided space to specify other related issues that were not stated in the survey but were important.

Bargaining Demand Platform

The membership survey data was then used to craft the initial Bargaining Demand platform. The platform was driven by major issues identified by those members who completed the membership survey. The initial bargaining demands coalesced around the following central issues:

- Liveable Salaries and Benefits — Providing salaries commensurate with cost of living in California, benefits including health insurance, and expanding mental health services
- Teaching at the Core of the UC’s Mission — Give lecturers control of their own syllabi and course materials, improve class sizes and enrollment policies, and offer more access to professional development
- Stable, Fair, and Career-Oriented Hiring and Reappointment — Ensure and enforce fair, timely, and transparent re/appointment processes, and more multi-year appointments
- Unpaid Labor — Compensate work related to advising and mentoring students, participation in shared governance, developing courses, etc.
- Faculty Diversity and Equity — Close gender and race-based wage gaps, include lecturers in faculty rosters and department websites, access to the same programs and facilities as tenure-track faculty (e.g., housing assistance, childcare centers, parking subsidies)
- Clear and Consistent Rights for K-12 Faculty — Provide equitable salaries for those faculty who educate young students in the UC system
- Union Rights — Ensure every UC-AFT faculty member receives a new faculty orientation, improve the grievance process, and provide more paid release time to members for union service

The platform was circulated for a member ratification vote. Those areas that did not secure enough member votes may become priorities for the next contract. However, the proposals for the next round of bargaining will be determined by the union members at that time, so it is conceivable that priorities might shift between now and then, especially as new concerns arise or becoming more pressing.

Open Bargaining Sessions

Open bargaining sessions gave deep context to the bargaining platform. These sessions allowed members to offer testimony as to how the current contract language affected their livelihoods, sense of belonging, and education for students. UC-AFT took this approach to nearly all articles opened, not just the pillar articles, for two reasons. First, this approach ensured that UC administration fully understood teaching from the lecturer's perspective. Secondly, this approach ensured that UC-AFT members' contributions to the development of the proposed changes were reflected to them in the proposal presentation and testimonials.

Negotiation

Once the bargaining platform was solidified, UC-AFT participated in a three-year negotiation process, which included stakeholders from every UC campus as well as constituent groups such as undergraduate students, tenured faculty and senior executive administrators. Lawyers from the Office of the President were present, as were academic personnel staff from most UC campuses. The academic personnel staff plays a key role in implementing the contract, codifying it in the university policy manuals, providing guidance to divisions and departments, and assisting in the grievance process.

Visit The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success for more example practices and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support faculty off the tenure track at: pullias.usc.edu/delphi.

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