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South Orange County Community College District Faculty Association

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Mark Blethen, President—SOCCCD Faculty Association

SUBJECT: Part-Time Faculty

The Faculty Association recently asked its part-time faculty members to share with us “one issue of particular interest and/or concern” to them.

While many more Part-Time Faculty members responded in writing, and even more talked with their Faculty Association Representatives, the narratives below are a sampling of their stories.

Their stories are both unique to each individual and their particular circumstances, and yet typical and representative of the experiences and concerns of many.

Please consider their stories.

Lack of Sufficient Affordable Health Care

Faculty Narrative # 1

I've been teaching in the district (and two other colleges) for four years now. After three years, I finally qualified for the \$175 healthcare stipend. I appreciate the stipend, but \$175 is not enough to purchase worthwhile healthcare for one individual (the lowest level plan on Covered CA is now \$300), let alone a family (which is what full-time faculty are offered). This semester I was only offered one course, so I lost my \$175 stipend. But the stipend issue is the least of it.

Because I need to teach a certain number of units to pay my bills, my family doesn't qualify for Medi-Cal. And even with the \$400 government subsidy, we're still looking at about \$1200/month for coverage. Last semester, I taught a combined 24 units across my three schools to pay for healthcare. When I lost units this semester I had to cancel our current plan. So, we currently do not have healthcare coverage. That would be fine (although scary) if we were healthy, but I have a chronic condition and two children with health issues. So I'm paying ridiculous medical bills out of pocket and trying to manage with as little healthcare as possible. I'm actually taking part in a clinical trial for access to medication and healthcare for my own condition, which is not an ideal way to deal with a chronic illness. At this point, I'm seriously considering leaving the profession that I love because I don't have access to basic healthcare benefits.

Faculty Narrative # 2

I'm 27 years old. I've been a part-time Instructor in this district since Fall 2017, and in two others since Fall 2016.

About a year ago, I unexpectedly went deaf in my right ear. No loud noises or traumas. It just quietly went away over the course of about a day. At the time, I was paying something like \$300-ish a month for insurance through the Affordable Care Act. I was able to get all the basic things looked at, my hearing itself checked twice (100% gone, a hearing aid won't get it back), and saw an ENT doctor who encouraged me to get a MRI to make sure it wasn't cancer or a tumor or anything like that.

An MRI would cost about \$1,000 on my plan. That's to say nothing of the brain surgery that he casually mentioned would be the "easy fix". The worst part, maybe, is that it also might end up being nothing at all. I'm not really sure if he was trying to comfort me, but I guess one in three people who do lose their hearing do so for no reason at all. That said, considering the cost of the MRI verged on rent, the surgery was obviously out of the question, and there was something like a 1/3 chance that it's all fine anyway; it has been about 6 months now of limbo as I continue to put that off.

I got rid of my insurance at the start of this year, as I was actually losing money on the plan. And since the fee for not having health insurance isn't as bad as how much I was paying, I figured, "why not go insurance free and use the savings to pay for any spot treatment?"

Anyhow, I'm teaching 23 units this term at three different colleges in three different counties. I drive something like 400 or 450 miles a week working 7:30am-9:50pm on Tuesday and Thursday because of bad luck trying to piece together schedules at three colleges. It's kind of a bummer that all I can really do is tread water after all that.

Faculty Narrative # 3

There are currently limited benefits for part-time employees. It is well understood that a good health care can positively affect job performance and completion of day-to-day work duties. The high expense associated with affording a stand-alone health insurance (not acquired as a full-time employee) in conjunction with high living expenses in South Orange County, places significant pressure on mental wellness of counselors/instructors. The fact that the working hours of part-time employees can vary per semester basis renders adequate monetary allocation for health care services extremely difficult. Part-time employees in particular, would greatly benefit from a college negotiation of health care benefits targeted solely for this group. This would enable the employees to be more impactful in their day-to-day activities working with students and results in a more positive work environment.

Faculty Narrative # 4

Most part timers don't know that teaching "under contract" not only reduces your pay to (9/18 or 12/18 or whatever combination), but also eliminates your \$175 monthly insurance allowance! Even though you still teach/work the same number of hours, you are penalized because, basically, you didn't make enough money.

Seniority/Rehire Rights/Course Load Reductions

Faculty Narrative # 5

I have taken on teaching as a second career and while I love it, it's always hard to start at the bottom. I've been teaching part-time for the past two years and the hardship that I face is the inability to get consistent classes each semester. It's hard not knowing whether you'll get a class each semester and how

many. Even if you do get a class, it may not be the same one with the same day/time, which completely changes our schedule and sometimes makes it hard to teach at multiple colleges because classes may overlap or it's hard to get from one location to another in a timely manner. Part of this hardship is also being given a class, doing all the prep work, and then having the class cancelled on you last minute without having any sort of compensation given for the prep work you did (even though I declined assignments elsewhere in order to teach in our district). It's hard not knowing if you'll get a consistent paycheck. I'd also like to apply for a full time position in the near future but it's hard to do that if you don't get consistent classes to help build up that experience.

Faculty Narrative # 6

Not knowing from semester-to-semester if I'm going to be assigned classes and, if yes, how many, makes for me and fellow "contingency employees" an uncertain and precarious existence. Having my courses cut from 10 units to four has caused for me a huge financial reversal. I struggle to make rent and to meet the basic costs of living in our district. I have also lost my insurance rebate.

Despite my loyalty to my department and to this district, for which I've taught for over five years, I was not given any notice or explanation for this abrupt reduction in workload.

My teaching availability is fairly open, and I've demonstrated that I'm qualified to teach several courses.

Given that my department has recently hired a large swathe of new part-time instructors yet without an apparent need for them, it's reasonable to infer that my department (and college and district?) is deliberately increasing the number of part-time faculty teaching less than six units, and decreasing the number of part-time faculty who for years have been typically assigned full loads in order to cut costs in part-time salary and benefits.

I feel emotionally and financially wounded by this reduction in classes and, like an increasing number of part-time faculty (no hyperbole here), I find myself two or three degrees removed from sleeping in my car.

Faculty Narrative # 7

As a part-time faculty member for multiple campuses, I experience many hardships. Most commonly, though, I worry about summer. It can be a struggle to economize, especially as a single parent with hefty student loans, and summer classes are difficult to come by, and we are not told until mid-spring if we will be assigned any. With the advent of new curricula requiring training in order to be considered to teach these courses, and having to work on different campuses during the time these trainings occur, now I do not have as many classes to ask for when I submit my teaching request. I am not sure what my seniority level is here, but I am fairly new, so I understand that several others are ahead of me. Still, a clearer sense of seniority would be helpful so I may plan my semesters in advance.

Parity Pay/Equal Pay for Equal Work/Professional Development

Faculty Narrative # 8

While our college has so far been my favorite place to teach because of the support from supervisors and the vibe among staff and students, it's still difficult to be an adjunct with today's wages. More and more, colleges are relying on adjuncts to carry a bulk of their teaching load, yet we are paid (per hour, when you take into account grading, class time, etc...) a wage that is not appropriate for our level of

education. We deserve equal pay to full-timers, since we possess the same qualifications, and since we do the same thing.

I am one of the lucky ones. I rent a house from my parents about an hour from campus. If I didn't have this luxury, I would need to have roommates to afford to live in Orange County. And while sharing rent and living with others is challenging for most anyone, it's especially difficult for someone like me in my 40s. I rarely can go to meetings at Saddleback because I have other jobs I need to do to be able to make a living. I can't take off to do something for free. Occasionally, the campus will throw in a \$50 stipend for a day of meetings or training. I can't afford to take a day off of other jobs to make \$50. This is to the detriment of the campus. Equal pay would mean more involvement by faculty. And in the end, this is better for students.

Since I have the highest load possible for an adjunct, with 3 classes a semester, I do appreciate the health insurance stipend. It helps tremendously. But equal pay would be even better. After all, whether we are full-time or part-time, we are doing the same job. So the pay should reflect that.

Lack of Safety/Support

Faculty Narrative # 9

I am deeply concerned for mine and my students' personal safety. The classrooms I and many others teach in STILL do NOT have internal locking devices. As a part-timer, we are not permitted to have keys to our classroom doors. Consequently, in the event of an emergency, if a lockdown is in place for our campus, part-timers have no way of securing our classroom doors. Additionally, the majority, if not all, classroom doors on campus open outward, which poses another challenge on how to secure those doors. In the event of a lockdown, counting on campus police to come by and lock each individual classroom door is obviously not feasible. Given this, I and many of my students feel like sitting ducks.

The Columbine tragedy was 20 years ago, Sandy Hook (where 20 first graders lost their lives) was six years ago. Since Columbine there have been over 25 mass shooting. Just last month lockdown incidents due to student threats occurred right here in our own backyard—at Cypress and Pearce Colleges. Will our colleges be next and, if it is, has every appropriate and necessary step been taken to ensure our safety?

I am told both colleges have been working on an electronic system that would secure all buildings and doors for some time now. But when will it be completed? Can we get an anticipated completion date? Can we make it a priority? Can we come up with an interim solution for part-timers to be able to secure our doors until a more secure system is online?

The level of safety for all employees and students should be equal.

Faculty Narrative # 10

As an Adjunct, I usually get the leftover time slots for class assignments. Because of this, I usually get evening classes. This semester, I'm teaching 6 - 10 PM two nights a week.

What makes my job difficult is I don't even get a key to the room. I have to literally wait for a lab tech to open my door for EVERY SINGLE class. Sometimes he's there and sometimes I have to hunt for him.

Now, this isn't his fault; it's not even his responsibility to let me inside. No one is in the division office to open the door for me at 6 PM and I don't want to call security twice a week to open a classroom door. I want a key to my classroom.

Every other college I work at gives me keys to my classrooms. In my opinion, it's a simple request and it is a token of support from the division, college, and district. To me, it seems like they don't trust me with keys. That's degrading in my opinion.

Faculty Narrative # 11

After 26 years as "Associate Faculty" I am still not trusted to have a key to my classroom. This is especially humiliating when teaching in the "Village" and having to call Campus Police to open my room. Only after arriving on campus, by the way.

Maternity/Parental/Family Leave

Faculty Narrative # 12

I had a difficult time getting baby bonding leave. There are a lot of loopholes you have to jump through, and administration didn't even let me know I was entitled to leave. Then when I did find out that I was entitled through a colleague, I was told by my college administration that I couldn't receive it, only to have them tell me a month or so later that I could. Then I was offered fewer hours of baby bonding leave than what I worked and was entitled to. That didn't seem right so I went directly to HR, and I received more. It was just really difficult emotionally to go through all that in my last trimester/right after I had given birth.

Student Debt

Faculty Narrative # 13

Like many part time faculty I exited college with major student loan debt. I am totally grateful for my education and earned degrees, which would not have been possible without loans, and I have taken responsibility to pay them back. Hence, I was excited about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF), which forgives the remaining balance on your Direct Loans after you have made 120 qualifying monthly payments under a qualifying repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer.

However part timers do not qualify for this program. For PSLF, you are generally considered to work full-time if you meet your employer's definition of full-time or work at least 30 hours per week, whichever is greater.

Yes, if you are employed in more than one qualifying part-time job at the same time, you may meet the full-time employment requirement if you work a combined average of at least 30 hours per week with your employers. Given the limited number of available classes and the uncertainties of scheduling, however, I have not been able to cobble together a consistent teaching schedule enabling me to achieve and maintain eligibility.

This program and any district policy or contractual clause that disproportionately impacts part timers is fundamentally unfair. We possess the same minimum/desirable qualifications, and teach the same classes to the same students. We deserve the same assistance that full timers receive.