

# P-fac NEWS

Serving the Part-time teaching community at Columbia College

March, 1999

## P-FAC MEMBERS APPROVE CONTRACT

Part-time faculty members have voted overwhelmingly to ratify the proposed contract with the college, nearly completing the [contract] approval process. By a vote of 134-3, *P-fac* members in the “bargaining unit” favored approval of the contract. The last remaining step is approval of the Board of Trustees, which is expected to meet in mid-March.

Ballots were distributed to all *P-fac* members known to be members of the “bargaining unit,”

generally longer-serving teachers, and were returned using a double envelope procedure to insure honesty and secrecy in voting. Approval of the contract was expected, but strong turnout (from a group normally too rushed to respond to requests from college or association alike) and the strength of the approval vote indicate that the part-time faculty is pleased both with the contract and with our efforts as an organization.

### CATCHUP IN PAY

Once fully approved, the new contract supersedes the old. The pay scale will be retroactive to February 15, and the college will make an adjustment to your paycheck then. The word from the administration is that the adjustment will come in a lump sum on April 15.

Meanwhile, we hope everyone signed the contract the college presented them with last month; signing that old contract is the key to getting any paycheck at all.

### WE URGE EVERYONE TO JOIN.

Our association is the key vehicle for part-time faculty participation in the life of the college, and your membership will strengthen our collective voice as it gives you a chance to make your individual voice and views heard.

### TEACH AT ANOTHER COLLEGE?

Part-time faculty are organizing at other schools, and periodic conferences have brought part-timers from throughout the area in touch with each other. If you're interested in learning what's going on, or want to start something yourself, call Tom Suhrbur at 630-495-3250.

### . . . A LONG WAY

Just over a year ago, *P-fac* was in the midst of a campaign to become officially authorized as bargaining agent for a majority of the part-time faculty. There was an exciting sense that the long-forgotten part-time faculty was about to formally achieve a recognized voice for discussing our livelihoods and our work with the college. We were nervous, of course; but when the votes were counted in early February, *P-fac* was indeed chosen to represent the part-time faculty by some 79% of those voting. We were delighted; but the hard work was only beginning.

In a year, we progressed from big hopes and good intentions to carefully formulated proposals for bargaining; from there, to interest-based negotiating, which went surprisingly well, and resulted in the proposed contract just approved by another vote of part-time faculty members.

Other developments, less dramatic but just as essential, supported the negotiations, and will make *P-fac* a lively voice for the part-time faculty in the future.

In a year, we organized formally, were officially chartered by the Illinois Education Association (IEA),

and enlisted several hundred members; and the commitment of members is if anything greater than a year ago. During that year, we reached out to the Columbia community to maintain public support. The full-time faculty – many supportive a year ago – remain so; meanwhile they're undergoing big changes of their own, with the advent of tenure and new procedures for selecting department chairs. Students remain supportive as well. They ask fewer questions than they did a year ago (we've been out of the news), but they remain as shocked as ever when told that the first two students who walk into a classroom have more than paid our salaries. Where, they want to know, are their tuition dollars going? With organization and public support, we come out of this process stronger than a year ago.

THANKS are due above all to our negotiating committee, and especially the negotiating team, led by Joe Laiacona and including Jack Behrend, Ellen Schapiro, Michael Caplan, Nadine Bopp, and Tom Osran. They put in long, sometimes difficult, hours without pay, and with their combination of tough-mindedness,

intelligence, and creativity, they've forged a path that will benefit the college as a whole and will inspire part-time faculty everywhere. We owe particular thanks to Tom Suhrbur of the IEA, who has advised us (and tolerated our quirks – this is an art school whose faculty doesn't fit into anyone's mold) for a year and a half; and to the IEA's Diane Davis, who has advised us on negotiations since last spring. Many others in the IEA and NEA have aided us, and 100,000 dues-paying Illinois teachers have provided crucial financial support.

Many part-time faculty have played a role in *P-fac* during its five years – offering ideas, circulating petitions and cards, distributing newsletters, designing posters, offering moral support, and simply – but crucially – by signing their names and casting their votes where it counted. These seemingly small actions are the key to a successful organization, and the uncelebrated moral support of colleagues is no less essential than the commitment of time; kind words and free advice from some make it meaningful for others to plug away. These most ordinary forms of support, from ordinary part-time faculty, have been crucial.

## THE BARGAINING UNIT AND *P-fac*

*P-fac* was formed in 1993 to further the interests and vocalize the concerns of part-time faculty at Columbia. It was, and remains, a voluntary association, and any part-time faculty member is eligible to join. Forms are available from the membership chair [344-7545] or from *P-fac* department representatives.

In February, 1998, *P-fac* was chosen (by a secret ballot of part-time faculty in the bargaining unit) to negotiate with the college over compensation, benefits, and conditions of work generally. The contract just approved by the part-time faculty covers those part-timers in the bargaining unit (see below). You don't have to be a member of *P-fac* to be in the bargaining unit. (And you don't have to be in the bargaining unit to be a member of *P-fac*, either.)

*P-fac* bargained on behalf of everybody in the bargaining unit, and the proposed pay raises and other changes affect everybody in the unit, whether they belong to *P-fac* or not. However, bargaining isn't cheap. *P-fac* got a lot of IEA help before and during the negotiation. We've had ongoing advice from an IEA organizer for close to two years and from an experienced negotiator for almost a year, legal advice on several occasions, negotiations training, help with printing and postage, and more. Now it's time for *P-fac* to carry its own weight.

Since everyone in the bargaining unit gets the benefits of *P-fac* bargaining, it seems only fair that everyone contribute a proportionate share of the costs of bargaining. That's the idea of the agency fee. Under our proposed contract, every unit member either joins *P-fac* or at least contributes their fair share in the form of an agency fee. (Dues for members are currently \$46.25 per semester; the agency fee is slightly less, since it doesn't include any IEA political action contributions.)

## BARGAINING UNIT DEFINED

The bargaining unit includes: 1) all employed as part-time faculty for at least two complete consecutive semesters who have taught a total of eight credit hours or more (excluding one- and two-credit courses), and 2) all who have been employed as part-time faculty for at least three complete semesters of five complete consecutive semesters and who have taught at least three credit hours during each of those semesters. (This means all of you who teach a course every fall year after year, but don't teach in the spring.) Summer semesters are excluded in determining this. Excluded: part-time faculty who are also Columbia grad students or full-time staff at Columbia, those teaching non-credit courses, and a few others.

We agreed to these definitions – reluctantly – a year and a half ago, to facilitate a vote by part-time faculty on whether *P-fac* should negotiate for them. The alternative was litigation, which might still be going on – with no vote and no contract for anyone.

## PAYROLL DEDUCTION OPTION

Under the proposed contract, everyone in the bargaining unit will have to decide whether to be a *P-fac* member, or a non-member who pays an agency fee. (Bona fide religious objectors will have another option). There will also be the choice of automatic payroll deduction, or paying cash. Payroll deduction will be available to *P-fac* members and agency fee payers alike, allowing them to meet this obligation conveniently and without worry (failure to pay at all is cause for non-rehiring). It will also save our (unpaid) treasurer a lot of headaches. It's likely to take a while to set up, however. In the meantime, we urge those who join *P-fac* to sign the "payroll deduction" box on the IEA membership form.

## DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVES

By Pete Insley

Department representatives are the heart of the union. They not only keep the part-time faculty informed about the activities of the union and the college, but they keep the union informed about the activities and needs of the part-time faculty. The representatives (meeting together) elect three members of the seven-member *P-fac* steering committee: the heads of the membership, negotiating, and publicity committees. The assembly of department representatives is also the body that can change the constitution.

When you have a problem with the school that you need help with, your department representative should be your first call. He/she will listen to you and either help you directly or pass your problem on to someone else more equipped to handle it. (For the first time, part-time faculty will have an avenue to appeal arbitrary or unjust college decisions.)

If you don't have any problems, but you see some ways in which the college's service to the students could be improved, please pass them on to your representative. He/she may bring these concerns and suggestions up at their semi-annual meeting with the department chairs and full-time faculty, or pass them along if they apply to the whole college.

## *P-fac* NEWS

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