

Politico

Some academics protest CUNY contract, saying it 'widens' gap with adjuncts

By Conor Skelding

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Eleven academics protested outside the City University of New York's central offices in midtown on Thursday, objecting to a tentative contract between the university and the Professional Staff Congress which, they said, "not only maintains the two-tier system of academic faculty, but ... also widens it."

The contract would provide a [10.41 percent raise retroactive to 2010](#), when the last contract expired. Glen Kissack, a retired mathematics teacher at Hunter College High School, echoed what several CUNY faculty members have said since the tentative deal was announced. By providing every class of employees with the same percentage raise, the proposed contract "widens" the gap between between tenure-track and contingent faculty. (Many tenured faculty earn six-figure salaries with benefits, while adjuncts earn several thousand dollars per course.)

"The gap between the full-timers and the part-timers is increasing," Kissack said, before pointing to another goal of the contract: less work for full-time faculty. "The union is hoping ... it'll go from [teaching] 21 to 18 credits [per academic year]. Well, someone is going to have to teach those courses," he said, implying that the burden would fall on adjuncts.

Kissack, one of two retiree representatives on the PSC executive council, said the settlement isn't bad for his constituency. But, he added, "if you really believe in solidarity, which is kind of a bedrock union principle, then you have to stand with the people who are the most underpaid, and that's these people," he said, referring to adjuncts.

Two weeks ago the same activist group, CUNY Struggle, [protested](#) the tentative contract outside the PSC offices.

"Last time we picketed the union. Now we're picketing CUNY," Andrew Battle, a PhD student at the Graduate Center and adjunct instructor at Brooklyn College, said. "What I want to tell CUNY is that they're no longer going to be able to use our union leadership as a delivery service for the austerity that keeps us in poverty and keeps our students' learning conditions in a state of crisis."

CUNY trustees [approved](#) the contract in late June, and PSC members will be voting on it until August. (Activists have criticized the decision to hold the vote over the summer, when many faculty members travel for vacation and research.)

PSC first vice president Michael Fabricant said in a statement, "The agreement secures major advances ... I am proud of what we have achieved. More remains to be done. Our continued fight for better working and learning conditions at CUNY will go on."

The 11 demonstrators marched and chanted carried signs reading, "Corporate University of New York" and "CUNY Runs on Poverty."

Standing by were several CUNY employees, including chief operating officer Allan Dobrin and spokesman Michael Arena. "We respect the current ratification process and reserve comment until that process is completed," Arena said in an emailed statement.

Jarrold Shanahan, a graduate assistant in environmental psychology at the CUNY Graduate Center, said that while graduate assistants like him have "a little more job security than an adjunct," they have more common interest with adjuncts than they realize.

"A lot of my classmates don't really find common cause with this movement," he said. "Many assistants imagine themselves headed for a tenure-track position, but if you look at the statistics..."

"You know what they say about the United States: there's no poor people, only temporarily embarrassed millionaires. And I think that that's true of a lot of graduate students and grad assistants. Nobody sees themselves as a future long-term adjunct. Everyone's going to make it to the N.B.A.," he said. "But the problem is, statistically speaking, most of them aren't."