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CFAC Negotiations: Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some questions and answers regarding contract negotiations between Columbia College Chicago and its part-time faculty union, and issues the union has raised recently in public communications.

Q: What is CFAC?

A. Until this fall, the part-time faculty union was known as P-Fac, the Part-Time Faculty Union at Columbia College Chicago. The union has changed its name – the new acronym “CFAC” stands for Columbia College Chicago Faculty Union. CFAC, however, is the same union and still only represents part-time faculty at the college. Its president is Diana Vallera, a part-time faculty member in Columbia’s Photography Department, and it remains unaffiliated with any parent union.

Q. What is the status of negotiations with CFAC?

A. Negotiations have been ongoing for the past 13 months. Columbia’s negotiating team has met more than 20 times with CFAC during regularly scheduled sessions. Columbia has always been in favor of a swift and amicable resolution and continues to advocate for federal mediation.

Below is a list of the most recent actions and key dates:

- **April 17, 2019**–The college and the union reach tentative new agreement on contract.
- **December 10, 2018**–The college and the union made a joint request to the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) for a mediator to assist the parties with ongoing negotiations. We hope that a mediator will be able to join negotiations as soon as possible after the winter break.
- **November 27, 2018**–An [update](#) on this regularly scheduled bargaining session.
- **November 16, 2018**–An [update](#) on this regularly scheduled bargaining session.
- **November 9, 2018**–During this regularly scheduled bargaining session, the union submitted its first comprehensive counterproposal. The college is assessing the counterproposal in advance of the next bargaining session scheduled on November 16.
- **October 26, 2018**–Regularly scheduled bargaining session.
- **October 19, 2018**–Regularly scheduled bargaining session cancelled at CFAC's request.
- **October 5, 2018**–Columbia offers third comprehensive proposal including salary increases to CFAC.
- **April 27, 2018**–Columbia offers second comprehensive proposal including salary increases to CFAC.
- **November 10, 2017**–Columbia makes first comprehensive proposal to CFAC.
- **September 2017**–Bargaining begins on new contract.
- **August 31, 2017**–Contract between part-time faculty union expires.
- **Throughout 2017**–Columbia offers to temporarily extend the part-time faculty contract as negotiations continued.
- **Late 2016**–Columbia attempted to initiate discussions and negotiation in anticipation of the part-time contract expiration.

Q: CFAC has complained about the process of verifying faculty qualifications. What is the college's position?

A: The college has collected evidence to be able to document to itself, students, parents, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC, our accrediting body) and anyone else who asks, about the faculty's qualifications. Columbia bolstered post-tenure reviews for tenured faculty. It likewise carefully confirmed the degree attainment and/or professional credentials of faculty members. That process confirmed that Columbia has impressive faculty who are deeply and successfully engaged with their students.

Q: Why is the college making it harder for part-time faculty to be assigned courses?

A: The expired contract contains a course-assignment system based solely on how long a faculty member has been at Columbia. The college values this important aspect of one's experience, but Columbia also wants to be able to take other measures of experience into consideration. Under the current system, the college has been unable to extend teaching opportunities to some highly skilled faculty with a record of success in their professional fields outside of Columbia and with very current knowledge and professional networks. The college is seeking a small amount of flexibility to hire faculty whose professional experience can be tremendously valuable to students but who could otherwise not be hired under current seniority rules.

Q: Why is the college cutting part-time faculty's pay?

A: The college has not done so. To the contrary, its proposals to the part-time faculty union have included pay increases.

Q: Why is tuition going up?

A: Columbia is a private institution that does not receive public funds in the same way that public universities and colleges do. As a result, almost all of its operations are paid by tuition revenue. Uses of tuition dollars include: faculty salaries; instructional technology and equipment; salaries of staff whose work is essential to the operations of the college, such as those at the Library, the Career Center, and Campus Safety and Security; and academic building operations and maintenance. Last year, Columbia raised tuition 2%, which is in step with the rate of inflation. Columbia's cost of attendance is competitive with peer institutions. At the same time, Columbia has increased financial aid to students dramatically, in keeping with its mission of access. Columbia now devotes about \$36 million a year for need-based scholarships, up from \$23 million when Dr. Kwang-Wu Kim became president in 2013.

Q: How will the Student Center be funded? Are tuition revenues being used?

A: No student tuition is being used to build the Student Center; proceeds for the sale of unusable or obsolete buildings are funding the project, along with donations. We are committed to investing in the future and in providing students with a place to gather and co-create, and the Center will address that need. For years, students asked for a building like the Student Center, and the college is very pleased that the building is scheduled to open in 2019.

Q: Is it true that the college is trying to 'dumb down' the curriculum, as the union repeatedly claims?

A: Quite the opposite. The collective work of the Columbia community shows otherwise. As called for in the Strategic Plan, the provost and the faculty worked diligently the last three years to revamp the curriculum to help maintain and, where needed, enhance both its currency and its relevance in the context of the rapidly changing landscape in the creative and media industries represented in our degree programs. Moreover, in alignment with sound practices espoused all over American higher education, Columbia made the paths to degree much more transparent to students, clarifying degree requirements and how to move through them so that every student can complete a bachelor's degree in four years. In 2018, Columbia's six-year graduation rate is 48 percent, up seven points in five years and on par with comparable institutions. Ninety percent of Columbia's 2017 graduates reported being employed within one year of graduation.

Columbia is making its curriculum more rigorous and challenging than ever so that students are more prepared for their careers than ever before. The college has worked to ensure that the curriculum is completely up-to-date and that it is as relevant as possible both to the goals of its students and to the professional and creative fields the students will go into. Where appropriate, there was engagement with chairs and faculty to ensure consistency and quality across multi-section courses that serve as prerequisites to more advanced courses, including the development of shared syllabi with common requirements and assignments. In addition, the college wants to make sure all students have an opportunity to get an internship; that all students are exposed to principles of business, marketing, and entrepreneurship that will help them find jobs and be competitive for career advancement; that all students gain a much deeper understanding of technology as it relates to their creative and professional practice; and that all students receive a deep education in the principles of diversity and inclusion that are so important in today's world. Columbia boosted its student support systems through a more formal advising structure, the creation of a student persistence team, and development of a centralized career center.

Q: Why do some faculty leave the college?

A: It goes without saying that the college wants to retain faculty members who deliver our quality instruction. But all colleges and universities experience a certain amount of turnover among the faculty, especially when the economy is relatively strong. Some faculty members retire each year; others leave for new opportunities, or to live in a city they prefer, or for family reasons. When faculty leave, the college has strategic conversations about how best to replace them. If the question is about part-time faculty, it is important to understand that the college hires them on a semester-by-semester basis depending on departmental and class scheduling needs. That being said, we have made proposals at the bargaining table to help ensure we remain competitive with other institutions.

Q: Why are some classes unavailable?

A: The college is very attentive to student need for courses. When all available sections of a course close, and there is a sufficient number of students to open a new section of the course, the college makes every effort to do so. Obviously, the college cannot offer every course in the catalog every semester, so Columbia also puts its courses on a rotation. While the elective a student is looking for might not be offered every semester, it will be offered every second or third semester so that student has a chance to take it while at Columbia. In addition, the college closely monitors courses that seniors need to be able to graduate and makes every effort to ensure that those courses are offered in a timely way so that they don't cause delays in graduation. In addition, in exceptional circumstances, if a student needs a required course to

graduate and it is not being offered, the student can work with his/her/their academic advisor to determine the best course options for on-time graduation.

Q: What is the status of Columbia's reaccreditation?

A: Like all colleges in the 19-state North Central region of the United States, Columbia College Chicago is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). HLC accredits colleges for periods up to 10 years at a time. Columbia was last accredited in 2009 for the maximum possible period of 10 years and is scheduled for its next accreditation cycle in 2018-19. In addition to its regular accreditation, Columbia is what is known as an "open pathways" school, a category permitted only for the schools most in compliance with HLC guidelines. Columbia's next reaccreditation visit is November 5-6; the college looks forward to meeting with the reaccreditation team.

Q: Why is the college selling properties like the Johnson Building? Is Columbia in financial trouble?

A: No. The college is selling obsolete or unusable property and making other smart property arrangements to fund the construction of the new Student Center, which will provide students a place to gather and work together across disciplines without using tuition dollars. All this is designed to have a more, up-to-date real estate portfolio and a more compact campus with the Student Center at its heart.

Q: CFAC says that Columbia is becoming a for-profit institution. Is that true?

A: Absolutely not. Columbia College Chicago is a not-for-profit institution and will remain so. Led by a volunteer Board of Trustees, Columbia proudly retains its 501(c)(3) non-profit status and the college will never change that status. What's more, some of the practices that compelled Congress to more tightly regulate for-profit colleges – deceptive advertising, exorbitant tuition, dismal completion and job-placement rates, and high student debt default rates that stem from the failure to secure jobs – are anathema to what this college long has stood for.

Q: Are classes getting bigger?

A: The average class size at Columbia has remained steady at 18 students for the past three years.

Q. What is Columbia doing to address declining enrollment?

A. Columbia has new enrollment management and communications leadership and is getting ready, for the first time in its history, to launch a large-scale national marketing and advertising campaign. Columbia spent the past year strengthening and rebuilding relationships with secondary-school and community-college partners. This fall, while the college again saw a decrease in new students overall, albeit the smallest in several years, Columbia also saw an 8 percent jump in transfer students, the best result in four years.

There will be no immediate fixes but tackling enrollment challenges is a top priority for the coming few years. As enrollment growth resumes, as the college fully expects it will, Columbia will remain resolute in providing students with the best-qualified faculty members through a

combination of full-time and part-time faculty, as well as graduate student instructors, the latter being critical to healthy graduate programs.

Q. Is Columbia abandoning its commitment to access and diversity, as CFAC charges?

A. Absolutely not. Prior to Dr. Kwang-Wu Kim's arrival, Columbia's trustees had decided to move away from open admissions to become moderately selective. Columbia still accepts more than 85 percent of applicants, and the percentage of students of color has increased over the past few years, as has the percentage of students of color obtaining a degree. The college is making a long-term commitment to continuing to seek students with the unique combination of ability and affinity to succeed at Columbia. The average high school GPA of new students has increased, meaning the college can simultaneously achieve a more diverse student body and one better equipped to thrive and graduate from Columbia. The college continues to welcome and support students whose financial means would otherwise shut them out of higher education. Columbia has boosted institutional aid to students by 50 percent over the last few years and aims to increase that number over the next two years.

As for diversity, this college is remarkable in the depth of its collective belief that a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion should be embedded in the curriculum, curricular programming, and faculty expertise that are available to its students. President Kim has launched a college-wide effort to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion by investing in training and education to foster an anti-racist campus culture. The college is holding Undoing Racism workshops and working to hire more diverse faculty who can help further reflect cultural perspectives and contributions in our curriculum.

Q: What resources are available to members of the campus community regarding Title IX?

A: We investigate any reported violations of Title IX, the federal regulation that deals with instances of sexual harassment and gender discrimination, which we take very seriously. We have taken disciplinary action (up to dismissal) against staff, faculty, and students found to have violated the policy. Any new or previously unreported allegation that is brought to our attention will be investigated. For more information, please visit students.colum.edu/title-ix.

Q. Has the college president's title been changed to CEO? If so, why?

A. Dr. Kim was hired by the Board of Trustees in 2013 as the college's President and CEO. The Board's intention in establishing that dual title was to indicate both his position in the college administration and his decision-making authority.

Q. The union is calling on Dr. Kim to resign. Will he?

A. No. Actually, [Dr. Kim's contract recently was extended to 2024](#). "Dr. Kim has served with great distinction as Columbia's President and CEO, and he has the full confidence and support of the Board of Trustees," says Bill Wolf, Board Chair.

Q. What are Columbia College Chicago's plans for online education? What role does part-time faculty play?

A. While the majority of these courses are facilitated by full-time faculty members, part-time faculty have been assigned to facilitate them as well. All online facilitators (whether full- or part-time faculty) are paid the same amount. Currently, Columbia offers continuing education courses and certificate programs via Columbia Online, not degrees. For more information, including a list of course offerings, please visit [Columbia Online](#).

In July 2017, the college reached out to the part-time faculty union leadership to discuss expanding these course offerings beyond continuing education. It told the union that it wanted to discuss a mutually agreeable arrangement to expand the online offerings and create opportunities for part-time faculty, one that would reflect the realities of online work. The union rejected that invitation.

Q: Is it true that Columbia has added seven new vice-presidents?

A: No. Due to our focus on increasing enrollment, this past year a position that was formerly an Associate Vice President was changed to a new Vice President of Enrollment Management to help us recruit a highly experienced leader in this field. Other than that, the number of vice presidents has remained the same in recent years. As with other positions, there has been turnover in the Cabinet, and when a vice president leaves Columbia, the position is typically filled again. The overall size of the senior leadership team has remained stable.

Q: The union said it had to cancel an October 10 news conference outside 600 S. Michigan Ave. due to threatened thunderstorms, because the college did not allow it to move the event indoors. Is that true?

A: The college has no record of receiving a request from the union to move the event to another indoor location. Repeated requests by the college's senior leadership for the union to tell us who they asked and who allegedly denied the request have gone unanswered. The union has an office inside 600 S. Michigan, so it could have held the news conference there in any event.

Q. Is the college blocking access to the CFAC website through Columbia servers?

A. No. The new website has been fully accessible via the Columbia faculty/staff and student servers and Wi-fi networks since it went live in early October. It did take a couple of days for the site to be accessible via the 'guest' login, as is the case with any newly registered .com site, but the site was accessible with a guest login within a couple days of going online.