

Support Networks:

An Active Life for Part-Time Faculty in California Community Colleges

By Ryan Tripp

Any resolution to debates over the hiring and presence of “part-time faculty” or “contingent faculty” on California community college campuses seems almost ephemeral.

Yet part-timers continue to propose new policies, revise existing ones, and agitate for change. Transformation, however, does not happen solely by legislative fiat or legal petition.

Throughout the past two decades, part-time faculty have dedicated themselves to a politically active life. By association, organization, committee, protest, demonstration, and even civil disobedience, part-time faculty persistently restructured dynamics of empowerment in community college learning communities. By engaging in a sociopolitical sphere, they advanced ideas which mutually reshaped and reinvigorated an active life for themselves and the California community college system.

Since 1998, part-time faculty activism has resulted in a slew of part-time friendly policy proposals. Several such proposals confirmed reappointment practices, staffing preferences, paid office hours, disability insurance, limited retirement, and healthcare benefits. This activism even generated AB 2705 (Williams), a bill that died in the Senate Appropriations Committee in 2014, but would have revised “part-time faculty” and “temporary

faculty” to “contingent faculty” thereby better describing how integral these faculty are to the system.

One of the most active associations spurring these proposals is the California Part-Time Faculty Association (CPFA). In fall 1998, over 60 part-time faculty convened at El Chorro Regional Park in San Luis Obispo, declaring goals that included paid office hours, retirement, healthcare, and equal pay for equal work. Unions and Academic Senates at both the local and statewide levels offered support for CPFA, but funding concerns often blocked communication channels over policy proposals. The idea of a statewide part-time faculty association subsequently faced the specter of dissolution.

Throughout its first decade, CPFA proponents instead participated in both faculty and student marches, from the March in March to pickets at the California Community Colleges Board of Governors' meetings. In 2000, a CPFA member drove a car onto the north lawn of the State Capitol to demonstrate for paid office hours and introduced an “adjunct listserv” to San Diego community colleges. This listserv became a precursor to the San Diego Adjunct Faculty Association.

Divisions soon stalled such activism. Most CPFA members were part-time faculty with part-time employment

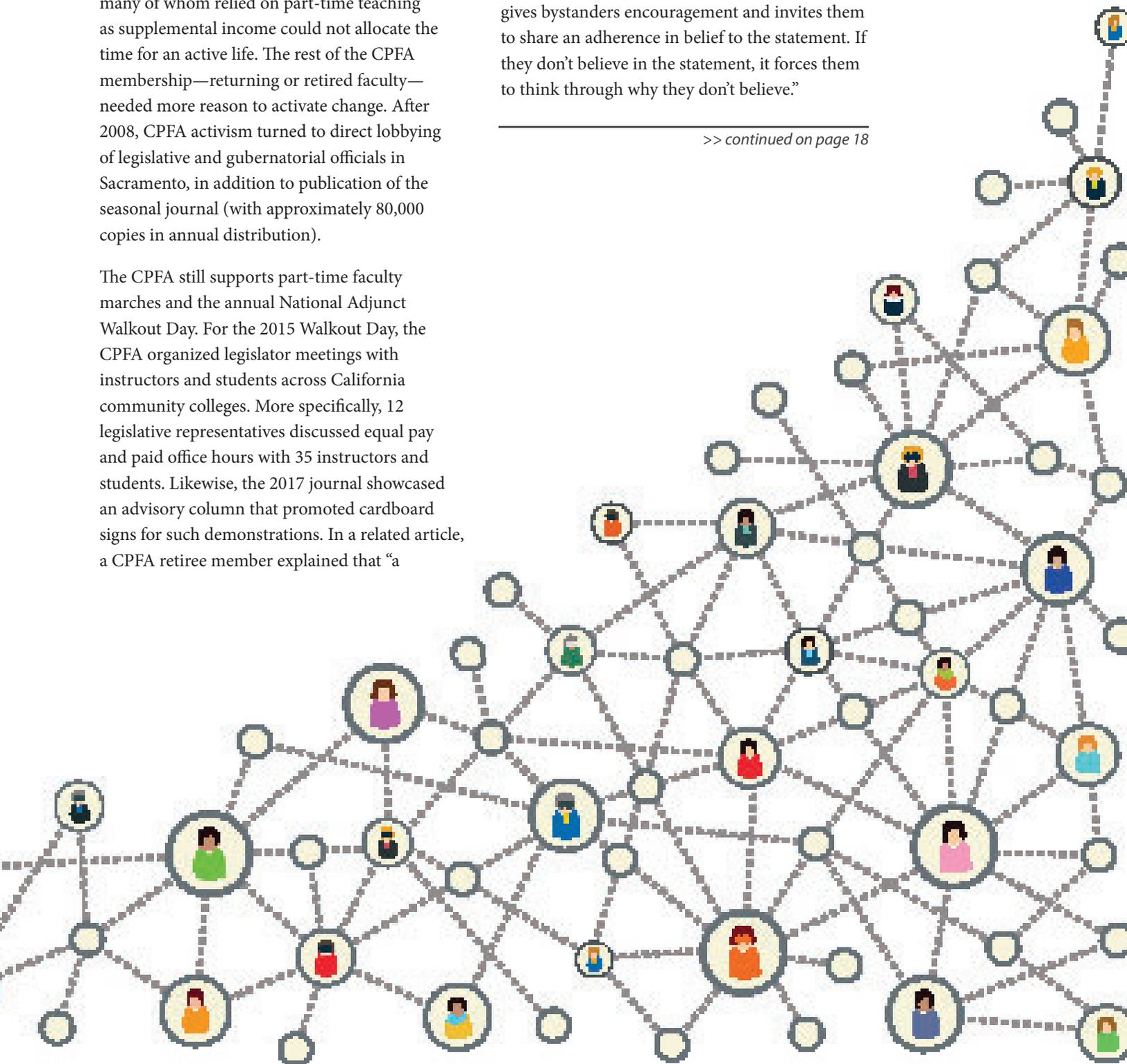


as their chief source of income. Certain members expressed fear that activism, particularly in public spaces, would diminish full-time employment opportunities. Additional CPFA members, many of whom relied on part-time teaching as supplemental income could not allocate the time for an active life. The rest of the CPFA membership—returning or retired faculty—needed more reason to activate change. After 2008, CPFA activism turned to direct lobbying of legislative and gubernatorial officials in Sacramento, in addition to publication of the seasonal journal (with approximately 80,000 copies in annual distribution).

The CPFA still supports part-time faculty marches and the annual National Adjunct Walkout Day. For the 2015 Walkout Day, the CPFA organized legislator meetings with instructors and students across California community colleges. More specifically, 12 legislative representatives discussed equal pay and paid office hours with 35 instructors and students. Likewise, the 2017 journal showcased an advisory column that promoted cardboard signs for such demonstrations. In a related article, a CPFA retiree member explained that “a

street march...shows that all the people marching are saying the same thing and really mean what they are saying. The show of commitment asks others to consider the statement and relate it to themselves. If they agree with the statement, it gives bystanders encouragement and invites them to share an adherence in belief to the statement. If they don't believe in the statement, it forces them to think through why they don't believe.”

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Committees, such as the part-time committee for the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), similarly collaborate with activist organizations. The CFT part-time committee “advances through political action and collective bargaining, the interests of part-time faculty in both public and private higher education.” The committee encourages the involvement of local unions, the AFL-CIO, and the wider American Federation of Teachers in contract negotiations. The committee additionally strives to educate all in “the benefits of changing the two-tiered system.” In 2011, the committee endorsed the Occupy Movement, lauding solidarity between union and student activism. The committee also publishes the seasonal Part-Timer and periodically organizes panels for CFT conventions.

The CFT part-time committee frequently advocates for the wider American Federation of Teachers, particularly during National Adjunct Walkout Day. During the 2015 Walkout Day at three San Diego community colleges, the CFT reported on AFT Guild distribution of buttons with “A is for ADJUNCT” scarlet impressions. The AFT also collected 800 signatures to demand funds from the gubernatorial budget for equal pay and paid office hours. Retiree Joe Berry, a member of the San Francisco Community College Federation of Teachers and author of “Reclaiming the Ivory Tower,” attended the rallies. He commented that “change will only come if we get organized and speak for ourselves.”

In 2019, the CFT website posted the American Federation of Teachers’ “toolkit” for fall Equity Week. The “toolkit” provided rally signs such as “Campus Equity Now,” “Fair Pay and a Union,” “Free College for All,” and “Student Debt Cancellation Now,” as well as fliers on the 52-question Part-time Faculty Quality of Life Survey, completed by 3,076 part-time faculty between May and June of 2019. Each flier assessed a separate category of survey results, from “basic needs and food security” to “healthcare,” “low pay,” “job security,” and “retirement.” Such posts serve as a testament to continuing CFT endorsement of an active life for part-time faculty.

Task Forces play a crucial role in the active life of part-time faculty for California community colleges as well. In 2014, for example, the statewide Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) commissioned a Part-Time Task Force. This Task Force aimed to ratify an ASCCC Position Paper on part-time faculty. According to current ASCCC Vice President Dolores Davison, “While the task force ultimately determined that the paper did not need to be updated (and that updating the paper would result in potentially changing previously stated positions), the task force did recommend the creation of a permanent part time committee, which was constituted in 2015.” Davison further explains that executive committee members “are assigned as the chair and second of the part-time committee; these appointments are made on an annual basis.” The part-time committee includes four or five faculty volunteers who serve for a year with the possibility of second-year extensions. The executive committee periodically assigns rostrum articles and resolutions to the part-time committee—which meet almost monthly via Zoom—for deliberation and ratification. The committee convenes face-to-face meetings at least once a year.

Since 2017, the ASCCC part-time committee has been chiefly responsible for organizing, scheduling, and planning the annual Part-Time Institute. The committee established this Institute to “support new and experienced part-time faculty” across California community colleges. This “support” encompassed multifarious information and advisory sessions at the annual Part-Time Institute. For instance, the 2020 Institute encompassed break-out sessions such as “It’s All a Game: Navigating the Ins and Outs of Academia Beyond the Classroom,” “Creating Opportunities for Collective Bargaining,” and “The Passive Majority: A Qualitative Inquiry of Part-Time Community College Faculty.”

The Faculty Association of California Community Colleges, the umbrella organization that publishes FACCTCS, similarly maintains a part-time committee for part-time faculty mobilization. The chair of the committee rotates on an annual basis, shifting between

the Part-Time FACCC Board Member from northern California and the Part-Time FACCC Board Member from southern California. Members meet monthly, frequently by phone, and annually on All-Committee Day and another date of their choosing. The chair drafts the meeting agenda in conjunction with FACCC staff and in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order as well as the 1953 Brown Act.

The FACCC part-time committee principally organizes and supervises the annual Part-Time Faculty Symposium. According to part-time committee member and FACCC Board member, Deirdre Frontczak, the Symposium "is an opportunity for both professional development/education on relevant issues, and for discussion of actions that can be taken at state and local levels (for example, organizing local meetings with state representatives or their staff)."

For instance, the committee scheduled a previous symposium at Glendale Community College and requested a session on "Organizing Contingent Labor: Thinking Outside the Box." During this session, part-time faculty at the Symposium learned "how groups outside of academia have pushed past organizational boundaries to more effectively mobilize contingent labor." This session also explored the "latest trends in social media and other communications, which are easy and effective methods to improve part-time advocacy at the local and state levels." Additional sessions focused on alterations to the CalSTRS retirement system and assistance in navigating unemployment insurance. The latter session prepared part-time faculty for "solving common issues that arise during the unemployment insurance process and how to successfully appeal a denial at a hearing with an administrative law judge."

The active life of the FACCC part-time committee is a multifaceted endeavor. Committee members may commute to Sacramento to testify before the California Legislature on legislative bills that pertain to part-time faculty. They may also schedule campus visits by state representatives or their staff, where delegates "speak to both part-time and regular faculty on whatever

concerns them." Committee members periodically host professional development events for part-time faculty on certain campuses, explaining current proposals and debates over retirement, unemployment, and healthcare. Santa Rosa Junior College, for example, participated in FACCC-sponsored campus activities for part-time faculty.

FACCC part-time committee members emphasize the significance of policy implementation at the district and campus levels. Deirdre Frontczak averred that "districts have considerable discretion in how they negotiate and implement regulations, within the very basic parameters defined by the state (e.g., the 67 percent load cap). So, many issues such as reassignment rights, health benefits, and retirement options are largely a function of local budgets and local negotiation—a process of which many adjuncts are unaware." FACCC and part-time faculty leaders lobbied to "protect the rights of part-time faculty across institutions; the recent bill on transferring accrued sick leave comes to mind, and of course raising the maximum load to 80-85 percent." She reiterated that state policy impacted "different regions and campuses in quite different ways, and a higher load cap that benefits one school, or one program in that school, could have pretty serious impacts for a school with a very different budget or demographic profile." District and campus execution of state policy centrifuged the active life of part-time faculty on their own districts and campuses.

Recent protests and demonstrations, organized by local part-time faculty leaders, substantiate her claims. In 2017, members of the San Diego Adjunct Faculty Association (founded in 2015) and CPFA took to city streets near community college campuses. They sought to demonstrate for the "right to live free, happy productive lives in full equality and free from exploitation and persecution." Likewise, part-time faculty from Ohlone College attempted to organize a distinct part-time faculty union. More recently, in March 2019, the College of the Desert Adjunct Association sponsored protests at dual entrances for

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the Palm Desert campus, presaging an annual address by the College President. Dozens of part-time faculty members held signs that read “Equal Pay for Equal Work” and “It’s a Matter of Fairness.” The protest ended on a note of disappointment for district associations and the efficacy of an active life. One part-time faculty member admitted that the “demonstration isn’t likely to offset the power imbalance between the college and part-time instructors.”

The formation of the Part-Time Faculty Caucus of the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers (LRCFT) offered compelling insights into the hope and hopelessness of a fledgling organization within a community college district.

In 2015, LRCFT at Folsom Lake College hosted a conference for part-time instructors, convening workshops on classroom instruction, policy implementation, and campus activism. The following year, LRCFT sponsored a districtwide conference for all part-time faculty, spearheaded by “adjunct representatives.”

Folsom Lake College again hosted the conference. Beginning in 2017, this part-time conference, arranged by Paul Baltimore and Linda Sneed, has rotated among Los Rios campuses.

Part-time faculty leaders subsequently met twice a month to schedule the conference as well as to plan events and coordinate activism as an LRCFT part-time “caucus.” According to Paul Baltimore, many part-time faculty members were “interested in getting together...some [were] more politically motivated.” The caucus initially operated as a consultation body to the LRCFT Board, and a Board member actually first described the group as a caucus.

This consultation role shifted with the Caucus publication of the 2017-18 Part-Timer’s Almanac. The Almanac served as a guide for

part-time faculty in the Los Rios Community College District, covering such topics as staffing preference, office hours, faculty grievance procedures, and academic freedom. The caucus aimed the publication principally at part-time faculty rather than the LRCFT Board. The Almanac also featured the caucus statement of purpose: “to build community, collaboration, knowledge, and power” among part-time faculty in the Los Rios District.

The statement of purpose in the Almanac posited four distinct caucus goals. First, the Caucus planned on “holding regular open meetings, professional workshops and social events using democratic processes that respect all participants in order to connect with each other, discuss matters of importance to part-time faculty, and celebrate the contributions of part-time faculty.” Second, the Caucus pledged to collectively decide on and pursue “meaningful projects that support the interests and address the needs of part-time faculty in the Los Rios District.” Third, the Caucus would expand “knowledge of part-time faculty issues and concerns within both the part-time community and the district through the development of informational resources and education forums.” Finally, the Caucus announced its intent to act as a mechanism for “empowering part-time faculty by advocating for greater inclusion in academic department matters, and communicating with part-time faculty leadership within the campus Academic Senates and Faculty Union (LRCFT) to advance the interests of part-time faculty in the district.”

The LRCFT Part-Time Faculty Caucus tries to hold their conference on an annual basis. Most years, the conference begins with keynote speakers and preliminary meetings in a main conference room. In adjoining rooms, breakout workshop sessions on media support, survey questions, and contract policies followed this meeting. Attendees move from session to session and join ongoing activities.



Invitations to the 2019 conference, hosted by Sacramento City College, encouraged part-time faculty to stay informed about major policy changes and “to learn what you can do to help shape those changes.” The invitations called for all part-time faculty to join their “colleagues for an afternoon of information, collaboration, action and fun.”

The future of the LRCFT Part-Time Faculty Caucus nevertheless rested on periodic meetings held at the LRCFT’s local union hall in Sacramento. Linda Sneed and Sheryl Fairchild frequently facilitated the meetings, while Paul Baltimore volunteered as note taker. During these meetings, part-time faculty from the Los Rios District planned on direct engagement in the active life. The Caucus had not yet participated in marches and demonstrations, but many discussions indicated a tacit endorsement for such activism. In addition, the “PTFC Be Involved Card,” distributed to any and all part-time faculty passerbys, featured checkboxes for those who wish to “Advocate for Part-Timers at the Capitol” or organize “pedagogical potlucks.” Paul Baltimore explained that the “structure and future of the Caucus would be determined by its participants rather than masterminded by its facilitators.”

The 2017 LRCFT Part-Time Faculty Caucus Concerns Paper, circulated chiefly among Caucus members, illustrated novel formulations of potential activism. The Paper enumerated five modes of “Support Networks.” First, the Caucus would create electronic support networks, via social media. Second, the caucus would maintain face-to-face support networks. Third, the caucus hoped to organize an orientation for new members. Fourth, the caucus planned on inaugurating an inquiry and concomitant interviews with part-time faculty across the Los Rios Community College District, aiming to identify “areas of concern.” Finally, the caucus would contribute to a process, or even a forum, to report information and updates to the LRCCD “part-time community.”

The formation of the part-time caucus for the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers offered compelling insights into the hope and hopelessness of a fledgling institution within a community college district.

The LRCFT Part-Time Caucus demonstrated that any assessment of part-time faculty activism in California community colleges must take into consideration the shifting venues and vehicles for an active life. Although many statewide committees and associations increasingly prefer lobby efforts over protests and demonstrations, new pathways for activism—from social media to part-time caucuses—create viable channels for activism. Across California, part-time faculty will undoubtedly approach these new avenues with critical perspectives. Yet, as the contemporary history of part-time active life revealed, these teachers continually configure and reconfigure alternative modes of activism into meaningful pathways for empowerment. Along the way, part-time faculty substantiate their claims and crucial roles in community college learning communities. ■