

Good Trouble in Bad Times:

Part-time Faculty Confront a “New Normal”

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The ashes of disaster are sometimes fertile ground for emerging and vigorous new growth. So when FACCC’s part-time activists met to plan a virtual Part-Time Symposium, we mulled the question: What would draw colleagues—exhausted by raging wildfires, pandemic isolation and economic collapse—to gather for one more extended Zoom session on a post-election November weekend? Could we tap the benefits of remote technology to mobilize attendance statewide? And would a remote gathering have the same dynamic effect as gathering on-site in real time?

Our efforts received a welcome boost when the California Part-time Faculty Association proposed co-hosting the event, leading to an even wider participant pool. So, when the meeting opened on November 6, FACCC welcomed more than 180 faculty participants from across the state, eager to explore new alliances and new ways to create Good Trouble in Bad Times.

The past year was a tough one. Community colleges were hit hard as students, faculty, and staff scrambled to maintain classes amid job loss, business closures, illnesses, isolation, and care for loved ones

at home. As always, part-time faculty endured a disproportionate share of the burden when classes were cut, even while student needs increased. As budgets tighten, teaching resources shrink, and hiring prospects are few and far between. So, the symposium offered a forum to tackle those problems head-on—or, to borrow a phrase from John Lewis, to create “good trouble” as a strong, proactive response to the challenge of the times.

The first session featured “Friends and Allies” from the key unions and associations. Panelists representing CCCI, CCA, CFT, CWA-PFA, and FACCC introduced a range of strategies for addressing—and ending—the inequities of the two-tier system. Following these remarks, panelists joined participants in breakout rooms to discuss questions and issues pertaining to specific struggles in their own campus environments.

Following those sessions, a second panel met to discuss “Fiscal Focus, Present and Future” and “Updates on Retirement and Unemployment” — two critical topics at the forefront of the current fiscal stress. John Govsky of Cabrillo College and Deborah Dahl Shanks of Diablo Valley spoke on unemployment and retirement issues affecting part-time faculty. They were joined by Jennifer Baker, legislative advocate, speaking on CalSTRS issues, and Suzie Dixon, Government Relations Committee chair for CalRTA providing updates on Social Security and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), and its impacts on part-time retirement plans.

During the following day’s sessions, participants heard from three extraordinary guests:

» **Leticia Pastrana**, ESL professor at Imperial Valley College, shared the research for her doctoral dissertation addressing “What Stakeholders Get Wrong about Part-time Faculty.” Her remarks exposed a number of myths held not only by tenured colleagues but by part-time faculty themselves—myths about economic scarcity, about inequities in working conditions, advancement opportunities, and faculty contributions and achievements, both inside and outside the campus walls.

» **Jack Longmate**, retired adjunct English instructor at Olympic College, Seattle, joined Frank Cosco, vice president and chief bargainer of the Vancouver College Faculty Association, to present “The Vancouver Model for Equity: What it is and How to Get Some.” The two offered a real-world success story of how Vancouver surmounted the psychological, social, and fiscal challenges of entrenched “tenure privilege,” and designed a system to ensure dignity, inclusion, academic freedom, and just compensation for part-time faculty within their district.

» **Evan Hawkins**, executive director of FACCC, and John Martin, chair of California Part-Time Faculty Association, teamed for an advocacy update: “Creating Positive Change for Good Trouble.” Beyond details of proposed legislation, the two leaders reminded us that building strong relationships with our legislators and communicating with them regularly was key to long-term effective activism.

Participants left the event inspired, challenged, and energized for further action on their own campuses, and at the state level. As we left, I noted a favorite quote from Robert F. Kennedy, cited on Saturday afternoon:

“ Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. ”

May our ripples become a tidal wave of equity reform that sweeps through both faculty and students throughout our community college system, and beyond. ■