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THE NEXT STEP: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH INCREMENTS (PGI) FOR ADJUNCTS

by Michael Kaufmann, Adjunct Faculty in English as a Second Language (ESL),
Adjunct Member of the AFA Executive Council and the AFA Negotiations Team

Recently I received the packet of materials from my department office that signals the onset of the semester ritual known as sign-ups. Along with the list of course offerings and their load factors, a department length of service list is also always included. Going down that list, I was struck yet again by the large number of long-term adjuncts we have in our department. By my count, there are seven adjuncts in ESL who have been teaching at SRJC for twenty years or more. One of the seven has been teaching for almost thirty years, practically being present at the very beginnings of the department, itself. Another eight have taught for at least sixteen years for a total of 15 out of 67 adjuncts in the department (more than 20%) being instructors who find themselves on Step 9 of the salary schedule—currently the highest step attainable for hourly faculty. Also instructive in looking at this group of “perma-temps” is their “like load.” These are not people who have “one foot” in teaching to supplement some other outside career; for most of them,

teaching at SRJC *is* their career, and, I would venture a guess, one of, if not *the*, most important sources of their income.

So what’s going on here? Wasn’t adjunct supposed to imply either a supplementary side job or a sort of transitory existence — a way station on the road to either a full-time teaching job or a transition out of teaching entirely and into something else? That things didn’t work out that way for the largest group of adjuncts in my department (and I’m sure we’re not the only department where such is the case) indicates to me that the notion of what it means to be an adjunct is changing and needs to be reassessed from various standpoints, (e.g., salary, benefits, working conditions *and* retirement). But since that’s a big job, and far too much to cover in one article, here I want to focus on the more limited problem of compensation for long-term adjuncts.

ON NINE ALL THE TIME

The 2006-2007 reorganization of the salary schedule resulted in:

a) increasing pay at the bottom steps providing an incentive for attracting new faculty — both full-time and adjunct; and b) ratcheting up income at the top steps — on which sit those full-timers contemplating retirement — providing an added incentive to retire by increasing pension income as well as rewarding those who have served the college for so many years.

But although the restructuring remedied the major inequities that had existed in the steps on the salary schedule, as in any “zero-sum game,” where an existing pot of money is reshuffled but not added to, some are bound to come out less advantaged than others. And so it was that faculty on the middle steps (8-12) saw less of an increase when COLA (remember that?) was applied to the schedule.

But the two “disadvantaged” groups — full-timers at mid-range on the schedule and long-term adjuncts on Step 9 do not share the pain equally. While the grumblings of some full-timers

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on the middle steps (who rapidly advance out of these steps and almost never retire on them) could be assuaged by simply explaining what awaits them in greater compensation and pension increases as they advance on the schedule, long-term adjuncts, currently destined to spend the rest of their professional lives on Step 9, have much less to look forward to in the areas of compensation and pensions. So the part of the salary schedule that for full-timers could be characterized as a “speed bump” in their advancement on the schedule, becomes for long-term adjuncts a not very favorable end of the road.

STEP 10+ OR PGI STEPS FOR ADJUNCTS?

If the problem is the “dead end” of Step 9 for adjuncts — resulting in pay increases that can’t approach the rising cost of living and that ultimately depress pensions — why not simply try to negotiate additional regular steps until we reach Step 16 — the highest regular step for full-timers?

As many people already know, adjuncts are not the only ones paid off the hourly schedule. The hourly schedule is also used to pay full-timers performing an overload. And because of both advanced placement for full-timers (up to Step 8) and the speed with which they move on the hourly schedule (twice as fast as adjuncts), just about all full-timers performing an overload are either already on Step 9 or soon to be there. Therefore, any additional

step(s) added to the hourly schedule would soon benefit all the Step 9 full-timers performing overloads, as well as the long-term adjuncts. This, of course, would dilute any resources spent on adjuncts who would be forced to share the new step(s) with their full-time colleagues performing overloads. The net effect would be to make the additional step(s) cost prohibitive.

One possible, though problematic, solution would be to create a separate hourly salary schedule for overload that would be paid at a lesser rate than adjunct hourly. The savings from this could then be applied to creating a Step 10 purely for adjuncts. I know this type of overload schedule exists in at least one district that is keen on discouraging overload. The overload schedule I saw consists of only the first three steps of the adjunct hourly schedule and it takes about four years to move one step! The main argument against the creation of such a schedule is that it would violate a cardinal principle of AFA policy — that the full-time and hourly schedules are linked and that any attempts to separate them would only play into the hands of those who think that adjuncts are already overpaid and would like nothing better than to de-link the schedules.

Another solution that I believe would be more palatable is the creation of PGI steps for adjuncts. Professional Growth Increment (PGI) steps presently are found on the full-time schedule at the point where regular steps stop — at Step 16. There are

three PGI steps — 20, 24 with the highest being 28. Without going into too much detail, the difference between regular steps and PGI steps is that movement between PGI steps requires just that — demonstrated professional growth and development on the part of the faculty member by means of various activities (taking extra units, publishing, attending conferences and workshops, etc.). The faculty member then receives credits for these efforts that, in turn, count toward PGI steps. The idea behind PGI steps is that constant growth and development on the part of the individual faculty member, which is then reflected in his/her improved classroom teaching, benefits the entire college community. The logic is clear. I believe it should apply to adjunct instructors — who teach half the classes — as well.

Looking to the future, there is no reason to believe that the position of adjunct is going away anytime soon. If anything, the college will only deepen its dependence on part-time labor. As adjuncts teach more classes and take on more responsibilities, it is vital that they (we) grow and develop professionally. Given that adjuncts are held to the same high teaching standards as full-timers and they have already contributed so much to SRJC, surely PGI steps for adjuncts would benefit the entire college community.

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