

Report on the NEA/AFT Higher Education Conference

Lynette Nyaggah

March 13-15, 2015

Orlando Florida

- Higher Ed Reauthorization – stalled in Congress.
- Some of the issues NEA is addressing at the federal level are contingent faculty and accreditation. This is important to CTA because we have a large number of part-time/contingent faculty in CCA and CFA, and they constitute nearly 40% of CTA's fair share payers.
- Accreditation is critically important in California with the incursion of our accrediting agency, the ACCJC, into bargaining and the scare tactics they are using to force districts to set up irrevocable trusts for retiree health care benefits, against the CTA position. Many of our community college districts are fighting back against these unreasonable uses of the ACCJC's authority, but we need help from NEA and CTA on this.
- There will be an NBI to the NEA RA on the Adjunct Loan Fairness policy. Currently, part time faculty working limited hours at an institution which qualifies for loan forgiveness may not be able to benefit. Dick Durban is working on this but we don't know if it will be a separate bill or part of the HE Reauthorization.
- Extension of Unemployment Insurance to part time faculty nationwide is still a priority for NEA. They are working with the Department of Labor. Currently, only California allows these faculty to collect unemployment between semesters and during the summer, even though no contingent faculty nationwide have a "reasonable assurance" of a job the next semester.
- AFT and NEA co-presented a session on the use of media for communicating with contingent faculty. AFT discussed the creation of a citywide union, UAP, for contingent faculty in Philadelphia, and how they wrote a communication plan, created an online contingent faculty community and engaged the traditional media. They used social media to spread the ledes for a story so that it reached traditional media, had a team of rapid responders on Twitter and Facebook, and reinforced the importance of the union message in people's lives. They live-tweeted and made cellphone videos as they did organizing events. They created photo albums on their website. They encouraged their members to disseminate content like a telephone tree. Instagram was all member-driven – members

took photos of themselves and explained why the union was important to them. Robbie Thompson of NEA followed with some specific social media options for communicating contingent faculty issues – advocacy memes, Canva, graphic videos with Videoscribe, CO.

- I attended the AFT Plenary instead of the NEA Emerging Leaders Academy graduation. The speakers dealt with a number of critical issues in Higher Ed which those attending the NEA session did not hear: o performance based funding and the lack of evidence that it results in improvement; an 18-year longitudinal study by the American Education Research Association showed no systematic increases in graduation, persistence or degree attainment with performance-based funding; it also caused colleges to close programs not leading to jobs; the liberal arts majors were reduced in an attempt to increase “career readiness”
- The elimination of all state funding for three Arizona community colleges
- The role of consultants such as McKenzie and Pearson in policy making was decried as well as the movement toward evaluating teacher education programs based on the test scores of their graduates is picking up steam;
- Student debt is burgeoning – more than 40 million Americans have student loans totaling \$1.2 trillion. AFT is supporting measures for debt relief. NEA is sponsoring the Degrees not Debt program. Part of AFT’s program in New York is to subsidize interest rates for SUNY and CUNY grads and to sponsor adjunct faculty loan forgiveness of up to \$29,000 per year.
- Finally, AFT spoke out strongly for social justice for faculty: the work force should not be divided into full and part time with tenured faculty feeling superior to contingent faculty. Those who default on student loans should not lose all the licenses issued by states.
- On Saturday, I attended the organizing track, which focused on how to build back membership that has been lost. AFT uses the terms “mapping and tracking” in place of our “COGS.” I liked the terms, because you decide on goals, map what you’re going to do and then track. AFT is very successful in organizing, so I was interested in seeing how they do it. Interestingly, their suggestions for reaching PT faculty are exactly what have done in CCA. We found every part time faculty member after their class and talked to them. It’s very labor intensive but it works. They also talked about “power mapping” in relation to Boards of Trustees, and stressed that you need to look at where the power lies in the Board.

- Finally, I attended the Legal Forum where Chief Counsels of both AFT and NEA spoke. There were two areas which are particularly important to us. Alice O'Brien talked about Friedrichs and fair share/agency fee. She stressed that we need to prepare now. We have 15 months. She also talked about the importance of the union being involved in online education. Direct dealing with individual faculty is a problem because members forget to check with their unions when they negotiate agreements about online classes. In California, the Community College Chancellor's Office is recruiting faculty to participate in what is called the Online Education Initiative, where they sign agreements which may bypass the contract. Alice recommends that we bargain our response now before faculty are invested and there's no turning back.
- She also talked about videos of classes and how we should protect our intellectual property rights. Students also videotape, and in one case a student put a discussion on Facebook where another student made an admission about being gay which was supposed to stay in the classroom. The university defended the student who videotaped, so that means that there needs to be language in our syllabi setting out rules for videotaped lectures.

Finally, I spoke with many higher ed faculty, both NEA and AFT, from across the country. We share a lot of concerns. One interesting quote was from an AFT member, "This is very interesting to me. I didn't know NEA had any higher ed locals." This tells us that we need to do a better job of communicating our commitment to Higher Education. The single most important thing was the increasing reliance on non-tenured faculty as part of a trend to do away with permanent status for faculty.