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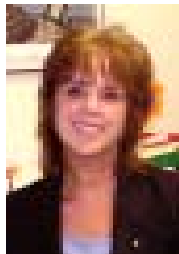
WCCFT *Union* NEWS

Monthly Newsletter of The Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers

President's Message

Collectively Speaking

By Anne D'Orazio



In a society which highly prizes individual achievement, individual award and individual advancement, it is no wonder that a union which is at its core collective, not individual, needs to fight for equal time. And it would be hard enough if the collective had autonomy to make decisions governing its own members, but when that collective has to exist in a hierarchy in which someone outside the collective ultimately has final say, it seems that the collective could lose its strength altogether. How easy it is for a member of the collective, dissatisfied with his lot, to circumvent the collective process and go straight to the top of the hierarchy for a decision favorable to his situation and how quickly that undermines the efforts of the collective. And if the highest level of the hierarchy is to maintain its position of authority in matters the collective could conceivably decide for itself, what better way is there than to be available to individual members for complaints and redress? (It's interesting to note that the top of the hierarchy never comes to the collective for advice and counsel on resolving differences among its own members.

If you're nodding in agreement and wondering why I'm spending so much time making such an obvious point, let me explain that this is not an excursion into the abstract, but a very real problem we face in the Union. While you may be saying to yourself, "I'd never break rank, I understand the importance of solidarity," don't underestimate how powerful competition

over workload can be. We all struggle with personal and professional situations that govern decisions we make on the job.

The WCCFT works to answer all the needs of the WCC faculty, including full time and adjunct teachers, librarians, counselors and academic support coordinators and it has to juggle contradictory interests among its mem-

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bers. Sometimes it is not easy to come up with solutions to difficult disputes. This summer the Union was involved in interpreting the new distance learning protocol, resolving differences between faculty members in several departments, representing faculty with complaints regarding health coverage, determining rights of faculty in assignment of classes, and arbitrating administrative decisions detrimental to the interests of faculty members. What stands out in all these grievances is the need for faculty to find ways of coming together to deal with personal and professional troubles within its own ranks.

Conflicts will arise naturally where there are scarcities of plum courses, materials or facilities; genuine differences in pedagogical approaches; disparities in workload; and personal idiosyncrasies. These natural occurrences can be exacerbated by existing divisions within the faculty—full-time and adjunct status, ranks of seniority, expertise. In spite of all these, we are one distinct constituency. It is directly to us that students look to learn and grow in an academic environment. Our primary commitment is to measure up to the trust students place in us as educators.

But we have another commitment to each other. And that is to function in a collective to further our own professional lives with substantial remuneration, security and protection. To guarantee and improve our working conditions, we bargain collectively with the Administration to achieve agreement on salaries, hours, and benefits. The current collective bargaining agreement expires in August 2008 and we will begin discussing changes in late 2007 and

early 2008.

We will go into contract negotiations this Fall better able to achieve advances for everyone if we can maintain the solidarity of our unit and do everything we can to resist any tendency to fragment into separate, irreconcilable groups.

A union is as strong as the sum of its members. And everyone has a responsibility to belong and participate in its functions and the elaboration of its goals. In particular, union members owe their organization unity of purpose and should demand of their union leadership clarity of vision.