THE UNION WAY

In so-called “right-to-work” states, there are two paths through the academic workplace for faculty and staff. There is the UNION PATH, in which you have a say in these matters because your union has an equal seat at the bargaining table with management. Your voice matters. Then there’s THE OTHER WAY... The other way is particularly perilous for contingent or adjunct faculty, who are often powerless without the collective voice of a union.

HOORAY! You’ve got your first job as a part-time professor. And you are grateful to your union colleagues who have negotiated a contract that means you will have a reasonable number of students in your course, and that your work will be professionally evaluated by your peers.

WHAT THE HECK!? The course you’ve been teaching for years has been reassigned to a new instructor. Fortunately, because you are a bargaining unit member, or because you have a union, you have the right to representation in a grievance. You will get the classes that your contract guarantees.

YOU’RE AN ADJUNCT PROFESSOR who has been teaching the same courses for years, but now the chair wants to hire a friend instead. Can you complain? Sure, you can complain. Can you get your classes back? No, you can not.

IT’S TIME TO RENEGOTIATE YOUR CONTRACT! What you want now is [a sabbatical for adjuncts, equal access to faculty training funds, or a real office with a phone!]. Guess what? You have a say in these matters because your union has a seat at the table.

YOUR PAY STINKS. Your benefits are... simply nonexistent. You’re sharing an office with 422 other adjuncts and your campus key opens the back door only. Professional development funds? That’s a joke, right? But what are you going to do about it? You are on your own, and alone you are powerless.

More than 75 percent of American faculty are working off the tenure track, and many of these contingent academic laborers have no say in their working conditions. But don’t count Ken Rothchild among the voiceless. Or Lauren Zavrel or Karen Roberts. When adjunct or contingent faculty belong to unions, they get a seat at the table where decisions are made, and their collective voice can call for fair pay, job security, and the working conditions that underlay college student learning. In New York, Rothchild’s union recently won salary increases of 33 percent. In Oregon, Zavrel’s union negotiated for compensation for office hours. And in Long Beach, California, Roberts’ union negotiated a clause that ensures part-time faculty will get the same raises as their full-time colleagues. Across the country, NEA Higher Ed faculty are organizing for equity!
The U.S. of Adjuncts
Across the U.S., NEA Higher Ed faculty are organizing for equity on their campuses. At the bargaining table, and in the halls of state legislatures, they are working together for more equitable pay and benefits, and new provisions for job security. Check out the good things that happen when all faculty get a seat at the table:

**California**

Lauren Zavrel isn’t quite satisfied — yet. But she does appreciate the critical work done by contracting faculty, both inside and outside of formal time, the contract also provides part-time faculty with two paid office hours (at a reduced rate.) And, importantly, it also requires the late the time spent by adjuncts in service to students. That multiplier helps part-time faculty to qualify for healthcare and state retirement benefits, and even public service loan forgiveness. That solidarity benefits, and even public service loan forgiveness. "Our bargaining team knew we (adjuncts) were hanging on by a thread," said Andy Olson, English lecturer at California State University Los Angeles. There were lecturers on the verge of home eviction, struggling to attend faculty meetings and organizing powerful campus demonstrations by professors, a Department of Labor Relations complaint and organizing powerful campus demonstrations by professors, and the contract went forward.

**Oregon**

"It's the strongest contract I've seen in years," said Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC) President Joe LeBlanc about the 2014 contract negotiated for more than 5,000 part-time faculty across the state. It captured 13 percent raises over three years — that's 5.5 percent in each of the first two years, plus 4 percent in the third — and also 4 percent in the fourth year if a new contract isn't settled. The contract also provides pay for part-time professors to attend campus meetings and teach online sessions, and greater access to class assignments for veteran instructors. "We still do not have full parity for part-timers, but this contract makes a step toward that," LeBlanc said. (And it almost fell apart for part-timers, but this contract avoids the problem.) And the contract avoided the problem.

**Illinois**

Two things about the new, first-ever collectively bargained contract for part-time faculty at Manhattanville College stand out for union member Ken Rothchild. First, the vital increases in pay. In May 2013, Rothchild was hired by the theater department for $4,700 a course. More than 15 years later, he was earning $2,000, while many colleagues earned even less. "By forgoing cost-of-living raises for so long, I calculate that the value of my salary had declined by about 25 percent," Rothchild said. The new four-year contract lifts the base pay in 2015 from $2,100 per course to $2,800 — a whopping 33 percent raise — with additional steps in subsequent years, and also provides a $500 add-on for a terminal degree and $400 for ten terms of experience. (By 2018, an adjunct with a terminal degree and 10 terms of experience should earn no less than $3,050 per course, nearly $1,000 more than the national average.) In the Ph.D. program, starting pay was raised to $4,000 per course. But equally important to Rothchild are the aspects of the new contract that finally (finally!) recognize the professionalism of Manhattanville’s 400-plus contingent faculty members. With new provisions that ensure adjuncts can attend faculty meetings and equally access funds for professional development, the contract goes a long way to "recognizing the common interest that adjuncts share with administration — and that’s about getting the best deal for students," said Rothchild, whose union is a joint NEA-AFT affiliate. "It’s about recognizing that we’re not invisible, we’re not cogs in the machine. It’s about recognizing that adjuncts play a valuable role here."

**New York**

"Equal pay for equal work" was the rallying cry for adjunct faculty at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, who negotiated their first-ever contract in 2013. Some of the highlights include: Pay raises that ranged from 15 percent to 41 percent in the first year, with additional boosts that raise adjuncts to about $11,150 per course in 2016, more professional job titles (“lecturers” instead of “adjuncts”), and a new system of professional peer evaluations.