

Just Employment in Action

Adjunct Unionization and Contract Negotiation
at Georgetown University



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KALMANOVITZ INITIATIVE
for Labor and the Working Poor

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Overview

Two years after they began organizing with Local 500 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), adjunct professors ratified a union contract with Georgetown University in October 2014. From the beginning of the adjuncts' decision to organize a union, the university's response was guided by its Just Employment Policy (JEP), which was adopted in 2005. That policy, which acknowledged the rights of employees to freely associate and organize, helped insure that the union certification and the contract negotiation processes occurred in a notably open and collaborative environment.

This contract between the adjunct union and Georgetown University arrives at a time when other institutions of higher education are strongly resisting adjunct unionization. Some institutions, even those that share a connection to a religious tradition similar to Georgetown's, have argued that their religious identity should exempt them from laws such as the National Labor Relations Act that protect the rights of adjunct faculty. Given this increasingly conflict-laden national context, it is all the more remarkable that the university and the adjunct union were able to reach their contract agreement while maintaining a high level of cooperation and respect on both sides of the bargaining table.

Georgetown University's Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor has undertaken this report to better explain the history and the context that led to the Georgetown agreement. This report will look at how this agreement came about and suggest ways in which this is a significant model that merits replication in other institutions of higher education.

The Nationwide Adjunct Problem

It has taken several decades for the current crisis affecting instructors in higher education to fully emerge. Universities and colleges facing increasingly tight budgets have found two primary ways to address their fiscal situation – raise the price of attending college (tuition has gone up 538% over the last 30 years¹) and lower their operating costs. One way universities have sought to reduce operating costs is to hire more part-time adjunct professors and fewer full-time tenured faculty members.

¹ Michelle Jamrisko and Ilan Kolet, "College Costs Surge 500% in U.S. Since 1985," *Bloomberg News*, August, 26, 2013. [Online](#).

In 1970, only 18.5% of faculty members were part-time employees at U.S. colleges and universities.² By 2011, the percentage of part-time faculty had more than tripled; now contingent faculty (such as part-time or adjunct faculty members, full-time non-tenure-track faculty members, or graduate student assistants) make up 75.5% of the instruction workforce.³ According to one study by the American Association of University Professors, the number of tenure-line faculty members dropped by about 27% between 1975 and 2011, and the number of contingent faculty increased by 27% over that same period.⁴ Contingent faculty accounts for roughly 1.3 million of the 1.8 million faculty members and instructors.⁵ Adjuncts alone make up approximately 50% of the total faculty at American institutions of higher education.⁶

While the number of adjuncts has steadily grown since 1970, the rate of compensation for adjuncts has remained low. The median pay for an adjunct for a three-credit-course is \$2,700.⁷ Most full-time adjuncts must teach courses at multiple institutions in order to earn enough income to cover basic expenses. Teaching four courses in both the fall and spring semesters of the academic year (a very heavy teaching load) provides an annual income of \$21,600 – and this still falls below the national poverty line for a family of four.⁸ A recent survey found that 73.3% of adjuncts considered teaching in higher education their primary form of employment and not as something “adjunct” to a separate career.⁹

Adjunct positions almost never include benefits, retirement packages, or health insurance. There are no merit reviews, cost-of-living adjustments, or other forms of standardized increases to compensation. There is little or no opportunity for career advancement or promotion to full-time employment. The courses adjuncts teach can be canceled the day before the semester begins without compensation for the instructor. Adjunct professors rarely have access to any kind of grievance procedure. Teaching contracts are most often for one semester at a time, placing adjunct professors in a precarious work situation and making it difficult to plan more than six months into the future. These precarious work conditions for

² Coalition on the Academic Workforce, “Issue Brief,” *One Faculty Serving All Students*, February 2010. (Citing: “Digest of Education Statistics.” U.S. Department of Education Statistics, 2008). [Online](#).

³ United States House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Democratic Staff, “The Just-in-Time Professor: A Staff Report Summarizing eForum on the Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty in Higher Education,” January 2014. [Online](#).

⁴ American Association of University Professors, “Trends in Faculty Employment Status, 1975-2011,” *AAUP Resources on Contingent Employment*, March 2013. [Online](#).

⁵ Coalition on the Academic Workforce, “A Portrait of Part-Time Faculty Members,” June 2012. [Online](#).

⁶ AAUP, March 2013.

⁷ Charlotte Allen, “The highly educated, badly paid, often abused adjunct professors,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 2013. [Online](#).

⁸ Colman McCarthy, “Adjunct Professors Fight for Crumbs on Campus,” *Washington Post*, August 22, 2014. [Online](#).

⁹ Coalition of the Academic Workforce, June 2012.

adjuncts persist in spite of the fact that 40% of “contingent” instructors have taught on their campuses for 11 years or more and 32% for six to ten years. Only 25% of part-time or adjunct professors have taught on a campus for five years or less.¹⁰

In response to these conditions, adjunct professors and contingent faculty have begun to organize unions at the universities where they teach. Several major unions – including Service Employees International Union (SEIU), United Steel Workers (USW), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA), American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Communications Workers of America (CWA), and United Automobile Workers (UAW) – have launched organizing campaigns in cities across the country. One recent survey undertaken in October 2014 found that adjuncts are organizing in 22 states.¹¹

In DC, Boston, and several other cities, SEIU has pursued a ‘metro’ organizing strategy that focuses on organizing adjuncts in a local region where universities and adjuncts are relatively concentrated.¹² By focusing on schools within the same metropolitan market, adjunct organizing campaigns aim to counteract market forces that have pitted adjuncts against each other in a bidding war for jobs, a dynamic that has kept wages low and made jobs insecure in cities where potential adjuncts abound. This strategy also removes the incentive universities currently have to resist any efforts at raising wages, fearing that by doing so they will place themselves at a competitive disadvantage with other universities in their region. Previous Supreme Court decisions (namely, *NLRB v. Yeshiva University*) have limited the number of faculty who could attempt to unionize by classifying certain faculty members as part of management. However, the recent National Labor Relations Board decision in *Pacific Lutheran University*, 361 NLRB No. 157, has clarified that the labor rights of adjunct professors are protected by federal labor laws and has expanded the number of adjuncts who can unionize. In doing so, the ruling has brightened prospects for the ultimate success of metro strategy in cities such as Washington, DC.¹³

¹⁰ AFT Higher Education, “A National Survey of Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty,” *American Academic*, Volume 2, March 2010. [Online](#).

¹¹ Joe Berry and Helena Worthen, “22 States Where Adjunct Faculty Are Organizing for Justice,” *In These Times*, October 9, 2014. [Online](#).

¹² Peter Schmidt, “‘Metro’ Unionizing Strategy Is Viewed as a Means to Empower Adjunct Faculty,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 3, 2012. [Online](#).

¹³ Bruce Bagley, “New NLRB Determination Makes It Easier for Unions to Organize Faculty at Universities and Colleges,” *Pennsylvania Labor and Employment Blog*, January 20, 2015. [Online](#).

The Georgetown Context

Within Washington, DC, SEIU focused its organizing efforts on George Washington University, American University, Howard University, University of the District of Columbia, and Georgetown University. Of these schools, Georgetown offered a unique organizing environment that had been established by earlier workers' rights and organizing efforts on its campus.

The “Living Wage” Fight Precedent

Georgetown, unlike most other universities, has a progressive labor policy in place known as the Just Employment Policy (JEP).¹⁴ The JEP sets a living wage standard for all direct employees and contract employees working on Georgetown's campuses that is updated annually to keep pace with inflation; it asserts the right to appropriate grievance procedures and access to campus community resources, like the library, ESL programs, and transportation shuttles; and it states that all workers have “the right to freely associate and organize.”¹⁵ It also includes provisions for a standing university committee—the Advisory Committee on Business Practices—that is charged with seeking to efficiently implement the policy. For a better understanding of why Georgetown has such a policy we must take a brief look at the university's history of labor organizing.

In 2002 Georgetown undergraduate students began to build relationships with contracted janitorial workers and to bring workers' concerns to the attention of the university administration. Students and workers organized for the following three years with a strategy of gradually escalating their organizing tactics to pressure the university to raise wages for workers. At the same time, a standing university committee that included students, faculty, and administrators sought to explore how to foster a better environment for campus workers. In January of 2005 this standing committee created a Living Wage Subcommittee that would provide the deeper attention necessary for deciding how to arrive at a figure for a living wage, and ultimately this subcommittee created a draft Just Employment Policy for the larger standing committee.¹⁶

However, students felt that this draft policy was still not strong enough, and the coalition of students involved in the living wage campaign launched a hunger strike in March 2005. The hunger strike combined a public fast by students, outreach to faculty and DC community leaders for support,¹⁷ and an intensive

¹⁴ Georgetown University, “Just Employment Policy,” *Georgetown University Office of Public Affairs*, Last updated: January 1, 2015. [Online](#).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Virginia Leavell and Kathleen Maas Weigert, “Working Towards a Just Employment Policy,” *The Hoya*, May 20, 2005. [Online](#).

¹⁷ Sudarsan Raghavan, “GU Activists Go Hungry To Help Janitors,” *Washington Post*, March 21, 2005. [Online](#).

media campaign to draw attention to the issue. Appealing to the University's Catholic and Jesuit identity, organizers timed the hunger strike to coincide with the Holy Week leading up to Easter, and the organizers employed language and rhetoric from Catholic Social Teaching in various ways.¹⁸ During this hunger strike, the Living Wage Subcommittee continued to meet and to work towards a consensus on what an acceptable Just Employment Policy could look like.

With students calling for changes to university policy, mounting public pressure, and the Living Wage Subcommittee constantly bringing together students, faculty, and administrators to seek a solution, the university announced in late March a comprehensive policy relating to wages and other rights of campus workers.¹⁹ Under this policy, the lowest total compensation rate went up from \$11.33 an hour to \$13 an hour by July 2005 and to \$14 an hour by July 2007.²⁰ At the beginning of the campaign students had asked for nearly \$15 an hour for workers but scaled back their demands as part of negotiations.²¹

The Just Employment Policy

While the vast majority of media attention focused on the wage increases, the policy that the university ultimately adopted included more than a commitment to ensuring that full-time workers could earn a living wage, whether directly employed by the university or by one of its contractors. The JEP affirmed a number of rights for workers whether directly employed by the university or by its on-campus contractors: These provisions included:

- Announcing a schedule for increasing wages to the new living wage standard and indexing this wage to inflation; the living wage would apply to Georgetown employees and full-time contract workers on campus.
- Affirming the university's commitment to a "safe and harassment-free environment" for "everyone in the Georgetown community" including workers.
- Affirming the right of workers "to freely associate and organize, and that the University will respect the rights of employees to vote for or against union representation without intimidation, unjust pressure, undue delay or hindrance in accordance with applicable law."
- Committing the university to provide "full-time jobs when possible and part-time or temporary work only when necessary," and seeking similar commitments from its contractors.

¹⁸ United Students Against Sweatshops and the Student Labor Action Project, "Case Studies: Georgetown University Hunger Strike," *Student Worker Solidarity Center*, Approximately: July 2005. [Online](#).

¹⁹ Susan Kinzie, "GU Protestors Savor a Win – and a Meal," *Washington Post*, March 25, 2005. [Online](#).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

- Establishing a standing committee (the Advisory Committee on Business Practices) to oversee the ongoing implementation of the policy.²²

Following the adoption of the Just Employment Policy, the campus saw a number of organizing drives among its contractors. Janitorial workers at P&R Enterprises joined SEIU 32BJ not long after the university adopted the policy, and students provided some support for these efforts.²³ The university also made clear that it did not oppose “card-check” union recognition of a union by P&R or its other contractors. “Any of our contractors are free to adopt a card-check (unionization) process if they decide to do so.”²⁴ Then, in 2010 and 2011, with the help of students, food service workers employed by Aramark organized a union with UNITE HERE Local 23.²⁵

A First Test for the JEP

The effort to organize the Aramark workers took place in secret for nearly a year leading up to the public campaign for a union. Student organizers reached out to Aramark workers as those workers were ending their shifts and heading home. Sometimes students met with workers in the workers’ homes or in church basements to talk to them about the power of collective bargaining and how to gain official recognition as a union. Once Aramark workers and Georgetown students publicly announced their intention to gain union representation on campus in January 2011, many workers cited instances of abusive behavior by managers or decisions to cut back the number of working hours for more vocal employees.²⁶

While the Georgetown University administration never directly involved itself in the negotiations between workers and Aramark management, the university administration took steps to ensure that all parties would be guided by the provisions of its JEP, including the protection of a safe and harassment-free workplace. Assistant Vice President for Business Policy and Planning LaMarr Billups and Associate Vice President for Auxiliary Services Margie Bryant sent a letter to Aramark CEO Joseph Neubauer on February 3, 2011 and stressed that Georgetown requires vendors to abide by its Just Employment Policy:

“As you know, Georgetown University’s mission as a Catholic and Jesuit institution includes principles and values that support human dignity in work, and

²² Just Employment Policy, January 15, 2015.

²³ Voice Staff, “Wages and Unions: Living Wage Revival,” *The Georgetown Voice*, March 2, 2006. [Online.](#)

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Lauren Weber and Laura Engshuber, “Aramark Workers’ Union Certified,” *The Hoya*, March 31, 2011. [Online.](#)

²⁶ Molly Redden, “Aramark workers at GU push to unionize,” *The Georgetown Voice*, February 17, 2011. [Online.](#)

respect for workers' rights. We expect the leadership of the companies we engage to provide services on our campuses to inform their managers, supervisors and employees of the JEP provisions in a timely manner. ... We appreciate the partnership we have enjoyed with Aramark, and urge you to remain open to respectful dialogue with your employees."²⁷

Aramark quickly responded with a statement that the company was "neither anti-union, nor pro-union" and made a point to highlight "that for half a century, Aramark has enjoyed excellent relationships with the 35-plus different unions that represent [its] employees."²⁸ Potential conflict in this organizing effort was averted and what followed was a respectful process. By the end of March 2011 workers had voted for a union and Aramark had officially recognized UNITE HERE Local 23 as the representative of their food service workers at Georgetown.

Despite successfully winning recognition for the union, it would be almost another year before the union and Aramark concluded the collective bargaining process and arrived at a contract. Students and workers managed to keep public attention on the importance of a fair contract for workers²⁹, and the university policy helped once again to set a tone for the bargaining process. After the conclusion of the negotiations, a university spokesperson noted that the university was "pleased that Aramark and the union worked collaboratively to reach an agreement that honors Georgetown University's Just Employment Policy."³⁰

Ongoing Implementation and Enforcement

The formation of a union and the final union contract agreement with Aramark marked the first major test of the Just Employment Policy. There have been other tests of the policy since then, and the university has continued to stand by its policy and worked to strengthen its enforcement and implementation.

Workers at another food service provider on campus brought wage theft lawsuits against the contractor and business owner in 2010 and in 2012.³¹ Ultimately, the contractor settled with workers out of court, but not before the court found that the workers' claims were legitimate. In the latter case, the business owner pled guilty to criminal contempt of court for violating a court order issued as part of the then-ongoing trials.³² Students and the ACBP, the committee responsible for overseeing the Just Employment Policy, called for the university to uphold its policy and to make sure that there were no more abusive practices with this particular vendor.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Matthew Strauss, "Workers Union, Aramark Strike Deal," *The Hoya*, February 10, 2012. [Online.](#)

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Upasana Kaku, "Employees File Suit Against Epicurean and Co.," *The Hoya*, July 31, 2012. [Online.](#)

³² Christopher and Annie Chen Zawora, "Activists March on Epicurean," *The Hoya*, November 12, 2013. [Online.](#)

This led to greater financial transparency from the vendor and a higher level of scrutiny from the university; the vendor publicly recommitted its business to upholding the values of the policy.³³ Georgetown officials conducted two trainings on the university's Just Employment Policy with the vendor's workers to emphasize the rights of workers on Georgetown's campus.

The university has also posted a short video explaining the Just Employment Policy.³⁴ The video features senior members of the university administration, faculty members, and students explaining how the policy embodies important elements of the university's mission. In addition to outlining the policy and its implications for workers at Georgetown, the video also highlights methods for reporting violations of the policy for further investigation by the university. The Advisory Committee on Business Practices released a protocol detailing investigative and reporting mechanism in the last year as well.³⁵

Georgetown Adjunct Organizing and Collective Bargaining

Adjunct Organizing

With Georgetown's history of student and worker activism as a backdrop and the university's Just Employment Policy establishing the basic right to unionize, adjunct professors began to organize in the fall of 2012 and spring of 2013. At the time, Georgetown did pay its adjuncts more than other schools in the area. However, adjuncts at Georgetown faced many of the same challenges that adjunct and part-time faculty faced in other university settings – limited or non-existent office space, low pay, no employer-provided health care benefits, heavy teaching loads, chronic job insecurity – and this motivated them to begin to organize.³⁶

Kerry Danner-McDonald, an adjunct professor, noted the difficulties of conducting research as an adjunct professor: “A full-time professor normally gets a research budget. The University will pay for them to travel to academic conferences. They usually teach one or two classes a semester and so they're also paid and expected to be researching for the college,” she said. “What happens with the adjunct staff [is that] if you're getting paid so little, you have to work more classes, so you don't have time to keep up your publications because it is like

³³ Kenneth Lee, “Epicurean owner responds to Solidarity Committee Petition,” *The Georgetown Voice*, December 5, 2013. [Online](#).

³⁴ Georgetown University, “Reflections on Georgetown University's Just Employment Policy,” *Georgetown University Office of Public Affairs*, October 31, 2013. [Online](#).

³⁵ Georgetown University, “Protocol for Reporting Concerns Related to the Just Employment Policy,” *Georgetown University Office of Public Affairs*, Approximately: October 2013. [Online](#).

³⁶ Lucia He, “‘Second-Class Faculty’: The Hidden Struggles of Georgetown's Adjunct Professors,” *The Georgetown Voice*, October 17, 2012. [Online](#).

you're working multiple jobs."³⁷ The low pay also "inhibits a deeper presence and engagement with students on campus because of the additional commuting costs or, for those with care-giving obligations, babysitting or elder care costs."³⁸

Beyond the logistics of research and conference costs, Danner-McDonald decided to support the union organizing efforts because she realized that she had little retirement savings and no college savings for her daughter.³⁹

Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which had already organized adjunct unions at several other DC-area universities, sent organizers to meet with adjuncts at Georgetown. Soon, they had engaged a number of adjunct professors at the university and had even received vocal support from individual students⁴⁰ and one of the main student newspapers.⁴¹

Georgetown University's Response

As adjuncts began to organize at Georgetown University, they were mindful of the hostility that adjuncts in other universities around the country were experiencing in their attempts to unionize.⁴²

However, when Georgetown University's administration learned that SEIU Local 500 had started a campaign to organize adjunct faculty on the main campus, the university leadership took a notably different approach—one guided by its Just Employment Policy. On September 28, 2012, Executive Vice President and Provost Robert Groves sent an email to all Georgetown faculty members that addressed the nascent organizing drive. The message made clear that Georgetown would not fight an effort by its adjuncts to organize. Instead it affirmed their right to organize if they chose to do so:

"The university has a long history of working productively with [...] unions. As stated in Georgetown's Just Employment Policy, our University respects employees' rights to free associate and organize, which includes voting for or against union representation without intimidation, unjust pressure, undue delay or hindrance in accordance with applicable law."

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Kerry Danner-McDonald, Personal Interview. March 23, 2015.

³⁹ Colleen Flaherty, "'Critical' Organizing," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 25, 2014. [Online](#).

⁴⁰ Sydney Browning, "Part-time professors Deserve their Full-time Rights," *The Georgetown Voice*, February 6, 2013, [Online](#).

⁴¹ Editorial Board, "Adjunct Unionization Efforts Deserve Support," *The Georgetown Voice*. April 4, 2013. [Online](#).

⁴² At Manhattan College adjuncts attempted to organize a union in 2010 and faced strong resistance from the university administration. After adjuncts had cast their ballots for a union, Manhattan College claimed it was religiously exempt from US labor laws that would force it to recognize the adjunct union on campus. Other religiously affiliated universities soon followed suit, blocking adjunct organizing efforts at Seattle University, Saint Xavier University, Duquesne University, and Pacific Lutheran University.

The letter went on to say that representatives of SEIU Local 500 would be allowed on campus and in buildings open to the public, like members of other outside organizations, and that the university encouraged adjunct faculty to gather information on the union, the representation process, and the rights of adjuncts under federal labor law. It concluded with links to the National Labor Relations Board's website and the phone number for the NLRB Washington resident office.⁴³

Even though Georgetown took a neutral stance, many adjuncts still had fears they would be discriminated against if they supported the unionization efforts. In particular, some worried that their department chairs would disapprove of any open calls for a union.⁴⁴ These fears are indicative of how vulnerable many adjuncts felt and that this was new, untested territory at the university. As it happened, no instances of intimidation materialized, and the organizing campaign proceeded without any reported problems.

Provost Groves sent another message to all Georgetown faculty on March 25, 2013 describing the pending union election process. Again, Provost Groves cited the principles stated in the university's Just Employment Policy and provided links to the NLRB website for further questions about the union representation and collective bargaining processes.⁴⁵ The union election took place from April 12 to May 3; with 70% of those who voted voting in favor, adjuncts voted overwhelmingly for union representation.⁴⁶ Provost Groves emailed all faculty members on May 14 to announce the results of the election, citing the Just Employment Policy and stating that the "University looks forward to productive negotiations" with the newly formed adjunct union.⁴⁷

Media coverage of the union election process took note of the fact that the university administration had "lived up to its promise to remain neutral"⁴⁸ – distinguishing it from other universities facing adjunct organizing campaigns. Local SEIU spokesperson Christopher Honey also praised Georgetown's administration for its respectful handling of the process, saying, "They were not just neutral but very cooperative throughout the entire process. They really upheld their social values."⁴⁹

⁴³ Robert Groves, "A Message Regarding Adjunct Faculty Organizing Campaign." September 28, 2012. *Email communication.*

⁴⁴ Kerry Danner-McDonald, Personal Interview. March 23, 2015.

⁴⁵ Robert Groves, "Important Update Regarding Adjunct Faculty Union Election," March 25, 2013. *Email communication.*

⁴⁶ Madison Ashley, "Adjuncts Vote in Favor of Union," *The Hoya*, May 5, 2013. [Online.](#)

⁴⁷ Robert Groves, "Update Regarding Adjunct Faculty Election," May 14, 2013. *Email Communication.*

⁴⁸ Alexandra Bradbury, "Adjunct Faculty, Now in The Majority, Organize Citywide." *Labor Notes*, May 30, 2013. [Online.](#)

⁴⁹ Ashley, "Adjuncts Vote in Favor of a Union."

Collective Bargaining Process and Agreement

Following the certification of SEIU Local 500 as the representative of Georgetown's adjuncts, the university and the adjuncts began the bargaining process. Six part-time faculty members were part of the bargaining committee for the union, including Prof. Mark Habeeb and Prof. Danner-McDonald. The university administration's bargaining team included the Senior Advisor to the President for Faculty Relations Lisa Krim, Deputy Dean of the School of Continuing Studies Walter Rankin, and Director of Faculty Affairs and Assistant Provost Cynthia Chance.

In September 2014 the bargaining committee reached a tentative agreement that would be subject to a vote by the union membership. Provost Groves and adjunct members of the union negotiating team sent a message to all university faculty to announce the tentative agreement on October 9, 2014, stating that the university and the union members were "hopeful that, through this agreement, and through our continued work together, part-time faculty members in our community will feel as welcomed and valued as other faculty members." The joint message cited Georgetown's Catholic and Jesuit traditions and how these faith traditions would be manifested in a first collective bargaining agreement with the part-time faculty.⁵⁰ On October 28, 2014 the union voted to approve the agreement.⁵¹

The deal included several significant improvements for adjuncts. Union negotiators had focused primarily on setting a higher floor for adjunct compensation rates and formalizing adjunct rights within the workplace. Key provisions addressed the need for greater job security.⁵² The contract would provide "good faith consideration" to adjunct faculty who have taught at Georgetown regularly over the prior two years or more and a small raise for those to adjunct faculty who were earning above the minimum compensation rate but below \$6,000 per course. Minimum compensation rates for a three or four credit course were set at \$4,300 for spring 2015 and would go up to \$4,700 by fall 2016.⁵³ According to Prof. Mark Habeeb, a member of the bargaining committee for the adjuncts, this represented a significant increase in pay for roughly 25 percent of adjuncts who were earning approximately \$2,300-\$3,000 per course before the agreement.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Robert Groves and Adjunct Members of the Union Negotiating Team, "Tentative Agreement with the Union," October 9, 2014. *Email communication*.

⁵¹ Clayton Sinyai, "A sign of hope at Georgetown: Adjuncts ratify union contract," *America Magazine: The National Catholic Review*, November 13, 2014. [Online](#).

⁵² Shalina Chatlani, "Adjunct professors reach settlement agreement with the university," *The Georgetown Voice*, September 18, 2014. [Online](#).

⁵³ Georgetown University and Service Employees International Union, Local 500, CTW, "Collective Bargaining Agreement between Georgetown University and SEIU Local 500," Signed on October 28, 2014. [Online](#).

⁵⁴ Mark Habeeb, Personal Interview. June 19, 2015.

The agreement would also mandate a \$300 course cancellation fee to be paid to adjuncts if a course was canceled 21 days before classes beginning and establish a “just cause” standard for discipline or dismissal of an adjunct faculty member.⁵⁵ The agreement codified existing benefits for adjuncts, like voluntary contribution retirement plans (non-matching), and revamped the evaluations process for adjuncts in order to increase transparency and fairness.⁵⁶

Furthermore, the new agreement would make \$35,000 of professional development funds available for adjunct faculty members. This pool of funding was viewed as “a real win-win” because it helps adjuncts present their research at conferences, which in turn contributes to the university’s good reputation. Perhaps most importantly, it showed that the university “respects [adjuncts] as legitimate scholars – it says that it’s worth it for [the university] to send [adjuncts] to a conference as scholars, [that an adjunct is not] just a person who drops in to teach once a week on campus.”⁵⁷

The unionization of adjuncts at Georgetown has the potential to foster positive pedagogical outcomes. By raising pay and increasing job stability for adjuncts through the new contract, Georgetown invested in improving retention among its adjunct faculty. Faculty retention has been shown to benefit both universities and their students alike: available evidence suggests that first-year students who take classes with full-time, non-tenure track instructors or adjuncts that are well supported by their institutions are substantially more likely to return as sophomores.⁵⁸

Looking back on the bargaining process and the contract it yielded, both sides praised the positive tone of the discussions. Each side saw the agreement as the beginning of a new and productive relationship. Adjuncts viewed it as a first step in a longer process to improve the conditions of their jobs. The university, for its part, viewed it as the beginning of an ongoing dialogue about building a more inclusive work environment. In the same manner that the organizing and union certification process had proven more amicable at Georgetown than at other institutions, the contract negotiations also exemplified a strong working relationship built on mutual respect between the university and the adjunct union.

⁵⁵ The Coalition of Academic Labor, “Georgetown University Contract Highlights,” *Service Employees International Union*, September 29, 2014. [Online](#).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Mark Habeeb, Personal Interview. June 19, 2015.

⁵⁸ A.J. Jaeger & M.K. Eagan, “Examining Retention and Contingent Faculty Use in a State System of Public Higher Education,” *Educational Policy*, June 13, 2010. [Online](#).

Lisa Krim, one of the lead negotiators for the university, pointed out that the Just Employment Policy “created a foundation for the university’s position in the negotiations because the policy clearly stated the values of the institution.”⁵⁹ She also noted that the participants in the bargaining process “built trust and mutual respect through open and respectful dialogue.”⁶⁰ Anne McLeer, Director of Higher Education and Strategic Planning at SEIU Local 500, also had strong praise for the negotiations and the final contract: “I think a significant accomplishment was our ratification of a contract at Georgetown. Georgetown stands out as a model for collaboration with their faculty for, first of all, not opposing the organizing to begin with and in collaboration with the adjuncts, negotiating a really good contract.”⁶¹

Future Implications for Adjunct Unions

Ultimately, the adjunct unionization process and contract negotiations at Georgetown represented a unifying moment for the campus community. The university administration and the part-time faculty members were able to reach a mutually beneficial agreement that represents an historic first step to improving conditions for adjunct professors. This result stands in stark contrast to the grim – at times calamitous – predictions by other universities of what effect adjunct unionization would have on a campus. While the collective bargaining agreement is only beginning to go into effect, it is already clear that it has not bankrupted the university’s finances or destroyed working relationships in academic departments.

Instead, the amicable organizing and bargaining process at Georgetown shows a way forward for academia. This agreement demonstrates that institutions of higher learning can provide top quality education *and* respect the dignity of workers.

Georgetown University’s Just Employment Policy emerged as perhaps the most important factor in creating an environment for positive discussions around labor and workers’ rights. Although it had gone into effect nearly eight years before adjuncts began to organize, the Just Employment Policy has repeatedly helped to frame important conversations regarding the dignity of work on campus. It is telling that university administrators involved in the contract negotiations point to the policy as essential to such a constructive process. By clearly stating how the university understands and respects fundamental rights, the policy helped set the tone for a respectful and positive dialogue with the adjunct union from start to finish.

⁵⁹ Lisa Krim, Personal Interview. February 3, 2015.

⁶⁰ Lisa Krim, Personal Interview. April 17, 2015.

⁶¹ Maureen Tabet, “New Congress Worries Adjuncts,” *The Hoya*, December 5, 2014. [Online](#).

Leaders of some Catholic and Jesuit institutions have raised concerns over whether collective bargaining with adjuncts would adversely affect their institutional mission. The Georgetown experience can help to lay such concerns to rest. Georgetown's approach to the adjunct issue, like its approach to other labor issues over the past decade, was guided by its Just Employment Policy – a policy deeply rooted in and informed by Catholic Social Teaching that further embodies the institutional mission. Guided by this approach, the university found that its mission was not adversely affected. To the contrary, the university came to better live out and exemplify the teachings espoused by its rich Catholic and Jesuit traditions.

What happened at Georgetown suggests that colleges and universities have the potential to act as model employers – and as better anchor institutions in their communities – by recognizing the rights of their workers and committing to pay them a living wage. To retain the respect of their communities and demonstrate the value of their academic endeavors, institutions of higher learning must also answer the needs of the men and women who make their effective operation possible. This is not just a matter of standing up for what is right; this is also to embrace good business sense. Employees who feel valued and respected are more productive and loyal, and this leads to a more efficient and dynamic workplace. Moreover, clearly recognizing employees' rights and ensuring that procedures are in place to prevent institutions from being drawn into divisive conflicts will help to better educate future leaders of a more democratic, just, and humane world.

Works Cited

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