

Oakton Adjunct Faculty Association History

Introduction

When Oakton Community College was established in 1970, students attended classes in the former warehouse buildings of Georgia Nut Company located on Oakton Avenue and Nagle in Morton Grove, Illinois. Initially student enrollment at “The Factory,” as it was called, totaled 832 students.¹ As enrollment increased, the school expanded into all four buildings.

Oakton Community College is part of the Illinois Community College system created by the Illinois General Assembly in 1965. Although the Illinois Community College Board coordinates the system of two-year colleges, locally elected boards of trustees set policies.

In 1973, Oakton Community College’s Board of Trustees voluntarily granted that full-time faculty could establish a collective bargaining unit, the Oakton Community College Faculty Association (OCCFA). As part of OCCFA’s first contract, the administration agreed to establish a Faculty Senate, whereby full-time faculty might have input on a regular basis with the Board of Trustees. In addition, a representative from OCCFA sat as a non-voting member on the Board. \

Oakton’s student population increased significantly during the early 1970s. In 1975, the Board of Trustees authorized development of a new campus on a 170-acre parcel of land that was acquired between the Des Plaines River and a Cook County Forest Preserve. In June of 1980 the college moved into its new facility; at the same time, it also arranged to lease the recently vacated Niles East High School in Skokie for an ancillary campus.

Paralleling the growth of the student population, Oakton’s faculty increased, especially the number of part-time teachers, or “adjunct” faculty members. The growing trend among community colleges was to hire part-time teachers, cheaper because they received no benefits and were paid a lower salary per credit hour than full-timer teachers. By 1979, the ratio of part-time faculty members to full-time was ___ to ___. In light of the growing percentage of part-time faculty, the Oakton administration in 1979 encouraged the establishment of a Part-Time Faculty Advisory Committee (PTFAC) to “promote issues that specifically affect part-timers”²

During the course of the next several years, part-time faculty members, working through the Part-time Faculty Advisory Committee, expressed concerns about their working conditions, specifically Oakton’s course assignment procedures and the lack of office space for adjunct faculty members. By 1984, the teaching personnel at Oakton consisted of 150 full-time faculty members and 375 part-time instructors.³ The number of classes being taught by part-time faculty also increased, even though many part-time teachers only taught one 3-hour class. (?)

1 “History of Oakton,” Oakton Community College website, http://www.oakton.edu/about/our_history/index.php (accessed 12 April 2011)

2 Cheryl Wollin, “Part-Time Faculty Flyer,” August 24, 1981.

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In January of 1984, Governor Jim Thompson signed into law the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act (IELRA) which allowed educational employees to join bargaining units. The law, written by the Illinois Education Association and the National Education Association allowed “educational employees” the right to organize in public schools, including community colleges.⁴ However, the law excluded “part-time academic employees of community colleges.”⁵

How did the passage of this law impact part-time instructors at Oakton? Even though the law did not apply to part-time instructors, the adjunct faculty members at Oakton used the passage of the law to form the first union for part-time teachers at a community college in the State of Illinois. This union, the Adjunct Faculty Association of Oakton Community College, took significant steps to stop the perceived exploitation of part-time educators, to improve working conditions, and above all, to gain a sense of dignity at their workplace. It is a story that needs to be told.

³Carl F. Costanza, Inter-Office Memorandum, March 23, 1983. In addition, there were 32 administrators, 204 full-time staff, and 57 part-time staff.

⁴ IEA, “Your legal Rights,” <http://www.ieanea.org/benefits/legal-help/your-legal-rights/> (accessed 20 January 2011).

⁵ Section II(b), Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act, January 1, 1984.