

Rise, Teach, Learn - Season 2, Episode 7

Faculty Salary and Working Conditions

00:03

We acknowledge and are mindful that CSU Chico stands on lands that were originally occupied by the first people of this area, the Mechoopda, and we recognize their distinctive spiritual relationship with this land and the waters that run through campus. We are humbled that our campus resides upon sacred lands that once sustained the Mechoopda people for centuries.

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Welcome to the Rise, Teach, Learn podcast. I am Dr. Chiara Ferrari, Director of Faculty Development at Chico State. And we are happy to make this resource available to our campus community and beyond. The podcast is hosted by Dr. Jamie Linn Gunderson. And she will engage in timely conversations with faculty, staff, and students and give you a taste of the Chico experience. Subscribe to our podcast and explore the many resources available on our website. Thank you for listening.

00:59

Hello and Welcome to Rise, Teach, Learn. I'm your host, Jamie Gunderson. In this episode, we explore the current status of our faculty contract negotiation. Okay, so I am here with Tim Sistrunk, a lecturer in the Department of History and the president of the Chico chapter of the California Faculty Association or the CFA and I'm also here with Dr. Al Schademan, a professor in the School of Education and the Vice President and Chair of faculty rights for the Chico chapter of the CFA. So Al and Tim, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to our listeners today about our contract negotiations.

01:39

Glad to be here.

Thanks for having us, Jamie.

01:42

Yeah, so let's start. I'm a fairly new faculty. This is my fourth year on campus. And I'm getting all of the emails about negotiations and impasse and I'm trying to keep abreast of the information but I have to tell you, I'm a little overwhelmed. And so can you give us kind of a nitty gritty breakdown on what is happening currently with our negotiations?

02:07

Just to remind people we the CSU, unlike other California State employees, we have to negotiate our contract. Every year we have to negotiate our pay raises for every year, and then we have that negotiated contract that will last for three years at a time and sometimes it's optional for renewal. So that's why there's always a salary dimension to salary negotiations. But the major parts of the contract that we are negotiating now right now with management, and finding it difficult to get the changes we

would like to make to make the system a modern 21st century university to serve the people of California, which were all dedicated to the educational mission. So we're interested in rights and respect and justice. So under different issues that are part rights that that govern our contract. Like all faculty have to take student evaluations of teaching. Everybody knows that those are always impacted by bias by unconscious biases of people maybe not even intentional. So women tend to score a lot lower than, than white males. Faculty of color also score lower. So we've addressed that in our contract we want to define how the student part of the conversation about feedback on what's happening in the classroom. We added language to our contract to change that. We would like to also underwrite, we want to create mediation possibilities for faculty that are in disputes with each other or students or with anyone in the university. To have our Ombuds office work robustly for everybody and fairly and rapidly. And we're also you know, given the times that we live in our academic freedom, we want to create a specific article in our contract to make that robust. So rights, also respect. So respect for all these workers. So lectures, in the CSU lecturers out number regular faculty by far we teach the largest classes, all these really important general education areas. And so in the contract, we've explored a route for permanent tenure track for lecturers, we want to start them out with a five year contract and then create a pathway for them to move into, into tenure. So it creates security for lecturers, we're also interested in letting the librarians manage their own time and then there are other things under respect but then justice we want to have things like course caps, you know that the course sizes just continue to grow. We want to think about cultural taxation of faculty of color in particular, being you know, students of color, which are a growing number of our student population in the CSU attracted to faculty and need their lived experience the kind of support that people who come from their from their own backgrounds can give and those that extra work. And so we want to make sure that that work is recognized as valuable for the university, paid for, and supported. We are also interested in under justice, having faculty who have children instead of, you know, 30 days leave after you have a child, give them a semester, you know, to bond with their children and all of that to enter into the modern world. So that's just an aspect of justice. There are all kinds of other pieces of the contract it's pretty complicated. You can look at the CFA website, which is linked to our conversation and find the contract and that exact negotiation, the different pieces of the contract. And what management say, and what we say.

06:27

That is a lot of information, it is much more than just a salary negotiation, I'm understanding. So I want to throw it AI. AI, can you tell us where are we in the bargaining and negotiation process?

06:44

It's interesting you've asked that question, Jamie, because we just had a meeting with one of the folks that's on our bargaining team. And he let us know that we just went to what's called fact finding, so you moved from impasse and mediation into fact finding. So basically, you can't just go out on strike, you can't have a wildcat strike. That's illegal, because we have to abide by the higher education employees relation act or HEERA and what HEERA that lays down the process and the first thing you have to do is start with public notice, you gotta let everybody know that you're going into bargaining, so everybody can get prepared, then you go into bargaining with a team sit down and they start to talk. And if they can reach agreement at there, they reached the agreement, and then they can just call it quits. But if they don't reach an agreement, then they go to something called impasse. And during impasse they

meet with mediators, a mediator. The State Mediation and Conciliation Service assigns a mediator to us. And the mediator helps the two sides talk about the issue. And then if mediation is not successful, then what mediation leads to then is fact finding and fact finding is almost like a hearing. And you get to plead your case to a panel of three people. And then the panel can then basically with a two to one vote say that this side is making a reasonable claim here and you should settle based on that side's view so they could they could say the CFA is reasonable or they could say the CSU is reasonable they could side with either. Now the thing is, is that that CSU even if the fact finders agree with us, they don't have to, it's not a binding arbitration, they don't have to go with that. And so then after fact finding what happens is there's a report issued but there's a 10-day blackout and nobody can share the report publicly, and that gives the two sides time to look at the report and then also meet and come to a settlement. And if that happens, again, process done, but if that doesn't happen, then once the CFA has exhausted all of those options, then they can go to strike. And then during the strike is when we would withhold our labor from the CSU and the CSUs would shut down. And then that sort of is a strong hand to play to force the CSU back to the table and to come to an agreement.

09:28

So from a junior faculty perspective, when we say things like impasse and strike, that creates a little anxiety for me as a faculty member, and I'm just wondering, is that where our negotiation is currently going? Or are we having some positive outcomes from these meetings with our collective bargaining unit?

09:57

You know, just to use salary which is always a clear illustration. So we sensibly, you know, without kind of overreaching, we thought we would ask for 4% raise for three years for each year of our contract and the what the Chancellor's office, the CSU said was what will offer you 2% raise for one year. Well, what that ends up doing is cost of living keeps increasing. So basically, we're losing money to be, to work for the CSU. You know your salary, the value of your salary will keep going down. So that's an illustration of a kind of an impasse. Oh, we do not have money to meet your question. And, of course, then, a couple weeks ago it was announced that the Board of Trustees is it's going to offer 10% raises to all the presidents across the CSU for 10% on a pretty hefty salary. So there, there are sticking points salary. that's just one piece. All the things I mentioned about rights, respect and justice, which we thought were reasonable approaches to accommodate our changing student demographics, those, none of those have been agreed to. None of them.

11:29

Is that we haven't reached a full agreement or is that just are we talking about these things individually? Are we negotiating the contract as a collective whole?

11:40

It's, it's both. So it's definitely a whole but once you come to an agreement on a topic, then that goes off the table. You see what I mean? So that they've had some, like, there's one where management has agreed to accept moving the new faculty orientation MOU into the contract. And so that was one of the one of the things that we put on the table and management agreed to. Another thing management has agreed to is that concept that librarian work can be performed remotely. Now, we're still working on

some of the details on that, but so there has been some movement on the smaller things. So basically, you've got the salary thing. And then you've got the collective bargaining agreement. And so what I'm talking about now would be changes to the collective bargaining agreement. And once you make changes there, and that's sort of like that's those that's how that's what governs how the management and faculty work with each other for the next three years, because we sign three year contracts. And so and then that will affect changes in the FPPP, you know, the policies at the university level. So some of those so we've seen some progress, but yet still a big divide on I think the major issues, especially salary.

12:59

So just for some context, you mentioned some potential changes to the FPPP, how does that correlate to faculty workload?

13:10

It would be like okay so faculty workload right now would be specific to librarian workload. That's one of the things that's on the table. Counselor workload is on the table. So hiring enough counselors to make sure there's 1000 there's one counselor for every 1000 to 1500 students. CSU Chico currently has one counselor for 1500 students, which is within the guidelines, however their use, a recent accreditation report of the Counseling Center said that because of the high demand and because of the severity of so many of the cases that they should be more looking for more like one to 1000. So we would like to have that ratio at CSU Chico. Course caps are another thing that's always on the table. And that always, and Jamie, you know how course caps, You have 35 students and, you know, or 50 students, or 25 students, that is a big difference in faculty workload. Our argument is that that class size should be based on each individual department's understanding of pedagogical teaching needs, shouldn't just be customary and added to by a Dean or something.

14:35

Just going back to the salary concept, when was the last time that faculty received a salary increase?

14:44

So five years ago, well, it was 2015. We were less than a week, it was about half a week, something, almost a week, something, we were ready to go out on strike and we struck for 5% raise, but other kinds of amelioration of problems with salary step increases which hadn't been given to us it had been seven years. There are other kinds of aspects of the salary service, salary increases, post promotion increases there's also equity raises for if you're, you've been underpaid or you were you were offered less than you're really worth maybe because you're female or because you're a faculty of color. That's demonstrated. Equity problem. We also try to so we negotiated to set up to get a 5% Raise but then also to change some of the dimensions of that. So we ended up cumulatively over time getting more than just 5%, some faculty got a you know, as high as 18%, 22%. So it was we've kind of changed the trajectory of how education was thought of and it had national impact.

16:17

That's amazing. Can I ask, given where we are with this current negotiation process in this current collective bargaining agreement, do you anticipate just in how, just with your background and

knowledge of previous negotiations and your contribution to this negotiation, do you anticipate that we'll find resolution or do you think it's going to be a case where faculty will go to strike or is it too early to tell?

16:49

Well, it's like futurism, right? But um, you know, I got the feeling from meeting with the chancellor when he was here, that they are definitely, you know, willing to sit at the table and reach a reasonable agreement. I did get the feeling that they're still crunching a number of numbers, and trying to do projections. And then and so I think there's a bit I mean, I don't know this for a fact. I'm just this is my hunch is that they are stalling right now until you know, they really have their ducks in a row about their projections, the current budget, what's coming in from the state, what's coming in from the feds, it's complicated. And, I mean, the facts are there. The money is there. Okay, the money is there from the state and the money is there from the feds. And so that's going to come out in fact finding and that is usually a really compelling argument for the arbitrators, right? You know, because if it's like the money's there, and they're asking for 12%, when the inflation is at 5.5%, it seems reasonable to me. And they haven't had raises in a little while. So hey, give them another bump.

18:12

You know, we tried to reconceptualize the place that the union, it isn't just about salary, because people work in the CSU because they love to teach, they're committed to the students, you know, and so antiracism, social justice, that animates all of us that we you know, we went to work for our whole community. And so, all those pieces I was talking about you know, like, cultural taxation, or any all kinds of issues of integrity or stability, respect, that impacts that impacts faculty across the system, but it also impacts students because our, our working conditions our students learning conditions, we that you know, we say that but it's absolutely true.

19:06

I don't know if we would know this number but just ballpark what are we looking at systemwide as a number to compensate our faculty? How much is this costing the university, the CSU?

19:21

So the CFA has lobbyists. Right, and we lobby the legislature for money in the California budget to be allocated to the CSUs, and the governor has been pretty generous. And so he allocated a large sum of money to the CSU system and that's what I think that's why I think there's a there's a pot, I don't know about a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. There's light at the end of the tunnel, I think and it's because the funding is there. Historical, historically high, historically high funding for the CSU. I think what factfinding is going to show is that the money's there. 550 million given to the CSU this this year, which is unheard of.

20:16

So projecting this forward if we were to reach in fact finding if we were to come to an agreement, it's my understanding that that it stops and we now have a contract correct, and that contract will be good for hopefully, around three years. What happens if in fact finding we don't reach an agreement?

20:36

Well, the factfinding report will be issued, and we'll go into the blackout phase for 10 days and hopefully, that you know, that time gives the two sides time to really look into the report and sit down at the table and bargain, at everybody's best interest. And then, you know, if that, at the end of those 10 days, then the report from the factfinding report can be made public and then the CFA can then call for a strike. And so if we call for a strike, we will withhold our labor. And then you will see us on campus and you will see us marching around and you will see us with signs and with megaphones. And, as that's this is when it becomes really important for faculty to be on campus and making their voices heard.

21:32

And on that note, how can faculty number one, stay abreast of the negotiations and also be additive to that collective voice?

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Other ways that faculty can stay involved and get the information they need is that Tim sends out emails to all faculty with bargaining updates. And you can also go to the CFA website. There's a whole website on bargaining that provides updates.

22:04

And so one last question. Do you have to be a CFA member to reap the benefits of these negotiations?

22:12

Nope, we have a duty, to, a duty to represent, so we represent everybody. Our strength at the bargaining table is based on the number of members we have. And so we have a pretty, at Chico we have pretty high percentage of membership among our faculty. But the more we have the better. So if you're wondering what to do this, one of the most powerful things you can do, join the union join the union and we're pretty inexpensive union for our region, and nationally.

22:45

And other ways for folks to get involved is to become a department rep and then come to our breakfast meeting once a month and you get all up to date, then you basically can go back to your department and you get on the department agenda and you provide the department with updates. And then folks if they have issues, they come to you and then you send them to the right place, if they have faculty rights issue, they come to the department rep and the department rep sends them to the faculty rights chair for campus. That's a great way to get involved, and then you know, you know coming up you know, we're gonna have actions as we get closer and closer. Well, if let's say if we get closer and closer to striking there will be actions on campus.

23:24

All right. So Al and Tim, this is very eye opening for me as a junior faculty member. I learned a lot from our conversation and I'm hoping our listeners took a lot from this conversation as well. So if you haven't already, folks, I encourage you to join the union. We are going to link the CFA website on our FDEV

podcast website for you to peruse along with some documents that kind of explain where we are in the negotiations process. But I want to just take a moment to thank you Tim and AI for the work that you do on behalf of the faculty at CSU Chico. And so thank you very much for all of that hard work.

24:04

Thank you, Jamie. I'll leave you with these final words. In solidarity. When we fight, we win.