

THE GOOD 5 CENT CIGAR

Letter: Part-time professors band together under union for better treatment

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To the Cigar,

There are professors at the University of Rhode Island who have been hidden and marginalized for decades.

Called "adjunct faculty," these part-time faculty members are the faculty who are assigned to teach introductory level courses for the various academic disciplines across the university, as well as many of the required General Education courses taken by URI's undergraduate students. And some also teach 300-level courses that are part of a student's major area of specialization.

There are currently approximately 625 full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty at URI; there are approximately 450 part-time faculty. URI's part-time faculty are the professors who set the educational foundation for URI undergraduates in their college careers and in their chosen fields of study. The fact is part-time faculty at URI are far from temporary. During the past few decades, they have been used over and over again as permanent members of a department's faculty. They routinely teach classes at both the Kingston and Providence campuses. Some part-time faculty have worked every semester-fall, spring and many times in the summer-for 10,15, even 20 years.

Yet, at URI part-time faculty are treated by the university as though they are temporary-invisible and poorly compensated for their expertise and education. For decades, URI has had the best of all worlds. They have a large core of part-time faculty who have the necessary education, intelligence, training and scholarship in their field(s) of expertise and the university obtains the services of these faculty at a bargain basement price.

Truth be told, without the continuous support of URI's part-time faculty, throughout all the academic departments of the university, there would not be enough classes or even enough sections of required courses to provide the educational needs of the university's undergraduate student body.

On March 25, 2008, the Providence Journal reported: "New faculty [at URI] earn \$50,000 to \$70,000 a year, depending on their discipline, plus benefits. Part-time [faculty] earn \$3,200 per course, no benefits, [no seniority rights], and are limited to [teaching] two courses per semester."

Therein lies URI's shame regarding its treatment of its part-time faculty, a group of teachers the university absolutely depends on to deliver its undergraduate curriculum.

Given these conditions, it is not surprising the part-time faculty at URI found it necessary to form a bargaining unit to stand together and strive for a more equitable and fair work environment. That desired environment should also include a culture that values and respects the enormous contributions made by the part-time faculty to the university in general, and to URI's undergraduate student body in particular.

The union was certified in spring 2008 and the Part-Time Faculty United (PTFU) contract negotiating team is now in negotiations with the administration in our efforts to establish an equitable and fair work situation for part-time faculty at URI.

In recent weeks, URI administrators, at all levels, from the president to the provost and including the deans, have spoken urgently about the need for a new vision, a new future, for the University of Rhode Island.

Although they don't mention it in their public statements there is no question that a large core of part-time faculty will form a significant part of and play a central role in this "new vision" and "new future" at URI.

As noted above, the university simply cannot deliver on its obligation to provide URI students (and their parents who are paying extremely high tuition rates) the education they came to URI to receive.

We hope to be able to announce in the near future a fair and equitable agreement that reflects the essential value of and the significant contribution made by URI's part-time faculty.

In closing, "Think Fairness. Think Pride. Think Justice."

URI/AAUP/PTFU Negotiating Team
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