



Time sheets and office hours

By PETER HOGNESS

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Usually it's management that tells employees to fill out time sheets – but in 1997, a group of part-time faculty activists at CUNY began to circulate time sheets of their own. These paper forms became the launching pad for a campaign that eventually won pay for adjunct office hours.

"Adjuncts at CUNY are not paid to hold office hours, but most do so anyway because of their professional commitment and moral obligation to their students," declared CUNY Adjuncts Unite! (CAU!) in 1997. "Our position, of course, is not that we shouldn't keep office hours, but that, like full-timers, we should be paid for our time and work." The rank-and-file group called for one paid hour of conference time for every three hours in class, paid at the full teaching rate.

"CUNY Adjuncts Unite! had just been formed," recalled Alex Vitale, now assistant professor of sociology at Brooklyn College. "The early meetings were very diffuse, because everyone had a million legitimate grievances. So the first challenge was to pick one or two things to focus on." Paid office hours for part-time faculty seemed like a good choice, he said, for several reasons: it affected all adjuncts; it illustrated the inequities faced by part-time faculty; and it would clearly benefit students.

Early in Fall 1997, CAU! distributed "Office Hour Time Sheets" to adjunct faculty on every campus of the University. Since adjuncts were generally not given offices, they made themselves available to students in a variety of ways: showing up early to class or staying late; grabbing some time to confer in a hallway; announcing to their classes when they could be reached by phone at home. CAU! asked part-timers to keep track of this time on the sheet so that it could be added up. The idea was to dramatize the amount of unpaid labor that adjuncts were doing by putting a number on it.

"Just the process of getting these blank time sheets into the hands of thousands of adjuncts on all the different campuses was a huge undertaking," said Vitale. CAU! had developed a network of about 100 volunteers to distribute its newsletter, he said, and it used the same network to distribute the time sheets. Eric Marshall, now an organizer with NY State United Teachers, said that getting the time sheets was a great opportunity for education and organizing. "When you gave someone a time sheet, that was a chance to talk with them about getting more involved in the union," Marshall said.

“Get Those Time Sheets In!” a headline in the CAU! newsletter reminded readers as the semester came to an end. They were gathered up and the numbers were tallied – with some startling results. Based on these records, which reflected the work of hundreds of adjuncts spread across every campus in the CUNY system, CAU calculated that, by a conservative estimate, the 7,500 part-time faculty then working at CUNY had worked approximately 20,000 office hours during the Fall 1997 semester. In monetary terms, this was over \$1 million worth of unpaid labor.

“When you put a number on it, when you show that you’re talking about people not being paid for about \$1 million worth of work, it makes it clear that this is a *big* problem, and a big injustice” Marshall said. “It’s not just a bunch of people whining.”

But if no one but adjuncts knew this, it wouldn’t do much good. To spread the word, CAU! organized a demonstration and press conference at CUNY’s headquarters on East 80th Street. “We got a giant Xerox enlargement of one of the time sheets and put the totals on it,” said Vitale. “That’s what we used for a visual – it looked like when someone wins the lottery and they give them a giant check.”

Close to 100 attended, said Shirley Rausher, adjunct assistant professor of English at BMCC. “The weather was cold and nasty, but the turnout warmed our hearts,” she said. Reporters came from *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *El Diario* and more, plus local television stations. The lively rally ended with the delivery of hundreds of sample time sheets, from every campus, to a representative of the chancellor. The time sheets were accompanied by a letter from CAU!, asking that employees be paid for this time.

“When I walked into Fairway a few days later,” Rausher told *Clarion*, “someone I didn’t know came over and said, ‘I saw you on television!’ It blew my mind, because it really showed that we had had an impact.”

CUNY wrote back to CAU! that this was a collective bargaining issue which it could discuss only with the PSC. Lacking support from the union’s bargaining team, in 1998 the campaign for paid office hours got no further than 80th Street’s door. But it had not failed.

“The campaign put the demand for paid office hours on the map,” said Vitale. “It made clear to both management and the union that adjuncts were upset about this. And it energized us – it got a lot of adjuncts involved in organizing.”

By the time the next bargaining round began, PSC members had elected a new leadership. When the PSC Delegate Assembly adopted the union’s contract demands, the list included paid adjunct office hours. The formula was the one popularized by the time sheet campaign: one paid office hour for every three hours of class time.

In addition to raising this at the bargaining table, the PSC also lobbied the State legislature for a new line item in CUNY’s budget that would provide dedicated funding

for office hours. “That highlighted the issue, and put some pressure on CUNY to deal with it,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. At a legislative hearing on adjunct issues in 2001, the chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee questioned CUNY Vice Chancellor Brenda Malone about the office hour issue, recalled Marcia Newfield, PSC vice president for part-time personnel.

But management strongly resisted the idea. “We heard for 18 months at the bargaining table, ‘You will never get office hours for adjuncts,’” Bowen said. That did not change until very late in the negotiations, when bargaining had been narrowed down to a very few issues. PSC negotiators made clear that they would not sign an agreement without some key elements in addition to salary increases – including an increase in Welfare Fund contributions, expansion of research time, and paid adjunct office hours. But it was not just strong words that convinced management to say ‘yes.’

“For what you say at the bargaining table to have any teeth, it has to be backed up by an organized membership,” Bowen said. “We kept reminding them of those time sheets and the attention they’d received. It was a reminder that they had to look beyond the walls of our meeting room – they had to offer a deal that would satisfy our membership.”

There was intense bargaining over the details of this contract provision. The final result was not everything the union had asked for – it was one hour for every six hours of classroom time on the same campus, not one hour for three – but it was a significant advance. “This was the last thing to get settled,” Bowen recalled. “We were literally exchanging pieces of paper at 11:00 at night.”

The most important lesson, said Bowen, is that union action can change what seems to be an immovable position. “It took real persistence to win this demand,” she said. “You have to not believe them when they say, ‘You will never get this.’ You have to keep pressing them, or you’ll never find out what you can achieve.”

“When this demand got pursued by the union and it finally went through, we really felt that our grassroots effort had paid off,” Rausher said. “When we started, who knew if anything would come of it? But we figured it was worth a try.”