



# UC-AFT PERSPECTIVE

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL-AFT/CALIFORNIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFT/AFL-CIO • VOLUME 19, NUMBER 2 • SPRING 2007

## Lecturers bargain for a better deal

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BOB SAMUELS, UC-AFT PRESIDENT

## What every American should know about the changes in higher education

As someone who represents non-tenured faculty, I am often placed in the difficult position of both defending the quality of our teachers and critiquing the quality of their working conditions. Sometimes, people inside and outside higher education ask me to explain why there is a problem with hiring faculty off of the tenure track when we argue that so many of these faculty members are great educators.

I have found that one of the best ways to respond to this important question is to show what the growing lack of tenure does to the educational experience of students. In other words, I try to prove that teachers' working conditions affect students' learning conditions. However, it is also important to emphasize that many of these negative effects are indirect and subtle.

For instance, since most faculty teaching outside the tenure system do not have representation within their faculty senates, the increase of the percentage of faculty without tenure means that there is a higher burden of governance on the tenured faculty. However, the tenured faculty have often not taken up this extra workload, and so we find that administrators are taking over many of the important pedagogical and academic responsibilities that once belonged to the faculty. Furthermore, since non-tenured faculty teach so many undergraduate courses, and these faculty members do not have a voice in their faculty senates, it is hard to keep undergraduate education as an institutional priority.

A strong example of this disconnect between faculty governance and undergraduate teaching became apparent to me when I was helping to negotiate a contract for over 3,000 faculty members in the UC system, and I realized that the people on the other side of the table representing the university had never taught a course in their lives. Furthermore, these people without expertise in pedagogical matters were making

important decisions on how teachers should or should not be evaluated in the UC system.

This question of how to evaluate teachers is also at the heart of why good non-tenured teachers can be undermined by bad working conditions. Since most of the faculty working outside the tenure track system are hired for their teaching and not their research, they are usually evaluated on the quality of their instruction. Yet, there is very little consensus on how to evaluate teaching, so most of these faculty members are judged primarily on their student evaluations, and it is important to stress that this reliance on student evaluations has several pernicious effects.

While many studies on student evaluations have come up with conflicting outcomes, virtually every study says that these tools are not scientific and should not be the main instruments for judging the quality of teachers. In fact, most studies on student evaluations show that there is a strong correlation between the grades that students receive and the types of evaluations they give teachers. To be precise, students who get high grades tend to give high evaluations, and students who are not happy with their grades give bad evaluations regardless of the quality of the instruction.

Since many teachers know, consciously or unconsciously, that the surest way to get high evaluations is to pump up grades, this incentive system not only creates grade inflation, but more importantly, teachers who are judged by students are motivated to keep their students happy and not challenge them too much. For example, a former colleague of mine once told me that she never wrote negative comments on her students' papers and never corrected their mistakes because she was afraid of

getting bad evaluations. While this may be an extreme example, it indicates that the reliance on student evaluations to judge the quality of non-tenured faculty can have many negative consequences.

Another side effect of this reliance on student evaluations is that non-tenured faculty lose much of their academic freedom. It is simply too risky for teachers to discuss difficult or controversial subject matter in a system where the customer is always right. Of course, recent national debates about higher education have

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# Lecturers head back to the bargaining table

By Ben Harder and Bob Samuels

The preliminary steps are over, and by the time this issue lands in your mailbox, a new round of partial contract negotiations will be under way for the lecturers' unit. The university and the union will be negotiating salary, workload, contract duration, and union release time.

In general, we have the following goals for bargaining salary. First, we want to ensure salary increases that account for both cost-of-living increases and any increases to our pension and benefits contributions. Second, we want to follow up our success in raising the minimum salaries with increases for those who have been working for a longer time. Third, we want to increase the "steps" in merit pay. Finally, we want to address the raw deal that part-time lecturers get in regards to Social Security contributions,

health benefits, and retirement contributions.

Workload goals are less easily codified, but we want to address the concerns raised during our study of workload problems in specific departments across the UC system.

Furthermore, we want to get UC to recognize the importance of pedagogical development. Lecturers do not simply teach the same canned course for decades: each of our assignments requires us to remain current in disciplinary advances, pedagogical trends, and technological advancements within the classroom.

Strategically, we want to build on our relationships, both with the university and with the coalition of UC unions. We think the university has an incentive to bargain efficiently and in good faith, but we also need to cooperate with our co-workers in the other unions. In any case, the stronger our union is, the better our bargaining position will be.

We have already met with the university to explain our proposals and to hear the university explain its opening positions.



The first two meetings allowed the sides to cover most of their opening proposals. The third meeting takes place in mid-March, as this issue goes to press; it should finish that process and begin the first round of counter-proposals. We are now waiting to see what UC will offer as counter-proposals.

*Ben Harder is an English lecturer at UC Riverside, and serves as president of his local. UC-AFT President Bob Samuels teaches writing at UCLA.*

## President's column

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missed this important lack of academic freedom because people are simply not aware of how the transformations in academic hiring have affected the classroom.

To help rectify this system of over-reliance on student evaluations, UC-AFT was able to get the university to agree that these tools cannot be the sole criteria for judging non-tenured faculty. In fact, we have been able to correct some situations where lecturers have not been rehired based only on a small drop in their student ratings. Yet, until we develop more effective means for evaluating teaching, these unscientific tools will be used as if they represent scientific facts.

Ultimately what we need to fight for as a union and a national movement is representation of all faculty in institutional governance. Currently, we simply have a non-democratic system without non-tenured faculty representation.

Above and below: lecturers rally for a contract, circa 2003.



While Unit 18 (lecturer) contract talks proceed, other unions are negotiating pensions with the university. The unions for service workers (AFSCME), clerical workers (CUE), and researchers and techs (UPTE-CWA) are bargaining as a coalition with UC over its plans to redirect 2% of employee salaries from their own retirement accounts to the system-wide pension.

The bargaining team of the UC Union Coalition (UCUC) has proposed the following responses to UC's plan to withhold more of employees' salaries to fund the pension.

First, the UCUC proposes the joint governance of pension plans by trustees representing both workers and management, as at CalPERS. Pension plans with joint governance tend to be more secure and effective. Second, UCUC proposes that UC repay CAP and "contribution holiday" funds. Before resorting to forced employee contributions to fund the pension system, UC management must repay the fund with money it

## UC Union Coalition update: focus on pensions

by Ben Harder

Tanya Smith, photo



Some members of the joint union pension negotiating team at a Berkeley session. From left to right: UPTE's Wendi Felson, CUE's Kathi Young, AFSCME's Debra Grabelle, UPTE's Kevin Rooney, and UC-AFT's Karen Sawsilak.

saved by not making pension contributions for 15 years – UC's "contribution holiday" – a time during which employees continued to pay 2% into the defined contribution plans. Third, the coalition is demanding that employee salaries be

raised to market rates that provide all employees living wages. Finally, UCUC is proposing a 5:1 employer/employee funding ratio, the historical rate of contributions at UC. This simply means that for every dollar employees pay into the pension fund, UC should contribute five.

In addition to bargaining, coalition members are pursuing legislative alternatives. AFSCME has worked with State Senator Leland Yee on AB 190, legislation that would require UC and CSU discussions of executive compensation to take place in public meetings. Such public oversight would help prevent some of UC's recent compensation scandals. UPTE is working on legislation to institute joint governance of UC's employee pension system, and developing a proposal to change the way in which regents are selected.

Finally, other unions are also engaging in activism and protests. They have collected over 8,000 postcards to the regents protesting UC's proposal to fund the pension plan by, in effect, cutting employees' compensation. AFSCME members staged a sit-in and were arrested in Oakland on February 16. Future demonstrations and pickets are in the works, and we encourage members to support the work of the coalition in protecting workers' salaries and benefits from unwarranted cuts.

## Governor proposes commission to study public employee pension reform

by Fred Glass

Nearly two years after his failed attempt to gut public pension funds, Governor Schwarzenegger has finally admitted his plan was deeply flawed. In an opinion piece published in the December 29, 2006 *Sacramento Bee*, he said, "I backed a proposed initiative that was poorly drafted." Instead, in keeping with his recent moderate approach, he has now proposed forming a bipartisan commission to study public pensions and recommend policy.

In spring of 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger announced he was withdrawing his half-baked pension "reform" ballot initiative from circulation, due to the "misperception" that it separated widows of fallen firefighters and police from their spouse's death benefits. (It wasn't a misperception; it was part of the badly written, poorly executed ballot initiative.) But the battle was far from over, even following his special election losses in November 2005. Destroying public pension funds is a top priority of ultra-conservative forces nationally. The issue is not going to go away.

Schwarzenegger recently acknowledged as much. In an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial board, "Schwarzenegger said he would continue pushing for changing the way political voting districts are set and for altering how government pays state workers' pensions" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, October 12, 2006).

Few public education employees – certificated or classified – embark on their careers with an idea of achieving great financial gain. But they do expect and deserve fair compensation within the constraints of public budgets. One of the con-

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## CSU faculty holding strike vote

The California Faculty Association (CFA), the union that represents both Senate and non-Senate California State University (CSU) faculty, is holding a strike authorization vote this month.

The CFA is proposing an approximately 25% salary increase over four years. CSU is proposing compensation that would effectively equal about 15% over four years for most represented faculty.

As a point of comparison, the most common bottom salary scale in the CSU system for lecturers pays \$120 per year more than the starting salary for Unit 18 members. For more information, visit the CSU website at [www.calfac.org/bargaining/html](http://www.calfac.org/bargaining/html). – Ben Harder

## 2006-7 Raoul Teilhet Scholarships

In 1997, the CFT established the annual Raoul Teilhet Scholarship fund, in order to help the children of members to achieve their higher education goals.

The fund was named after long-time CFT leader Raoul Teilhet, who served the organization as president from 1968-1985. The fund awards scholarships in amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000.

At our 2003 convention, delegates voted to extend eligibility for the scholarship fund to continuing college students who are children of CFT members, and to children of deceased CFT members.

Scholarships may be awarded for any one year of higher education; those who received scholarships as high school seniors are not eligible for another scholarship.

### Deadlines approaching

There are two scholarship application forms: one for high school seniors, and the other for continuing college students. High school seniors must submit applications by January 10, 2007, and college students by July 1. You can find both application forms at [www.cft.org](http://www.cft.org).

## False diversity

by Bob Samuels

This fall at UCLA another caravan of busses brought hundreds of minority K-12 students to see the campus and plant the seeds for future applications.

At the same time, UCLA students rallied to protest the low level of minority students accepted this year. In fact, over 90 percent of the African American students that applied in 2006 were rejected. The main reason given for this low acceptance rate is that these students simply don't have the GPAs and SATs to compete.

What is behind this strange conflict between the university's push to recruit more "underserved" minority students and the high rate of rejection?

From a conservative perspective, race should not be taken into account in any way, and test scores are the fairest way to sort out potential students. However, from a liberal perspective, this public institution should go out of its way to expand diversity and opportunity.

Still, since universities are often ranked not only by the test scores and grades of incoming students but by the percentage of students who are rejected, the university is motivated to recruit students it knows it will reject. In other terms, the more students rejected, the higher the selectivity rating of the institution. While I do not think that is an intentional strategy, many competing forces motivate this type of system.

As a union president representing primarily undergraduate teachers, I see this diversity debate as a secondary issue, which does not deal with the real problem of universities bringing in more students, yet failing to increase the number of faculty who teach.

The result is often large classes that drown out the voices of any student, let alone minority students. In this debate, we cannot neglect the real issues concerning the quality of education and the protection of academic working conditions.

[cft.org/home\\_news/rtscholarships.html](http://cft.org/home_news/rtscholarships.html).

You may also download a Raoul Teilhet Scholarship flyer to pass out to members without web access, informing them how to get the application forms; and another flyer with information on all labor scholarships available to CFT members, including those from AFT, the California Labor Federation, and the AFL-CIO.

For more information, contact your local or call 818-843-8226.



# Librarian workload survey results: a brief overview

by Karen Sawislak

Nearly 150 Unit 17 librarians participated in the union's on-line survey of workload issues. Over 100 reported that their workload had increased significantly in recent years, and a great majority of respondents agreed that it was impossible to complete their assigned duties in a 40-hour workweek. To handle their responsibilities, most, on average, work between 45-50 hours per week; several dozen reported working over 50 hours per week; and a handful of respondents work 55-70 hours per week.

There appear to be several interrelated reasons for the unit's increased (and increasing) workloads. On a global scale, respondents pointed to changes in librarianship itself – that in regard to service-related duties, librarians are expected to maintain their traditional mastery of print resources – and at the same time constantly learn (and learn to teach) new electronic resources.

Gaining proficiency in new systems requires significant investments of time. In addition, a new and expanding world of information resources has led to heightened demands for instruction. Indeed, respondents cited "instruction" as the area of responsibility that clearly has seen the most significant increase in recent years.

## Keeping up with new technology

New technology, as in many workplaces, is increasing workload for most librarians. E-mail queries and web page maintenance are frequently touted by managers as key to efficient service delivery, and have doubtless in many cases

increased access and usage. But for most respondents, new responsibilities in newer forms of service delivery have only been added on to their traditional tasks. Further, many librarians indicated that various electronic systems, while allegedly labor-saving, had in fact become enormously time-consuming.

Staff shortages were frequently mentioned as a cause of heightened librarian workload. Sometimes respondents were short of librarian colleagues and had to scramble to cover work that previously had been assigned

levels have greatly affected Unit 17, as librarians have less access to skilled assistants or student help. Frequently, they must perform routine administrative and clerical tasks that could easily be handled by non-librarians.

## Doing more with less

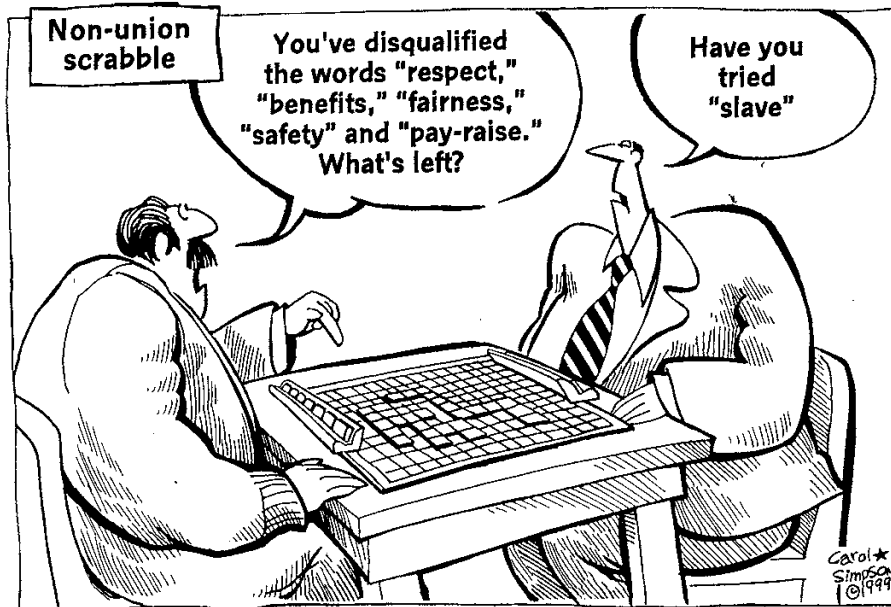
In sum, the survey results reveal a broad consensus that Unit 17 librarians are being asked to do more, but with increasingly constricted resources. For many, the demands of Criteria 1 service work are encroaching severely on their ability to attend to their professional development in the areas of Criteria 2, 3, and 4. As one respondent put it, "I would like to pursue more research and writing, but this is extremely difficult if you want to do a decent job at the primary responsibilities... instead, I'm encouraged to drop professional activities in order to make time."

Over the next months, UC-AFT field staff will be

working with librarians at each campus to assess the workload survey results. The extremely thoughtful responses to this survey now need to be translated into action at the local level and bargaining proposals at the systemwide level.

We thank the many librarians who took the time to participate, and we convey our special gratitude to Steve Petersen, a Unit 18 lecturer at UCSC who acted as our webmaster. Please look for invitations to help take this workload initiative to the next level.

*Karen Sawislak is UC-AFT's executive director.*



to others, as supervisors generally are not willing to reduce or modify existing duties when they ask librarians to take on new work.

## Turnover costs

Moreover, the work of interviewing and recruiting new colleagues has itself become a significant burden for many, as the unit goes through the first wave of what will be dozens of retirements in the next decade – exacerbated as more and more junior colleagues stay in UC libraries only for a few years and need to be replaced when they depart.

Finally, library staffing cuts at all

# Action in Sacramento for part timers, transparency

by Kevin Roddy

The UC-AFT has continued to work on a number of fronts to improve working conditions for all employees at the University of California. These efforts have included contacts with legislators, drafting specific bills, and joining forces with other unions in promoting common interests. In this we have been helped by the California Federation of Teachers lobbying staff in Sacramento: Judy Michaels, Mike Weimer, and Dolores Sanchez. We have also received counsel and aid from CFT political director Kenneth Burt.

Foremost among our initiatives is the issue of pension protection for UC employees with less than half-time employment. As reported in the previous *Perspective*, over 27,000 UC faculty and staff (among them over 1,300 lecturers) are denied access to Social Security.

This means, simply, that instead of a 12.4% contribution shared half and half between the university and the employee, 7.5% is deducted from that employee's salary and placed in a "safe harbor" fund.

There are other penalties as well, detailed at [cft.org/councils/uc/index.html](http://cft.org/councils/uc/index.html) in the news article, "The Great UC Social Security Scam," by Robert Weil.

## Fixing the problem

On December 4, accompanied by CFT's officers, I met with State Senator Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach) to discuss the viability of a bill to correct this injustice. Since then, we have met with staff on the Senate Higher Education Committee; staff in Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata's office; and David Felderstein, Principal Consultant, California Senate Retirement Committee.

As a necessary initial phase, we were advised to submit questions to the legislative counsel concerning the standing of current practice. Ms. Michaels accordingly framed questions regarding Education Code Sections 92613 and 92614, and replies are forthcoming.

Thanks, then, to the efforts of many, we now have a bill, AB 1649, sponsored by Assemblyman Richard Alarcon (D-Van Nuys) and Assemblywoman Nell Soto (D-Pomona). The substantive portion of the bill reads as follows:

92613. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that nearly 30,000 employees of the University of California lack basic pension benefits consistent with benefits enjoyed by university employees under the University of California Retirement Plan or the social security system.

(b) The Legislature hereby encourages and empowers the Regents of the University of California to take all necessary steps to implement a defined benefit plan for the employees described in this section, including, but not limited to, contributing to the defined benefit plan \_\_\_ percent of the wages payable to these employees, or, if these employees do not participate in Social Security, at least an amount that would normally be required to be paid for an employee to participate in Social Security.

The final bill language is still in the offing, and the exact percentage of the university's contribution above must necessarily at this point be left blank.

The long, tortuous road by which a bill becomes a law is by no means completed, and in the meantime the UC-AFT is attempting to convince the university to voluntarily do the right thing, but failing that, legislation may be the only remedy. In this effort, we were helped tremendously by the investigations and research of Robert Weil, UC-AFT staff, and Howard Ryan, former field representative for UCI and UCLA.

Another blatant injustice practiced by the university administration is its pernicious habit of reducing legislatively-mandated cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) before passing them on to our members. In the most recent case, a 10% adjustment over three years was

lowered to 6% in the name of funding merits (which were formerly funded otherwise). We are now investigating the possibility of legislation to prevent this, but there may be statutory law already in place that forbids such practice.

## Reining in executive salaries

On another front, Senator Leland Yee (D-San Francisco/San Mateo) will re-introduce his bill (formerly AB 775) aimed at opening regents' subcommittee meetings concerning executive salaries. It has been in such secret subcommittees that outrageous payments for administrators have been approved, the regents taking advantage of a loophole that exempts such meetings from public scrutiny.

Last year, the bill easily passed the Assembly, but was held from Senate approval by Senate Pro Tem Perata. We participated in a UC Union Coalition campaign to persuade the senator, but failed. This year, we will be exerting more pressure much earlier.

Finally, on February 14, representing UC-AFT, I, CFT representatives Mary Bergan and Ken Burt for the community colleges, and California Faculty Association representatives for the state universities met with Lt. Governor John Garamendi, Senator Jack Scott (Chair, Senate Higher Education Committee) and Assemblyman Anthony Portantino (Chair, Assembly Education Committee) to discuss the lieutenant governor's educational agenda. The lieutenant governor is a voting ex-officio member of the Board of Regents, and he plans to participate fully in its deliberations. Watch this space for new proposals to come.

*Kevin Roddy is a lecturer in Medieval Studies at UC Davis, and serves as UC-AFT's vice president for legislation.*

# The need for climate change at UCSD

by Maria daVenza Tillmanns, Ph.D.

From what I know, I am the first field rep for the UCSD campus who is also a lecturer. I work for the union part time and I teach part time. My background is in philosophy, but I have taught across departments for eight years. I have also been teaching at UCSD Extension for almost as long.

What I sorely miss as a lecturer on this campus is the sense of a vibrant intellectual community. While lecturers seem to come to campus to teach and then leave (as most of us do not even have an office here), Senate faculty seem to show only a distant respect toward one another. Senate and non-Senate faculty, of course, have their own peer groups, but the overall climate is not very engaging or stimulating, friendly or forthcoming, and so it is not surprising that we are often referred to as the “iceberg campus.”

## Fostering involvement

There is no sense of a true community of intellectual inquiry, as I experienced at other universities in my long career student career. Because we lack an intellectual climate, it is difficult to get lecturers and Senate faculty interested in matters the union is fighting for.

We do not know and are not concerned about shared interests and goals, and are only caught up with our own individual needs, which are either met or not met. We don't really have a community from which we can draw interest

for matters about which the union works so hard to get addressed and resolved.

So, part of my organizing strategy is to awaken the spirit for an intellectual community on this campus. I want to create a climate in which people feel comfortable and included. Through meetings for lecturers at the UCSD campus, Professional Development Funds

awardee get-togethers, etc., I try to create the beginnings of a community where we can be ourselves, express our interests, our accomplishments, our questions and concerns.

My hope is that through these efforts, lecturers, Senate faculty and librarians will feel more inclined to join the union, and more importantly, feel a desire to be active participants. It is hard to win people over to join a union if its only goal is to increase our fighting power, regardless of how important that may be. But we cannot survive on fighting alone.

An intellectual community for its own sake is essential for recruiting members and activists. One step back, two steps forward: we often need to go back a step to create community first, before we can draw from that community for organizing and activist purposes.

## Creating a community

It is through this community effort, I believe, that I have been able to motivate librarians to ratify their contract, and to complete the workload survey put together by the union state-wide; that lecturers and librarians read my emails, find them informative and enjoy the energy, as I have been told; that lecturers are increasingly coming forward with questions, concerns, potential grievances, instead of fearfully keeping their issues to themselves, feeling isolated and alone in their plight; that lecturers trust us more and respond to invitations to

meetings and are interested in coming to Council meetings, etc.

I am also gaining the trust of administrators, for the purpose of bringing union matters above board, making them visible and discussable. The hope is that we can discuss issues together, before they become so-called “union issues.” If we have an intellectual community to bind us, it makes discussing sensitive issues possible, without instantly resorting to a fight or struggle in which someone always “loses.”

Don't we have the intellect to reason things through, to discuss things critically, to pursue a just community and not just a wealthy company to exploit its workers (read: lecturers) and keep its managers (read: administrators) happy in order to be able to “compete” in the world? Intelligent beings know how to integrate the many needs that exist among people and the workplace.

UC has the brainpower. Now it is a matter of using this power to create a healthy, inviting and prosperous intellectual climate and community.

*Maria daVenza Tillmanns, whose background is in philosophy, has been a lecturer at UCSD and UCSD Extension for the past eight years. She is also a part time field rep for UC-AFT.*



Maria daVenza Tillmanns

*An intellectual community for its own sake is essential for recruiting members and activists*



# In the fray: a UC lecturer reflects on four decades of work

by David Bacon

Some teachers can justly wear the diatribes of conservative, would-be reformers of academia with pride.

Paul von Blum is one.

The Bruin Alumni Association, whose UCLA Profs.com searches out left-of-center faculty in the manner of David Horowitz, condemns von Blum for being “virulently anti-war,” “a tribune for Black people of the United States” (apparently sins in their world), or just plain “witless.”

In the real world, von Blum is one of the country’s leading authorities on African American art, and in particular, on the life of Paul Robeson. Robeson himself was blacklisted as a singer and actor in the cold war, and in an implicit rejection of that dark history, the Postal Service issued a stamp in his honor three years ago.

Von Blum describes Robeson as “a public intellectual.” Much intellectual debate, he says, “is confined to academic circles, which means the public is neither interested nor has access to it. But he was out there in the fray.”

That’s not such a bad description of von Blum himself, and offers an insight into the reasons he’s earned some shrill enemies on the right.

As a young man, von Blum came out of the civil rights movement close to half a century ago. From 1961 to 1964, he worked in Atlanta with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, at the height of the sit-ins and voter registration drives that changed the face of the South. Returning to California, he joined the Congress of Racial Equality, organizing demonstrations in San Diego to end the color line barring the hiring of African Americans in the Bank of America. Arrested and hauled into court, a local judge sentenced von Blum to law school.

He got that law degree at UC Berkeley’s Boalt Hall law school, and went on to pass the bar. Yet he’s only rarely practiced that profession, and then only to provide pro-bono defense to anti-war demonstrators and other political activists.

Instead, he became a teacher.

Von Blum got his first job in the Rhetoric Department at UC Berkeley in

July of 1968. Those were heady times at Cal. The Free Speech Movement demonstrations had shut down the university only three years earlier, and at the end of the sixties, the Third World Strike threw the campus into turmoil. Those movements led to the creation of

the first departments for African American, Chicano, Asian American, native American and women’s studies, not just in Berkeley, but at universities throughout the state.

Von Blum was a participant, and a  
(continued on p. 10)

*For many years, labor journalist David Bacon has covered issues of interest to UC’s lecturers and librarians, from reports on organizing campaigns and political issues, to personal portraits like that of the UC lecturer above.*

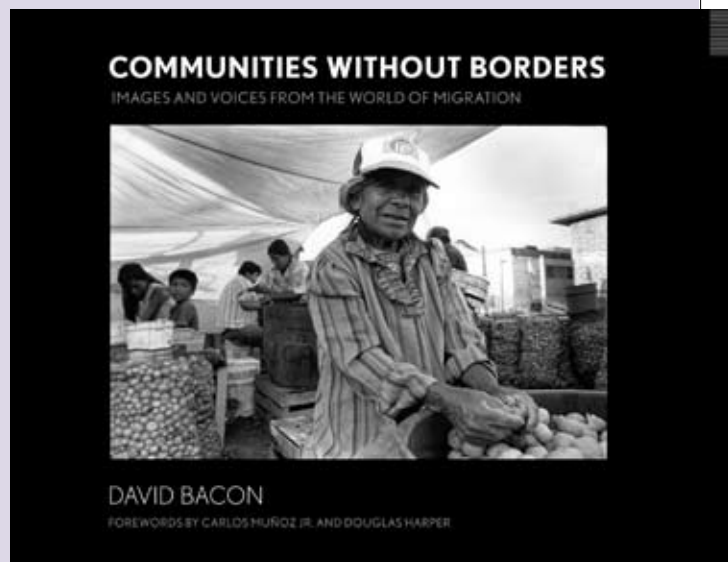
Now, Bacon has a new book out that members may want to add to their libraries or syllabi.

*Communities Without Borders: Images and Voices from the World of Migration* (Cornell University / ILR Press, 2006) is an extraordinarily rich collection of visuals and accompanying text on the lives of immigrant Latino workers. The book presents dozens of powerful black and white documentary photographs alongside oral histories of workers, all of it interwoven with Bacon’s own analytical writings that frame the materials within the context of cross-border migration, global economic change and social activism.

The chapters span diverse communities of Latino workers in Mexico, Guatemala and the United States, from Oaxacan agricultural workers who travel to the fields of the Napa Valley to pick grapes, to meatpackers successfully organizing for union representation in Omaha, Nebraska. While explaining the difficult challenges these workers faced from employers, corporations, and governments, the book also eloquently describes the successes they achieved in building their own unions and constructing transnational social and economic communities.

Bacon’s quietly dramatic photos capture a remarkably wide range of contemporary subjects, from work in the fields and at union meetings, to makeshift tent encampments, children at play, family portraits and community festivals. The last chapter covers the exploitative “bracero” program, which brought contract workers from Mexico to work in US fields from 1942 to 1964. It includes interviews with, and photos of, former *braceros*, lending a strong historical dimension to the book’s narrative of Latino migration.

This outstanding book brings the reality of workers’ daily lives and social justice struggles to readers in a way few text-only works could match. It’s both accessible and intellectually challenging, and would serve as engaging course material in labor studies, ethnic studies, geography, sociology or politics, among other fields. — *Vanessa Tait*



## In the fray: a UC lecturer reflects

(continued from p. 9)

budding faculty member. He taught in Rhetoric for four years, and then in the newly created Division of Interdisciplinary Studies. He was a very popular teacher, reflecting in the classroom the political turmoil of the civil rights and anti-war movements, in which his students were deeply involved. The university recognized his skill, and gave him a Distinguished Teaching Award.

But they didn't give him tenure. In fact, in 1972 he was told his appointment wouldn't be renewed. "I suspect my support for ethnic studies was a factor," he recalls dryly. His own suspension became a campus issue, and student pressure convinced administrators to find another assignment and job title that would keep him in the classroom.

But they wouldn't give him tenure.

In 1979 he spent the best part of a year at the National Endowment for the Humanities, and then returned to California. This time, however, he went to UCLA, where he continues to teach today. And he's still a lecturer, probably the longest serving one in the UC system.

Over that time, the UC administration has promulgated various rules to limit the employment of lecturers, and to require their termination after a certain time. The most notorious was the "eight-year rule," which was itself one of the primary motivations behind the successful effort by lecturers to organize a union in 1983.

Negotiating a contract with the university to expand the job security and job rights of contingent faculty was not easy. "Administrators were very hostile towards us, especially in the early years," he recalls. "We had to fight for our very existence, and I was one of the people they targeted." A complaint was filed in von Blum's case at the Public Employees Relations Board later in the 1980s. Finally, better contracts brought with them more security.

"Without a contract, as a lecturer you have to hustle course by course, year by year," he explains. "Now our contract says we have to be employed at the same percentage as when the agreement was signed, and layoffs can only be done by seniority. That all helped me to survive."

But the other reason why von Blum is now a senior lecturer, with distinguished teaching awards in both Los Angeles and Irvine, is his academic scholarship. He has authored five books on African American art and the art of social movements, and hundreds of articles – probably more than some tenured faculty. He also teaches six courses a year, while many ladder faculty teach four.

"I love what I do," he says. "I go into the classroom, and see the line of students outside my office, and I'm at the height of my energy level."

Teaching without tenure, however, has its costs. Over 40 years, he would have made hundreds of thousands of dollars more in salary as a full professor. He would have enjoyed some missing job rights, and is still denied a vote in the Academic Senate.

According to von Blum, the programs in which he taught didn't have tenured positions, so he had no avenue to apply. But the reality is also that ethnic studies departments and interdisciplinary programs have had to fight with the university to gain those tenure track positions they have. "If I'd taught more mainstream subjects, it would have been easier," he concedes. "Ethnic studies is here to stay, but we still have the additional burden of proving our 'legitimacy.' It's been a very long process, but it's a lot better than it was 30 years ago, and we've produced extraordinary scholarship."

Today he teaches a special honors course, "Critical Vision – the History of Art as Social and Political Commentary." It's the kind of class UCLA Prof.com would like to eliminate, along with the jobs of the faculty who teach them. The website, in its entry on von Blum, predicts happily that "doing that will no doubt involve a little housecleaning; perhaps even disposing of a few old relics that no longer match the new decor."

It's clear they've underestimated this teacher who, like Robeson, will definitely be "in the fray."

*David Bacon is a Berkeley-based labor journalist who regularly contributes to CFT publications.*

## Protecting pensions

(continued from p. 4)

solutions offsetting less-than-stellar paychecks has been the anticipation of a secure retirement benefit at the end-of-the-work rainbow.

But in his January 2005 "State of the State" speech, Governor Schwarzenegger proposed to dismantle two of the largest, most stable and successful defined benefit pension programs in the nation – the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) and State Teachers' Retirement System (STRS) – and replace them with defined contribution programs, in the name of "fiscal responsibility." He proposed the same so-called reform for the University of California's smaller but still important UCRS.

Defined benefit funds promise a guaranteed regular retirement payment based on years of service and ending salaries; your payment under defined contribution plans depends on how much money your contributions have gained or lost in value over time.

PERS and STRS have a combined portfolio of nearly \$300 billion.

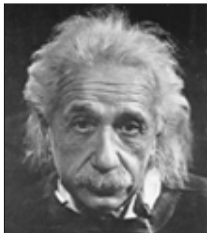
### Corporations want two tiers

With these actions, Schwarzenegger offered a view of the future that resembles private sector management proposals over the past few years.

Take-back demands at the table in supermarket, airline, auto, and hotel collective bargaining negotiations, for instance, have been pushing two-tier health and retirement packages that seek to divide the workforce and to save money on the backs of new hires. They propose to accomplish this by mostly maintaining the packages for current workers (although not always) while slashing benefits for future hires.

Certificated and classified staff in our schools and colleges should not have to worry about whether

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**Albert Einstein**, charter member of AFT Local 552, Princeton University, comments in 1938 on why he joined the union.

**“I consider it important, indeed, urgently necessary, for intellectual workers to get together, both to protect their own economic status and, also, generally speaking, to secure their influence in the political field.”**

## UNIVERSITY COUNCIL – AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS MEMBERSHIP FORM

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## Governor proposes commission to study public employee pension reform

(continued from p. 10)

they will be able to make ends meet after their years of service have concluded. Defined contribution programs are a good supplement for individuals' retirement, but are too risky to rely on as the main retirement support for hundreds of thousands of teachers and school employees.

### Collective security, not individual risk

The idea of privatizing pension funds is as distasteful to teachers and other school employees as the idea of privatizing Social Security is to most Americans. The point of a large, publicly guaranteed retirement fund is that it is collective security. PERS and STRS are model public pension programs. They return well on their investments; they have strong public oversight; and they perform their central function—providing people with a livable income after years of public service—in an efficient manner.

So what gives? Corporations want to roll back public sector pensions for

two reasons. First, as they reduce or eliminate their own private defined benefit plans to boost their profits at the expense of their workers, their greed is more readily revealed by comparison with ongoing decent public pensions.

Portraying public pensions as “overly generous,” or as special perks for public employees, helps to reduce the risk of a poor corporate public image on the issue. Second, less visibly, the anti-defined benefit push represents a corporate counterattack on efforts by public pension fund trustees to demand accountability from corporations in which the pensions invest.

As former state treasurer Phil Angelides noted, “Public pension funds have taken a leading role in restoring honesty, integrity, and openness to our nation’s financial markets after corporate scandals shook the very foundations of our financial institutions, damaged our economy, and harmed millions of Americans.”

It’s not as if the pensions delivered through STRS are overly generous, as

right wing ideologues like State Senator Tom McClintock charge. The average STRS monthly benefit is \$2448—less than \$30,000 per year for a teacher to live on. PERS pays out \$1792 per month. These are hardly golden parachutes. Rather, they represent a simple measure of dignity—and often the difference between eating well or eating cat food—for the golden years of public servants.

The governor’s efforts on behalf of the right wing were set back by the November 2005 election results and his own missteps. Time will tell if his commission is a genuine bi-partisan effort to deal with potential problems, or a mechanism to return to the attack.

But the goal of corporations and right wing ideologues to destroy public pension funds remains the same. We have a lot of work to do before we can rest assured our retirement systems are safe from corporate piracy.

*Fred Glass is the CFT’s communications director. For updates on pension plans and other issues, see <[www.cft.org/resources/leg](http://www.cft.org/resources/leg)>.*

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