

# Forum for Fair Employment

Summer 2009 Newsletter

<http://karen.stanley.people.cpcc.edu/FFE>

## Vancouver ESL Schools Bargain Collective Agreement

Jeff McKeil

There are few who would argue that, on a strictly financial basis, ESL teachers are paid or treated adequately. In general, the ESL industry often provides poor wages and little job security to their teaching employees. ESL teachers are not given the respect they deserve because in general they do not have the leverage to demand it.

Fortunately, there are some ESL teachers who are not afraid to work to improve their situation. In Vancouver British Columbia, Canada, ESL teachers at three private ESL schools are members of the Education and Training Employees' Association (ETEA, <http://www.eteaunion.org>). While ETEA is an independent union, they receive support in the form of professional staff and access to a strike fund as members of the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia (FPSE, <http://www.fpse.ca>). FPSE represents approximately 10,000 teaching faculty, primarily in the public sector in BC.

Recently, the members of ETEA Local-1, which represents approximately 100 teachers at the largest ESL School in Vancouver, ratified a renewed collective agreement that includes the following:

- (a) Annual wages of roughly \$50,000 Canadian (about \$44,000 US), with pro-rated pay for part-time instructors.
- (b) Wage increases of between 2 and 2.5% per year.
- (c) Tax sheltered retirement savings, with an employer match of up to 1 percent of gross

income.

- (d) Parent/pregnancy that supplements the Canadian federal program; parental leaves may extend for three years.
- (e) Professional Development. Teachers may apply to a 10-day pool of professional development, with selection based on seniority. For other upgrading, the employer will pay up to 50 percent of the cost for approved education/training, and 100 percent of employer's requested training.

Like most things worthwhile, the package took hard work and determination, which was not made easier by the employer's initial bargaining goal of rolling back teacher's rights and wages. It took a strike vote with 93% membership support for the concessions to be withdrawn and a fair package to be settled on.

ETEA is a growing union that is actively seeking new members. We can only hope that their efforts to improve the working conditions and rights of ESL teachers at their schools, will also have a broader impact on the industry as a whole.

Has your school been forced to make cuts in these tough economic times? Read TESOL's Position Statement on Fairness and Equity in ESL Program Reduction:

<http://www.textesolv.org/announcements/TESONPosition-FairnessProgramReduction.pdf>



Karen Stanley and Carmen Roman-Murray setting up the FFE booth at the TESOL Convention

## Forum for Fair Employment Business Meeting 2009

The FFE held its business meeting on March 27, 2009 in Denver, Colorado.

We successfully applied to become a forum and were given booth space and time for a business meeting at the TESOL 2009 convention. A banner was made for the booth. We also organized two sessions for the TESOL convention, an Academic Session entitled "Big Steps and Small Steps: Making Progress on Employment Issues", and another session on ways of assisting adjuncts at community colleges. We issued two newsletters and created a website. Thanks to all involved for your hard work.

For the coming year our plans include organizing an Electronic Village session before the TESOL convention, possibly on the topic of job loss. We will submit a proposal for another Academic Session, and produce two more newsletters. We also plan to write a generic article about FFE for distribution to TESOL Affiliate newsletters as a way to form a stronger network of people working on employment issues.

We hope to propose via TESOL's Standing Committee on Employment Issues that TESOL create a database of working conditions at institutions world-wide that is easily accessible to the membership. It was felt that a simple, factual database would be better than a list of "good" or "bad" schools, since so much can be

subjective (and confrontational) about those labels. We would need a process to verify information that is submitted. We further proposed that TESOL, via its Standing Committee on Employment Issues, establish some type of "best practices" relative to teacher employment, and make those available via the TESOL website.

We discussed the pros and cons of becoming an Interest Section of TESOL rather than a forum and decided to investigate the issue further.

Incoming officers for the year are:

Past Chair - David Rives

Chair - Carmen Roman-Murray

Chair Elect - Peter Vahle

Associate Chair - Lara Beninca

Newsletter Editor - Karen Brooke

Secretary - Karen Stanley

Email list manager and Website manager - Karen Stanley



FFE Academic Session at TESOL in Denver

The Modern Languages Association (MLA) has developed a set of reports and guidelines for faculty working conditions. Very interesting for those teaching English and other modern languages!

[http://www.mla.org/advocacy\\_kit](http://www.mla.org/advocacy_kit)

## Report about TESOL 2009 – Jack Longmate

I had the good fortune of attending the TESOL convention in Denver, despite facing a ban on out-of-state travel. One memorable aspect of TESOL 2009 was weather. Tuesday and Wednesday were springlike, with beautiful views of downtown Denver from my hotel. On Thursday, a blizzard hit that brought 100 MPH winds in some parts of the state and a declaration of a state of emergency by the Colorado governor, though conditions weren't as severe in Denver. The blizzard did interfere with some of the convention events—the shuttle that ran between my hotel and the downtown/convention center area was suspended for a two-day period, and businesses, like a restaurant near my hotel, closed.

The highlight of the convention for me was being a member of a Forum for Fair Employment Academic Session about part-time faculty within the field of TESOL. Chairing the discussion was FFE chair Carmen Roman-Murray. One of her main points was that on those campuses where part-time faculty have good working conditions, it tends to be at institutions with a union that acts on part-timers' behalf. Carmen is from the City College of San Francisco, which, arguably, has bargained the strongest contract for part-time faculty, with part-time salaries at 86 percent pro-rata. Carmen alluded to the rich tradition of advocacy at CCSF, which was the home campus of Giselle Cervisi whose case paved the way for many other part-timers to draw unemployment in California. (On another note, the first chair of TESOL's Caucus on Part-Time Employment Concerns, Randy Laroche, was also from the same institution.)

Another presenter at the session was Jane Desnoee from Lehigh University. She attended the TESOL convention in New York last year. The FFE/COPTec colloquium last year featured two nationally recognized speakers, labor historian and activist Joe Berry from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Frank Cosco, widely respected union leader of Vancouver, BC, Canada as featured speakers, and was inspired by both. She enthusiastically praised Joe's *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower* and his *Access to Unemployment Insurance Benefits for Contingent Faculty*, which, she said, she'd circulated around Pennsylvania. She credited Frank for a

\$10,000 salary increase over the last year. While Lehigh is a private, non-unionized university, she explained that when she returned from the TESOL convention, she shared the handout that Frank provided at that session, which outlined some of the employment provisions at Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, particularly those addressing "Right to work and to convert status" and "Professional Development." Lehigh's ESL adjuncts now have a graduated pay scale that is sensitive to degree type/certification and length of service.

Also presenting was Karen Brooke from Vancouver Community College, who circulated a similar VCCFA handout describing the working conditions that she and others have at her institution. Karen highlighted the fact that she has recently become "regularized" and elaborated the extensive evaluation process that probationary (term) faculty are expected to endure, which include preparing model lessons, writing an essay, being interviewed by a review committee, critiquing one's own performance, etc. She qualified those expectations by saying that VCC strives to hire a given individual once (as opposed to the rehire every term that is commonplace in the U.S.), so the institution looks carefully at individuals hired as they could be at VCC for the duration of their career.



Jack Longmate and Lara Beninca (in orange)

Worthy of mention for TESOL members, I think, is the fact that people like Frank Cosco, Karen Brooke, and Debbie Hlady from Victoria's Camosun College, who spoke at the conference of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor in San Diego, do so not from the

standpoint of being in a dismal workplace situation and are seeking ways to make improvements, but take part for the purpose of helping the rest of us. I think that's solidarity.

Because of the radically different reality of the British Columbia system, I sensed (as I have sensed at other occasions) that some members of the audience weren't really comprehending the monumental ideas that Karen was conveying about the British Columbian workplace, so when I began, I said that I hoped that the audience understood her description of the system there, that there is no two-tier system as there is in the United States, that after two years on the job, all instructors have the functional equivalent of tenure, that there is a single salary scale for all faculty (those who work 30 or 60 percent of full-time get 30 or 60 percent of the pay), and that part-time faculty members, once regularized, accrue seniority at the same rate as an equivalently ranked full-time member and can have greater seniority and workload assignment preferences over a full-time instructor with less seniority.

I presented a set of slides that reported on the sobering responses of colleges in Washington state to the state's revenue shortfall, now projected to be 9 billion for the next biennium. I cited a few specifics from individual colleges, with the recurrent strategy adopted by most colleges to simply lay off adjuncts and cut programs, with ESL programs typically being at the top of the list. Among the slides was one that involved a protest organized by ESL students at Renton Technical College, where the ESL program is being reduced from 925 students to 475 students, with over a dozen part-time ESL instructors being laid off.

I also mentioned the erosion of tenure in Kentucky, the campaign to protest the adjunct pay reductions at Weber state, recommended participation in COCAL, Campus Equity Week and Bob Samuel's New Faculty Majority day (April 30), and urged people to consider organizing a legislative forum on their campuses. I also discussed TESOL's new "[Position Statement on Fairness and Equity in ESL Program Reduction](#)," the TESOL's board's position relative to advocacy. If anyone would care to see the slides I presented, they are viewable at the FFE Yahoo website, or I can e-mail them directly ([jacklongmate@comcast.net](mailto:jacklongmate@comcast.net)).

I left convention feeling encouraged about the FFE leadership--optimist because of the dedication of such people as Karen Stanley, who also presented at the academic session, and Carmen Roman-Murray, and the smart young TESOL professionals like Karen Brooke and FFE chair-elect Peter Vahle. I'm delighted at the cooperative spirit with TESOL's Employment Issues Committee, which I have the honor of chair, and to serve with such powerful and experienced individuals as Steve Hanchey, Richard Bailey, Suchada Nim, among others.

I also left Denver feeling quite encouraged about TESOL and its commitment to part-time faculty issues. I know incoming TESOL president is Mark Algren, who, as convention chair for the 2003 Baltimore convention, helped engineer a Board-sponsored session featuring Rich Moser of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). President-elect is Brock Brady, who has championed the idea of TESOL professional identity and is another outstanding representative of the profession.

**See you in Boston in 2010!!!**