**13 Years After Vote**

**Point Park Faculty Wins First Contract**

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as it worth the years of struggle? By all accounts, yes.

More than 13 years after they began their quest for a union contract, full-time faculty at Point Park University in downtown Pittsburgh ratified an agreement by a vote of 96 to 6 on Aug. 28.

Raises for full professors began at just under 16 percent, with some receiving significantly more; lecturers, at the lower end of the pay scale, received an increase of 64 percent, going from $25,000 per year to a minimum of $41,000 in the first year of the contract.

The agreement established minimum compensation levels for each academic rank for full-time faculty; they may be paid more — and many will — but they cannot be paid less, said Michael A. Fuoco, president of The Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh, which represents the full-time faculty as well as about 150 editorial employees at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

The agreement also marked, in a practical sense, the university’s acceptance of the faculty’s decision to unionize.

**What took so long?**

After the staff voted in 2004 to join the Pittsburgh Newspaper Guild, the university challenged their right to unionize. It cited as precedence a ruling regarding Yeshiva University, which prevented staff from forming a union because they acted as managers, making decisions about hiring and firing as well as financial matters.

“In no way did the [Point Park] faculty have any say in how the university was operating,” Fuoco said.

As the university appealed the faculty’s vote to unionize in every possible venue, the union continued to win decisions.

The dispute dragged on for 12 years with the university finally withdrawing its challenge to the union’s right to represent the faculty in 2015, after the National Labor Relations Board rejected a similar claim from another university.

Negotiations began in earnest in March 2016, but progress was still slow. With this year’s classes set to begin on Aug. 28, the administration finally moved. Fuoco said awareness and support from students was essential.

“Of course, our professors should be compensated for the work they put in,” the editorial board of the student newspaper, the Globe, wrote on Sept. 13, 2016. “Their wages should be comparable to other similarly-sized private universities, so the best professors we have won’t want to leave for a higher pay grade.”

The agreement has done a lot to repair the relationship between the university administration and the faculty, Fuoco said.

“This contract is a really solid, solid foundation for gains in the future. We made tremendous gains now, but this gives us something to build on,” he said.

**Other Improvements**

In addition to the raises, the teaching staff also won other significant improvements, including a guarantee of academic freedom, expansion of their intellectual property rights, and more options for replacing some of their course load with extracurricular activities, such as advising a club.

The union also negotiated a system for appointment renewals, a grievance-arbitration procedure and due process protections. In addition, they won a reduction in health insurance premiums and a modest increase in retirement benefits.

NewsGuild-CWA President Bernie Lunzer praised Fuoco and Joe Pass, the local’s attorney, and the Point Park faculty for their tenacity. “Their struggle gave new meaning to the word ‘persistence,’” he said.

Cutline:

Faculty member Rick Hawkins and others wore T-shirts emblazoned with the words “Contract Now” on the day prospective students visited campus.

Gracey Evans, courtesy of the Globe.