



TCNJ's Local 2364 is affiliated with the **Council of New Jersey State College Locals**, the bargaining agent for more than 7,000 professional staff, librarians and full-time, part-time and adjunct faculty at the nine state colleges/universities of New Jersey.

Dear TCNJ Campus Community,

Welcome to our Union local's monthly newsletter, the online coronavirus edition. We are hoping to share information about what your Union is doing to further education on campus and positive relations with the greater community.

Meeting Schedule

Our local meets virtually on the third Wednesday of each month at 3:00pm. Our first meeting of this semester will be on September 16. You will receive a Zoom invitation a few days before. We will meet on October 21, November 18 and December 16.

President's Column: College Costs and a Semester Online

Dear Members,

On August 15 an article in *The New York Times* on student and parent demands for lower tuition costs for an online semester led me to write the following piece. I knew the *Times* wouldn't publish it (to anyone who has had an op-ed published in the *Times*, you are amazing!) but I had to get this off my chest. [To the *NYT*'s credit, its article was better balanced than most articles I've seen over the past several months, but it was one article too many for me!] I'm happy that I can share this with all of you.

Nancy

Let me begin by saying this is a response to the article "As Colleges Move Classes Online, Families Rebel Against the Cost" (*NYT* 8/15/2020) but it is also a response to the entire drumbeat for reductions in tuition by students and parents while colleges and universities continue to provide students with an education designed to move them forward in obtaining their degrees.

As a professor and a parent, I understand the disappointment that students have when their institution decides for safety and health reasons to move classes online. As a teacher, I'm disappointed as well that I won't be seeing my students in person; however, I am grateful for the concern for health and safety that my employer has demonstrated by moving classes online.

Let me also point out that teaching online involves a great deal of work for professors, many of whom had no—or only limited—previous experience with online teaching and learning. Professors know that their approaches need to be different in an online-only environment and have spent many hours planning and preparing for the fall term. This preparation has been greatly assisted by our institutions, which have provided us with experts and extensive training.

Education costs money and I understand that the cost has outstripped many families' means. But let's direct the anger and frustration over the cost of higher education appropriately. Simply demanding a reduction in tuition for an online semester is not the appropriate direction. Professors will still be performing their duties—teaching, grading, advising, and writing recommendations. We will still be holding office hours. We will be helping our students any way we can to get through this unprecedented experience in their lives. And many of us will be doing it at a reduced salary this year to help make up for the deficit that state institutions in New Jersey will be running.

College librarians will be assisting students remotely with their research questions. The Student Health Center and Counseling Services will be available, as will the Accessibility Resource Center, to help students learn. College staff will be assisting students with financial issues, IT problems, registration and transcript questions, and everything else that college staff do day in and day out to help students navigate their college years.

The college experience is supposed to be primarily about education. Colleges did not create the pandemic and are working hard to provide the best possible education to keep our students' lives moving forward. Yes, there are many issues with the high cost of higher education. But online learning in the middle of a pandemic is not the cause of the problem—and is certainly not worth less from a tuition standpoint.

12-Month Employee Furloughs

I am deeply disturbed by the problems that those of you who took furloughs this summer have had with collecting unemployment. When the State Council negotiated the furlough agreement, we knew that the NJ Unemployment system was already lagging behind in its operations, and that having furloughs for CWA and AFT employees statewide would further tax the system. However, we could never have imagined that software glitches could cause problems of this magnitude, not only at TCNJ, but at our sister institutions and for other state employees working throughout New Jersey's agencies, as well as for private sector employees.

Our intention with this agreement was to alleviate some of the financial hardship of the furlough days, especially since there was CARES Act money available in addition to NJ Unemployment Insurance (the last time we took furlough days we were not eligible for unemployment). We also feared that that there would be many more furlough days than the 12 that we were ultimately able to settle on, so being able to collect Unemployment Insurance was a top priority. We could never have anticipated the amount of hassle you have all had to endure.

I have been in contact with Kimberly Woods in HR and she has been working for weeks with the Department of Labor to make sure that the information the State has is accurate, and to get instructions from the DOL on the most expeditious way to resolve the problem. Thank you to Kimberly for trying to cut through the DOL backlog on everyone's behalf!

Nancy

Community Outreach Updates

Our AFT local has been deeply engaged in community outreach during the Covid pandemic, primarily through supporting the work of the Eastern Service Workers Association (ESWA). Each Saturday since March, our members and their families have helped the ESWA distribute groceries and fresh produce to 40-90 families in need. We expect these food distributions to continue during these difficult times, so please refer to Matt Wund's weekly email for updates, or email him at wundm@tcnj.edu with questions.

In addition to the food distributions, many of our members have made financial donations to the ESWA. With this financial support, the ESWA has been able to expand its group meeting space, expand the

capacity of its emergency food pantry, and upgrade its HVAC system. These changes will allow the ESWA to better serve its membership by providing emergency food, as well as workshops on health and nutrition, legal considerations, and issues of social and environmental justice. Finally, the AFT response to the call for donated school supplies has been overwhelming. At last count, we have collected 82 backpacks, 70 notebooks, 80 folders, and many other items. Thank you so much for so generously supporting all of these efforts.

A Semester for Compassion

At the time of year when we usually are looking forward to new beginnings: walking into a classroom with an unopened packet of chalk and new ideas, welcoming students to campus and helping them access the library, we are faced this year with a very different, much less fun reality. By now most of us have carved out a space at home as our new workspace, and we're daily discovering things we don't know about the technology that is now so vital to our jobs. We're doing this while somehow making sure we and all our family members remain safe and healthy. We've had to accept the cancellation of so many plans—from weddings and concerts to simple dinner with friends. We've had to put a hook for our masks by the door. There is no question that when we left campus in March most of us did not envisage that this would be our start to the 2020 Fall semester at TCNJ.

For our students, these changes are perhaps even more strange. Cancelled plans and the fear of finding a job in a recession give our students anxiety. Not only that, but online learning takes time to get used to, whichever side of it you are on. Students often lack private spaces to work, reliable Wi-Fi and consistent access to a computer. As educators, compassion is often overlooked as a part of our teaching toolkit. We can take this semester to practice compassion, by showing patience and kindness to our students, who are struggling with their worries just as we are. Remember that periodic check-ins, flexibility, and a caring attitude are just as important to teaching as getting content across or mastering the challenges of online tests.

Contact Us

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[Phone and office hours are suspended while the college remains virtual.]