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INVISIBLE NO MORE PART-TIME FACULTY, UNPAID LABOR, AND THE PUSH FOR EQUITY AFTER ROBERTS V. LBCCD



By Crystal Huckabee, Ed.D. (c)

Part-time faculty are the backbone of California's community college system. We teach the same courses as full-time faculty, outnumber them, support the most vulnerable student populations, and carry out the daily work of instruction. Yet for decades, our compensation has been built on a fiction: that teaching happens only in the classroom.

The recent case Roberts v. LBCCD forces us to confront that fiction—and its consequences.

The Myth of "Contact Hours"

In most California community college districts, part-time faculty are paid according to teaching units or contact hours. On paper, this appears straightforward: faculty are compensated

for time spent delivering instruction in the classroom. In practice, however, this model obscures the reality of academic labor.

Teaching is not limited to lecturing in the classroom. The work we as part-time faculty are not paid for: course design, syllabus construction, assignment creation, grading, student communication, student mentorship, learning management system maintenance, accessibility compliance, office hours, and curriculum updates.

These are not optional tasks. They are required, evaluated, and essential to student success. Yet under the traditional compensation model, much of this labor remains unpaid since it is conducted outside of the classroom. Make no

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THE METRIC TRAP

HOW A 50-YEAR-OLD STRATEGY IS KILLING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

By Scott Douglas, CPFA Southern Regional Representative

The institution of tenure is, as ever, in the crosshairs. But the latest offensive—tying tenure to workload and performance metrics—is not a new strategy. It is the second, more pernicious phase of a campaign that began over half a century ago.

The first phase was one of exclusion. In states like California, laws passed in the 1960s used a simple workload metric as a bright-line rule. By defining faculty working

below a certain threshold (e.g., 67% of a full-time load) as "temporary" or "part-time," the system legally and permanently excluded the majority of the teaching faculty from the protections of tenure.

This new phase is one of control. Having successfully normalized the idea that faculty rights can be quantified by a metric, administrations are now applying this same logic to those inside the gate. Punitive

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mistake, full-time faculty are paid for this labor. It is only part-time faculty that must work for no pay.

The Roberts case makes this contradiction explicit.

What the Court Recognized

In its 2025 ruling, the Los Angeles County Superior Court acknowledged what part-time faculty have long known: part-time instructors are required to perform significant work outside the classroom in order to adequately conduct their courses, and institutions are aware of it.

Under California law, employees must be compensated for all hours worked—defined as time during which an employer “suffers or permits” work to occur. Since districts evaluate part-time faculty based on out-of-class responsibilities, the court found that this labor cannot be ignored or excluded from compensation.

This represents a critical shift in how academic labor is recognized and valued. It reframes part-time labor not as supplemental, but as comprehensive and measurable.

Why This Matters Beyond One District

Although this case centers on LBCCD part-time faculty, its implications extend across the California Community College system.

For decades, part-time faculty labor has been structured around systemic inequality: part-time faculty have the same qualifications as full-time faculty, but are not compensated equally for teaching the same classes.

The Roberts decision disrupts long-standing norms by applying existing labor law to academic work. It does not create new rights—it exposes that part-time faculty have always been entitled to protections that institutions have long denied.

The Role of Collective Action

This did not emerge in a vacuum. It reflects years of organizing, advocacy, and coalition-building among part-time faculty.

Recent gains associated with this movement include LBCCD’s acknowledgment of the full scope of work performed by part-time faculty, increased salary parity with full-time faculty (still only at 51%), union-led contract negotiations resulting in

retroactive pay, and a landmark \$18 million settlement providing back pay for more than 1,450 part-time faculty.

These outcomes demonstrate a key lesson: legal victories are strongest when paired with collective action. The courtroom can recognize injustice, but it is organizing that transforms recognition into sustained change.

Structural Inequity in Higher Education

At its core, this issue is about more than wages—it is about how institutions define the value of faculty. The current system depends on a two-tier faculty structure: full-time faculty are compensated for the full scope of their labor, while part-time faculty are paid for only a fraction of theirs. This inequity persists despite comparable qualifications and contributions to student learning. What emerges is a system sustained by invisible labor—essential, unrecognized work carried on the backs of part-time faculty.

What Comes Next

As of 2026, the case is moving through the settlement process, with a preliminary approval hearing scheduled for July. If approved, eligible faculty may finally receive compensation for past unpaid labor. But the larger impact of this case will not be measured solely in settlement checks. Its true significance lies in the shift it represents, from:

- Invisibility to recognition
- Status quo to accountability
- Isolated grievances to systemic critique

For too long, part-time faculty have been asked to do more with less—to carry out the full responsibilities of teaching while being compensated for only part of the work.

The Roberts case challenges this imbalance by insisting on a simple principle:

If the work is required, it must be paid.

For part-time faculty across California, this is not just a legal argument. It is a statement of dignity, professional recognition, and the value of the work we do every day.

Crystal is an Indigenous Latina Anthropology instructor and union leader serving California’s community college system. She teaches at Long Beach City College and several other community colleges. Crystal serves as union President for the Certificated Hourly Instructors (CHI) at LBCC, CCA Board of Directors, and FACCC Board of Governors.

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The Community College Association, with CTA and NEA as our partners, advocates and organizes with California’s public community college faculty, staff, and students; empowers locals; builds strong and effective coalitions; promotes equity, inclusion, anti-racism, social justice, and part-time faculty equality, and strives to preserve universal access to quality public education.

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2026 CHAIR'S REPORT

John Martin, CPFA Chair



Over the past several months, CPFA has worked to identify a legislative author for a proposal aimed at strengthening seniority protections for part-time faculty in California's community colleges. While we were not able to secure an author during this stage of the current legislative cycle, many legislative offices responded thoughtfully and expressed interest in revisiting the proposal when the new two-year cycle begins next fall. We understand the constraints legislators face, including the 35-bill limit per cycle, which many offices have already reached.

We also recognize that the Legislature recently took an important step forward with AB 1028 (Fong) in 2025, in which local union chapters are to negotiate a fair process for notifying contingent members of the reason when they are let go. That progress matters. Today, AB 1171 (Patel), addressing healthcare access for contingent academic workers, is currently before the Senate. These efforts demonstrate the Legislature's ongoing commitment to improving conditions for the part-time educators who are essential to the success of California's community college system.

Our proposal builds on that progress in a practical and fiscally responsible way. It is a no-cost measure that simply clarifies and strengthens existing language in the Education Code. It does not require new state funding or impose additional financial obligations on districts. Instead, it establishes clarity, consistency, and fairness in how seniority is defined and applied across the state.

Currently, seniority practices vary widely among the 72 districts in the California Community College system. In some districts, seniority lists are

inconsistent, unclear, or applied in ways that do not reflect faculty members' actual service. In others, part-time faculty may not be placed on a seniority list until they have completed evaluations that are sometimes delayed for years. In certain cases, instructors must teach for four to six years before being recognized on a list at all.

The result is that many instructors serve students semester after semester without receiving credit toward seniority, while districts continue hiring new instructors without a consistent framework for recognizing those already contributing to the institution. This lack of clarity can undermine stability for faculty and departments alike.

Our proposal addresses this issue in a straightforward way by clearly defining seniority as the first date of hire and ensuring that part-time faculty are placed on a seniority list once they receive their first evaluation—or automatically if an evaluation is not conducted within the expected timeframe. This approach promotes fairness while also encouraging districts to follow existing evaluation requirements.

We also sought to address a practical issue related to course assignments. Many districts limit part-time faculty to teaching only the specific course they were initially hired to teach, even when they are qualified to teach other courses within the same discipline. Our proposal clarifies that qualified faculty should be eligible for assignments consistent with their expertise, supporting both students and departments.

Across the state, negotiations over rehire rights and seniority have been

uneven, and in some cases, limited progress has been made at the local level. Establishing clearer statewide guidance would help ensure that "local control" operates within a framework that is consistent, transparent, and equitable.

Ultimately, this proposal is about strengthening stability within the community college system while supporting the educators who play a critical role in serving California's students. By clarifying existing law—without adding cost—we believe this legislation represents a practical and responsible next step.

CPFA looks forward to continuing this conversation with legislative offices and hopes to work with an author in the upcoming legislative cycle.

Other Note: CPFA elections are approaching, and several seats remain vacant. I strongly encourage you to consider running for a position.

As many of you know, I will not be seeking reelection as Chair when my term ends in May 2027. This makes the upcoming election cycle especially important for building leadership continuity within CPFA.

If you are thinking about running for Chair—or any other position—serving on the Executive Council is an excellent first step. It provides valuable insight into how CPFA operates and helps prepare you to take on a larger leadership role.

Please give this serious consideration. CPFA's strength depends on members stepping forward to lead.

Our Annual CPFA Conference will be held on Saturday, May 16, 2026. Check out our website for more information or contact me at jmartin@cpfa.org.

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post-tenure reviews and “productivity” standards are designed to control and revoke the rights of tenured faculty.

It is the same weapon, deployed for two different purposes. This “metric trap”—the principle that academic freedom is not inherent but must be earned and re-earned by meeting quantifiable targets—is the single greatest threat to our profession.

**The Two-Front War,
 Waged with One Weapon**

The two-tier system has created two related crises, both powered by the same flawed logic:

The Crisis of Exclusion (The “Part-Time” or “Contingent” Faculty): For the contingent majority, the metric trap is a locked gate. Your workload percentage defines your status and permanently denies you due process, a voice in governance, and the shield of academic freedom. This created a large, precarious workforce whose very existence proves that a college can run on faculty without rights.

The Crisis of Control (The “Tenured” Faculty): For the tenured minority, the metric trap is a weapon of coercion. It redefines tenure from a shield for academic freedom into a revocable performance contract. It gives administrators a backdoor mechanism to silence dissent by simply claiming a professor is “failing to meet metrics.” Workload is the excuse to nullify the shield.

This two-front war has been devastating. The exclusion of contingent faculty created the leverage to attack the tenured faculty. Now, the entire profession is being pushed toward a gig-economy model where all faculty are just “content deliverers” managed by productivity data.

**The ‘One-Tier’ Solution
 & Its Own Metric Trap**

The obvious solution is to dismantle this system and move to a unified, “one-tier” faculty model—a single, stable employment track offering proportional (pro-rata) pay, benefits, governance rights, and the full protections of due process and academic freedom for all.

But this solution is pointless if we fall into the exact same trap.

Many one-tier proposals are a Trojan horse. They perpetuate the core problem by establishing a new workload or performance threshold required to attain status on this single tier.



This is just the 1968 California strategy in a new package.

It guarantees that institutions will simply hire a new

class of “pre-tier” gig workers, kept just below the metric, to maintain a flexible workforce.

It concedes the central lie: that faculty rights are a reward for a certain quantity of work, not a necessary condition for the job itself.

Conclusion: A Principle, Not a Metric

Our position must be absolute. The fight is not so much against the “two-tier system” as it is against the administrative principle that ties faculty rights to workload or performance metrics.

A true one-tier model must be built on a non-negotiable foundation: Academic freedom is a necessary condition of all faculty work, not a bonus.

Access to the shield of due process and academic freedom must be granted to all faculty upon hiring. It is not a prize to be won by the most “productive,” nor is it a privilege to be revoked when one’s teaching or scholarly activity becomes inconvenient. It is the fundamental right that makes our work, and that of the college itself, possible.

Scott Douglas is currently CPFA's Southern Regional Representative and serves on CPFA's Legislative Committee. Contact him at sdouglas@cpfa.org.



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CORRESPONDENCE AND ARTICLES may be edited or condensed due to space limitations. Letters may be published. Op-ed pieces, news briefs on union organizing or contract negotiations are particularly welcome. Human interest articles and opportunities to reprint items about the contingent faculty condition are encouraged. Signed articles express their authors’ opinions and do not necessarily reflect the views of CPFA.

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