

Brookdale Adjuncts Vote to Unionize

By Jay Cook

LINCROFT - Over 450 adjunct professors in the Brookdale Community College system now have more bargaining power, thanks to a decision earlier this month to join the state's largest higher education union, representatives said last week.

The adjunct professors - who teach at Brookdale campuses in Lincroft, Hazlet, Freehold, Long Branch, Neptune and Wall, as well as online classes - will join the United Adjunct Faculty of New Jersey-American Federation of Teachers (UAFNJ) Local 2222.

The decision to unionize provides the educators with a collective voice when negotiating with the college, which is harder to come by for part-time professionals looking to make some extra cash in their fields, said Nat T. Bender, communications director for the American Federation of Teachers New Jersey.

"Adjunct unionization is a relatively new phenomenon - in the old days, most of the professors were full-timers," Bender said. "Adjunct faculty has become an increasingly larger share of the faculty."

The unionization effort was spearheaded by Joan Carroll and James Schmitt, a pair of adjunct mathematics professors who led an internal committee. With some teachers spread thin teaching classes on multiple campuses or balancing teaching with other jobs, being able to create a union now gives adjuncts a more defined voice each semester, they said.

"We stuck together and now have our unified official voice for interacting with Brookdale's administration along with a forum of communication among adjuncts," said Carroll.

"Our goal is now to



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Over 450 adjunct professors at six Brookdale Community College branches chose to join a union earlier this month.

negotiate a contract providing Brookdale Community College adjuncts with a better, more equal and more efficient environment to teach, grow and prosper," said Schmitt. "We have achieved something meaningful at Brookdale - a union - a voice for all adjunct faculty."

Adjunct faculty signed authorization cards to form the union and were recognized by the county college's administration on Feb. 13, said Keith Heumiller, Brookdale's college relations coordinator.

"Adjunct faculty are integral members of the Brookdale community and we value their important contributions to our curriculum, campus life and the student experience," Heumiller said, on behalf of Brookdale's Office of College Relations.

Brookdale's administration had yet to meet with union representatives as of Feb. 23, he added.

Adjunct faculty at colleges and universities across the country face uncertainty at the beginning of academic terms. Bender said job security is based on a number of factors, like student enrollment,

seniority and the different types of classes sought.

Elaine Bobrove, UAFNJ's president and an adjunct English professor at Camden County College, said adjuncts across the state are unionizing for "better pay and respect for our professional contributions to our schools."

A challenge unique to Brookdale is its widespread footprint over Monmouth County. With 12,790 matriculated and non-degree students enrolled across six campuses on different ends of the county, Bender said it's been difficult for adjuncts to coordinate with one another when it is time to renegotiate contracts. He anticipates that soon will change.

"This is a committee that got together, was consistent and made a concerted effort to make it work," Bender said.

Brookdale will become the UAFNJ's 11th community college chapter in New Jersey, joining community colleges in Bergen, Camden, Morris, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, Passaic, Sussex and Union counties. The organization represents more than 4,000 adjunct educators.