

A statement delivered by Joan Atlas, Adjunct Faculty Representative, To Bentley University Faculty Senate on April 6, 2016.

As you know, I am the adjunct faculty senator. I want to give you some information today about the adjunct bargaining process that has been going on since last June. I believe it is my job to do this.

Before I discuss the bargaining, though, I want to tell you how it is that I am speaking to you under "other items" as opposed to being placed on the agenda. Because while some of you may not care much about adjuncts, I am pretty sure we all care about free speech.

The fact is that when I have requested, which I did on at least two occasions this semester, to be placed on the Senate agenda, I have been told that the Senate Planning Committee has been instructed not to do it. In other words, the administration does not want me to speak about adjunct bargaining.

They apparently think that bargaining is a secret process that has to be carried out behind closed doors, and that you have no right to know about it. I think that the faculty, and especially Faculty Senate, has every right to know what is happening with bargaining – and to express their thoughts and concerns about it -- just as they did with respect to the hockey rink.

Creating the impression that we cannot talk or raise questions about adjuncts at Bentley – or other issues, such as not getting paid for the additional 14th week of the semester – is part of what I see as a culture of fear, and based on conversations that I have had with many people, I believe this fear exists in levels far above the lowly level of adjuncts.

The fact is this, though: there is no law relating to bargaining that precludes the faculty, or Faculty Senate, from being made aware of what is happening with bargaining. So the question arises in my mind: what happened to the First Amendment? Does it somehow not apply to Bentley? That is an issue that we should all be concerned about.

And what about shared governance? If shared governance exists, then Faculty Senate should make its own decisions about what issues it considers – the administration should not be dictating this to them. This is something else that we need to be concerned about.

So I am going to tell you a little bit about bargaining, which has run into some very difficult waters. And, it all revolves around money – and I think, power, because as it turns out, the amount of money we are seeking is really very small in comparison, say, to the cost of a brand new hockey rink, or gutting and renovating Jennison.

Adjuncts are paid \$5000 to teach a course – a little bit more for a graduate level course – and we have not had a raise in three years. All other faculty, and staff, have received raises in each of the past three years, while the lowest paid faculty have received zero.

\$5000 to teach what is now a 14-week college course? When I tell my students that this is what I am paid, their jaws drop because it is such a small amount compared to the amount of work that I do – that all of the adjuncts do – and that the students see with their own eyes, and benefit from.

The administration and the board of trustees, though, think the controlling issue is the "market" – they can get adjuncts to teach the courses for \$5000, so what's the problem? The problem is that it's not right, or fair, and it is contrary to what the university says it stands for – social responsibility and business ethics. And returning to my prior point, is it ethical to prevent people from talking openly about the situation, forcing them to discuss it in whispers in the hallways?

Another important point: Three years ago, in April 2013, Faculty Senate unanimously voted in favor of a resolution that the University should commit to an annual pay increase for adjunct faculty, "given the critically important contribution of the Adjunct Faculty to Bentley, and the inequity of their current compensation." This resolution still stands.

A few figures to compare to our \$5000 per course pay: At Northeastern, which came to an agreement in bargaining a couple of months ago, the minimum per course pay will be \$6200 as of this summer. At Tufts, which came to an agreement in bargaining about a year ago, the minimum per course pay will be \$7300 beginning this fall. Another interesting figure is that an adjunct who receives \$5000 per course for teaching math here at Bentley receives \$7191 for doing the same thing at Babson. They don't have a union – maybe they don't need one.

What has happened in bargaining related to pay at Bentley? What has been suggested most recently by the administration would mean that in 2020, Bentley would pay adjuncts more than 20% less than Tufts will pay its adjuncts in 2016. Maybe the administration's proposal would be fitting if you are viewing the adjuncts as an ant colony – we are just there, scurrying around in the basement of Morison and other little corners, but not really worthy of notice, and definitely easily replaceable. However, there are 170 of us teaching this semester, we teach about 500 of the courses at this university every year, our students call us "professor," we do every bit as much work as you do when you teach your courses, and teaching and learning is the central work of an institution of higher education – that is why it exists. In short, we deserve more than poverty pay – we deserve fair pay.

What is next? Both parties have agreed to a mediation session with a federal mediator, and that will take place on April 20th. I have to be hopeful about it – and Gloria gave me some reason to be hopeful when she said, at the Feb. 17th Faculty Senate meeting about the hockey rink, "We care hugely about pay equity." If that is true, we need the university to agree to a truly fair contract that uses the figures I have mentioned for Tufts, Northeastern and Babson as a real reference point – not a contract that throws us a few more dollars without making any real difference to the income of my adjunct colleagues – your colleagues.

Moreover, as I have said already, the amount that we are seeking is tiny in comparison to the university budget – you have probably all seen the pennies around campus – we are talking about a penny on the dollar over three years, or 1/3 of a penny each year. Why reject such a proposal and insist on a meaningless amount instead? Maybe power, plain and simple, is at the root of it, when what should be operating here are social responsibility, pay equity, and business ethics. And aren't those principles that the university should stand by and act on as it heads towards celebrating its 100th anniversary? Or is it going to say one thing and do something completely different?

Given the climate of fear that I mentioned previously, I am not sure what I can realistically expect each of you to do or say, though obviously, people in this country should not be afraid to say what they think or stand up for what they believe in. The idea that free, open dialogue is in effect being repressed at Bentley is appalling to me, and should be to every one of us. But I do hope that somehow you will see your way clear to stand with the adjuncts in their fight for fair treatment.

As I have said during bargaining, the adjuncts have no power, but what they do have on their side is what is right, fair and just.

Thank you very much for listening, and I welcome any questions or comments.