

FACULTY

As Lockout Continues at Long Island U., Students Report Meager Classroom Instruction

By *Fernanda Zamudio-Suaréz* | SEPTEMBER 09, 2016



Erik McGregor, Pacific Press, LightRocket via Getty Images

A protest on Wednesday in support of faculty members who were locked out by the Brooklyn campus of Long Island U.

The university, which replaced them with administrators and temps, says the student reaction has been "overwhelmingly positive." But at least some students there beg to differ.

When Kiyonda Hester started the final year of her master's program in social work, on Wednesday at Long Island University's Brooklyn campus, an instructor began a course by acknowledging he was unqualified to teach it.

The temporary instructor, who is an administrator, told the students that he had to be there so he wouldn't be fired, Ms. Hester said. He took attendance and noted that the syllabus had been posted online.

When students asked why the syllabus bore a date from another year, Ms. Hester said, the administrator responded by saying he hoped things would get back to normal next week.

"They would literally outright let us know that they were not equipped to teach," said Ms. Hester, who declined to name the administrator.

Ms. Hester is one of many students on the Brooklyn campus who have reported bare-bones classrooms after the New York university locked out 236 full-time faculty members and 450 adjuncts, all members of the Long Island University Faculty Federation, after their contracts expired, on August 31.

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And on Thursday the lockout dragged on. Administrators rejected the union's proposal to extend the contracts for five weeks so faculty members could return to their classrooms on Thursday, said Jennifer L. Solomon, a university spokeswoman.

"Surrounding students with the uncertainty of five more weeks of bargaining, which could still result in a strike — as has been the pattern in five out of the last six contracts with the Brooklyn faculty union — is not in the best interests of our students," said Gale Haynes, the campus's chief operating officer and general counsel. "We believe the time to resolve is now and will continue to negotiate in good faith."

As the negotiations continue, the temporary instructors will keep teaching classes. And while Ms. Solomon said on Thursday that the response from students had been "overwhelmingly positive," it's clear that not all of them are happy with the arrangement.

The response from students has been 'overwhelmingly positive.'

Justina Salib, a freshman majoring in pharmacy, said the lockout had overturned her perception of the university. At freshman orientation, held a few days before the lockout began, on Saturday, students received an email from the president, Kimberly R. Cline, saying that they might see different instructors than planned on the first day of class.

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"Everyone was freaking out," Ms. Salib said. "You know, you go on Rate My Professors, and you try to get the best professor you can, and then all of a sudden you're going in on the first day with nobody, not knowing anything."

Fifteen minutes after no instructor showed up for her first mathematics class, on Wednesday, Ms. Salib said she walked out. Other confused freshmen stayed, she said, not sure what to do next.

Ms. Salib said she assumed the instructor never materialized, just one of the cases where, despite administrators' best efforts, attempts for the university to function as normal fell flat.

Recruiting Temporary Instructors

Administrators began recruiting temporary instructors in July to prepare for the lockout, Ms. Solomon said in an email. They were recruited through job boards and personal university contacts, she wrote.

Other administrators and non-union staff members were told they would teach classes, Ms. Solomon said in an interview earlier this week.

Sam Schreiber, a former staff member at LIU Promise, a student-services group, said that on August 22 the head of the group told staff members that they would have to take on classes, in addition to their administrative duties, when the academic year started.

Inquiries to the dean of students' office on Thursday were directed to Ms. Solomon.

Although his salary would remain the same, Mr. Schreiber said, he was told to include teaching two three-credit courses in his 40-hour work week.

An email to Mr. Schreiber from the Office of Human Resources stated that he could be provided with everything he needed to teach each course at the last minute. "In the next few days you will be provided with a course syllabus, books, and resources to assist and support you in this very important effort," the email reads.

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Even though Mr. Schreiber was assigned to teach a literature course on fiction and has an M.F.A., he said something didn't sit right. He said he couldn't substitute for faculty members he considered colleagues and friends.

After consulting with a labor lawyer, Mr. Schreiber said, he learned he could be fired if he did not teach the courses. "I was informed that there was no law, no real labor rules, that protected me or my colleagues from being asked, and, I'll use the word, to scab," Mr. Schreiber said. "And there was no rule against them firing for refusing to do so."

He resigned on August 31, when the faculty and adjunct contracts expired, he said.

Jeff Campoli, a speech-language pathologist at Francis of Paola, a preschool in Brooklyn, said he was recruited by a former LIU classmate to be an instructor via text message on Sunday, three days before classes began. When he was offered a gig teaching a course in speech pathology, he thought something had happened to one of his former professors, perhaps one who had recently had a cancer scare.

Mr. Campoli said the former classmate wouldn't give specifics on the course. However, the classmate, whom he declined to name, was quick to emphasize that the job was easy money, Mr. Campoli said. He was offered \$500 for the first class and \$500 for the second class, he said. For every class he taught after the initial two, he said, he would be paid \$1,000 per tuition credit.

According to an email from Ms. Solomon, temporary instructors are paid the same amount as adjuncts.

When Mr. Campoli reminded his former classmate that he had never taught a class in speech pathology, she persisted, he said.

"I don't feel comfortable just jumping in and teaching a course at the graduate level or even undergraduate level," Mr. Campoli said on Thursday. "It was Sunday, and this was for me to just show up yesterday."

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