

EDUCATION

Bristol Community College union faculty unhappy with contract talks

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Zoom

MCCC union members looking for a new contract meet with Bristol Community College President Jack Sbrega. COURTESY PHOTO

By **Auditi Guha** [Follow](#)

Posted Jan. 10, 2016 at 2:21 PM
Updated Jan 11, 2016 at 1:55 PM

Union members at [Bristol Community College](#) say they are not happy with the conditions set by the state in the ongoing contract negotiations that have reached an impasse.

"We are very very frustrated with the pressures put on us to do more with less unlike what has happened with other higher education institutions in the state," said Diana (Donnie) McGee, statewide vice president of [Massachusetts Community College Council](#) and an English professor at BCC. "Community colleges have already been seriously underfunded for many years."

"I believe that because we are colleagues of faculty and professional staff at the four-year colleges and universities, we should receive the same increases without conditions," added Catherine Adamowicz, English professor at BCC who is on the contract negotiation team.

All 15 community colleges in Massachusetts, including BCC, have been negotiating a contract since last April; the last contract expired at the end of June.

The MCCC is seeking a new three-year deal with salary increases comparable to the 3.5 percent annual hikes other higher education unions received last year. The state is currently offering 2 percent increases with an additional increase in the last two years if the union agrees to new performance metrics. These include lowering the achievement gap and increasing graduation and retention rates, union members said.

"Community college students are not like traditional college students," said Adamowicz. "To tie in increases in salaries to graduation and retention rates is not reasonable or feasible."

Community college students are largely part-time, are first-generation college-goers, have jobs or family commitments, financial struggles and almost always need math and English support, the union maintains. They rarely finish in two or three years. Those who aim to go to college often transfer out.

Community college teachers are "expected to do a great deal with struggling students" and often carry a five-course load, unlike state college and university professors who carry two or three, Adamowicz said.

The MCCC has about 2,400 members statewide, including community college faculty, counselors, and librarians; BCC has about 160 MCCC members.

Given the stalled talks, BCC union members joined their colleagues statewide to go on work-to-rule, a labor negotiation in which employees perform only the tasks required by their contract.

This means they are not picking up their phones or emails to reach students after hours, or volunteering to cover orientations or serve on committees, and not working outside the academic calendar until they reach a fair settlement.

"We care a great deal about our students but we need to be treated fairly by the people in power," Adamowicz said.

Student learning outcomes have never been a part of community or state institution contracts "so it just came out of the blue," McGee said.

State officials declined to discuss the matter Friday.

"Because it is an ongoing negotiation, we are unable to provide any comment," said Nate Mackinnon from the commissioner's office at the Massachusetts Higher Education Department.

Since the last Dec. 21 session, both sides are a long way from reaching an agreement, union representatives said.

"After months of bargaining, our faculty and professional staff are still waiting for a fair deal that shows respect for our role in making our colleges work. It's time for the Board of Higher Education and college presidents to settle this contract and get back to focusing on our students," said Joe LeBlanc, MCCC president in a statement.

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Robert Chase

I happen to agree with the union's position. The faculty at community colleges should be treated exactly like faculty at the four year schools.

I will say it does appear that ability to contact professors is having an impact on my ability to register for classes, especially if I need permissions. I wonder if the administration and leaders at the state level understand what a stupid move it is to oppose the union's legitimate requests when it directly impacts the registration for the next... [» more](#)

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Maureen Sowa

team DOES NOT UNDERSTAND the environment of community college teaching.