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Seeking better pay and health benefits, Fordham University non-tenure track faculty vote to strike effective January 30

The Bronx, NEW YORK – As a worker organizing wave continues to sweep the country, Fordham University instructors are joining the ranks of educators and students challenging the status quo in higher education. On Friday, an overwhelming majority of the school's non-tenure track faculty voted in favor of striking (90% of those who voted), if necessary, starting January 30.

The Fordham Faculty United / SEIU Local 200United members, who teach the majority of the courses offered at the Bronx-located college, have been in negotiations with school administrators since March. They are fighting for a pay increase for all members, pay parity between departments and a health benefit for the most vulnerable adjunct faculty who are paid on a part-time basis and currently receive no benefits. Union members agreed to two contract extensions during COVID—viewing that as a down payment of goodwill for current negotiations.

The union has been shocked with the administration's indifference to the need for wage adjustments and healthcare benefits amid rapid inflation and the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the faculty community and NYC particularly hard.

"I support the strike because the university has not listened to us at the bargaining table," said **Fordham Faculty United Co-chair and Departments of Sociology and Anthropology Adjunct Diane George**. "They do not truly understand how their practices affect our lives and they have not shown any commitment to Fordham's social justice mission. They disrespect those who most carry out that mission, adjuncts in Social Services and Religion, by paying them thousands less per course. And they refuse to provide a living wage or any form of health benefits to adjuncts, who teach the majority of students. This is not 'cura personalis.' If I can't afford health care, I can't take care of my students."

Fordham Faculty United members also say they are inspired by the movement of higher education strikes happening around the country in recent months, including those in New York City by New School adjuncts, who struck for three weeks in November and New York University adjuncts who nearly went on strike in October.

"We believe in Fordham excellence and want to provide the best education for our students," said **Fordham Faculty United Co-Chair Kari Evanson, a senior lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures**. "This is only possible if all contingent faculty receive a fair

contract. Our only course of action is to call a strike for Jan 30th in order to ensure fair working conditions for all faculty and ideal learning conditions for our students."

Their decision to strike is receiving growing support from political and community leaders.

"Despite their herculean sacrifices prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fordham's non-tenured faculty members are struggling to stretch their meager salaries in a City where the cost of living is rising exponentially," **said Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D/WF - Manhattan)**. "From skyrocketing rents, to inflated grocery prices, to increased healthcare costs, non-tenured faculty cannot subsist on a mere \$18,000 a year. It is incumbent on Fordham to come to the negotiating table and to ensure its employees are provided a living wage with health benefits. Anything less is unacceptable."

Melanie Knutz, who teaches as an adjunct in the Graduate School of Social Work, says that the pending strike is also an issue of social justice and women's rights. Adjunct faculty in Graduate School of Social Service are disproportionately women, yet adjuncts currently earn significantly less than other departments.

"I am prepared to strike on January 30th to honor the work I have done for the past 30 years, the Fordham Graduate Students of Social Work that I teach, the populations with whom I work and the model of this great Jesuit institution," **said Knutz, a licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Psychoanalyst**. "Social Work is traditionally, and still remains today, a women's field. The contingent faculty and non-contingent faculty at GSSS are by far and away women. And we are paid more than \$2000 less a course than all the rest of contingent faculty across all the other Fordham schools."

"This is a Women's issue. This is a Social Justice issue. This is about equal pay for equal work."

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