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Call Me Ishmael

A whale of a tale, by your SFT President, Emari DiGiorgio.

By now you've probably seen the "Orcanize" memes on social media, as orcas continue to attack and/or capsize yachts, sailboats, and large fishing vessels. It's unclear exactly how this trend started, but researchers speculate that one orca had a bad run-in with a fishing boat and either taught her offspring how to chew a rudder or bash a hull, or they simply copied her behavior, the same way our own youth learn through imitation.

According to a [BBC article](#), there are between 35-50 Iberian orcas left, making them a critically endangered species, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Interestingly, the same 15 orcas are the ones seizing the seas.

Researchers are quick to remind us not to anthropomorphize the orcas' intentions, but in the summer of 2023, I reckon that organized labor could use a new mascot.

As of June 30th, our statewide contract has expired, and once again, we are working without a contract. Last summer, we were asked to "share the burden" of healthcare costs, and in an historic multi-union coalition, we struck a deal that preserved our coverage with minimal cost increases.

But workers have always been asked to do more, for less.

In the epilogue of Kim Kelly's *Fight Like Hell: The Untold History of American Labor*, she reflects on how the COVID-19 pandemic; social, political, and economic inequities; police violence; and the "soul-crushing capitalist brutality that has defined American life" have led to a recent revival in organized labor.

Of course, I understand how easy it is to feel like an endangered species in the workplace, getting caught and tangled in one University net after

another. But we are not without recourse, and as Kelly argues, "solidarity is the sturdiest weapon of all" (313).

When I look back on the past year as your SFT President, I can count so many small victories, from our own local multi-union collaborations with CWA and IFPTE to developing positive relationships with the Office of Human Resources, to support members' personnel processes, benefits and leave, supplementals, reclassification/promotion, and disciplinary proceedings. We've been able to host our beloved PayDay Parties, Toast & Roast, and Retiree Dinner, and the "volunteer vibe" setting up and breaking down these events is unparalleled. We negotiated several key agreements despite many obstacles and provided stability and trust when Academic Affairs and the Faculty Senate navigated their own troubled waters. We increased our emphasis

on staff issues, launching the first-ever Winter Welcome, hosting several staff-specific workshops, and assisting staff with rebuttal letters during the reappointment and/or reclassification process.

As I have reminded members during some of the most challenging moments of their careers, this is our University, our Stockton, and we have the privilege and obligation to build and tend the community we want here. Fortunately, we do not have to do this alone.

One orca became three. Three have become fifteen.

When we stand with each other, we are just as powerful.

In solidarity,

Emari DiGiorgio, MFA
Stockton University
President SFT Local 2275



Image credit to Kindly_Wedding, reddit.com, June 2023

Academic Labor: We're Having A Moment!

Nazia Kazi, SFT Grievance Officer, is pretty cool. She regularly writes interesting things about labor issues for us. Here is another one of those.

Editor's Note: This article was written before the Rutgers strike began.

For this newsletter, I'm stepping out of my usual Grievance Officer updates (which, if you haven't noticed, are too confidential to share!) to talk instead about the lay of the land in higher education and labor organizing.

One thing is abundantly clear: academic labor is having a moment. If you've been reading the news, you've heard not only of strike actions – many of them truly historic – but also a record number of union drives at formerly non-unionized campuses. And these labor events are happening at every level of campus labor, including graduate student workers, faculty and staff, and even the rare instances of undergraduate student organizing.

It is striking that a huge number of union elections have been held at prestigious institutions, schools like [Yale](#) and [Johns Hopkins](#). And at those institutions where campus workers are deciding whether to unionize, the victories often come with huge margins. It's remarkable to think that folks at schools like Northwestern University or Yale want what we have

long had (and often take for granted): a union.

Here at Stockton, I'm faculty advisor to the Stockton Socialists. These students regularly express to me their long-term desire to see student labor unionized and have engaged in a campus-wide project of political awareness on the issues of labor exploitation.

These remarkable developments stem in part due to the dire position of the American working class, which increasingly faces exorbitant housing costs and little in the way of a social welfare state. But it is also rooted in the increasing “corporatization” of American universities. Barry Eidlin [explains](#), “As [public funding of higher education](#) has [eroded](#) over the past several decades, university leaderships have drawn increasingly from the managerial handbook of private corporations to run their institutions.”

In other words, the ills of our economy at large have trickled into higher education, and academic workers are turning to the power of the union to address them. The University of California system saw

the [largest strike](#) in academic history mere months ago (winning many of their crucial demands), and down the street from my own home in Philly, the [Temple University Graduate Students](#) also saw a historic strike this winter. In New York City, the New School's record-breaking strike made national headlines.

What does all this mean for us here, at Stockton? For me, it's a clarion call to recognize not only the power we wield as workers, but also a reminder to appreciate the ways in which, when organized and united, we can win. Furthermore, the nationwide strike waves and union drives remind us that our own SFT is not here to simply advocate for us on a local, or even state-wide, level, but rather that it is a part of a growing and robust national movement of higher ed unions that, when American workers bear the brunt of the nation's economic difficulties, must spring to action.

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*Nazia Kazi, Ph.D.
Stockton University
Grievance Officer SFT Local 2275*



Adjuncts: Know Your Rights

You can't know everything, but here are some important rules that adjuncts ought to know, from Vice President for Adjuncts, Stephanie Cawley.

As adjuncts, we teach the same courses as our full-time colleagues, sharing the same responsibilities to our students in the classroom and delivering the same excellent teaching. However, adjuncts' employment is governed by a different contract, which you may or may not be so familiar with. (After all, many of us adjuncts are busy juggling teaching with other work, or cobbling together more-than-full-time teaching loads across multiple colleges and universities; it's hard enough to make time to read for pleasure, much less pore over a labor contract.)

So, I thought I would use my newsletter space this quarter to highlight some of the contract provisions I have gotten asked about most often in my first year as your VP for Adjuncts. (Note that these are all from our 2019-2023 contract, so some details may be subject to change once our next contract is finalized.)

Course Assignments

By definition, adjuncts are hired on a per-semester, per-course basis. While many of us come to rely on our income from adjunct teaching, and come to expect we'll be assigned the same courses year after year, our contract provides no guarantees of continued employment. However, it does state that if we are currently teaching a course, we should be "given initial consideration for appointment" if that course is offered the following semester. Be proactive in asking about course assignments each semester, and don't hesitate to reach out to the union for support if you have any concerns.

Course Cancellation

As we all know, a lot of the labor involved in teaching a course takes

place well before the first day of class, when you are preparing the syllabus, setting up Blackboard, and communicating with students. In recognition of this, our contract ensures that adjuncts are compensated for courses canceled or reassigned at the last minute. If a course you are teaching is canceled or reassigned within less than 2 weeks before the start of the semester, you are entitled to 1 credit hour of pay. If it is canceled after you have taught the first class, you are entitled to 1.5 credit hours of pay.

Office Hours + Offices

Many adjuncts are passionate, dedicated teachers, so many of us make time to meet with students outside of our scheduled courses. However, adjuncts are not and cannot be required to hold office hours. If you choose to meet with students, though, our contract does state that Stockton should, wherever possible, provide suitable space in which to work. Contact the school where you teach if you need to find out where that space is located.

Applying for Unemployment Benefits

Adjuncts fall into a tricky area when it comes to state unemployment benefits. However, some adjuncts have had success applying for and receiving unemployment during the summer months, or when they are not offered a course following a semester when they had taught. While we cannot guarantee that your application will be successful, our contract states that Stockton's HR must provide written documentation for adjuncts applying for unemployment benefits.

If you have questions or concerns about your work as an adjunct, contract-related or otherwise, you can always contact me at stephanie.m.cawley@sftunion.org. I'm happy to help where I can, or point you in the right direction if I can't.

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*Stephanie Cawley
Stockton University
VP of Adjuncts, SFT Local 2275*



Welcoming a New SFT Lounge Curator OR A Welcoming New SFT Lounge

An intro and update from your new SFT Lounge Curator, Joyce DeStasio.



Greetings SFT members! I'm happy to take on the role of the new Lounge Curator for the union.

A little about me:

I am Bjork Library's newest librarian and have been at Stockton for one year now. Prior to coming to Stockton, I worked in AtlantiCare's Health Sciences Library in Atlantic City. Before that, I was in advertising and marketing for over a decade. At Stockton, I put my marketing and health science expertise to work as the Outreach & Public Service Librarian. I'm very excited to be here and get involved with the SFT union. I appreciate the warm welcome I've received this past year!

Enough about me, let's talk about the lounge:

You may have noticed that our lounge has been given a facelift and a new name! No longer called the Faculty Lounge, the SFT Lounge has been rebranded to include all of our

members, not just the faculty. As always, we continue to provide tea, coffee, water, and a welcoming sunlit atmosphere for our members. We hope that our new name extends this warm welcome to all SFT members!

Another way to ensure that this is a welcoming space for all is to do our part to keep the lounge clean. Please keep in mind that it is not the responsibility of the University housekeeping staff or SFT coordinators to clean the donated appliances. It is up to each of us to clean up after ourselves and ensure that the lounge remains a clean, comfortable, and inviting space for all.

Last but not least:

A big thank-you goes out to the person who went above and beyond to clean the microwave for us, as this is certainly not their job. As for me, I will continue using my research skills to find and post as many microwave memes as necessary! :)



In all seriousness, please feel free to email me at Joyce.DeStasio@stockton.edu if you notice any issues, and I will make sure it's handled.

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*Joyce DeStasio, MI-LIS
Stockton University
Lounge Curator, SFT Local 2275*



Banking and Our Money

Heather Perez, Treasurer, gives you the skinny on our money.

With all of the news and insecurity about banks over the past few weeks, many people are more aware of where their money hangs out. I wanted to highlight how we as a union manage our banking. As you are probably aware, we the members contribute 1% of our salaries to the union. That money is directly deposited by the University each payday into our main checking account.

As a union, we try to always patronize local businesses whenever we can. You've probably noticed this at Payday Parties - we don't use the big chain restaurants. In our banking decisions, we do the same. We choose local banks. Like most other banks, these banks are insured by the FDIC up to the \$250,000 limit per account holder. We are well under the \$250,000 limit at each bank.

Our checking accounts are with First National Bank of Absecon (FNBA). We have three checking accounts - one for our regular expenses, one for our payroll expenses, and one for COPE. The regular and payroll accounts earn interest each month; the COPE account is not permitted to earn interest by law. All three of these accounts are reconciled monthly by our accountant.

After all the bills are paid at the end of each fiscal year, the Union Executive looks at the balances and deposits any surplus money into CD accounts for "rainy days." We currently have nine of these, and they are spread among FNBA, Parke Bank, Fulton Bank, Valley Bank, and OceanFirst Bank. These accounts each have varying maturity dates, interest rates, and fixed periods of time. We do this so that we are able

to withdraw funds for emergencies with the least penalty possible. For example, if there is a job action and we need to create a reimbursement fund for members' expenses, we could cash-out the CD closest to maturity for the lowest penalty.

If you made it this far, congratulations! You understand more about the Union's banking. Let me know what questions you have and I'll answer them in a future newsletter.

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*Heather Perez
Stockton University
Treasurer, SFT Local 2275*



Governor Murphy Says Unemployment Insurance A Universal Right

Erin O’Hanlon, COPE Chair, illuminates some recent changes to Unemployment Insurance benefits for workers in New Jersey.

Recently, New Jersey Governor, Phil Murphy signed into law legislation that protects workers from intimidation by employers for participating in labor disputes in New Jersey.

Previously, there were loopholes in the law that allowed Unemployment Insurance benefits to be denied to workers who were participating in strikes or walking on the picket line. This was particularly relevant as the bill was being voted on, which was concurrent with Rutgers University’s faculty strike. The faculty returned to work shortly after and are currently voting on a new contract.

“Unemployment insurance benefits should be a universal right for individuals who have recently lost their jobs, are unable to find work, or are currently in the middle of a labor dispute,” said Murphy. “These benefits are crucial to allow individuals going through this process the support they need to continue to take care of themselves and their families during difficult times. This Administration will continue to stand up for the rights of workers who are the backbone of our state’s economy.”

Workers will be disqualified from UI benefits for 14 days following a strike, down from 30 days that was previously legal. However, if replacement workers are hired either on a permanent or temporary basis, benefits can be paid immediately.

The bill also supports workers to receive UI benefits immediately after an employer lockout, even if no strike occurred first.

If the employer does not comply with an existing agreement between management and workers, this

would not automatically disqualify a worker from receiving UI benefits.

Union representatives from across the state were upbeat about the signing of the legislation:

“Workers and their families often struggle financially when they go on strike to protest injustice in the workplace. Going on strike is a very difficult decision, but it is sometimes necessary when workers are pushed to their limits” said Charles Wowkanech, New Jersey State AFL-CIO President. “This law will help ease that financial hardship and we applaud Governor Murphy for standing with working people and enacting this legislation.”

“Striking workers will no longer worry that participating in a job action will result in them not being able to pay their bills and reduce the power of management to instill that fear in workers into the future,” said Elfrieda Johnson, Board President of JNESO District Council 1, IUOE-AFL-CIO.

“Union members put everything on the line when they vote to strike. All they hope for from the State is fair treatment,” said Rich Maroko, President, Hotel Trades Council. “I applaud the Governor and the sponsors for bringing fairness to the unemployment insurance program by closing loopholes and expanding eligibility. Now every striking worker will be able to access the unemployment insurance benefits they paid for, on a schedule and under conditions that are clearly laid out in law.”

Erin O’Hanlon is the Chair of the Committee on Political Education (COPE), the political engagement committee of the Stockton Federation

of Teachers. COPE is the legislative advocacy arm of Local 2275 and works to ensure that the concerns of the faculty, faculty librarians, and professional staff at Stockton are front and center with local elected officials. While negotiators are keeping an eye on member’s interests at the bargaining table, members of COPE are supporting laws that will give us a voice in important spaces, provide equitable pay, and focus on accountability from our institutions. COPE accepts all sustaining contributions, from \$1 to \$10.

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*Erin O’Hanlon
Stockton University
COPE Chair SFT Local 2275*

HOW DID WE DO?

Spot any errors? You can reach me, Justin Maciejewski, your editor and Communications Officer at:

justin.maciejewski@sftunion.org

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