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The Longest Faculty Strike in U.S. Higher Education:
 Perspectives from Key Participants

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRIDGEPORT FACULTY STRIKES: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

DENIS COLLINS

I joined the University of Bridgeport (UB) faculty in 1999, seeking refuge after a tumultuous tenure battle at a nonunion public university. I chose UB because it had the dual virtues of being the most international university in the nation and located near my aging parents. Each higher education institution has its own peculiarity, and UB was no exception. During my first faculty meeting, senior faculty made vague references to political warfare earlier in the decade between faculty and administrators. Several months later, after I made an off-handed comment about organizing faculty to advance our mutual interests against a burdensome administrative imposition, one of the elder statesmen approached me and our conversation went something like the following.

"Professor Collins," he said, "your new academic home is the Gettysburg of the faculty union movement, the battleground of the bloodiest academic civil war ever fought."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"We had the longest faculty strike in the history of higher education history," he said. "And we're the first and probably only university to hire permanent faculty replacements. A lot of people lost their jobs. Those of us who crossed the picket line, like me, may have damaged our souls. According to many of those no longer here, you're surrounded by scabs!"

Intrigued, I went to the library and performed a literature search, but could find little besides old newspaper accounts. As a professor of business ethics, I was fascinated by the ethical issues associated with faculty going out on strike and then the follow-up issue of either walking the picket line or crossing it. When I asked UB faculty why no one on either side of the issue had ever published a case study based on their personal experiences, I was told that the strike issues were "too close to our broken hearts."

This special issue of *Journal of Academic Ethics* is aimed at filling the historical gap. Faculty are among the most unionized segments of the American workforce. In 1959, Wisconsin became the first state to allow its employees, including faculty at two-year postsecondary technical institutions, to participate in collective bargaining. Four years later, the Milwaukee Technical Institute faculty were the first to vote in favor of a

collective bargaining agent. By the early 1970s, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) represented faculty at community colleges and public and private four-year institutions throughout the nation. Growth in the unionization of private university faculties dramatically ended in 1980 when the United States Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that faculty at Yeshiva University performed managerial tasks, and thus had no legal right to collective bargaining.

Nonetheless, public university union organizing continued; 18,000 faculty members of the California State University system unionized in 1982. Since the Yeshiva decision, regional directors of the National Labor Relations Board have ruled that faculty at several private universities were not managerial employees because they only had advisory, rather than actual, governance authority, paving the way for a union vote. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' 1998 *National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty*, collective bargaining agreements cover 37 percent of full-time higher education faculty in the United States (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nsopfe/>). Collective bargaining units are more popular at two-year institutions, where 63 percent of full-time faculty are union members, compared to 31 percent of the faculty teaching at four-year institutions. Union organizing campaigns persist at higher education institutions, including the recruitment of part-time faculty and graduate students.

Strikes are a union's ultimate weapon against employers who mistreat employees. The first prominent faculty strike took place in March 1965 at St. John's University in response to administrative actions taken against the formation of a union and other faculty grievances. In 1970, the Chicago City College system's AFL-CIO affiliated faculty union was the first certified bargaining unit to go out on strike. The following year, AAUP organized faculty at Oakland University (Michigan), a four-year public institution, went out on strike for two weeks, but the strike was ruled illegal because the state of Michigan prohibited public employees from striking. In 1974, the AAUP faculty union at Rider College in New Jersey was the first to strike a private university, a year prior to the University of Bridgeport's first faculty strike.

Strikes remain a prominent tool in the faculty union's arsenal. Having failed to receive a pay raise since 1998, the University of Hawaii system faculty staged a thirteen-day walkout in April 2001 before settling for an across-the-board \$2,325 pay raise followed by a 6 percent raise. In 2003, the threat of a faculty strike during contract negotiations earned the faculty at Southern Illinois University salary increases independent of state appro-

priations, a guarantee of no layoffs due to financial problems, and a fixed student/faculty ratio of 26 to 1.

But the "mother of all" strikes happened in the decaying industrial city of Bridgeport, Connecticut while the nation geared up for the first U.S. led invasion of Iraq. On September 1, 1990, 125 of 175 University of Bridgeport (UB) faculty represented by an AAUP bargaining unit went out on strike in response to administration proposals to (1) cut wages 30 percent at the financially troubled private university and (2) insert "Management Rights" language into the union contract that would permit the dismissal of tenured faculty with thirty days notice and no severance pay. Two weeks later the administration retaliated by becoming the first institution in higher education to employ permanent replacement faculty, costing some striking faculty not only their jobs but also their livelihood. The state of Connecticut ruled the administration's action a "lock-out," and leaders of the remaining striking faculty unsuccessfully lobbied for a state government takeover of the nearly bankrupt university. The faculty strike formally ended two years later when the remaining 66 strikers, in media-tion, received two-thirds of one year's salary in exchange for a "cease and desist" order and the union's decertification.

This special issue is purely intended to discuss the University of Bridgeport faculty strikes and by no means aims at being libelous or slanderous regarding any person or agency associated with any of the strikes. The special issue consists of a case study written by an independent party and six response essays written by a former university president, two faculty union leaders, and three faculty union members who crossed the picket line. In addition to examining facts related to the strikes, each response essay explains why the author decided to do what he or she did.

The opening article of this special issue is a case study of labor relations at the University of Bridgeport beginning with the certification of a faculty labor union in 1973. During the next seventeen years, contract negotiation disputes focused on shared governance issues, managing faculty reductions during a time of inflation and declining enrollments, and determining fair wages. These deliberations resulted in a three-day faculty strike in 1975, a sixteen-day strike in 1978, a two-day strike in 1987 and a two-year strike beginning September 1990. Student enrollments continued to dramatically decline during the 1990 strike and the following year the Board of Trustees had to decide whether to close the university or agree to a financial bailout from the Professors World Peace Academy, an organization funded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. The case study highlights a plethora of complex ethical issues faced by administrators, faculty, and unions during times of economic decline.

Leland Miles served as president of UB from 1974 to 1987, after having been Dean of its College of Arts and Sciences from 1964 to 1967. When he returned as the university's new president in 1974, the institution had substantial financial problems, declining enrollments, and a newly unionized faculty. His essay provides a first-person account of his efforts to work with a contentious union to save Liberal Arts programs at a time of growing student demand for professional degrees.

Alfred Getreiny joined the UB History Department faculty in 1966 and was faculty union president during the 1987 strike and the first year of the 1990-1992 strike. He provides a dramatic, personal account of a faculty union under attack by a chief negotiator with a "union buster" reputation, and refutes accusations that the union and its leadership were trying to destroy the university. The union, he argues, was fighting a concerted onslaught on traditional "faculty rights" and attempted to stifle a retrograde revolution in higher education administration to impose absolute "Management Rights." He lost his tenure and career as a result of the strike.

Glenn Bassett had been employed as a human resources professional for General Electric before joining the UB Business School faculty in 1980. He brings a labor relations specialist's perspective to the discussion and maintains that the faculty union followed a policy of maximum militancy, a strategy often met with an *ad hoc* and poorly informed administrative response. He argues that the university administration lacked a coherent union relations strategy that, when combined with the union's pattern of militant confrontation, almost destroyed the university.

Ruth Anne Baumgartner was a member of UB faculty from 1971 to 1992, losing her tenured position as a result of the administration's lock-out of striking faculty. She had served in many governance capacities, including president of the Faculty Council and as a member of the union's 1990 collective bargaining negotiation team. She highlights problems associated with imposing a corporate model on faculty relations, wherein administrators treat faculty like replaceable "hired hands," and argues that faculty loyalty is not to an administration or an institution: it is to the truth, to the integrity of the profession, and to themselves.

T. Mathai Thomas, who joined the UB faculty in 1969, served as president of the Faculty Council and secretary of the University Senate during the 1990-1992 strike. His essay examines the role of the Faculty Council in relation to the faculty union. He participated on the picket line during the 1975, 1978 and 1987 strikes, but crossed the picket line during the 1990 strike. Under his leadership, the faculty petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to decertify the union in 1991.

Dick Allen, one of America's leading poets, joined the UB faculty in 1968 and was selected for the university's first "Outstanding Professor of the Year" award. His essay is the memoir of a tenured poet who walked the picket line at the beginning of the 1990 faculty strike. However, during the strike's second week, he made the difficult decision to cross the picket line of a union he helped create seventeen years earlier. He continually relives his strike experience.

One important voice missing from this special issue is that of Janet Greenwood, president of UB during the 1990 strike. Unfortunately, legal counsel advised her not to submit an essay because certain former union members have disrupted her career since the strike began.

After reading the case study and the six subsequent articles by faculty and administrators involved in the labor disputes, the reader may feel compelled to answer the following question: What would you have done if you were a UB administrator or faculty member in September 1990? Why?

Dennis Collins
Guest Editor