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Part-time faculty, Tufts near contract

Tentative accord awaits union vote

By **Matt Rocheleau**

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Negotiators for a newly unionized group of part-time professors at Tufts University have reached a tentative contract agreement with school administrators, the two parties said Tuesday.

The deal could influence bargaining between adjunct faculty and leaders of several other local schools where part-time professors have recently organized or are considering doing so.

The Tufts agreement — which will go before approximately 200 adjunct teachers at the school for final approval — would improve job security, wages, benefits, and other working conditions, according to Andy Klatt, a longtime part-time lecturer at the university.

“We’re proud of it,” said Klatt, who helped lead the unionization and negotiation efforts. “I think it’s going to be a

positive contract both for the university and for part-time faculty.”

Officials said the two sides had agreed on a three-year contract, but they said they will not disclose specifics until the deal is ratified. Union members are expected to vote on the contract later this month.

James M. Glaser, interim dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Tufts, said the contract “reflects our commitment to recognizing those contributions within the overall context of the university’s priorities.”

The announcement marked a significant milestone for a campaign that has successfully organized part-time faculty at two other local colleges and that is pushing for professors at several other area institutions to unionize.

The Service Employees International Union, which launched a national campaign a year-and-a-half ago to organize adjunct faculty at campuses across the country, discussed the idea with part-time faculty at more than 20 Boston-area colleges.

In September 2013, Tufts adjuncts became the first local group within the SEIU campaign to unionize.

A month later, a push to organize at Bentley University in Waltham fell two votes short.

In February, about 700 adjuncts at Lesley University in Cambridge unionized , followed by about 960 adjuncts at Northeastern University who organized in May. Faculty from both of those schools are now in negotiations.

Meanwhile, campaigns to unionize adjuncts are underway at Boston University , Simmons College, and other area schools that SEIU officials have declined to identify because part-time faculty there are not ready to publicly announce their intentions.

William Shimer, an adjunct who is helping to lead part-time faculty negotiations at Northeastern, said he hopes the Tufts agreement will help pave the way for adjunct contract talks at other colleges.

“I think it’s a very good development that the Tufts administration is taking such an enlightened view and is negotiating in good faith and has tried and succeeded in reaching an agreement with its teachers,” he said.

The number of tenure-track positions has dropped as colleges have become increasingly dependent on the low cost and flexibility of adjunct faculty.

In 1975, about 30 percent of faculty across the country were employed part time, according to the American Association of University Professors. Today, part-time faculty account for more than half of college teaching jobs, and about 76 percent of higher education instructors hold non-tenure-track positions.

Before the SEIU campaign, part-time faculty at other local schools had unionized and negotiated contracts. Suffolk University adjuncts unionized in 2006 and signed their first contract three years later. Adjuncts at Emerson College unionized in 2001 and signed their initial contract in 2004.

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