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Statement of Jason Pramas on the Cambridge City Council Late Policy Order by Councilor Mazen
2/23/15

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor and Honorable Members of the City Council, for the record I am Jason Pramas, assistant professor of communications at Lesley University. I'm also a longtime Cambridge resident and live at 375A Harvard St. I'm here to speak in favor of the Lesley University faculty union resolution before you today.

Last year, I stood before this body as an adjunct professor, and asked you to support the adjunct union drive at Lesley. You did offer your overwhelming support at that time, and Lesley adjuncts went on to win a landslide victory in our union election shortly afterwards.

Now I'm back, this time as what the Lesley University administration calls "core faculty." Which sounds nice. And might make you think that core faculty like myself are tenured or tenure track - which would be the case at almost any other comparable university in the country.

But we're not. There is no tenure at Lesley University. So in fact, core faculty at Lesley are all either half-time or full-time contract faculty. That is to say, contingent faculty just like adjuncts. Which is why we're now trying to unionize as well.

For background, this academic year, I was brought on as core faculty for nine months on a .57 faculty line for \$32,000 plus benefits, an office, and, of course, a title that gives me traditional faculty rank. Unfortunately, getting promoted to core faculty at Lesley is not a one-way ticket to secure employment. Which is why, next year it is virtually certain that I will be an adjunct again, since they called me an "emergency hire" this year.

Next year, I will teach some of the same courses that I taught this year, and I will do so for no more than \$3500 a course. With no guarantee of even the four course units I had this year. Not because anyone in the Lesley administration lied to me or promised anything they didn't deliver on. My situation is simply part of a structural problem at Lesley and throughout the higher education industry today.

But should I get four courses - and work nearly full-time teaching - I will make no more than \$14,000 for the next academic year. With no benefits, a single common office shared by hundreds of other adjuncts, and no faculty rank. Unless the adjunct union succeeds in pushing the Lesley administration to sign a fair contract, and increase that pay to something more in line with a market rate per course plus some pro-rated benefits and job security.

That's one reason I'm asking for your support on this year's Lesley faculty union resolution: so that you can help our adjunct union improve the lives of over 700 adjunct faculty who would currently make better money working for Starbucks than teaching four courses a year at Lesley ... when they can get four.

The other reason I'm asking for your support is that the only way Lesley faculty like me can stop bouncing back and forth between adjunct and core faculty status is if the core faculty unionizes, and joins the adjunct union in seeking better pay, benefits, working conditions and job security. So that the adjunct professors who make up more than 70 percent of the Lesley faculty can have a path to long-term employment as core faculty members after teaching a certain number of courses in a few years. And professors that are hired as core faculty members will stay core faculty members as long as we are teaching at Lesley.

Thank you.