

The Politics Classroom

Host: Professor Floros

Ep. 2023.04: From the Archive – UICUF Wins a Contract (2019)

In the Classroom: Professors Janet Smith (President, UICUF) and
Aaron Krall (Executive Vice President, UICUF)

Professor Floros: Hi everyone. It's Professor Floros in The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. The humble beginnings of this podcast traced back to spring 2019 when a student brought UIC Radio to my attention. I made a throwaway comment about wishing I had my own radio show, and after several texts and emails on my behalf, meetings with radio personnel and struggles with in-studio equipment, The International Classroom debuted on air in April 2019. Because I teach international relations, I wanted every week to focus on a different international event or country. I soon learned, however, that it was much easier to book in-studio guests who could talk about American politics than international topics.

So, I took the summer to reimagine the show and returned in the fall 2019 semester with a live studio version of The Politics Classroom. In spring 2020, I ambitiously and foolishly expanded to two hours live every week, but was shut down in March because of the pandemic because (a) global pandemic and (b) rules were instituted that limited who could be in the studio. Because my show employs an interview format, I didn't see a way to continue.

When the university announced that it would loosen some of its in-person restrictions in Fall 2021, I wanted to restart the show, but I wanted to be able to easily interview folks outside the UIC community. Luckily, UIC Radio was also interested in branching out to podcasting, so I enthusiastically signed up.

I provide all this background because if you scroll through the early episodes of this podcast's episode feed, you will find recordings of the live radio broadcast of The Politics Classroom with the copyrighted music edited out. What you will **not** find are the small number of International Classroom episodes from Spring 2019.

Last week I spoke with the president and staff of UIC United Faculty, the faculty union at the University of Illinois Chicago, about our most recent contract campaign. I'm recording this introduction on February 4, 2023, and UICUF members are currently in the process of voting whether or not to ratify the contract.

I thought this week I would broadcast a special episode of The International Classroom where I spoke with the late Janet Smith, then president of UICUF and Aaron Krall. Then executive Vice President of UICUF soon after a tentative agreement was reached in 2019. Aaron was a bargaining co-chair in both that contract cycle and the one finishing up. We discuss the bargaining process and critically, university budgeting. If you missed the 2023 contract focused episode, you can find it at thepoliticsclassroom.org or your favorite podcast platform. You can also find links to the 2018 - 2022 contracts on that episode's Bookshelf page linked in this episode's show notes.

Finally, toward the end of the episode, Aaron, Janet, and I started giggling at the mention of a master plan. UIC had just released a 10 year-ish plan for new buildings, renovation, green spaces, et cetera. I can't remember what we found so amusing at the time, but one of the

plans, a renovation of the central quad, may make an appearance in next week's episode, so stay tuned.

So, sit back and enjoy this April 2019 gem of the precursor of The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio.

Good afternoon. You're listening to UIC Radio, where music and culture ignite. This is Professor Kate Floros and I wanna welcome you to a special session of The International Classroom. Usually I spend this hour every week trying to provide context for events occurring around the world. But today I wanna provide context to events happening much closer to home. I have the honor of welcoming two special guests, members of the leadership team of the UIC United Faculty union, who are here to talk, not only about the union and what it hopes to achieve for its members, but about larger factors affecting tuition fees, salary, and other budgetary issues affecting UIC.

So, let's get started in the international classroom on Monday, April 15, 2019.

Intro music: Three Goddesses by Third Age

You're listening to a special session of The International Classroom on UIC Radio, where music and culture ignite; streaming on radio.uic.edu. I'm Professor Floros. I am honored to welcome into The Classroom two leaders of the UIC United Faculty union. Dr. Janet Smith is a professor of Urban Planning and Policy. She is also the president of UIC United Faculty. Welcome Professor Smith.

Professor Janet Smith: Thank you very much.

Professor Floros: Also in the classroom is Dr. Aaron Krall, a senior lecturer in English and Executive Vice President of UIC United Faculty. Professor Krall also served as the co-chair of the bargaining committee, which recently reached an agreement with UIC administration on a new four-year contract. Welcome Professor Krall and thank you to you and your committee for the hours of work dedicated to negotiating the contract.

Professor Aaron Krall: Thank you. Excited to be here.

Professor Floros: Okay, so in the interest of full disclosure, in addition to being a Clinical Assistant Professor of political science, I also serve as the Coordinator of Political Education for the affiliated UIC UF Committee on Political Education, which is basically the union's political action committee. So, while I'm not a member of union leadership, I am union leadership adjacent.

So, I wanna begin by introducing UIC United Faculty to our listeners. So, what is UIC United Faculty and when and why did it get started?

Professor Janet Smith: So I'll take that one. UIC United faculty is the union that represents two different bargaining units. One is the tenure track faculty here at UIC, and the other is the non-tenure track faculty who are, uh, full-time, which is 51% or more, um, employment.

Uh, what we don't include in our bargaining units are people from the medical school, from Pharmacy, and from Dental. And that is not by our choice, but by law.

Um, and so we've been in existence, uh, as an organization since about 2010, formally recognized in 2012, and we bargained our first contract, um, beginning in 2014. And as you mentioned earlier, we've just completed bargaining our third contract, um, which will be for this, uh, 2018 to 2022.

Professor Floros: Okay, fantastic. So why, why was the faculty interested in unig-, unionizing in the first place?

Professor Janet Smith: Well, I think, um, Aaron and I can both answer that question maybe in different ways, but, um, I think if we can go back to that period of time, 2010 when we formed, um, it wasn't the first time, first of all, that UIC's faculty tried to form a union. It was actually about the third time, maybe the fourth if you count some informal efforts.

However, what was happening around then and what really happened the, the whole decade before that, uh, got down to, to questions about how faculty were being included in governance decisions. Uh, we talked a lot about the lack of respect, the lack of voice, and the lack of transparency during that time. And so we've really organized, because we were frustrated with the direction that, um, administration at that time was going at our campus. And we wanted to, um, have more, um, of our involvement in it and our ability to say we, you know, the, the unions based on what the concept of shared governance. And we felt that we weren't in the, weren't able to share in that. And ma many of the decisions that were being made.

Professor Aaron Krall: So, I think that's right. I'm a member of the non-tenure faculty and from our perspective, we had never really been included in shared governance at all, or at least only very loosely.

And so that was a moment about 10 years ago when the tenure system faculty was feeling that they were being left out and wanted a stronger voice. And it was a, an opportunity for the, the non-tenure system faculty to, to join together with the tenure system faculty to see if we could work together on some of those issues.

The non-tenure system faculty at UIC teaches full-time, it teaches on a limited contract basis and for a long time wasn't really considered part of the faculty, or at least not a true part of the faculty. And so this was a, an effort to try to see the faculty differently, a kind of One Faculty that joined the tenure system and the non-tenure system tog- together.

Professor Floros: Okay, great. Thank you. I, I'd really like to expand on this theme, and I don't wanna get too into the weeds, but can you explain what a bargaining unit is, and probably part of that conversation is the difference between tenure track and non-tenure track faculty and whether or not that difference matters to students?

Professor Janet Smith: Well, can I just jump in? One of the things that's interesting, I wanna kind of go to your question in a little bit different way, is when we first formed as a union, we knew that there were, there were these categories called tenure track system and non-tenure track system. But we really came together as one faculty and we tried to actually form one

bargaining unit. That is, it's identifying who is included in bargaining. So we identified one bargaining unit that was tenure track and non-tenure track faculty. That's, that's how we viewed it. We didn't see a difference structurally in what we did. We understood how we were hired, made a difference. But what we did in the classroom, how students saw us, and the kind of work we were doing, we didn't see that differently.

However, the State of Illinois Labor, uh, Relations Board and this university for that matter, the UI System decided that they didn't understand how we could be one bargaining unit, and so they forced us to have to separate. We still function though, however, as one union, and that's one of the things I'm proudest of.

You know, we, we sit at the table, one Union, uh, made up of people who are in two different categories by the university and the labor relations standards, but how we function together, I hope, um, you're not always the, you know, with the same level of understanding, but we are working to change that, that, you know, we really function as one faculty.

Professor Aaron Krall: So just to follow up on the question about the bargaining unit, I think that's right, Janet. So, a bargaining unit is a group of employees that are recognized as having a, a shared interest and can bargain together through collective bargaining for contracts and for public employees, particularly public employees in higher ed and the state of Illinois, those bargaining units are defined by state law, and so the state sets up what they call "presumptively appropriate" bargaining unit, groups of employees that they see as connected in certain kinds of ways. And although we tried to form a union together, the State Supreme Court ultimately basically affirmed that the state law says that we are separate bargaining units, but we're represented by the same union. So we have these three kinds of categories here. We have the union, UIC United Faculty, that represents two bargaining units that includes about 1200 faculty members on campus. And then we have our members of the uni-union who sign membership cards and participate in union activities.

Professor Floros: Okay. Yeah, so that was gonna be my follow up question about the difference between being in the union and not being in the union, but being in the bargaining unit. And, um, if you could talk a little bit about how the Supreme Court Janus case kind of maybe muddled that a little bit, et cetera. So, okay. If you just, topics around that, if you don't mind.

Professor Aaron Krall: So, the state of Illinois, like a lot of states in the United States, uh, has a history of supporting union rights and supporting the right of faculty and other employees to join together and bargain together. And part of what made that possible was, uh, an expectation that a union would be able to bargain as the exclusive representative of all of the members of the bargaining unit, whether they're in the union or not.

And so that means that when a union comes to the table and bargains for that group of employees, everybody in the unit benefits whether you're a signed member, whether you're not a signed member. And so in the past we've had a system where, if you sign a membership card, you can go to meetings, you can vote on your leadership, you can vote on contracts, you can play an active role in the union, and you know, we pay dues.

You're part of this organization and if you choose not to join the union, right? That doesn't mean that you're not gonna be in the bargaining unit, you're still in the bargaining unit. You

still benefit from the terms of the contract. And so then you pay a fee that basically pays for that representation and the benefits that you get for the representation.

Under the Supreme Court case that happened last year, that idea of what we call "fair share" dues was challenged. And the Supreme Court ultimately decided that if members did not, if members of the bargaining unit didn't choose to join the union, that they wouldn't have to pay those fair share fees. So now we have a group of employees in our bargaining unit at UIC that's being represented by the union, that is gonna benefit from the union, but they are not necessarily going to have to be members of the union or pay those union dues.

Professor Floros: So, did the union lose members when they no longer had to pay dues?

Professor Janet Smith: Nope. Um, that was one of the premises that people looking at this case, that the Janus case, which was decided by the Supreme Court June 27, 2018, there was a lot of speculation. Sure. We, we lost the fair share payers. However, membership actually has grown since that time. In fact, um, I will say that I was watching the Supreme Court ruling come down on my, um, computer at nine o'clock that morning, and at 9:01 I had a brand new membership card come to me via email. And subsequently after that, and even before it, leading up to the case decision, we had people joining them and, and showing that they believed in the union and wanted to be a member, um, knowing that just being a fair share payer, not only was it going away, but also the benefits that they were getting, they really wanted to commit themselves to as being a paid member. And since then and during our course of bargaining and moving up to getting our contract to, um, be, uh, finalized, we have seen membership grow even more.

And we're really excited about that. The majority of faculty in our bargaining unit are members and they're committed, and we see a lot of strength coming in this last year of coming together to bargain, to witness and experience what bargaining is like, I think has really brought us together as a union.

Professor Floros: We are going to take a break here, and when we come back, we're gonna talk about this last round of negotiations and, and what the union wanted. So, you're listening to Professor Floros in a special session of The International Classroom on UIC Radio, where music and culture ignite.

Music interlude: Truffle Shuffle by Tiger Gang

Welcome back to a special session of The International Classroom on UIC Radio, where music and culture ignite, streaming live on radio.uic.edu. I'm Professor Floros and I'm joined in The Classroom by Professors Janet Smith and Aaron Krall, President and Executive Vice President of UIC United Faculty, the union representing most full-time faculty on UIC's campus.

I wanna turn the conversation to the recent negotiations between the union and UIC's administration. So first, kind of a basic question, why did it take so long? I mean, it was about a year, right?

Professor Aaron Krall: Bargaining always takes some time. This time it took, uh, quite a while. We went to the bargaining table officially in June of 2018, and we are working on ratifying

our contract now. So it was about a year. The process was even longer though. We started in the fall of 2017, figuring out priorities and, and trying to get ready for bargaining.

Uh, it's just a question of why it took so long. I guess there's maybe two answers. One more generous than the other is. The less generous answer is that the, the administration came to the bargaining table with the point of view that our existing contract was perfect and they saw no reason for any changes and they didn't really have any interest in addressing any of the issues that we were concerned about.

And so it took about five or six months really to make progress on any issues. The first issue that we settled at the table was expanding our non-discrimination statement to include citizenship status and expressions of gender identity. Uh, that was something that we argued about over, I don't know, it felt like at least a dozen sessions before we made any progress there.

Professor Floros: Why do you think that is?

(Professor Krall and Floros start laughing after a pause)

Professor Floros: Okay, wait, so you had a less generous...

Professor Aaron Krall: So that's, so the more generous answer I think is that, you know, it's, uh, it took both sides some time to figure out how to work with each other at the table. You know, we had an administration that was new to the idea of bargaining. We had a, a new lead negotiator for the System's labor relations. Our provost, Susan Poser, was also at the tables the first time that she was involved in union negotiations. And we were also trying a new approach this time, a much more member driven approach. So I worked as the co-chair, uh, with Kevin Whyte, who's a professor in math, and a team of faculty members from across the university.

We had members in the room for many of our bargaining sessions. And it was a different kind of dynamic than the university was used to. And maybe one that we were different, one that we were used to, uh, also.

Professor Floros: Okay. Janet, do you have anything to add on the time?

Professor Janet Smith: No, I think, I think that was a apt description. I think, relatively speaking, we were compare if we compared it to the first time we went to the table, it was speedy, uh, because it took almost two years to get a contract. So by the time we signed a contract, we were two years into the contract period. But the other thing that I think is important is we were bargaining two contracts at the same time.

The first time we did it, we did 'em separately. So we were bargaining non-tenure track one day and that tenure track the next day. And we finally said, for this round, let's just do 'em all together. Because as I said earlier, from our perspective, with the exception of a few differences that were important, a lot of the things that we were bargaining for in principal and in practice are pretty much the same, whether you're in one bargaining unit or the other.

So we had 27 sessions during that one year period. Um, and I think, uh, as Aaron alluded to earlier, though, really a lot of activity didn't happen until the second half of that period. And so when you look at it, if we could have had not so much time spent on the first half getting to know each other, you know, sort of like dating, right, you know, you're kind of getting to know each other and figuring how to talk to each other and get your points across, we probably could have done it in half the time. But it, there is a certain time period to kind of get comfortable with, you know, process and getting to understand what each other's about.

And I will say one thing also is that when we began this process, we had a conversation with the chancellor and the provost and we said, we respect the idea that you want it to be done fast, cuz that was what they were telling us. They wanted it to get done fast. I said, well, there's a difference between fast and efficient. And what we really wanted to do was to make sure that they were listening to our concerns and really understanding them. And I think that's part of what takes time is really to come to understand who we are as a faculty and what the issues really mean when we're asking for these things in our contract.

Professor Aaron Krall: I think that's right. And you know, when we think about these contracts, so we have the two contracts and each of the contracts are built of 23 articles, right? So they have all these pieces. The first time we bargained the contract, the one that took two years to bargain, we were sort of writing all of that stuff from scratch.

Professor Floros: Mm.

Professor Aaron Krall: This time around, um, we've had several years to live under the contract to see how it works and how it didn't work. And so we ended up identifying about half of those articles that we thought needed significant changes. And so building on, you know, what those articles are, presenting those to the, to the administration team did take some time and, and we were seeing this as an opportunity to really revisit a lot of the issues that we had talked about last seriously, like in, in 2014, 2015, so to come back to them in a serious way.

Professor Floros: Yeah. I wanna move on to the issues that were at play in the negotiation for this contract. So I understand there were both economic and non-economic issues that the, um, bargaining team was really trying to address. So can you start with the non-economic issues and maybe highlight some of the concerns that were facing the faculty?

Professor Aaron Krall: Mm-hmm. . So, you know, the non-economic issues include a wide variety of things. Everything that doesn't have a specific dollar sign attached to it. And like Janet said, when we look at the non-economic issues, the first thing we look at right, is, is what is the faculty's role on campus?

What kind of decisions should the faculty be involved in? What kind of shared governance should they have? How can the contract support those kinds of things? And also, what do we need to just have fair and equitable working conditions for all of the faculty? So I think in terms of the history of our union, a lot of the non-economic issues have largely addressed the non-tenure faculty.

We have a variety of rules that govern the faculty's work here in the U of I System, including the Statutes and other kinds of administrative policies. And a lot of those policies were built

with the tenure system faculty in mind. So when we go to the bargaining table, what we're looking for in addition to sort of big picture faculty voice issues, is also just how do we sort of design and implement, uh, job expectations for the non-tenure track faculty.

How do we evaluate them? How do we sort of discipline and dismiss them when it's necessary? What are the structures and rules in place that are going to sort of set out what these jobs look like. And so in addition to, like, setting up the sort of job conditions and expectations, the other big part of it is developing some job security for the non-tenure faculty.

Professor Floros: Mm-hmm.

Professor Aaron Krall: In many places now, uh, universities have what they call adjunct faculty.

Professor Floros: Okay.

Professor Aaron Krall: Contingent faculty. These are faculty who work on, you know, course by course basis for very little pay with very little job security. At UIC, our circumstances are better than in most places. Most of the faculty who teach here teach full-time. They have some degree of job security, at least one year contracts at a time. They have salaries that are getting better. They have healthcare benefits, things like that.

Professor Floros: Thanks to the union.

Professor Aaron Krall: Thanks...

Professor Janet Smith: That's right.

Professor Aaron Krall: Thanks in large part to the union.

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah

Professor Aaron Krall: And so every time we go back to bargain contract, we wanted to try to push on particularly that most vulnerable set of faculty members to give them some more job security.

And so we wanted to get our faculty onto multi-year contracts as soon as possible, we wanted to increase the salaries of the non-tenure faculty. We wanted to make sure that, uh, there was clear job expectations that wouldn't be sort of creeping, sort of quietly, uh, in sort of growing, uh, teaching expectations and those kinds of things.

And so that's the sort of big picture. We're also looking at issues around academic freedom, those kinds of things.

Professor Floros: Okay. Janet, is there any particular non-economic issue that you feel most passionately about?

Professor Janet Smith: Well, I, I wanna second what, um, Aaron just pointed out though, is that since the beginning of our union, we really have tried to raise up those who are considered, you know, economically, and how the university views them, not our union views them, in sort of the lower rungs and always raise everyone up at the same time.

And so one of the things I think that was a really important win, this contract that, uh, cuts across both um, units is the ability, it sounds silly, but the ability for us to actually determine through shared governance, what our teaching looks like or teaching load, our workloads. And I know Aaron mentioned it, but I think it's important to underscore that, um, what we see, um, happening at this university with the growth in the last few years, and I, I talk to students about this a lot and as many of in sitting in this room may know, um, is that your classroom size keeps get- your class size keeps getting bigger and we've filling up our classrooms and we're having to teach later and earlier, um, maybe even on the weekends as the, the new grid allows.

Why are we doing that? Because we've grown. Why, um, haven't we added more faculty? Good question. Um, so what's happened is there's a lot of burden put on faculty to expand their teaching and, and for students' experience as well as the teaching experience, right? I mean, it's, it, when you double the class size or triple the class size, it's very different. It's a lot more work and a lot less, um, opportunity to, to interact with your students. So,

Professor Floros: But, but surely faculty are getting paid more for having bigger classes?

Professor Janet Smith: Well, that's a really great idea. What we haven't seen is that although I think with our economic package improvements, we're trying to compensate for that.

Although I think that what our ultimate goal is, and it's an agreement although it's not contractually as binding as we would've liked, is to have the university has made a commitment to increasing faculty and particularly tenure track faculty, cuz we wanna see more job security. What unfortunately happened during this last contract is we saw faculty in one college being told just unilaterally, oh by the way, your teaching load used to be 2-2, oh, now you're gonna teach 2-3. So two per semester. And three, the next. One group actually was told to increase their teaching by like three classes over the course of a year with no extra pay. So we don't want that to happen ever again. And we've worked hard to try and change those conditions.

But I think that, you know, it's a really good point, is that, you know, if you're asked to take on extra work, either you're compensated, or in our case, we really think it's better to think about it from the perspective of adding more teachers to the university who can actually teach smaller classes. That's what students want.

Professor Floros: Okay now, so those were some non-economic issues. Let's turn to the economic issues and how did that go and what was the union looking for? And are most people satisfied with what they got?

Professor Aaron Krall: I think most people are satisfied with where we ended up. You know, whenever you sit down to negotiate a union contract, the money is gonna be a big part of it.

Right? So in addition to the, the conditions under we work, we wanna make sure that everybody's getting a paid a fair salary. And that was especially important this time because we've had a number of years where the state of Illinois has been in a mess financially. The, the University of Illinois system has had budget shortfalls, and we see this as a moment when the university is recovering.

Uh, we heard at the bargaining table that it's, it's not entirely recovered yet. Uh, but, but we see that upward trajectory and we wanna make sure that the faculty is staying on an upward trajectory as well. And, what we are looking for were raise pools, and the way that the University of Illinois System handles raises is not across the board cost of living raises, but instead pools that can be distributed for various purposes.

Specifically, we have merit pools that are used to reward faculty for demonstrating merit across whatever their job expectations might be, including teaching and research and other kinds of functions. And we also have pools to address salary issues like compression and equity. Compression is when a faculty member has been at the university for a long time and their salary has been eclipsed by the job market. And so they end up making less money than someone who's newly hired on for a similar position. Equity pools can be used to address, uh, discrepancies in salaries based on gender, race, or, or other kinds of issues that might show up. And so these are categories of raise pools that we've had in our contracts in the past, and we wanted to see larger percentages in those categories.

What we ended up bargaining is essentially 16% in raise pools over a four year contract. One year of that is retroactive and three years will take us out into the future. And that split equally between the merit pools and the compression and equity pools. You know, when you, when you start negotiating a contract, you always ask for more.

Professor Floros: Mm-hmm.

Professor Aaron Krall: And, uh, I think we would've liked to have seen a little bit more. And we're optimistic that, uh, particularly in the raise pools for merit, that they could end up being a little bit higher. Uh, what we've negotiated was 2% in each year of the contract or what they call a Campus Salary Program, which is, if the administration wants to pay us more, we'd happily take it.

Professor Janet Smith: Yes.

Professor Aaron Krall: Uh, so, uh, you know, are we happy with that? I think we're satisfied with that. The other piece of the economics that's really important as related to what we were talking about in terms of non-tenure faculty.

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah.

Professor Aaron Krall: In each year of the contract, or sorry, in each contract, this is our third contract. So in each contract cycle we've worked to increase the minimum salary for the non-tenure faculty. Uh, when I started teaching as a full-time lecturer, uh, I guess 12 years ago, my salary was under \$30,000 a year.

Professor Floros: Yikes.

Professor Aaron Krall: Yikes. It was not a whole lot. Um, and like I said, you know, that's the way it is out there in a lot of places and it's getting better at UIC. Um, slowly in the first contract, we managed to raise that minimum salary up to \$37,500. In the second contract, we raised it to \$42,000, and in this contract we raised it up to \$50,000, which is about equivalent to the starting salary for a CPS teacher. And so, you know, we're, we're getting close to what we could think of as a, as a reasonable professional salary for somebody living in Chicago. We're not there yet, but you know, we're, we're moving in that direction.

Professor Floros: I think students are a little horrified when they, when they hear these salary numbers, they think they have a mistaken impression that we're, you know, six figure salaries because we have PhDs. Uh, unfortunately, you know, that isn't the case for most of us.

Professor Aaron Krall: That is not the case.

Professor Janet Smith: Right. I would add also that just in general, putting in perspective our salaries, you know, uh, UIC is a Research 1 university. Uh, we are one of two public Research 1 universities in the whole state of Illinois. The other being the UIUC campus. The other two Research 1 universities in Illinois that are in our region is University of Chicago and Northwestern. And when you look at their salaries, not to say that we, you know, we, we understand we're a public university, but what you start to get concerned with is that we all live in the same city. And for us to be able to survive in this city, um, we need to be paid appropriately for that.

And so what we're trying to do for all of our faculty, and that's why cost of living isn't, isn't allowed in our, you know, in, in our calculations for salary increases. But we recognize that that's a really serious concern, especially given that we've had many years where, you know, the salary planner said 0% increase.

So what you start to worry about is competitiveness. And so how are we as a Research 1 university, maybe gonna be losing faculty? And I know there are faculty who have left to go, stay in Chicago, but they got opportunities to go to Northwestern and University of Chicago, which is, you know, great for them. I'm not, it's not against them, but you know, if they had the choice and they wanted to stay at UIC, if financially they felt that it was better for them to go, you know, we have to respect that. And I think that's where, you know, we need to be really recognized as a Research 1 university, but yet at the same time, we've got such a diverse population compared to those universities, compared to UIUC even that we have to understand, like, what that means financially to operate a university like this. And so it's not just about the salaries that we get, but the overall budget model that drives the reason our salaries were low in the first place.

Professor Floros: Okay, and we're gonna talk about that in our next segment. But, we do make more money than, than the folks in Urbana, right?

Professor Janet Smith: No

Professor Aaron Krall: No

Professor Floros: No!?!? But it's so much more expensive to live in Chicago!

Professor Janet Smith: When, when you, we're almost the same actually, when you look at the medians across the different categories of faculty. But when you adjust for inflation or you adjust just the cost of living, like for housing for example. The cost of housing is about 17 to 20% less down there, and the cost of living is gonna be significantly different.

Professor Floros: Man!

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah. (Professor Krall laughs at Professor Floros in the background)

Professor Floros: That doesn't seem fair. Uh, one more question before we, we end this segment. Um, so the, the GEO, the graduate

Professor Janet Smith: mm-hmm.

Professor Floros: Um, students, they went on strike earlier this year, um, and that caused some disruptions around the campus. How close was the faculty to also going on strike? And, should they have done it?

(nervous laughter all around)

Professor Janet Smith: Ooh, so I will give the technical, some technical things. Then we can discuss more the kind of qualitative thinking about that. Um, so technically the faculty did, took a vote to authorize the bargaining committee to call a strike. Uh, we took that vote April 8-10. Um, and three quarters of our members showed up and 93% voted to authorize a strike if needed. We went up until literally the day we, a week ago, a week ago at this time.

Professor Floros: Right,

Professor Janet Smith: We were

Professor Floros: which is why I was not on the air because I was in the bargaining session.

Professor Janet Smith: Right. A week ago at this time, we were still continuing to bargain and working in good faith to get a final contract agreed upon. But I will tell you that up until that morning, and even during that meeting, you know, we had, we had discussions about whether or not we were gonna have to go on strike. We used the strike authorization, you know, as a tool in this process. That's, that's how it works. But we were serious about it. I wanna be clear about that. When people talked about it, they talked seriously what this meant. I will say that many of our members were here in 2014 when we went on strike for two days.

Um, to use the phrase, we have muscle memory. We knew how that worked. We knew what it took. Uh, it wasn't something we enjoy and it wasn't something we wanted to do given how close to the end of the semester we were, but it's also the one thing that faculty can do that is really powerful is to withhold your labor or any labor, laborer. Um, right? And so if you withhold your labor, then you're really demonstrating that you are worth something to the university and they need to pay attention to you. So we were serious about that, but we also

had to think about other things and, you know, where we were at and what had happened before that.

Professor Aaron Krall: I think that's right. I mean, the short answer to like, how close were we to going on strike? I would say, like, really close.

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah,

Professor Aaron Krall: Right?

Professor Janet Smith: We had strike signs, auth, um, so, you know, ready to go. We had, you know, we had everything lined up technically

Professor Aaron Krall: Right. I think the most important thing for me as a co-chair of the bargaining committee was that authorizing the strike, having the members sort of stand up and say, they were demanding, uh, a good contract, a fair contract, and that we could set a deadline for these negotiations.

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah.

Professor Aaron Krall: If we hadn't authorized the strike, we would still be bargaining.

Professor Janet Smith: Mm-hmm.

Professor Aaron Krall: There's, there's no doubt. There's no doubt about it.

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah. Yeah.

Professor Aaron Krall: And the other thing is, you know, these negotiations played out a little bit differently than, than they have in the past. In part because of what was going on in the campus in terms of GEO, what we ended up seeing was that, like we said, it took a long time to get these bargaining sessions and really the true negotiation started, and it wasn't until GEO went on strike and then we voted to go on strike if necessary in March and April that we started seeing real movement at the table. And ultimately, uh, my view is that the, the administration team gave us what we needed to have a contract that we could be satisfied with without going on a strike, including the, the salary issues, but also the non-economic stuff. This past week we were trying to hammer out some final issues around healthcare and some other details, and ultimately we felt like we got what we needed.

Professor Floros: Okay, great, thank you. Let's take another break. Um, this is Professor Floros in a special session of The International Classroom on UIC Radio where music and culture ignite.

Music interlude: Hotpants by Tiger Gang

You're listening to Professor Floros in a special session of The International Classroom on UIC Radio where music and culture ignite, streaming live on radio.uic.edu. I can be found on

Twitter @DrFloros. I'm joined in The Classroom by Professors Janet Smith and Aaron Krall, President and Executive Vice President of UIC United Faculty, and we've been talking about all things union and bargaining for a fair contract.

With the time we have left, I'd like to move on to UIC United Faculty's plans for the future.

Professor Janet Smith: Mm-hmm.

Professor Floros: So, as Aaron mentioned, this contract is retroactive for this past year and goes three years into the future. But, in two years, we have to start thinking about bargaining again. So, what issues do you think the union will be focusing on between now and the negotiations for the next contract?

Professor Aaron Krall: I think there's a little bit of outstanding business from our current, sort of, bargaining sessions that we'll need to follow up on next time. Uh, one of those is developing some stronger procedures for, for making complaints about academic freedom violations and, and making sure that we have a clear remedy so that those can get settled in a, in a fair way.

I think there's a, a set of, uh, additional issues that although we didn't get firm commitments in this contract, we did come to an agreement with the administration that we would work together through a process, through the faculty Senate to address those things. And so that especially includes issues like non-tenure faculty access to sabbaticals. And so, you know, a sabbatical is this sort of traditional thing that happens in higher education when a faculty member has, has worked for some number of years that they could take a semester off to work on research projects or professional development projects, something like that. And it happens at Research 1 universities like this. It also happens at small teaching schools. Right now, the non-tenure faculty don't even have access to apply for a sabbatical. That was something we wanted in this contract and we didn't get it. Um, but I think that we'll continue working on that in the future.

And I think we're also gonna continue working with the faculty Senate to expand the, the maximum length of contracts for the non-tenure faculty. Currently, according to the University of Illinois Statutes, non-tenure faculty can have contracts up to a maximum of three years at a time, and then that contract has to be renewed, and we'd like to see that number get longer. Um, so I think those two things are, uh, are definitely issues that we'll be gonna be talking about.

The other issue is around salary and particularly what they call the Campus Salary Program. So I referenced that in relation to that 2% merit pool that we bargained, or the Campus Salary Program, whichever is higher. And part of the difficulty in bargaining for merit raise at UIC is that we are sort of our own university, but we're also not, right?

We're part of the University of Illinois System with the campuses in Urbana and Springfield. And so that Campus Salary Program is a standard that they set up for raises across the three campuses. So when we sit down at the table to bargain with our employers, our employer, um, sometimes looks like UIC and sometimes it looks like the U of I System and sort of negotiating the difference between those two employers, which are really one employer that

can act differently, is a challenge. And I think that's something that we're gonna continue working on.

Professor Janet Smith: I would say, just to add to that sort of a, one thing that became apparent as we were bargaining and we kept getting the response about the System and pay is we, we as faculty spent a time digging into the budget, looking at the University System budget and looking at UIC's budget, and not just budget, but its financial situation. So budgets are are, as we say, moral statements about how you wanna spend your money. Your financials are your financials, what you get in revenues, and what you spend in expenses. And then there's a buckets that they go into as we've learned from bargaining.

One of the things though that kept coming up is that this question of how the System actually determines how much money we can get for our salaries, but it's really tied to a broader, what I would say, sort of a social justice and racial justice question here at UIC is that the University System and the Board of Trustees for the last five years has held tuition constant. Now, before everyone screams, and says, "Don't raise tuition!" 'Cuz we've been accused of that.

Professor Floros: Hmm.

Professor Janet Smith: We're not asking for tuition to be raised, but when you hold that constant, but everything else goes up in cost, something has to give. And so what we have observed, and this is where the GEO really made a clear statement in their, in their strike and their contract negotiations, and where our students really align with these issues is, the way, the, the difference gets made up is we charge our students fees. I've been referring to UIC as Ryanair, and if you know Ryanair, you get really cheap airfare, but then as soon as you try and go in the plane or do anything, suddenly the price goes up to United Airlines price.

So it's, you know, it's a, it's an economy model that really is sort of a, a shell game. The Board of Trustees and the President of the University look like really great people cuz they're like, we're not gonna raise tuition. But then the Chancellor has to turn around and raise fees and charge students all this money. And when we start to look at UIC, we feel like, especially given how many of our students are Pell Grant eligible? So, you know, in terms of income levels, we have lower income levels than our, um, than Urbana. And also in terms of our diversity, our racial and ethnic diversity, we are more diverse. What, why does that matter?

Well, we have to look at our university and say, why are we different and how are we different? And how financially it costs more actually to be here at UIC or to operate UIC because we don't get the same tuition brought back into our campus. And so our students are paying all these fees and then we're told, "Well, you can't get a pay raise unless we raise tuition." And so it puts, pits us against each other. We're in this together and we wanna really change that, that model. We wanna get the University of all- Illinois System and the Board of Trustees to look at our university different, that is the UIC, and to look at how it can make up those differences. Um, believe me, they've got some money in their buckets that they can share.

Professor Floros: You know, the fact that there are more Pell-eligible students at UIC, does the funding that we get from the System make up for that at all?

Professor Janet Smith: No. When you look at the data, at least as our understanding of it, and, and if anyone from the System wants to correct us, I'm happy to sit down with you and discuss it. Um, but when we look at it, if you look at the distribution of, um, money coming back to the university, taking out the medical center, we actually get less when you compare it to the proportion of students that we teach.

Professor Floros: How do they justify that?

Professor Janet Smith: I don't know. (Professor Floros laughs) I don't, I don't actually know. Um, and, and we, that's a really good question. So I'm taking that seriously that we need to get an answer to that.

Professor Aaron Krall: No, the way, the way that it's been presented to us is that UIC commits some portion of what would be the revenue that it could spend on its functions to giving financial aid to students, right? And so this idea that, we take in, um, Pell eligible students, which is essential to the mission of UIC, like it's part of why the faculty who teach here want to teach here, right? That's

Professor Floros: Right.

Professor Aaron Krall: Because of the students that we have here. And so we have a structure where it looks like we are waiving a portion of the tuition and not having it made up by the state. And so what we really need is some more money from the state.

Professor Floros: And I think the governor's budget suggests that more money will be coming. But does that go to the system or does that go to us?

Professor Janet Smith: So there's a, a proposal for a 5% increase coming into the System, and then it distributes down, up, I should say, from Urbana and what we understand is there was a lot of discussion, at least from the president when it was announced, and we heard it a little bit on campus when we were discussing the budget with our provost, is there was interest in actually putting that money, um, into deferred maintenance for the, the university itself, the physical infrastructure. Um, and I think we were arguing that faculty are also deferred maintenance, um, and that we could benefit from a little bit of that.

Professor Floros: So UIC has all these new students and lots of buildings going up. Is there any way to tap in or include funding for faculty or student issues in the fundraising or whatever for the buildings?

Professor Janet Smith: Well, so I will, I will say that, um, what we, all we understand is that, um, to use the term fungible, that is that money that goes to buildings is usually in a separate bucket, um, than money that goes to faculty or to help with students. And part of the reason is it is, is because it's seen as a one time cost, right?

Uh, even though you have to operate in all that. But the investment, the initial investment in building that building, so the fundraising strategies we understand are different. What we're asking is just to think about your priorities. So when we sat down and we learned about the budget and we were presented the budget from the provost, and it was presented as in like, this is how we operate. And we said, well, if this is the time when we see enrollment going

up, which means more tuition is coming in, but also just in general an investment in this university, we're like, "What's your plan to help faculty in the future if you can't do it now, when?" And the response at that time was disappointing because it felt like, well, we heard basically we don't really have a plan, and so we think that's not the right answer, and we would like to help this administration improve that situation and maybe get a different plan, which means to have a plan.

Professor Aaron Krall: A master plan, you might say?

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah, yeah. A master plan that isn't just a physical campus master plan, but one that is actually about facilities and faculty.

Professor Floros: Okay. So, we're part of this system. Are we getting more than we're putting in or, I mean, so I mean this is like philosophical. We're not gonna like sever, maybe, from, from the System, but I mean, does it help or hurt us to not be by ourselves, do you think? I mean, I don't know. I don't know the answer to that question.

Professor Aaron Krall: I don't know the answer to that question. I mean, you know, UIC is unique in a lot of ways, but it's also unique because it is a Research 1 university. Um, but it's not the flagship sort of land grant university in the state of Illinois. So we have these two Research 1 universities that are part of the, the University of Illinois System, and there's a way in which we share resources and you know, when I, when I get a order, a book from the library, it comes right from Urbana, I'm always happy to get it right away. You know, there's, there's all kinds of resources that we share across the campuses, but it does seem like UIC has a different set of needs that aren't being addressed, right,

Professor Janet Smith: Mm-hmm.

Professor Aaron Krall: through the system.

Professor Janet Smith: Yeah. I, I think, um, what's been interesting, I have the kind of long perspective that I've been here 21 years. We've gone from being centralized to decentralized to centralized to decentralized in terms of management, in terms of management decisions. I think we, we're moving back towards the decentralized approach, which means that we have to look at what we need at each campus to help strengthen those campuses and do what they do well and the UIC campus mission and, and the people that we serve, the students that we serve, the communities we serve, we need the right resources for that. And so I think what we need to do is to, to be really clear that the system should be benefiting us, but when it's not, we have to change something.

Professor Floros: Excellent. Well, I know we could sit here and talk about this all afternoon, but my time is running out. I wanna give a thank you to Professors Janet Smith and Aaron Krall, President and Executive Vice president of UIC United Faculty for coming into The Classroom to explain to the UIC community some of the labor issues that we face.

That's all I've got for this week. Thanks for joining me in The International Classroom. I can be found on Twitter @DrFloros. For this week, I'm Professor Floros; class dismissed.

Outro music: Three Goddesses by Third Age