

KFT VOICE VOICE VOICE

DECEMBER | 2025

Kean-NJCU Merger Update



**James
Castiglione
PhD**

Since Kean University submitted its proposal for merger/acquisition of New Jersey City University almost a year ago, a lot of progress towards finalizing the merger has taken place. Some milestones already achieved include:

- Selection of Kean’s proposal by the NJCU Trustees in March 2025
- Signing of a Letter of Intent to merge on May 15, 2025
- Signing of the Definitive Agreement on October 1

Council files demand for “impact bargaining”

Once the Definitive Agreement was signed, our statewide union, the Council of New Jersey State College Locals (CNJSCL or simply the College Council), filed a formal demand for negotiations over “impact”, meaning the negotiable aspects of the effects that the merger will have on our terms and conditions of employment.

This demand covers impact on employees at both NJCU and Kean.

Impact is a broad and somewhat vague concept that can cover a wide range of effects that members experience due to some managerial decision. By way of example, the Council’s demand letter cited “seniority rights, tenure rights, job security, layoff and reemployment rights, notice requirements, and procedures relating to the review and retention of ‘Continuing Employees’ as that term is used in the [Definitive] Agreement.”

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Lecturers Start New AY With Both Gains and Concerns

Lecturers at Kean began the new academic year amid the usual swirl of duties, service, and falling leaves – but also with mixed feelings about their futures.

On the one hand, Kean lecturers are in a stronger position than ever before. Thanks to statewide collective bargaining, local negotiations, grievance procedures, and union representation on committees, Kean lecturers have seen many gains over the past five years. At the state level, they have benefited from significant union victories, including a major pay increase awarded through the Master Contract and a recent reversal of legislation that would have significantly raised healthcare costs for state employees.

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**Shannon
Case
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The letter also stipulated that the potential issues for impact bargaining, “are not limited to,” this list. For example, if the University reassigns an employee to a different work site, it may be possible to negotiate over increased expenses associated with this change. Even if an issue is not mandatorily negotiable, the University may be open to negotiating a solution once it has an understanding of the practical impact on members.

Merger legislation introduced on November 13

New Jersey State Senate President Nicholas Scutari introduced Senate bill 4881 on November 13, to govern the merger. **Notably, the legislation includes language specifically protecting the jobs of all current Kean University employees.** I think it is important to acknowledge that this language fulfills President Repollet’s stated promise that there will be no layoffs at Kean and we thank the President for following through on this commitment.

Initially, there were some important elements of the bill of serious concern, including:

- Language eliminating seniority, tenure, and rank for all NJCU employees and classifying them as “new hires” upon employment at Kean. We were able to get amendments to the bill addressing these concerns that are discussed below.
- Language allowing Kean to create subsidiaries and joint ventures whose employees would not be deemed public employees
- Language that reduces state oversight and transparency and that weakens shared governance
- Language allowing Kean to engage in restructuring and privatization with only “consultation” with affected bargaining units

Upon receiving a copy of the bill, we immediately began internal discussions to identify ways to improve the bill to address these and other concerns. These discussions included the leadership of the NJCU and Kean Locals, CNJSCL, AFTNJ, legal counsel, and the Higher Education Division at AFT National and later extended to Legislators and the President and his staff.

Restored tenure, rank & salary for NJCU colleagues

We were able to get amendments to the bill restoring tenure rights, rank and salary for NJCU colleagues who become employees of Kean upon merger. NJCU colleagues will give up their seniority rights. This helps to ensure that current Kean employees will be protected in the event that there is a retrenchment in the future. This would only come into play if there are ever layoffs. None are anticipated at Kean due to the merger.

Having resolved our most pressing concern, we will continue to review the bill and work with Legislators and the President to address other elements of the bill. We are prepared to move quickly as the bill is on an expedited path for approval by the end of the year. As of the time of writing this article, the bill had been passed out of the Senate Higher Education Committee and was being prepared for review by other committees.

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Lecturers Start New AY with Both Gains and Concerns

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At the local level, lecturers have benefitted from victories such as the reduction in faculty office hours from 12 to 5 hours per week and from ongoing negotiations over coordinator duties and compensation. Additionally, the 2023 Kean Lecturers Letter of Agreement (LOA) reduced the teaching load for 12-month lecturers, placed limits on in-load teaching assignments, and increased lecturer vacations from 12 to 22 days per year. **Our LOA also extended the duration of lecturer contracts. In fact, this is the first year in Kean history that lecturers are on 3-year contracts!** In short, the tireless efforts of the KFT at the national, statewide, and local levels have greatly enhanced the lives of Kean lecturers.

**Thanks to our negotiations:
For the first time at Kean, some
Lecturers are on 3-year contracts.**

However, challenges remain, and the future is uncertain. Nationally, higher education is under attack by interrelated forces – political, social, economic – that put contingent workers like lecturers at risk. In New Jersey, despite the significant victory of labor-friendly Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill, higher education is still in jeopardy, and lecturers must stay vigilant, unite, and advocate for their rights. The upcoming merger with NJCU could impact not only Kean employees but also NJ higher education overall, given forecasts of more mergers to come.

Locally, Kean lecturers need to remain alert to protect their rights. There has been an increase in confusion and miscommunication about lecturer rights and duties among managers, deans, and department chairs. This has led to issues such as incorrect compensation, delayed payments, over-scheduling, and, in some cases, exploitation. The KFT has been there to support lecturers individually and collectively, but it is crucial for lecturers to be aware of their rights and stay informed. All Kean lecturers should read their LOA and keep a copy handy. They must carefully review their grids, not sign anything unless it is correct, and contact the KFT if any discrepancies arise. It's also essential for lecturers to maintain written records of all discussions about their schedules, compensation, duties, and service to ensure that the KFT has a paper trail in case issues develop.

Perhaps most importantly, lecturers should not work for free. They can decline voluntary assignments if they feel overwhelmed. Many academic departments are understaffed, and lecturers have increasingly taken on extra responsibilities to fill the gaps. However, the best solution is to hire more faculty, not to place excessive burdens on current staff. Each lecturer should strive to find the balance among teaching, service, and personal life that works for them. Did I mention “most importantly” already? Well, here's another one: Get involved in your union! The KFT needs your support in advocating for all Kean employees. Join a committee, attend membership meetings, volunteer for activities, and make your voice heard. In academia no less than in warehouses, invisible workers seldom win labor struggles. The KFT looks forward to seeing you at our next meeting!



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KEAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

LOCAL 2187 - EXECUTIVE COUNCIL DIRECTORY 2025-2026 HUTCHINSON HALL - 2016

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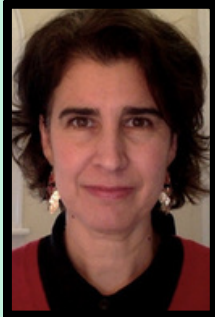
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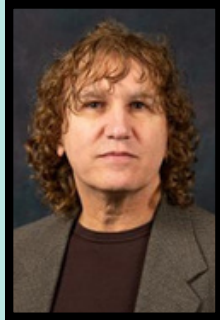
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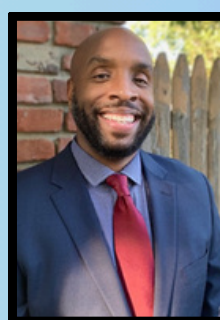
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'I try to be for students what I never had'

Growing up a Black man from the City of Passaic contributes to what Shawn Jernigan considers some of the most valuable lessons of his life. Jernigan, a Student Development Specialist at Kean University, said many of his peers, growing up without money or privilege, deviated from the path to success.

Instead of deviating as well, Jernigan attended William Paterson University on a Trustee Scholarship and spent every day in the library until midnight to persevere through ADHD and dyslexia. "Nothing came easily to me, so I had to focus really hard to read and comprehend the material," said Jernigan. "I got my work done well and on time. It was a practice of independence and self-sufficiency."

Jernigan uses his experience to help guide students, who are admitted to Kean contingent upon participating in the Bridge to Success Program. In his role, Jernigan works to build rapport so his students know he is there to support them. "I try to be for students what I never had," he said.

For freshmen, Jernigan works with them to navigate their new autonomy and introduces them to the expectations of the college environment. For upperclassmen, he works with them to align their studies with career options that fit their aptitude and interests.

Jernigan is able to draw on a wealth of education and experience having completed his masters at Montclair State University and having taught high school for twelve years before working for the Educational Opportunity Fund program at Ramapo College. He came to Kean three-and-a-half years ago eager to join the union and has become involved as a delegate to the College Council (our statewide collective bargaining unit).

Jernigan encourages other staffers to get involved with the local. At Ramapo, Jernigan experienced the union difference when he witnessed non-aligned staff terminated during COVID, while the union's agreement preserved employment through that difficult period. Being in the union provides this collective and individual security on the job in addition to empowerment, according to Jernigan. "We can do what we need to do for our students without worrying about getting fired for speaking up for our students' needs."



Shawn Jernigan

The KFT Voice

The *Voice* is the newsletter of the Kean Federation of Teachers (KFT). Established in 1978, the KFT is a union of professors, professional staff and librarians. KFT Local 2187 is a member of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the AFL-CIO. The KFT is one of the locals under the Council of New Jersey State College/University Locals (CNJSCL), the statewide bargaining agent for state college locals in New Jersey.

Union Role In General Election Wins

New Jersey's Governorship is arguably the most powerful in the nation with the ability to appoint all state judges, agency heads, state boards and commission members, and control billions in state finances. As a local, we are reliant on direct support for higher education to fund our institution and student support programs from the same administration we bargain with for pay, health insurance and retirement programs.

Labor Outreach



Relying on member-to-member outreach, Labor Walks, like this one from Nov. 1 in Union County, coordinate direct outreach to educate union voters. Far left, Mikie Sherrill is introduced by AFT President Randi Weingarten, with AFTNJ President Jennifer Higgins (center) and NJ AFL-CIO President Charlie Wowkanec and HPAE-AFT Secretary Treasurer Alexis Rean-Walker (right)

A few days prior to the November 4 General Election reputable polls showed the race favoring Mikie Sherrill by less than the margin of error. For observers who have witnessed state and federal elections bring out voters who defied traditional expectations, the concern was real.

The fact that New Jersey had not elected a Governor from the same party after that party held office for two-terms since 1961 and that the Republican candidate narrowly lost the previous election, added to the tension. With a federal administration cutting funding for education, scientific research and student support programs, higher education workers had much at stake.

Our union's work includes voter education so members know where candidates stand on issues which matter to our profession. We track candidates records of support for public higher education policy that supports students, shows respect for organized labor and workers' rights and favors fairness in bargaining contracts.

In election activities, KFT members joined with the rest of College Council (our statewide bargaining unit), with AFT New Jersey colleagues across the state and New Jersey's labor community in the AFL-CIO. To support endorsed candidates including Sherrill for Governor and Assembly Representatives, members attended events such as a Legislative Breakfast to speak with candidates about Higher Education issues, participated in outreach to union households and participated in phone banks to encourage voter turnout.

AFT New Jersey President Jennifer Higgins credited Sherrill's participation in union-sponsored get out the vote (GOTV) efforts. "She proved that she cares about organized labor and prioritized health care," said Higgins. "We look forward to working with the governor-elect and her staff on continuing to improve working and learning conditions in our public schools and across higher education."

College Council Legislative Breakfast



*An opportunity to engage members and educate legislators, this College Council Legislative Breakfast, was held Oct. 22 in Rutherford. **Left: Council President and Stockton Prof. Emari DiGiorgio** addresses attendees. **Center: KFT delegation.** **Right: Senate Higher Education chair Joe Cryan with mic, flanked by Assembly Higher Education chair Linda Carter (right) and Assembly representative Lisa Swain (left).***

In addition to our endorsed candidate winning the state-wide position, Assembly candidates in Union County won with union support.

Four State Assembly districts cover portions of Union County. The state's biggest shift within one district this past election took place in District 21 where Republican incumbents Matsikoudis and Munoz were defeated by Democrats Vincent Kearney and Andrew Macurdy.



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Faculty Promotions AY 2025-2026

“On behalf of the entire membership, I congratulate all of these colleagues receiving promotion and I ask them to join with the KFT Executive Council in advocating for increased promotional opportunities for our professional staff, librarian, lecturer and faculty colleagues.” KFT President James Castiglione

Full Professor

1. Louis Beaugris
2. Claire Mulry

Associate Professor

1. Denise Anderson
2. Pablo Pintado-Casas
3. Kung-Kuen Tse

Range Adjustment Awards

1. Elizabeth Hyde
2. Rosa Lemel

Tenure with Promotion to Associate Professor

1. Victor Camacho
2. Gabriel Fuentes
3. Maria Denise Gemmellaro
4. Ipek Kocoglu
5. Matthew Niepielko
6. Edward Olsen
7. Raza Rafique
8. Tin Shan Suen
9. Jenna Tucker

Sabbatical Awards

- Edward Johnston (Fall 2025)
- Valerie Vaccaro (Fall 2025)
- Sucheta Ahlawat
- Nira Gupta-Casale
- Elizabeth Hyde

- Feng Qi
- Dina Rosen
- Jennifer Block-Lerner (Spring 2026)
- Raymond Viglione (Spring 2026)

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Member vigilance

There are a number of other on-going activities that have been taking place, some public and others behind the scenes. We applaud the University for hosting public Town Hall meetings and the transparency they provide. In addition, we appreciate that the University agreed to release the Hanover Report, an external, third-party analysis of NJCU’s academic programs, enrollment trends, financial health, and regional workforce needs. There are a number of Integration Teams that have been created, staffed by managers and, to this point, excluding faculty, professional staff and union appointees. The work of these teams lacks the expertise of our members and the necessary transparency. Involvement of Kean faculty in discussions over academic programs, in particular, has been uneven and needs to be expanded.

The University’s timeline is aggressive, calling for the finalization of the merger legislation this winter, approval by Middle States in the spring, and US Department of Education sign-off in early summer, all to meet a July 1st deadline for finalizing the merger. This merger is, without a doubt, the most complex initiative ever undertaken by the University and there may be incentives for the University to cut corners to meet these deadlines. But it is most important that it be done right. To that end, our leadership team needs member vigilance – your regular input and updates on what is happening around campus will help ensure the best possible outcome for all involved.