

Olivia Cronk  
[o-cronk@neiu.edu](mailto:o-cronk@neiu.edu)

I am a member of NEIU's UPI, the union that represents tenure-track and contingent faculty and many staff members, and I have also served on the Communications Team for union correspondence and organizing.

I want to advocate for prioritizing increased funding for NEIU AND specifically speak to the way that our state's twenty years of de-funding public higher ed have created a social justice issue related to Writing.

I have been a "full-time" instructor at NEIU for 14 years. I teach Composition, Creative Writing, and Literature to undergraduate and graduate students. I have received two Excellence Awards, am the author of three full-length poetry collections, and co-edit a journal. As of 2023, I make \$48,000 a year. I mention my salary, not as a gripe, but to put these details into perspective.

I and three of my colleagues—all contingent faculty—built our Creative Writing Minor program and community with no budget and minimal other support.

We work to facilitate a space wherein we emphasize Literature as a living body to which students contribute; this is explosively important when we think about whose voices are present in the stream of Literature and who OUR students are; at NEIU, we serve primarily students from under-represented groups. A classroom of writers might include a man in his 60s who works at a factory, a twenty-year-old single mother, a young man who has been incarcerated, a person in their 30s who is undocumented, many people who have experienced trauma/have trouble with their mental health/have trouble with their physical health.

Our program is explicitly invested in the interrogation of power. It's the subtext of every class and every event.

Last year, because of ongoing neglect of our institution, two of these colleagues with whom I built this amazing space could not return to NEIU.

Because of an ongoing pattern of de-funding, disregarding and ignoring the life-changing power of our school, we lost two brilliant, nurturing, radically student-centered instructors. We have no one to teach certain genres, requests for letters of recommendation go unanswered, all of the uncompensated program work of building and supporting a community now falls on two people.

Many students from across the university who would have entered the body of Literature, wherein they might process their own micro- and macro-level traumas by working with voice and effect and power and expression; who want to read and write in community with other people who are somehow like them, simply CANNOT, and this is because of our school's financial woes.

In 2017, when NEIU was a victim of Rauner's manufactured budget crisis, I came to see NEIU's financial woes as such an obvious arm of racism and classism that it was scandalous.

I see the continued dismissal of regional public universities in the same way.

NEIU is an exceptional space where things that are truly changing the world are happening right now.

But it needs immediate and substantial funding—real funding—to help stabilize, sustain, and grow in its work, which is: nourishing the intellectual lives of Illinoisans who are so often disempowered by our systems and institutions.