



# ADJUNCT FACULTY ALLIANCE

*Making USC a better place to work and learn*



## AFA-UAW Bargaining Team Election Candidate Statements

### **Jeanie Bergen**

Department/Division: John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television

Dear Membership,

My name is Jeanie Bergen and I am an Assistant Adjunct Professor in the John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television. I am a proud graduate of the MFA program (Class of 2014) and I am thrilled to be back at USC teaching our talented students.

I care deeply about fostering a safe, respectful, and honest environment in the classroom. I seek to do the same as a member of the bargaining committee and believe I would be useful as an open and collaborative person who cares about what you would like to see in our contract. Listening and gathering input will be key to this process and it will be important to keep an open dialogue.

As a writer and human, I seek the truth, even if it is vulnerable and uncomfortable. During the 2023 strike, I utilized my voice to express the current realities of being a mid-level TV writer in an essay for New York Magazine, "[I'm a TV Writer on Food Stamps](#)," in addition to contributing to a segment for [CBS Sunday Morning](#). I believe change can only happen when we are truthful about our experiences and remain steadfast in our commitment to fairness and equality. All of our voices should -- and need to be -- heard.

Most importantly, I encourage you to vote for a diverse bargaining committee. Just like a writers' room, we need a variety of voices at the table, so that we may grow stronger together.

Thank you for your time.

In solidarity,

Jeanie Bergen

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### **Aven Gonzalez**

Department/Division: Interactive / Themed Entertainment

I got involved with the AFA after answering a simple question: ""Would you like to help our unionization effort?"" I said ""Sure. Let me know how my skillset could help."" I thought I would be doing some light design or video editing work, but I would up doing more strategic thinking and outreach work than

anything else. As one of the few people from Interactive on the organizational team, I helped provide the perspective of people outside of the video production departments to our discussions.

I can't tell you why I would make a great candidate because part of my nature is to listen more than I talk, identify needs and problems where I see them, then help sell solutions to people who think they have all the answers. I could list the issues I see with SCA, but I feel the major ones are well known and repeating them wouldn't show what I can bring to the table.

What I can say is that I have a knack for speaking to people in power about the lives of people without power in a way that resonates with their worldviews. And as a constant problem solver, I am slow to react in situations where more data is pertinent. I have often spoken up as a cooler head in rooms full of very loud manager and team lead types.

Also happen to care very much about advocating for the quality of life for faculty AND students. Because, at the end of the day, the current path the university is walking is a disservice those families. And I know if I was a parent paying more than most people's annual salary to send my child to school, I would be FURIOUS to find out that faculty is not getting paid enough to focus on my child's education.

I want teaching even part time at USC to be a job that people WANT to take. And it needs to be a job that provides enough pay and benefits to justify our full, undivided attention while we are teaching. Because, when you strip away the morality of our situation, the bottom line is the most expensive film school in the country should be able to confidently say that they pay top dollar for their faculty's undivided attention to the student body's education.

And right now they don't even try to pay the lowest rates available at smaller schools.

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## **Bruce Green**

Department/Division: Production/Editing

I have been teaching film editing at SCA since 2021. I love the students and faculty SCA attracts, I would like to keep teaching here, and I would like to be paid fairly for the work I do, all the work. I was surprised to learn how little SCA was paying compared to NYU, and that UAW unionized adjuncts had won health insurance in their contract.

Earlier in my career I was very active in IATSE local 776 (now 700) the Motion Picture Editors Guild. I was a board rep, then the vice-president, and a member of the negotiating team. I would like to take my experience, and put it to work for our first fair and equitable contract.

My first duty as a negotiating team member, as an AFA activist, is to get to know you and your needs. Text me at 310-614-3995 or email me at [brucegre@usc.edu](mailto:brucegre@usc.edu) so we can start.

And please vote for me.

Bruce Green

Adjunct professor of film editing USC-SCA.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce\\_Green](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Green)

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## **Christopher Guerrero**

Department/Division: Production

As a graduate of the MFA program, I wanted to become a faculty member to inspire and help change SCA for the better. When I joined, I realized it was more broken than ever; after witnessing outstanding faculty lose their second classes and much-needed healthcare, I knew I needed to join the AFA. So, encouraged by my peers, I'm committed to championing our collective goals for a fair contract that benefits all members. We are at a pivotal moment not just for our adjunct faculty but also for the entirety of SCA. Our bargaining agreement will set the tone and future of the School Of Cinematic Arts.

Central to our mission is establishing an equitable, safe, and diverse workplace that ensures the prosperity of adjuncts at the School Of Cinematic Arts. With that, I bring a deep understanding of our shared challenges through my work on the organizing committee. I started working with the union early last year, and in addition to doing union training, I focused on setting up our communications channels, such as Google Groups and Slack. Communication and transparency are critical, which is why I put energy into it when I joined. With patience, credibility, and a commitment to transparency, I am set to ensure our negotiations truly reflect our diverse voices and needs. My approach is to advocate, question, and seek innovation, challenging the status quo for the best possible contract. I must foster and demand an inclusive environment that supports our professional growth and well-being.

Electing me means pushing for immediate improvements and a foundation for a sustainable future for ALL adjunct faculty at USC. United in our effort, we can secure a contract that mirrors our value and enhances our academic community. I'm ready to lead this charge, advocating tirelessly for our rights and recognition, convinced of our collective strength to enact significant change.

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## **Chinyere Nwodim**

Department/Division: John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television

I believe in teachers. I've had the great fortune of having incredible teachers while I was a student here in SCA. I want to make sure present and future students have access to the same committed, experienced, talented teachers who made an impact on my education and career. The only way to do that is to make this profession financially sustainable, so USC can continue to attract the finest teachers and protect its reputation as the best cinema school in the world.

I know that the bargaining committee will have to dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to getting the adjuncts the contract we deserve. I want to support that effort and make sure your voices are an integral part of the process. I also want to make sure that we continue the efforts to have the faculty reflect the growing diversity of the student body. I know whoever is selected for the committee will do great work and make us all proud.

Sincerely,

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## **Dara Resnik**

Department/Division: The Peter Stark Producing Program

Ten years ago, the legendary producer and Peter Stark Producing Program chair Larry Turman asked me to become an adjunct lecturer at USC and teach Producing the Screenplay. I quickly fell in love with everything about teaching and even during my busiest years as a showrunner, made the time to teach at least one class. In the last decade, I've lectured at least a dozen classes as an adjunct for USC's School of Cinematic Arts in both Stark and the John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television. I still love to teach, but in that time, I've watched our pay stagnate, and I've seen colleagues lose their health insurance because of unnecessary university policies mandating adjuncts teach only one class. I've revealed gender inequities in the pay structure that nobody would rectify. I discovered if we want to take money out of our Vanguard accounts on off semesters, we can't because the university claims us as employees so they can earn money on our paltry "retirement" plans while refusing to pay us any benefits as said employees. Meanwhile, the university's endowment grew by \$330 million this year alone.

As a 4th generation union member, I am passionate about the power of unions to rectify what's broken in our systems. I'm running for the bargaining committee because as a former economics major and a producer in the business, I understand finances, game theory, and bargaining strategy. And I believe that my experience in two SCA departments gives me a valuable lens into how the school has been run until now. I was also part of the initial organizing effort, and have been passionate about building this union from the ground up. Now that it's time for us to build our first contract, I would be honored to represent our members' best interests as we sit across the table from the university's lawyers and administrators, calm and clear-eyed about how to make adjunct lecturing a sustainable living again.

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## **Jeremy Royce**

Department/Division: Production

I first became involved in our campaign in the Spring of 2023, shortly after I was notified that if I were to take a leave from teaching to shoot a film (as I've always been encouraged to do) I would lose my second class and my health insurance. In that moment I realized that if something isn't done to turn back this shortsighted policy, many of my most talented colleagues would likely leave SCA, and the quality of the

education would suffer. As an alumni of the MFA program, I was shaken by the institutional damage these policy changes would create. That fear for the long term future of our school is what has driven me as an organizer on this campaign.

As we became more focused on how best to meet these challenges, and chose to partner with the UAW, I became even more involved in shaping the strategy of our movement. I began working with a core group of early organizers to find faculty members who shared our concerns and sense of purpose. I discovered my primary mission in the AFA: to broaden and deepen our organizing base to make our movement as democratic as possible. I've fought to bring as many adjuncts as possible into the process of building our union so we could all claim ownership of this shared mission. It was only through this expansion in active organizers that we won our election with an overwhelming mandate.

As a member of the bargaining team, my goal will be to ensure that all member's needs are represented at the table. Over the past year, I've personally visited over fifty colleagues at the end of their classes to build support and I've had the privilege of hearing directly from adjunct faculty in every division of our school. I realize there's a broad diversity of priorities and I'm aware of the challenges that may emerge from balancing these sometimes disparate needs. But every voice should be heard. As a vote captain and coordinator during the union election, I've had hundreds of conversations with our membership about their hopes and fears surrounding the upcoming contract. This experience has made me uniquely qualified to speak to those needs at the bargaining table.

If I'm elected to the bargaining team, I'll continue to work to make everyone in the unit as involved in our negotiations as possible. I'll focus on informing our members of the progress made and the challenges presented. I will fight to prevent the University from dividing us into factions as they have historically tried to do, and I will ensure that we win the best contract possible.

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## **Ivy Sunderji**

Department/Division: Writing for Screen and Television

I am a fearless negotiator, and my two priorities are representing the best interests of my colleagues at SCA, and caring for the students who attend SCA now and in the future. The biggest priorities to me are fighting for fair pay, ensuring healthcare access for adjuncts, equitable hiring and appointments, and addressing student debt at SCA for both faculty and students. I am willing to do my research and tell the truth, and I will be a fearless advocate for what I believe represents the best interests of the faculty and students. I will hold both SCA leadership and UAW-AFA accountable and push for ethics and transparency on both sides. I will push for a deal that is actually in the best interests of faculty and students and not one that simply diverts money from the SCA budget to union pockets without significant change while adding yet another cohort of sticky-fingered "middle men" into the mix to further worsen the debt crisis happening at USC.

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## **Lori Webster Fore**

Department/Division: Production

Teaching at the collegiate level has been my lifelong dream. As SCA adjunct faculty, I take pride in mentoring such amazing talent. SCA has impressive offerings, unrivaled by most programs. Unfortunately, there are blindspots that persist. If we are to remain the premiere program we pride ourselves on being, we must collectively hold ourselves accountable. For all the strides that have been made, the disparities that persist at SCA are as urgent as ever. With policies dismantling progress underway nationwide, we cannot afford to self-congratulate or rest on our laurels while the needs of our students hang in the balance.

I, like many current students and alumni, risked it all financially to attend USC to the tune of six-figure debt. The education and network I gained on account of it have been invaluable to the extent that I'm committed to give back as faculty. Unfortunately, the phrase give back has been a double-edged sword. Administration expects us to give back at our own expense because, in their summation, we should not need the wages earned as adjuncts since we're still actively working in the industry. That logic is abusive. SCA is not a charity. My student loan debt is proof. Fair compensation is a basic right, and the work we do outside SCA can only stand to add to the immense value we bring to the program.

On a personal level, the stakes for teaching at SCA couldn't be higher, particularly being one of few faculty of color. To love and be so invested in a program that shows such reticence to embracing comprehensive change has been a perpetual rock and hard place for me. A seat at the table at SCA is an honor but not a privilege. I know my value, and my students do too. On countless occasions and across all identities, my students regularly confide how rare it is to come across a younger faculty of color and how impactful it's been for their learning experience. I take great care to pour into my students all the things I wished I'd had while in their shoes, and that's what motivates me to speak truth to power and advocate for better, right where I stand. I'm an activist first, and teaching is part of my activism. Students look to us to lead by example, so it's only that right that I practice what I teach.

I've been active in the Adjunct Faculty Alliance since Fall 2023 (including as a vote captain this semester). I look forward to going the distance to effect positive change for us all by way of my unique perspective, level head and collaborative spirit. We are a beautiful mix of seasoned and rising professionals across every facet of the entertainment industry and from all walks of life. We as adjunct faculty bring our best and expect the administration's best in return. We deserve fair compensation just as much as our students deserve top tier education. That's why I'm running for the bargaining committee to do my part in seeing to both.

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## **Jody Wheeler**

Department/Division: Screenwriting

My name is Jody Wheeler. I'm a screenwriter and an adjunct. I'm also a damn good teacher. In this crowd, that last bit far from unique. In the larger world, having both sets of skills is not only rare, it's valuable. It's also something USC doesn't value. That's why I got involved with AFA-UAW.

This past semester, I was one of many adjunct faculty members who had their second class pulled (I had just signed up for USC health insurance.) With the second class gone, health insurance out, and pay trivial, adjuncts value to USC was abundantly clear. We needed to speak as one collective to show the university of just how important we are to them and to our students. (Mostly our students.)

We won the first round. We got our union. But this is just the start of the process. That's why I'm running for the negotiating team — I love USC and I want to make it a better place for all of us.

Before I was a screenwriter, I was a social worker. I spent a lot of time reading and digesting in-depth, detailed information, breaking it down into smaller, easier to understand chunks, But also working with people to help them come to consensus, and work together to overcome truly difficult issues.

I also learned that's not always possible. Sometimes you have set a firm boundary, a place you won't move from. A position where others need to come meet you. And you have to know which is which.

I found these skills transferred to my work as a director and as a producer. They'll be an asset in union negotiations too.

When I don't understand something, it tends to sit like a burr in my mind. I have to read whatever I can find to get a clearer picture of what's going on. This has meant tracking down contracts from other schools, reading up on negotiation strategy and asking people who've negotiated successful contracts how they won what they won. Scratching that itch has been helpful for me to understand the nuts and bolts of what we're about to do. In sharing this information with others on the organizing team, it was yet more evidence that creating a union was how we get similar gains.

It's been an honor to use my skills to help organize our new AFA-UAW union. It would be another honor to bring those skills to our contract negotiations, to fulfill the promise of making USC a better place to work and learn.

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## **Ashley York**

Department/Division: Media Arts + Practice (MA+P)

My name is Ashley York and I've been an adjunct professor at the USC School of Cinematic Arts for 12 years where I have taught classes in the Media Arts + Practice Division.

I voted YES to form our union with the United Auto Workers and am beyond thrilled that more than 200 of us voted to unionize!

I love being part of the SCA community and working with students to help them learn ethical production practices all the while realizing their visions and staying true to their authentic selves. I also love being part of our faculty and cherish the community we are building as part of the unionization effort.

Adjuncts like us account for more than 74% of the teaching faculty at SCA. I know we all take great pride in being part of SCA, and work hard to ensure that it remains one of the top film schools in America. Given its position in the industry and being in the backyard of Hollywood, it's imperative that USC lead the way for creating the best environment it can for its students, faculty, and staff. It is undeniable that adjuncts are a crucial and valuable part of the workforce at SCA. We deserve more.

I've joined this movement to help create better working conditions for adjuncts like you and me. I want to be part of the bargaining committee to help us get pay increases, cost-of-living raises, and multiyear contracts that provide more stability in our jobs.

Making a career as a creative artist is a lifelong endeavor and one that requires us to navigate the uncertainty and volatility of an ever-changing industry, which has seen unprecedented change in the past few years. Some of our colleagues have shared that they have to rely on social welfare programs such as unemployment insurance and food assistance benefits to make ends meet. We deserve a living wage. We deserve healthcare benefits. We deserve a pathway to promotion.

Many of us rely on the health insurance coverage provided by USC. This benefit was especially important for me when I had an emergency cesarean section, which led me to be hospitalized for five days. While the hospital bill was \$53,000, I only paid \$300 because I am a benefits eligible faculty member. I want to see our health benefits preserved and expanded.

I was there the day we marched to the provost's office after 80 percent of our adjunct faculty signed union authorization cards to form our union, the AFA-UAW. I nearly burst into tears when I walked into the SCA courtyard and saw all of us gathered there in solidarity. I want to be part of the bargaining community so that we can work together to make USC a better place to work and learn.

Fighting on & yours in solidarity,

Ashley York

Adjunct Professor, Media Arts + Practice

<https://adjunctfacultyalliance.org/>

<https://cinema.usc.edu/directories/profile.cfm?id=6407>

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