

THE JUST-IN-TIME PROFESSOR

A Staff Report Summarizing eForum Responses on the Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty in Higher Education

House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Democratic Staff

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Introduction

The post-secondary academic workforce has undergone a remarkable change over the last several decades. The tenure-track college professor with a stable salary, firmly grounded in the middle or upper-middle class, is becoming rare. Taking her place is the contingent faculty: non-tenure-track teachers, such as part-time adjuncts or graduate instructors, with no job security from one semester to the next, working at a piece rate with few or no benefits across multiple workplaces, and far too often struggling to make ends meet. In 1970, adjuncts made up 20 percent of all higher education faculty. Today, they represent half.¹

Increasing the number of Americans who obtain a college degree or other post-secondary credentials is a key to growing and strengthening the middle class and ensuring the country's global competitiveness. Yet the expanding use of contingent faculty to achieve this goal presents a paradox. These instructors are highly educated workers who overwhelmingly have post-graduate degrees. They perform work critical to our national efforts to lift the next generation's economic prospects. In 2009, CNN Money ranked college professor as the third best job in America, citing increasing job growth prospects.² The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts post-secondary teachers as having faster than average employment growth over the next decade.³ Having played by the rules and obtained employment in a highly skilled, in-demand field, these workers should be living middle-class lives. But, as will be seen in this report, many often live on the edge of poverty.

More than one million people are now working as contingent faculty and instructors at U.S. institutions of higher education, providing a cheap labor source even while students' tuition has skyrocketed. Traditionally, adjuncts were experienced professionals who were still working in or recently retired from their industry outside of academia, with time on their hands to teach a class or two at the university or community college. Adjunct work supplemented their income; teaching was not their main job. Such adjuncts still exist. But national trends indicate that schools are increasingly relying on adjuncts and other contingent faculty members, rather than full-time, tenure-track professors, to do the bulk of the work of educating students. Today, being a part-time adjunct at several schools is the way many instructors cobble together full-time employment in higher education.

In November 2013, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democrats launched an eForum to invite contingent faculty and instructors around the country to comment via email on their working conditions, how those conditions affect their ability to earn a living and have a successful career, and how those conditions may affect students and their attainment of educational goals.

Over the course of six weeks, the eForum received 845 responses. Participants hailed from 41 of 50 states. Some have been working as contingent faculty for more than thirty years, while others have just begun, with only one semester under their belt. They are employed by private and public two- and four-year institutions.

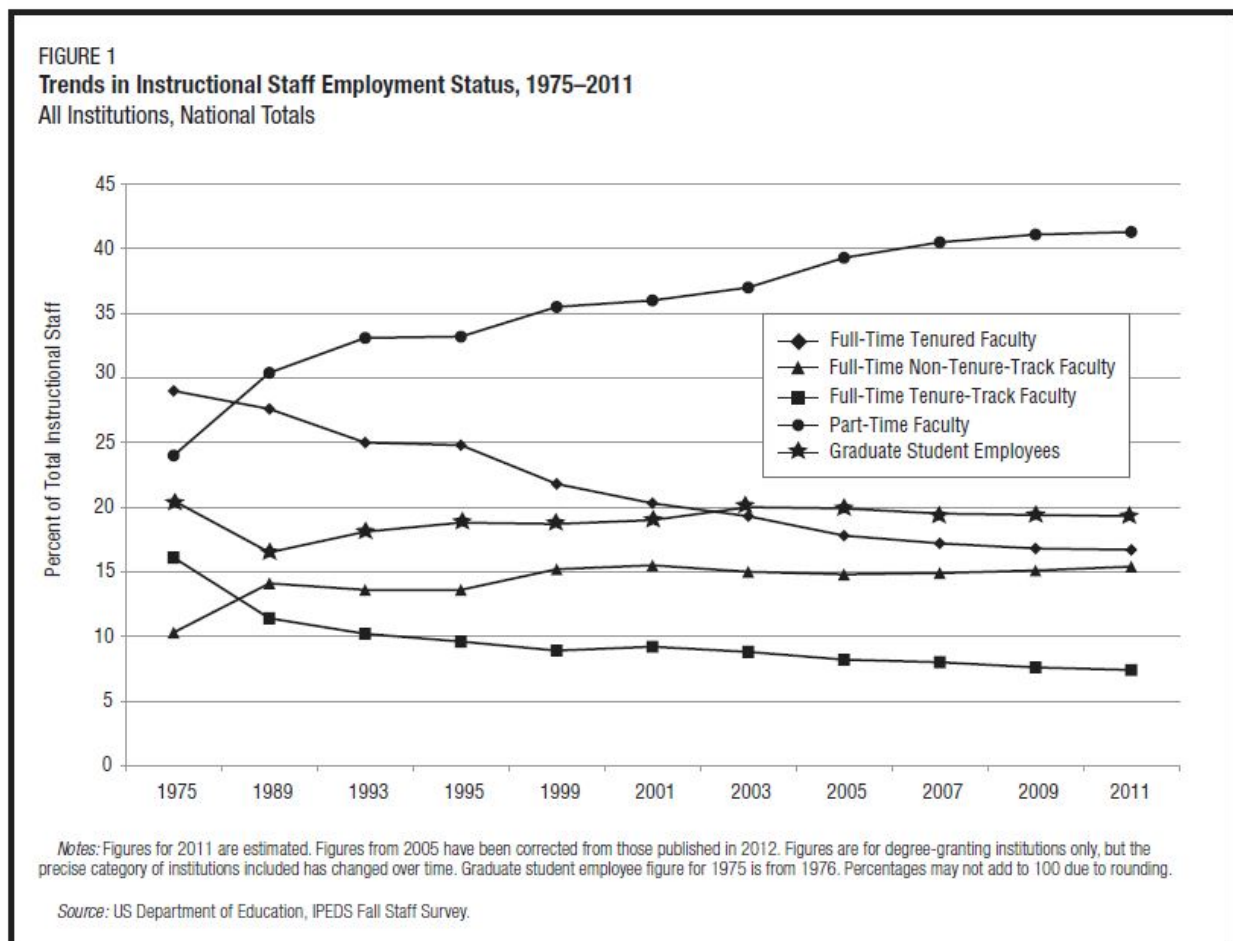
This report summarizes the responses, providing a snapshot of life as contingent faculty. Because many of these workers fear retaliation for speaking out about working conditions, respondents' names and institutions have been omitted from this report.

The eForum responses were consistent with news reports and other research that indicate contingent faculty earn low salaries with few or no benefits, are forced to carry on harried schedules to make ends meet, have no clear path for career growth, and enjoy little to no job security. The contingent faculty trend appears to mirror trends in the general labor market toward a flexible, "just-in-time" workforce, with lower compensation and unpredictable schedules for what were once considered middle-class jobs. The trend should be of concern to policymakers both because of what it means for the living standards and work lives of those individuals we expect to educate the next generation of scientists, entrepreneurs, and other highly skilled workers, and what it may mean for the quality of higher education itself.

A growing, visible trend that dims many workers' prospects for stable, full-time employment

Data show that there has been an increase in the hiring of contingent professors in all institution types. In 1969, the number of professors working part time was just 18.5 percent.⁴ The number of part-time faculty has grown by more than 300 percent from 1975 to 2011.⁵ According to U.S. Department of Education data, the number of contingent faculty (these include part-time or adjunct faculty members, full-time non-tenure-track faculty members or graduate student assistants) in degree granting two- and four-year institutions of higher education is more than 1.3 million people, or 75.5 percent of the instruction workforce.⁶ Researchers have found the trends in pay, benefits, and working conditions for adjunct faculty members to be consistent across institution type.

The following chart from a recent report from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) illustrates the shift away from tenured or tenure-track faculty toward part-time and other contingent faculty.⁷



Many eForum respondents noted that the trend toward using more contingent faculty is very visible and dimming their prospects for career growth.

At [my school] 82% of faculty are "part-time" and the trend is only getting worse.

There are really no opportunities for advancement because there [are] very few full-time opportunities available, most likely because the schools are using more and more adjunct instructors instead of adding the higher-paid full-time positions (with or without tenure).

My hope is that once I receive the degree I will get a full-time position, but I realize that this may not happen as universities continue to cut faculty positions and pay and move to using more adjunct instructors.

Nevertheless, many respondents clearly hold out hope that they will secure a rare tenure-track, or at least full-time, position. As others have reported on why adjuncts remain in the profession despite poor working conditions, a recurring theme throughout the responses was the instructors' dedication to their students.⁸ Adjunct faculty are often not adjunct in the purest form of the word, meaning they are not hoping to teach in a purely temporary or auxiliary capacity with their institution. Teaching is often their core passion and career goal. "I believe in what I'm doing," "I love my students," and "we love teaching and helping our students succeed," were common refrains from respondents.

Low pay at a piece rate

Generally, adjunct work is piece work. These contingent faculty usually are paid a piece rate, a fixed amount of compensation for each unit produced, regardless of how much time it takes to produce. In this case, the unit of production is a college course.

The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW) estimates that the median pay for a standard three-credit course is \$2,700.⁹ Adjunct faculty income therefore depends on the sheer number of courses they teach each year.¹⁰

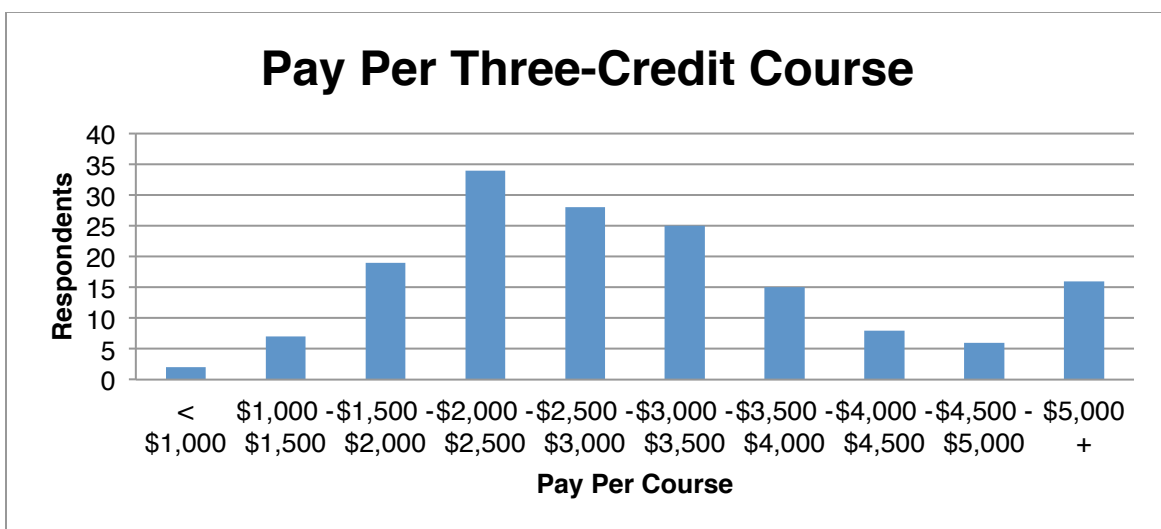
I am not reimbursed for any amount of prep time, grading, office hours, website building, or other duties that require me to interact with students on a daily basis.

Adjuncts are compensated per course at a fraction of the payment full-time professors receive for the same courses. We are not paid for our hours preparing class, grading, and providing office hours.

There is no way to earn a living as an adjunct faculty member. \$1,200 a term, with four terms a year, is \$4,800 taxed...

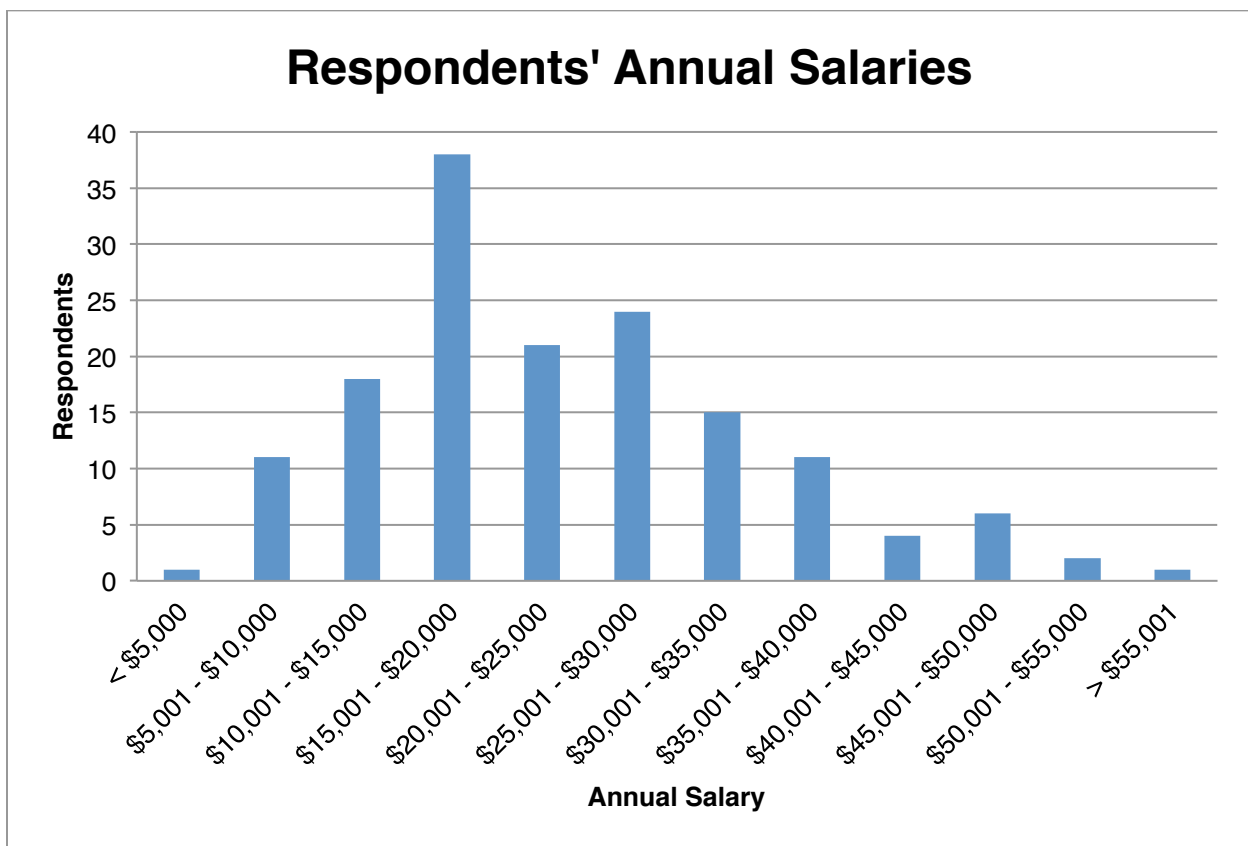
My university pays 2100 per class which means even if I work at 100%, 10 classes per academic year, I would only make 21,000.

One-hundred and sixty respondents supplied information on how much they are paid per course. The reported rates are displayed in the following chart.



Of the one hundred and fifty-two respondents who provided their estimated annual teaching salary, the average was \$24,926. The median was \$22,041. In contrast, the median pay for a full-time faculty member is \$47,500.¹¹ In order to garner comparable wages, an adjunct would have to teach nearly seventeen courses per year. To put this in perspective, researchers consider a full course load for an academic year to be eight courses.¹²

Respondents reported annual salaries that ranged from \$5,000 to \$55,000. A large number of respondents reported making between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per year, at or mostly below the federal poverty line for a family of three (\$19,530) or well below the poverty line for a family of four (\$23,550). For many, a career in higher education has meant relying on help from family members and the government to make ends meet. Indeed, many respondents explained that, without a spouse's income, they would not be able to continue teaching.



One respondent, who works for a for-profit online university, broke down his remuneration from students' tuition:

Considering that students pay \$565 per course, and that there are approximately 20 students per class, adjuncts are paid approximately 4% of what the university takes in even though we execute the core requirements of the university. As an open enrollment university with 86% Title IV students, dedicated adjuncts must provide extensive, time-consuming feedback frequently up to 20 hours per week, which averages a wage of less than \$10 per hour.

When there were a bounty of courses I was able to earn \$30,000 yearly by accepting every course offered and working nightly and weekends, but as a result of declining enrollment my current salary is approx. \$7,000 per year... Unable to pay back \$110,000 in original student loan debt and with the deferred interest inexorably increasing to the point where I may never be able to repay the loan, I am slowly entering the ranks of a deadbeat defaulter in spite of a doctorate...

Respondents explained that their low salaries left them unable to assist their own family in paying for higher education.

Teaching two courses per semester—assuming my upcoming Spring classes won't be cancelled or reassigned—I'll earn \$8,000 this year. That is not a typo. This is well below the federal poverty level for an individual. I now qualify for Medicaid under the Affordable Care act in my state ... and I have already applied for coverage.

Growing up in a poor neighborhood ... I believed earning several college degrees would be my path out of poverty—but that is no longer the case.

Even though I'm a first-generation college graduate, and I teach at an institution of higher learning, I can't afford to help pay tuition for family members who are currently enrolled toward degree programs: college tuition costs more than I earn in a semester.

Other respondents described an existence on the edge of poverty.

Despite all the work I do, I earn very little. Typical compensation is approximately \$2300-2500 per class. In 2012, as a result of working at three institutions, my income was approximately \$25,000. My husband and I live, like so many other American families, from paycheck to paycheck, praying that our only working car will not break down, that I will not get sick and be unable to work, and that we will be able to make our house payments.

A part-time teacher recounted how he and his partner fell over the edge, while carrying an “adjuncting load” of five classes spread over two schools:

During this, we lost our home. We could no longer afford to make the payments on my poverty wages and my domestic partner's wages from her job. We moved in with a friend and now had to commute an hour each way and a half hour between schools. I was driving three hours a day and teaching five days a week switching colleges during the day. I had no office space, so I often carried all of my work with me. Piles and piles of manilla [sic] folders in the back of my failing car. A car I couldn't afford to take care of but was basically working out of. It is a run down Nissan that cost \$60 a tank to fill and I was filling it two to three times a week, paying for childcare for my son who made it out of the hospital in good health and paying for my child support for two boys. I was now making \$3000 a class and able to make \$15000 for that semester.

A Persian Gulf veteran who worked his way through college and graduate school, earning a Ph.D. to become a contingent professor who has garnered teaching and writing awards relayed:

I love what I do. I work incredible hours (my shortest work week is probably 50+ hours), and always through the weekends. I am lucky enough to have health insurance (which is over 1/10th of my total income), yet I probably make a tad over what someone on full benefits unemployment makes. I'll tell you straight--I make 28000 before taxes...My homelife [sic] is a disaster--I never buy anything new, and often my bills are paid late or not at all. Think about what YOU could buy with less than 2000 a month--it's not much, let me tell you, and we haven't even begun to discuss the nature of student loans...

Adjuncts and other part-time instructors have turned to public assistance programs such as food stamps and Medicaid.

Because I was also the sole support of my two children (both of whom are gifted and honors students, I am proud to report), I relied on Medicaid to pay for the medical bills of my daughter. And, during the time I taught at the community college, I earned so little that I sold my plasma on Tuesdays and Thursdays to pay for her daycare costs. Seriously, my plasma paid for her daycare because I taught English as adjunct faculty.

My salary is abysmal. I have been forced to rely on food stamps and other welfare programs.

If I do not find a full time position within a year of completing my PhD, I will be leaving the profession unable to use the degree to which I've devoted over a decade of my life (from 1st degree until now). But with two small children, living with food stamps in my mother-in-law's house, I just can't continue to subject my family to this. It is beyond embarrassing.

While teaching ... I found myself making so little money that I had to apply for food stamps and Medicaid to support myself, my wife, and our two young children (about ages 3 and 6 at the time).

Respondents' stories squared with an increasing number of press reports about the low pay of adjunct faculty.

Since fall of 2010, when the 52-year-old started adjuncting, Cerasoli has had to rely on the kindness of friends to survive because her pay is so meager. Over the past six months she's had to move four times. Her annual salary for teaching five courses per semester is around \$22,000 before taxes. Because she has no health insurance, she goes to a specialty clinic in Manhattan, where she has racked up thousands of dollars in medical bills.¹³

The death of a long-time, part-time professor in Pittsburgh is gathering the attention of instructors nationwide. The trend of relying on part-time faculty has been in the works for decades, and Margaret Mary Vojtko's story is seen by some as a tragic byproduct...After 25 years of teaching French at Duquesne, the university had not renewed her contract. As a part-time professor, she had been earning about \$10,000 a year, and had no health insurance....Vojtko died Sept. 1 after a heart attack at the age of 83, destitute and nearly homeless.¹⁴

As one respondent put it: "I can tell you first hand the high cost of a college education is not due to adjunct compensation."

But these low incomes do pose taxpayer costs. According to analysis by the Congressional Research Service, a family of three in California relying solely on the median adjunct salary would qualify for, among other things, Medicaid, an earned income tax credit, a child tax credit, and food stamps, costing taxpayers \$13,645 per year.

Long hours and harried commutes from one job to another

Many eForum respondents described daunting workloads. Because they are paid based on courses taught, making ends meet requires a complicated juggling of multiple courses, often at multiple schools, sometimes with additional non-academic jobs squeezed in between.

The typical course load for adjunct faculty is difficult to ascertain from the eForum responses. Respondents stated that they rarely have a typical set of courses assigned to them per semester, as they work on a semester-to-semester contract and the course loads can change unpredictably. In fact, having such unstable course loads was a commonly reported cause for financial stress. Respondents reported teaching anywhere from one to ten courses per semester.

Many semesters I have taught 2 or 3 courses, some semesters 5 courses.

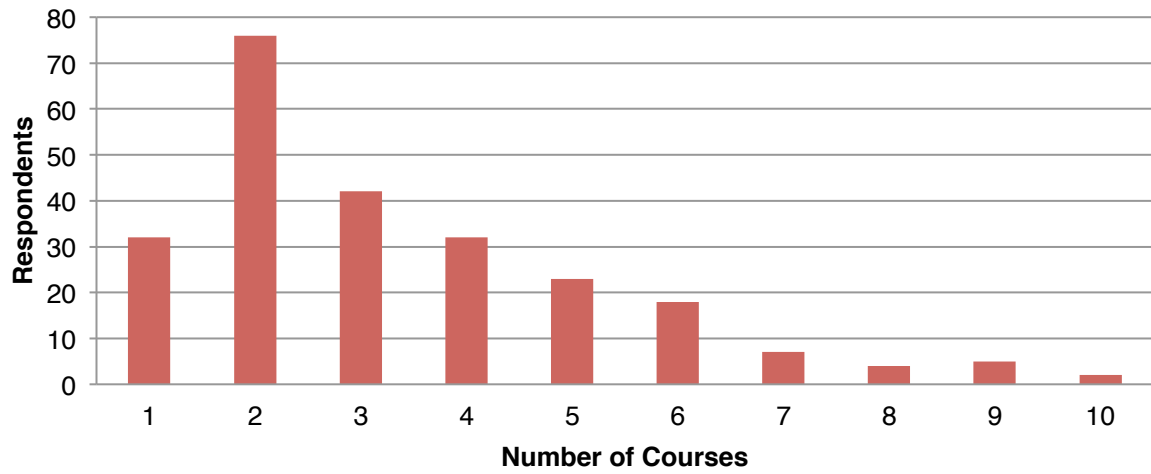
I teach 4 classes, which is 12 credit hours. That takes me about 30 hours per week for about 45 weeks of the year.

I hold my obligatory "office hours" in a bustling copy room, while teaching everything from intro courses to senior theses, teaching seven or eight courses a semester.

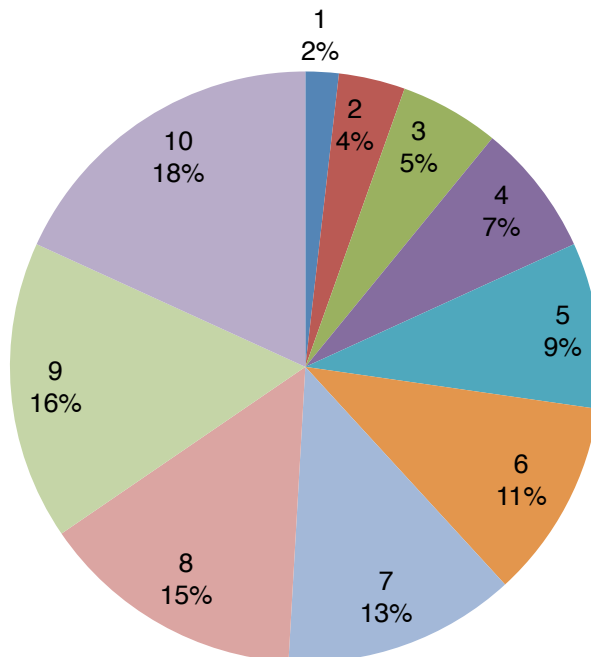
I have worked for several online schools to put together enough money to make ends meet, and I don't feel like this is an effective way to teach my students.

The charts below show the distribution of the number of courses taught per semester by those respondents who provided such information.

Number of Three-Credit Courses Taught Per Semester



Number of Classes Taught Per Semester



Many respondents wanted to be clear how much time was spent working on each class outside of actual lecture time.

People often labor under the misapprehension that adjuncts only work during their class hours. In fact, adjuncts work many more hours than those in the class. Because I teach developmental reading, I give gradable homework in almost every class. That means I am grading papers as many as five hours a day depending on the assignment. I am also preparing lessons on a regular basis. I am constantly looking for connections to the readings to which students can respond. I don't have an office; much to my husband's chagrin, I am usually surrounded by stacks of papers. Although there are copy machines available on campus, I have no access to secretarial help and so must not only write but also duplicate the worksheets I give my students. Without an office, I must find other time and space to meet with students.

One respondent explained that he taught five courses in one year at a public college then his course load inexplicably fell to just one for the next semester. With \$2,500 per online course and over thirty students, he explained how that rate squared with the hours of work required:

As this is a lot of students I decided to figure out my hourly wage. Considering that I must have the class ready 2 weeks prior to start of class and that work begins actually 4 weeks earlier. So assume 2 hours per day for the 2 weeks of prep for 28 hours of effort. I have to respond to student questions for the next two weeks usually this is light another 3 hours. Once class starts it is between 3-5 hours a night for responding to students and grading work. If we go low at 3 hours for 8 weeks is another 168 hours of work. Add the earlier and ... we are at 199 hours. This comes to an hourly salary of approximately \$12.56.

At such a piece rate, as adjuncts attempt to compile enough courses to earn a more decent living, their hours of work can spiral out of control. One respondent explained:

Once I had proven myself as an instructor, in fall of 2012, I was given 4 classes to teach at the major university and 2 classes at the community college. In order to maximize my productivity I slept in smaller 3 or 4 hour shifts Monday through Sunday, I did a break from working for 3 days over the Thanksgiving holiday. Then last winter I taught 5 classes at university and 2 classes at the community college. I didn't sleep in shifts that semester, but I did work 12 hour days Sunday through Thursday and took a small break on Friday and Saturday only working 4-6 hours on those days.

Others told similar stories.

I teach in three community colleges ... My income is adequate, but to earn it, I must drive sometimes 4 hours a day, working at three colleges (three email addresses, three sets of deadlines, three sets of keys, three copy codes, three policies and procedures, three bookstores, three course assignment protocols), and spend nearly every waking hour grading, preparing, driving, or teaching.

This respondent went on to explain that she had incurred \$90,000 in student loan debt acquiring her graduate education. After more than ten years of working as an adjunct and making loan payments, her debt still stands at \$87,000.

As noted in the responses above contingent faculty often work at multiple schools piecing together different courses in order to make a living. Of the two hundred and seventeen respondents who gave information about the number of schools where they taught, the term “freeway flyer” was an accurate descriptor for 89 percent of the respondents. 48 percent taught at two institutions, 27 percent taught at three institutions, and 13 percent taught at four or more institutions.

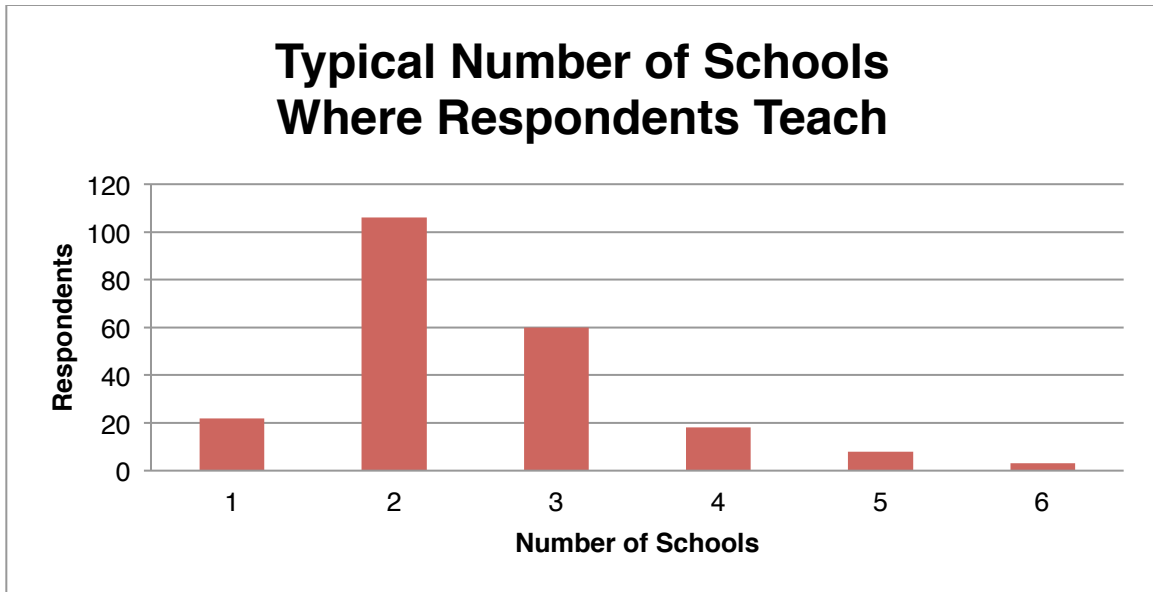
I am 77 years old, hold a doctorate in Education (Learning and Instruction), and am a practicing artist, and currently teach at 2 different colleges...

I am an adjunct instructor at 3 different school districts...

I am now working at 4 different colleges...

Typically I work at 4 or 5 different institutions in any given semester and teach between 7 and 9 classes per term...

For several years, I was a "freeway flyer," teaching at two colleges to make ends meet.



Respondents who taught at multiple institutions recounted tales of commuting one-hundred or more miles in order to teach. The transit between classes was a time-consuming task.

The commuting was expensive and time-consuming; during one period, I drove nearly 100 miles a day around a triangle from my home to two jobs and back again.

As an adjunct, traveling over 100 miles one way, arriving shortly before classes...

My commute at the highest point was 900 miles per week; at the lowest it was only 550 miles per week.

I put almost 500 miles on my car per week traveling from home to the various campuses. Those are uncompensated miles.

Most part-timers work at several jobs, then. For me, this means driving a reasonable 12 miles to my first and second jobs. I then drive 42 miles south of those campuses to my third teaching job, and then, for my fourth teaching job, 77 miles north, thus paying the equivalent of two hours of my labor for gas and parking every week.

Contingent faculty also take other jobs outside of academia to make ends meet.

During the Fall of 2013 I taught [a course at my school for three days a week] while working 40 hours night shift at Walmart to make ends meet. My take home remuneration for [the] course was \$796 per month for the duration of the semester. I literally was paying the college to teach the course!

Juggling these three jobs, I teach my first class at 7am and finish my last class at 10pm (an hour and a quarter away from my home). I teach six days a week. I do not rest on the seventh day: I grade papers and plan lessons (unpaid). I also work three non-teaching part-time jobs.

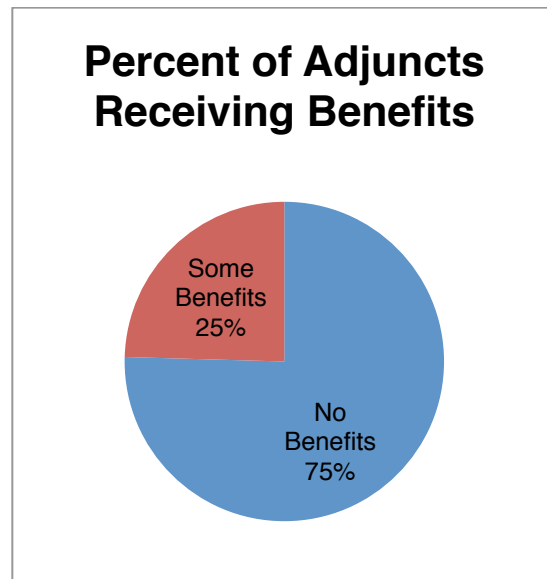
To make ends meet, besides teaching at the community college, I also deliver pizzas. I feel that I lose the respect of my students when they see me delivering pizzas!

I cannot earn a living working in higher education, regardless of my credentials and over 20 years of teaching experience. I generally have to hold down 4 or 5 part-time jobs plus picking up extra work whenever possible to earn enough for gas, food, and my share of household expenses.

Access to employer-provided benefits, like health care and retirement, is rare

Adjunct faculty rarely receive benefits from their institutions. According to a survey conducted by CAW in 2010 (“CAW survey”), only 22.6 percent of respondents said they had access to health benefits through their academic employer.¹⁵

Many eForum respondents (391) commented on whether or not they received any health care or retirement benefits. Of these, 75 percent said that either their employer did not offer benefits to part-time faculty or that they were otherwise ineligible for their employer’s benefits package.



Many adjuncts explained that their benefit eligibility is based on the number of courses they teach. If an adjunct was unable to obtain a certain number of courses, they were ineligible for employer-provided benefits, if any were offered at all. In addition, those without benefits felt as though they were not being recognized for the number of hours needed to prep, grade, and meet with students; their employers were only accounting for the amount of time actually spent in class to determine benefit eligibility.

"Benefits" are really out of reach at my pay scale. The health care plan that I could buy into costs more than my take-home pay on even a good year (and far more than I earn on a bad year). I don't earn enough to save for retirement (every month is a struggle to just pay the basic bills). My "retirement" plan is to work until they bury me.

The problem is that, because we work less than the required hours for benefits at a single location, we don't qualify for health insurance benefits. You see, in order to qualify for health coverage, we must work 15 hours or more at one location. Regardless of whether the total hours at my 3 school districts add up to more than 15 total hours, I will not qualify for health benefits.

As far as benefits go, we have a sham "retirement" plan...it is a contribution to OBRA where there is NO employer match ... We also have NO health insurance help.

I have been told that I may be offered another [course for the spring semester]... I have also been informed that the plans are on hold until the University-level administrators work through the details. Frankly, I suspect the delay is due to them making absolutely sure that no one will become eligible for health insurance benefits as a consequence.

The university bases my pay on the number of days of the week I am required to be on-campus ... I get zero benefits, but I am "permitted" to join the health insurance plan, as long as I pay 100% of the premium.

As most eForum responses predated January 1, 2014, the majority of comments were received prior to the availability of health care through the new state or federal health insurance marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Under the ACA, individuals and families earning below 400 percent of the federal poverty line can now purchase coverage through these new marketplaces and receive premium tax credits and cost-sharing subsidies to help reduce their health care costs. As *The Wall Street Journal* has reported, “[m]ost adjuncts who don't receive coverage through their employer will be eligible for subsidized insurance starting in 2014 through new exchanges set up by the federal health-care law.”¹⁶ Several respondents took note of this changing circumstance.

Two and a half years ago I let my health insurance go. I needed to choose between paying rent, maintaining a commuter car and health insurance. Under the Affordable Care Act, I now qualify for a \$398 subsidy and I have signed up through coveredca.com.

My wife and I are currently uninsured, and are very grateful finally to be able to get insurance through the Affordable Care Act.

Though many respondents were optimistic about signing up for affordable coverage using the new health exchanges, others were outraged by the way their employers were reacting to the law. Under the ACA, large employers must provide affordable health care coverage to their full-time employees (defined as those working 30 or more hours per week) or otherwise pay a penalty.

The college used the excuse of the ACA cap on part-time hours, but the cap is at 75% of full-time, or 30 hours. But their cap was set at 22 hours, on the excuse that this was 75% of full-time teaching loads, pretending that the office hours and committee work full-time faculty are supposed to also work, did not count.

I was supposed to teach three courses this fall, but the university cancelled one of my courses in August, the week before the semester started. The reason was to avoid having to give me any benefits, including health care, due to the Affordable Care Act.

Part-time lecturers at my university do not have the option of employer provided health insurance, and the university plans to reduce workload opportunities even further for individual part-time lecturers in the year to come in order to avoid negative consequences (to the university) of the Affordable Care Act. Because of this, most of my colleagues and I work multiple jobs.

It would appear that, at some institutions, the ACA employer responsibility requirements are providing an excuse for administrations to continue manipulating adjuncts' hours, as they often had pre-ACA to avoid paying benefits under other employer benefit plans. One respondent described a similar dynamic involving pension benefits when a state law changed:

Right away I loved teaching; what I lacked in experience I made up for in excitement and research. I barely slept, working until all hours to perfect lessons. And even though we were eating leaner and travelling less, my husband was patient and supportive, noting how much more fulfilled I seemed with my work. When my first year of teaching wrapped up, I was no less excited, I was sleeping more, and I was getting stellar student feedback. Then the rules changed again. The administration, in response to a Texas Retirement System benefits mandate, decided to limit adjunct hours, cutting between 1/3 and 1/2 of the adjunct workload and thereby cutting about 1/3 of adjunct pay. And for the first time my adoration wavered.

In her 2013 testimony before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Maria Maisto, president of the New Faculty Majority and an advocate for adjuncts, explained:

Some people would have us believe that the ACA is giving these colleges and universities no choice but to enact these policies. I am here to correct that misperception. It is not the ACA, but rather these colleges' interpretation of and response to the law that is hurting adjuncts and their students. Colleges have lots of choices and unfortunately for their students, too many have chosen not to support or invest in faculty.¹⁷

One respondent recounted how his union helped his school make a different choice in how it responded to the new law:

This summer, I can only assume in a preemptive move in advance of the Affordable Care Act, the administration attempted to reduce my hours, and those of my colleagues teaching similar loads, by 20%. Our union, the AAUP, was able to step in and hold off this threatened 20% reduction in our earnings - this time.

An oft-cited reason for the increased use of contingent faculty over the last several decades has been institutions' desire to avoid paying benefits, particularly given the skyrocketing cost of health care. Since the inception of the ACA, however, health care costs have begun to stabilize. As the ACA bends the cost curve in health care, at least one pressure to use contingent instructors instead of full-time faculty may abate.

Other benefits questions are raised by contingent faculty's status. One respondent relayed:

We do not have paid vacation, sick or personal days. If I am sick, I cannot cancel class without potential reprisal from the administration... Retirement benefits for me take quadruple the time to accrue as they do for a full-time professor. Unemployment compensation is denied us.

Another explained that she was limited to teaching four classes per year at one school, occasionally working at other colleges, earning less than \$10,000 annually. For her, maternity leave is out of the question:

I am currently pregnant with my first child... I will receive NO time off for the birth or recovery. It is necessary I continue until the end of the semester in May in order to get paid, something I drastically need. The only recourse I have is to revert to an online classroom for some time and do work while in the hospital and upon my return home.

To address many of the concerns related to benefits raised by respondents to the eForum, which largely stem from contingent faculty's part-time status, Congress should extend a number of critical workplace protections to part-time workers. H.R. 675, the *Part-Time Workers Bill of Rights Act*, sponsored by Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), addresses coverage issues for part-time workers in a number of federal labor laws. The bill does three things: First, it would extend the ACA's employer responsibility requirement to include part-time workers. Large employers that are required to offer health care to full-time employees or pay a penalty would also have to offer health care to part-time workers or pay a pro rata penalty. Second, the bill extends job-protected family and medical leave to part-time workers under the FMLA and, finally, it would require part-time workers to be treated like full-time workers for purposes of participating in their employers' pension plan.

Job instability and unpredictable course loads

To be an adjunct faculty member is to have almost no job stability. Many are hired on a semester-by-semester contract, with their assignments “the last to be confirmed and the first to be changed at the last moment.”¹⁸ Of the 264 respondents who commented on their job stability, an overwhelming 95 percent felt that they had no job stability and did not know whether they would be teaching courses from one semester to the next.

Some respondents explained that they are not notified as to whether or not they will be teaching a class until the day before the semester began. Others said they may receive a few weeks of notice. More than 100 respondents said that, whatever notice they received for the coming semester’s course assignments, it never provided sufficient time to adequately prepare for the course. One adjunct wrote into the forum on December 7, at which point he still had not received communication from his university confirming whether or not he would be teaching the following month.

No insurance, no unemployment insurance, [no] assurance that I will have a job next semester...It’s December 7th. I still don’t know if they will have classes for me at the beginning of January.

On August 28th 2012 two days into the fall semester of my 4th year at [my institution] my college fired me, although they said they were rearranging my classes.

Job stability: None. As adjuncts, we never know if we will be rehired from semester to semester. The process for hire or rehire has no transparency. Classes for adjuncts are assigned or cancelled less than a week before the semester begins, every semester.

In all cases I was not told I would not be working for them the next quarter. I simply had to wait and see, and in all cases I was not offered another class.

The uncertainty and short notice can prevent adjuncts from making alternative financial plans when class assignments fail to materialize.

I taught four course[s] in the fall, but was not told until the day before spring semester started that I wouldn't have any classes for the spring. I was unemployed with no notice.

I am an excellent and well-credentialed teacher in good standing in the department, but I was told that next quarter instead of the twenty credits I thought I was going to teach, I will only get ten -- a \$6,000 pay cut.

Professors prepare extensively for their courses, but adjuncts are not paid for this preparation time. So a month or more of thoughtful course preparation can be obliterated a week before the first class, if an adjunct's expected work assignment does not materialize or is suddenly dropped. This lack of notification can spiral adjunct faculty members into financial chaos.

Moreover, some states' interpretations of federal law complicates adjuncts' ability to obtain unemployment insurance benefits between semesters. Federal law prohibits benefits for individuals with a "reasonable assurance" of continued employment, and some schools claim that the assignment letter the adjunct receives, indicating an intention—but certainly not a guarantee—to rehire the adjunct for the next term, constitutes such "reasonable assurance," in order to avoid an unemployment payout.¹⁹

Problems with career advancement and professional support

Many contingent faculty take part-time employment because it is the only job available in their desired field, hoping it will be a temporary detour on the way to full-time status. This detour, more often than not, becomes permanent. The 2010 CAW survey found that more than 80 percent of part-time faculty had taught for three or more years.²⁰ Despite the desire to teach full-time, many professors find it difficult to move into a full-time position.

... It is very common for an experienced adjunct to be passed over for a position and it is given to a brand new graduate.

It is impossible for adjuncts to earn a decent living and impossible to have any career advancement. We are shut out of regular teaching jobs and are shut out of full time employment by our own schools...

Adjuncts face systemic obstacles to career growth. Because they teach so many classes to piece together a living, they have little time to research and publish. Universities may pay for graduate students and tenured faculty to attend academic conferences, but adjuncts usually must travel to these events, where faculty recruiting often occurs, on their own dime.²¹ Despite these hurdles, some respondents reported that, on top of the hours they spend teaching, they published, attended conferences, and pursued professional development—all with an eye to one day landing a coveted full-time job.

Part-time faculty may experience wide-ranging gaps in the support they need to perform their teaching jobs well. They may lack administrative staff support, copies of required textbooks, access to students' email addresses for communicating with their classes, access to professional development courses provided to other faculty, or opportunities to participate in departmental meetings with their colleagues.²² Respondents expressed frustration with a sense that they were excluded from the broader faculty community: "Although I've been at my present Very Decent University job for the past 15 years, a tenured professor asked me, 'So, you're teaching for US this semester?' Why am I not part of this 'us' after so much dedicated teaching, year after year?"

The majority of eForum respondents addressing professional support in their comments stated that they did not receive sufficient support from their schools.

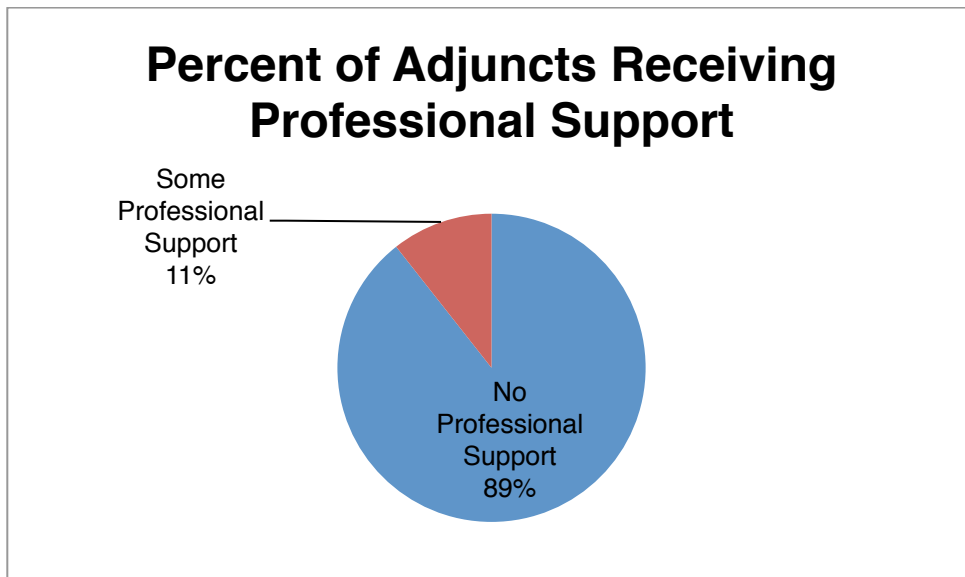
...opportunities for growth and advancement, job stability, and administrative and professional support - they are all structured in a framework that sees contingent faculty not as faculty more like contractors and performing unimportant labor....

My institution does not offer many of the same professional support benefits to adjuncts that it offers to tenure-line faculty. The university does not support my research...

I am still relatively new to and excited about the experience of teaching. The lack of support I receive from the university is wearing me down though. I can sense in myself the inclination to “go through the motions” of my job.

Other respondents, albeit a minority, relayed a different experience.

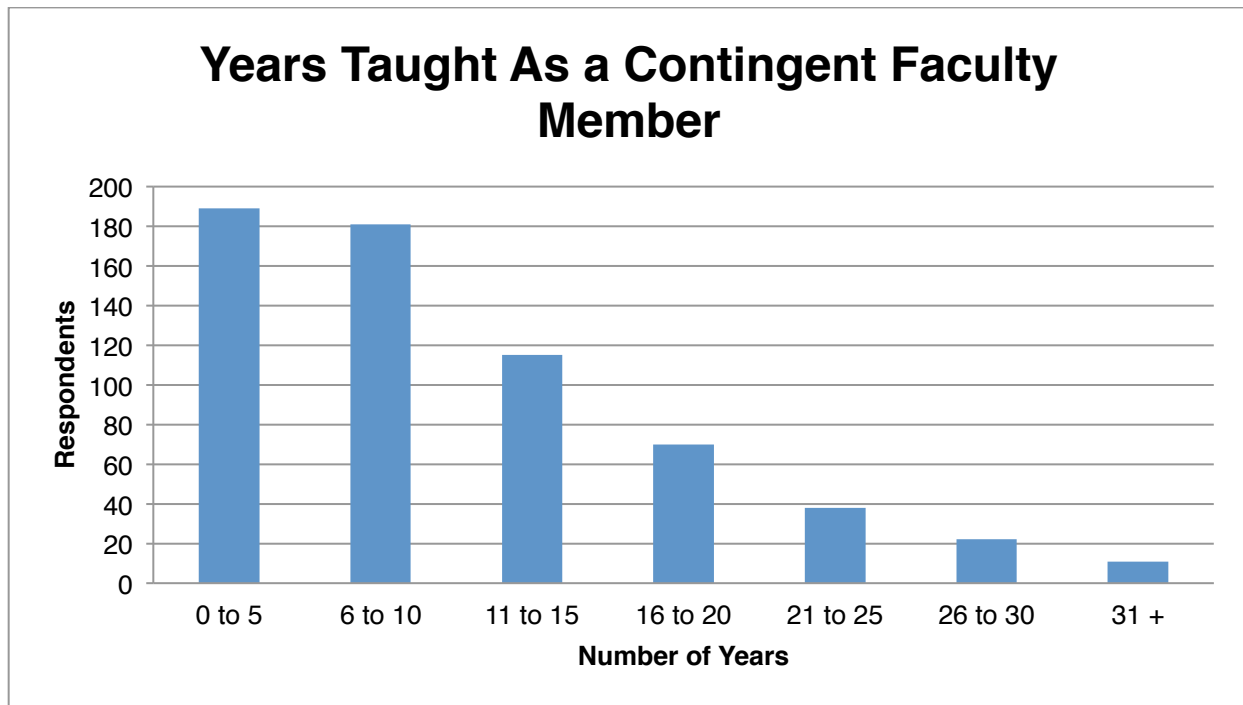
Administrative and professional support on our department level are very good and I feel that the Chairperson and other full-time staff within the Music Department respect us and are aware of the important role we as adjuncts fill (all instrumental instructors are adjuncts).



Adjuncts are highly skilled

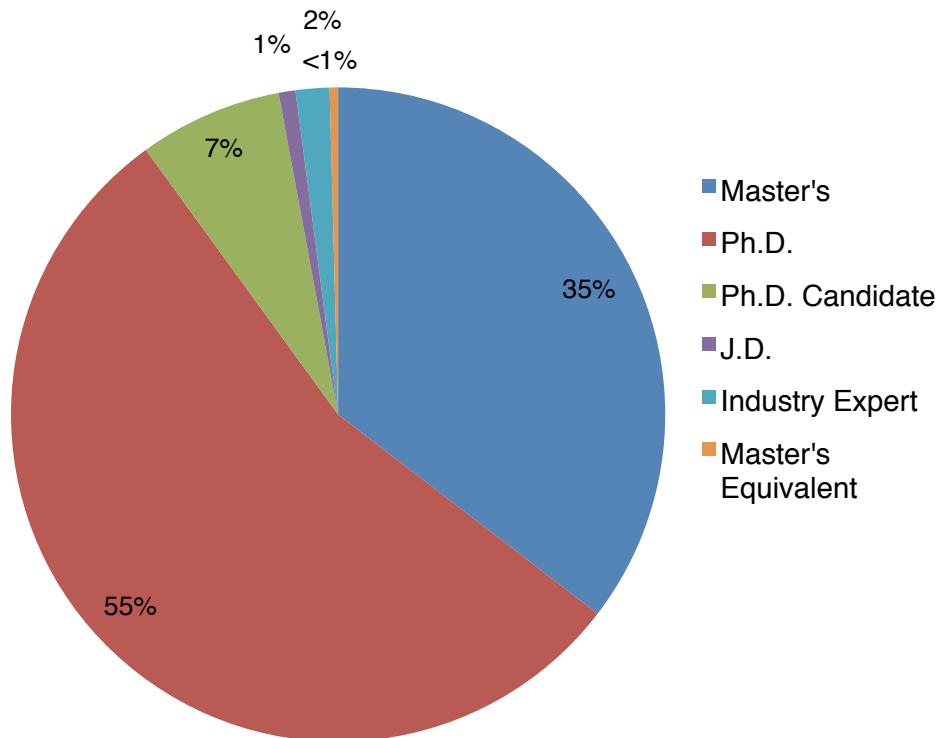
The eForum found that, despite their low pay and lack of benefits, contingent faculty possess impressive educational backgrounds, often with many years of teaching and industry experience.

Some two hundred and sixty-six respondents discussed the number of years they had worked as a part-time professor. The responses ranged from one semester to thirty-five years. The average was ten years as a part-time worker; the median was four years. Many also taught in other capacities or were otherwise active players in their field for additional years.



Of the respondents who provided their educational background, the vast majority held a Master's degree or higher; more than 50 percent held Ph.D.s, and 30 percent held a Master's. Many have been published or have completed post doctorate studies. Of those who did not hold a degree, two percent held substantial industry experience or a terminal degree equivalent, which they noted as an indispensable tool when conveying real-world experience to their students.

Highest Educational Degree Obtained



In short, adjuncts and other contingent faculty likely make up the most highly educated and experienced workers on food stamps and other public assistance in the country.

The impact on teaching

These trends are not without consequence. Because many eForum respondents are juggling several courses and jobs, many expressed that they do not spend adequate time on class preparation and office hours. These faculty members worry that students are negatively impacted because they are unable to access professors who, for example, may have to sprint out of the office to drive an hour or longer to teach their next class. 98 percent of adjuncts who commented on the impact of their working conditions on their students felt that they were missing opportunities to better serve their students because of the demands on their schedule.

These conditions make it impossible to dedicate my full attention to the success of my students because I spend almost as much time driving from institution and looking for jobs elsewhere as I do prepping lectures grading assignments, developing curriculum, etc.

Since I need to teach so many classes and have to work a third job right now, I cannot put in as much time with my students as I would like to.

Students get their work back more slowly and I cannot hold office hours (I only actually have an office in one of the 4 colleges) and prep is sometimes rushed ...I am an outstanding teacher and care about the quality of education that my students receive, although the sheer volume of the workload makes it hard.

I am limited in the amount of time I can spend at my office, having office hours, and otherwise serving my institution and my career, since I am not paid enough to afford child care beyond the hours that I spend teaching.

When you pay an adjunct only for the contact hours they spend in the classroom, it doesn't give adjuncts a lot of motivation to spend extra time outside of class working on projects for students or scheduling extra time to help those who come to class unprepared to study or write at college level. I have heard some adjuncts say, "I'm not going to put in all this extra time, because they don't think we're worth paying us other than our time in class." Many of us put in the time anyway, because we love teaching and helping our students succeed, but the system certainly doesn't reward it.

I enjoy working with students and I have found that the students at this community college are some of the most motivated and determined students I have ever met. I want to be able to help them succeed. However, I feel that my position as a part-time faculty instructor severely hinders helping these students to the best of my ability. I do not have an office to meet with students in, and I am only paid for half an hour a week of office hours. For a thirty student class I will need to spend some of my own time helping all the students that need extra time. I am only in my early twenties and would like to be able to make teaching my life's work. But under these conditions, I do not think I will be able to last much longer. How can I pay off the student debt I accumulated as an undergraduate when I am only scheduled for less than twenty hours a week? When I am only granted one class? How can I save up money for emergency expenses? Our students are in desperate need of good teachers, and the labor conditions are forcing highly qualified teachers to search for other professions that offer a living wage or benefits.

I caution my students about choosing education as a career path. I would not wish their lives to turn out like mine has.

While the eForum asked only contingent faculty for comment, these views are shared by some students. The student newspaper at Castleton State College, for example, featured a piece this past December, asking, "Are there too many adjuncts?" Noting that 134 of 231 instructors at the school were part-time, it read:

...[A]djuncts are much more difficult to get in touch with because many of them have other jobs and not many office hours. Their suggestion is to email them questions about the class, but they are often slow to respond. As far as actually teaching during class, sometimes they forget they are talking to students trying to learn, not their co-workers, and they move too fast through lessons. They are very knowledgeable about their subjects, but often times, they're not the best at explaining it to students...

Students should be learning valuable information that a future employer will expect them to know, but many students said they don't feel they're getting that. They don't feel they are getting the information they're paying all this money for and they don't feel prepared to go into a job setting where they will be expected to know this material.

We feel that full-time professors, who are much more invested, should be teaching these courses.²³

More than a handful of studies over the last 10 years examining outcomes for students taught by contingent faculty have found "some consistent and disturbing trends." According to these studies, students who took more courses with non-tenure-track faculty experienced lower graduation rates, lower grade point averages, and fewer transfers from two-year to four-year colleges, compared to other students.²⁴

A 2013 study of introductory courses at Northwestern University, however, found that students learned as much, if not more, from non-tenure-track professors than from tenure-track professors. Importantly, non-tenure-track professors at Northwestern enjoy better pay and support than the average adjunct at other schools. At Northwestern, “lecturers have long-term relationships with the University, and the vast majority are full-time instructors with their own career ladders” at the school.²⁵

As some have pointed out, “[i]t’s not that some of these adjuncts aren’t great teachers. Many do not have the support that the tenure-track faculty have, in terms of offices, teaching assistants and time. Their teaching loads are higher, and they have less time to focus on students.”²⁶ In short, adjuncts and other part-time faculty likely must work harder to deliver the same quality education as their full-time or tenured peers: “Adjuncts and graduate students often deliver excellent instruction, but that is in spite of their working conditions.”²⁷

One respondent raised the issue of gender equity, noting that “you will probably find a majority of adjuncts to be bright, highly educated women.” She went on:

Students are receiving an excellent education from instructors who are highly educated, committed to education, experienced and world wise, but who are not models or examples of success in higher education, especially older women. Female students suffer when some of the best women teachers are an underclass in higher ed.

Engaging in self-help

Recent press accounts show that a growing number of contingent faculty have turned to organizing with labor unions like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the United Steelworkers (USWA), and the United Auto Workers (UAW) to improve their lot in the academy.²⁸ The 2010 CAW survey found that unionized adjuncts earned 25 percent more per course than non-unionized adjuncts, and eForum respondents said that adjuncts who are union members have more job stability and better access to benefits.

I am fortunate because I have a faculty union. I am paid much more than most adjunct faculty, and I have the same benefits as tenured faculty--medical, dental, vision, retirement.

One adjunct asked if she [the administrator] would give preference in hiring to adjuncts. She replied, "not only will I not give preference to adjuncts, I want people who have been out in the world doing things not teaching." This was the impetus for us to form a union. We realized the futures for which we had prepared would be denied to us unless we worked together to change our situation.

For now, due primarily to our faculty union, I make a decent salary, have full health benefits, and am looking forward to retiring with a modest pension.

I work at [school] which is a better place than most for adjuncts thanks to a union contract that gives us access to health insurance and a minimal number of paid sick days.

Our administration tried this year to change the contract for part-timers, asking us to directly contribute to full-timers retirement health benefits (which we do not get), take away our benefits and eliminate seniority so they can reduce our course loads to avoid paying health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. Luckily, the union stood by us and those changes were not made.

Unionization has not been universally welcomed by institutions of higher education. While Georgetown University has cited the Catholic Church's social justice teachings in recognizing its adjunct union, Duquesne University—also a Catholic school—has argued that it is religiously exempt from recognizing its adjunct union and has refused to bargain with these professors.²⁹ At Northeastern University, the administration has hired the anti-union firm Jackson Lewis to fight its part-time, non-tenured faculty organizing campaign. The school employs 1,400 such academic workers.³⁰

Conclusion

By no means comprehensive or scientific, the eForum provided an alarming snapshot of life for contingent faculty. While the occupation of “college professor” still retains a reputation as a middle-class job, the reality is that a growing number of people working in this profession fill positions not intended to provide the stability, pay, or benefits necessary for a family’s long-term economic security. Whether some adjunct professors piece together a living from their teaching job or only use it to supplement a more stable primary career elsewhere, many contingent faculty might be best classified as working poor.³¹ As one respondent put it: “[T]he bulk of instructors at the college level fulfilling this goal [of educating students] are compensated less than their peers despite equal expertise, are given no benefits despite obvious need, and are continually stripped of their voice and dignity by a situation where they must overwork themselves or find a new career.” Their story is another example of the shrinking middle class and another data point in the widening gap between rich and poor. Policy solutions for part-time workers more generally, such as the Part-Time Workers’ Bill of Rights, would help address some of the economic security issues these faculty face.

While these individuals worry about their own futures and how to provide for their families, they are equally distressed by what they believe is a shortchanging of students who pay ever-increasing tuitions to attend their courses. The link between student outcomes and contingent faculty working conditions—not just the adjuncts’ schedules and compensation but the respect and professional support they receive from their schools—deserves serious scrutiny from the Committee and other policymakers around the country, as well as from institutions of higher education themselves.

Researchers have pointed to various causes of the increased reliance on contingent faculty. Some argue that reduced state funding for higher education has pushed schools to both raise tuition and cut costs, particularly labor costs. Others argue that institutions have actually deprioritized spending on academics in favor of other categories of spending. Indeed, the proportion of colleges’ total expenditures attributable to teacher salaries declined five percent from 1987 to 2005.³² In today’s lean era, schools have often chosen to balance their budgets on the backs of adjuncts. Outsized administrator salaries, marketing operations, and campus frills recently have received significant attention. Increased budget transparency for institutions of higher education would be a critical step in understanding the nature and necessity of this now-pervasive labor practice and whether and how it may be changed.

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