

Only Partway There

The working conditions and compensation of adjunct faculty in some states have improved dramatically over the last few years. But many part-timers say things are getting worse just as they're getting better.

By Kristina Lane

NEW YORK — Ingrid Hughes, who teaches at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, has a cardboard box for a desk. She shares “her” office, a 12-foot-by-12-foot wedge of space, with nearly 100 other instructors who come and go. At another college where she once taught, she had to plead with the administration for two years just to get access to a telephone. That is, she’s an adjunct.

For Hughes and many other part-time faculty members, frequently called adjuncts, such indignities go with the territory, but they’re far from the most serious of their problems.

Low salaries, nonexistent job security and frequent lack of health and other benefits have

driven many adjunct faculty from the teaching field, but more and more are hired every year, often to replace full-time faculty.

And although they’ve won some key legal battles recently, many adjuncts believe the system they feel exploited by isn’t likely to cut them a break any time soon.

“I always feel totally peripheral ... at every college I have taught,” Hughes said.

The Part-Time Picture, by Numbers

There’s a lot of data to justify that feeling.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, part-time faculty at community colleges make just over half the salary of their full-time colleagues per classroom credit hour —

\$3,566 versus \$6,603.

The NCES has also reported that 43 percent of faculty and instructional staff at all higher-education institutions were part-time instructors. That represents an increase of 10 percent since 1987, when 33 percent of all faculty members were part-timers. At community colleges the percentage of adjunct faculty — 64 percent — was significantly greater than the overall number.

While the report found that part-time instructors at all institutions spend slightly less time in the classroom than their full-time colleagues — about seven hours versus 11 hours per week on average — the difference in their salary levels is hugely disproportionate.

The average salary for adjuncts at all institutions was substantially

less than the average salary of their full-time counterparts — \$12,000 compared to \$57,000, respectively. Adjuncts at community colleges earn less than the overall average — about \$11,000 a year.

Pressing for Pay Parity

Because salaries for adjuncts are so low, most must seek out other sources of income, teaching at other campuses or working in other professions.

“For years I taught on multiple campuses, but I reached a point where ... I was running myself so ragged. I decided I needed to be on just one campus, even though that put me at only two-thirds of a full load,” said Dr. Julianne Clark, an adjunct instructor of Spanish at North Seattle Community College in Seattle.

Clark, who has been a part-time instructor for 18 years and does not hold any other jobs, said the disparity in pay between adjuncts and full-time professors is one of the most disheartening parts of her job.

“If I have a Ph.D., which I do, and I’m teaching course X, and the person in the room next to me is teaching the same course but has a full-time label, and I’m earning 40 percent less than that person — that’s just not fair,” Clark said. “When people are so ridiculously underpaid, after they’ve spent their lives getting their educations — it’s insulting to people who are professionals, as we are.”

Although Clark said she believes current salary standards are unacceptable, the state’s pay gap between adjuncts and full-time

“When I retire, I am condemned to an old age of squalor ... of total poverty.”

—Dr. Julianne Clark, adjunct instructor of Spanish at North Seattle Community College

faculty used to be even wider. Before 1999, adjuncts were making about 40 percent of what full-time faculty earned, according to the American Federation of Teachers, a national union that represents more than 60,000 community college faculty and staff throughout the country.

But that year, after lobbying by the Washington Federation of Teachers — a state affiliate of the AFT — Gov. Gary Locke and the state Legislature authorized \$20 million in community college adjunct salary increases.

The state allocated \$10 million to be used exclusively for salary increases. To be eligible for part of this money, community colleges had to match the state’s contribution by at least 40 percent, according to the AFT. Some colleges, such as the Seattle Community College District, matched 100 percent, while others did not participate, said Lynn Dodson, president of the Seattle Community College Federation of Teachers.

Part-time instructors throughout Washington state now earn about 56 percent of full-time faculty salaries on average.

“It was a major boost, but it would have been more of a boost if colleges had been required to match, not given the option, and if more money had been appropriated,” Dodson said. “I figure it will take \$100 million (more) to reach parity in the whole state.”

The Other Side of a Thin Coin

Like Clark, John McCarthy has also held more than one job — and still does — but his perspective is miles different. McCarthy, who has taught part-time at Montgomery College in Rockville, Md., for the past 23 years, works full time as a deputy state’s attorney. While McCarthy realizes how little he makes as an adjunct, the salary has never been an issue for him. He said his classroom work has greatly benefited his court-room work, and vice versa.

“Because I’ve learned how to communicate with people in a classroom, it’s assisted me in my law practice,” McCarthy said. And “one of the things students recognize as a great strength is a teacher doing a job they hope to do, and giving them insight as to what it’s really like to do that job.”

Phillip Laughlin, assistant superintendent and vice president for instructional and information services at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, Calif., said

adjunct faculty who bring real-world expertise to the classroom are invaluable.

“I also think there is a great degree of flexibility these individuals enjoy. In general adjuncts can work whenever they want to,” Laughlin said. “There is flexibility for the institution and the employer.”

James Jacobs, associate director for community college operations at Columbia University’s Community College Research Center, said this ability of adjuncts to bring current, real-world skills into the classrooms is one of factors that make adjuncts indispensable. But, Jacobs said, many institutions throughout higher education have overlooked their value by paying them poorly and failing to integrate them more with full-time faculty.

“It’s not just a community college trend, it’s a trend in all higher education,” Jacobs said. “It has to do with costs (and) flexibility; the issues are important ones for all of higher education to consider.”

David Viar, executive director of the Community College League of California, said it is important to remember that, while the current situation for adjuncts may not be optimal, most college administrators are doing the best they can with resources they’ve been given. As financial situations fluctuate from term to term, Viar said, administrators often turn to adjuncts to help meet the students’ needs.

“Throughout the country, community colleges do not receive adequate revenues to serve our student needs,” Viar said. “It really is a balance. ... The question becomes one of, ‘Do we not offer that course because we cannot afford to employ a full-time faculty member, or do we bring someone in who can help us meet the need during this semester?’”

Bereft of Benefits

Next to low pay, the lack of health and retirement benefits is widely considered the worst pitfall of being an adjunct at most community colleges and universities.

A report by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, a group of 25 academic societies, surveyed the benefits of part-time faculty at colleges and universities and found that 63 percent received no retirement or health benefits from their institutions.

Again, adjuncts in Washington state have made some progress. The 1999 cash infusion for adjunct salary increases was

accompanied by \$1.9 million to expand adjuncts’ eligibility for retirement benefits. According to the Washington Federation of Teachers, this provision enabled 1,200 adjuncts to qualify for retirement benefits.

While this was a step in the right direction, Julianne Clark said, it was too little too late.

“I’ve been cheated out of a huge percentage that could go into my retirement. The kind of turnover you get on your money (over time), that’s forever gone,” Clark said. “They can never make this right for me. When I retire, I am condemned to an old age of squalor ... of total poverty.”

Ingrid Hughes, an adjunct at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, said part-time fac-

■ Average Salaries Per Classroom Credit Hour at Community Colleges



FULL TIME: \$6,603



PART TIME: \$3,566

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, 1993 NATIONAL STUDY OF POSTSECONDARY FACULTY

Profile of the Adjunct as an Older Man

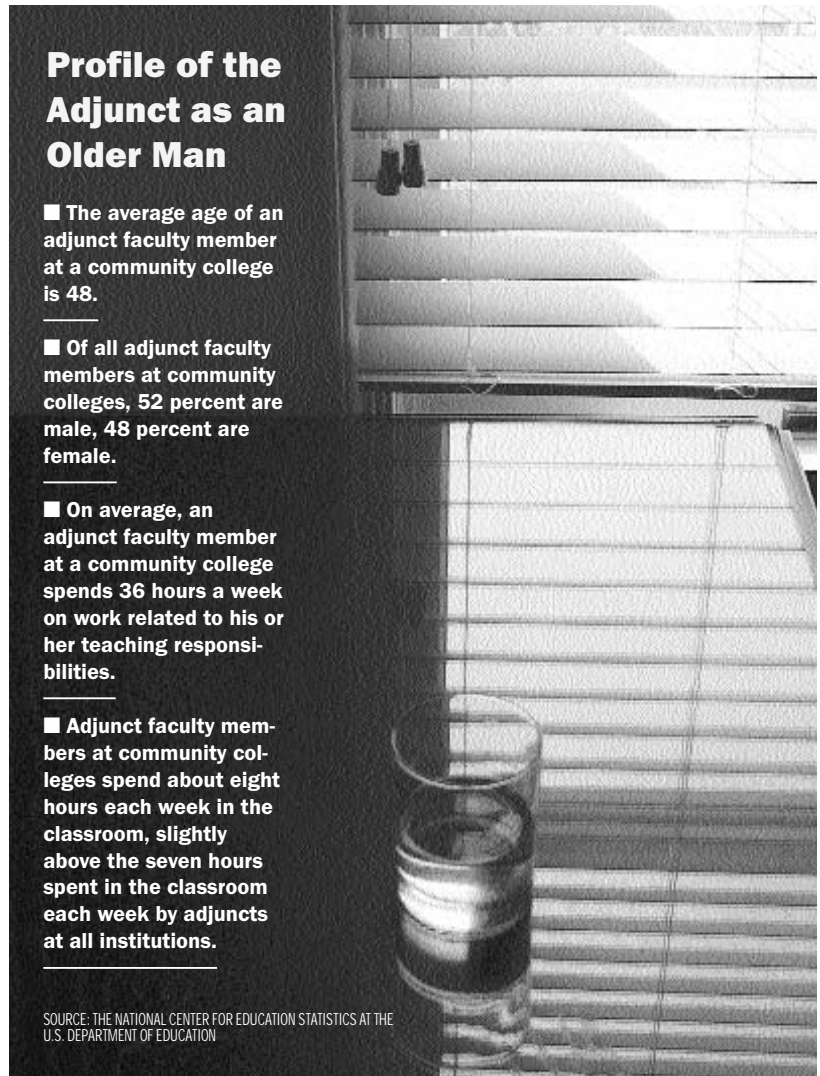
■ The average age of an adjunct faculty member at a community college is 48.

■ Of all adjunct faculty members at community colleges, 52 percent are male, 48 percent are female.

■ On average, an adjunct faculty member at a community college spends 36 hours a week on work related to his or her teaching responsibilities.

■ Adjunct faculty members at community colleges spend about eight hours each week in the classroom, slightly above the seven hours spent in the classroom each week by adjuncts at all institutions.

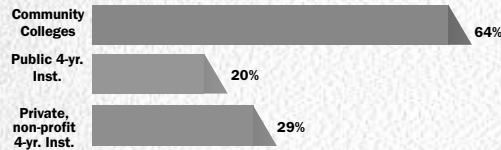
SOURCE: THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



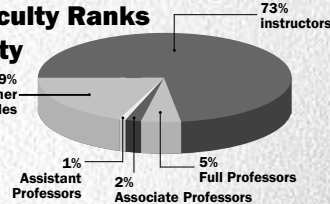
Facts of the Matter

Part-Time Community College Faculty Statistics

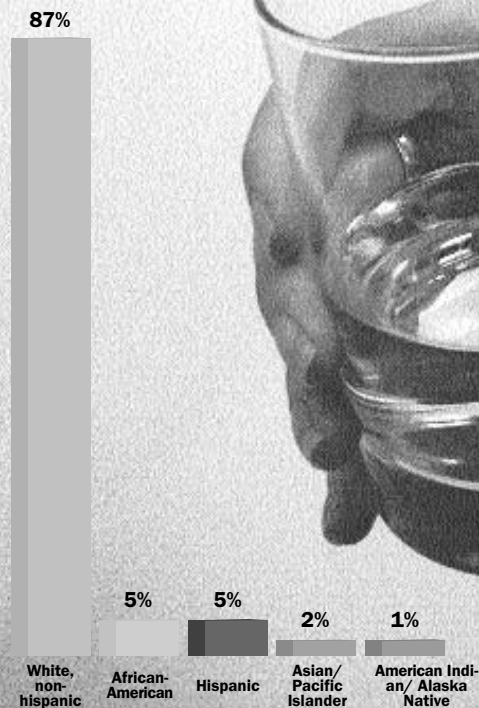
■ Adjunct Faculty by Institution



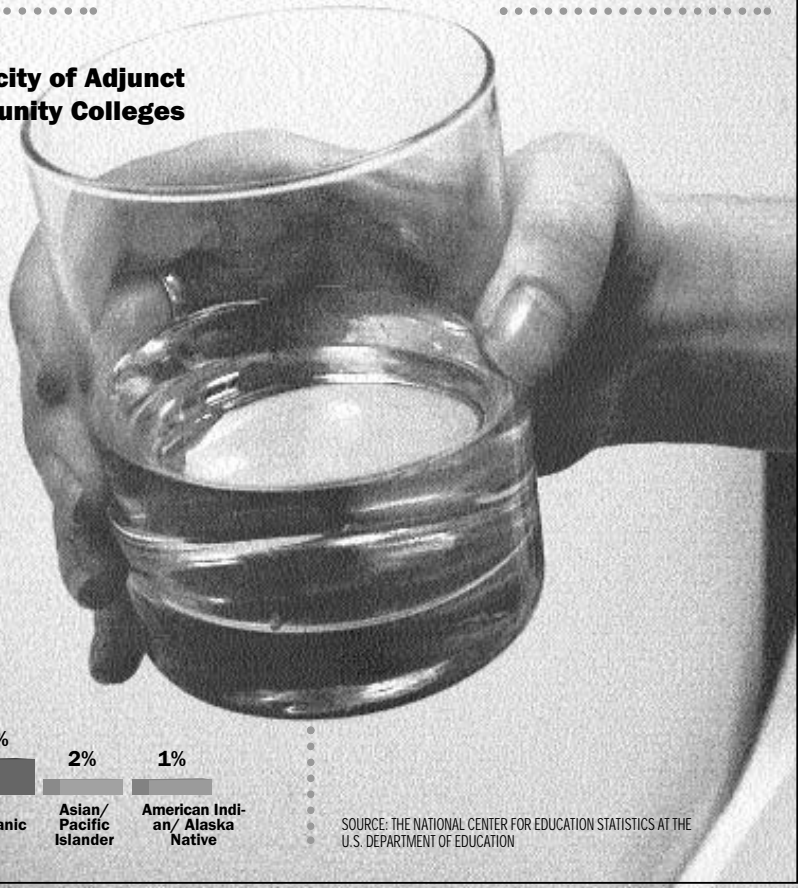
■ Adjunct Faculty Ranks at Community Colleges



■ Race and Ethnicity of Adjunct Faculty at Community Colleges



SOURCE: THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Job Insecurity

Craig Smith, assistant director for higher education at AFT headquarters in Washington, D.C., said nonexistent job security is just as much a problem for adjuncts as their hassles with pay equity and benefits.

Smith said adjuncts are often told only two or three days before class begins whether they will be needed.

Hughes said she has had to become accustomed to starting jobs at the last minute at BMCC.

"I sometimes begin after the first class has been taught. And I've heard of people being hired by e-mail," Hughes said.

Clark said this is especially unfair for part-time instructors who have been with a college for an extended period of time.

"You shouldn't be told two weeks before the semester that you will be cut," Smith said. "A big issue for our local (chapters) is to get language that says the longer you teach at a place, the more secure your position will be."

Part of this effort, Smith said, involves getting schools to guarantee adjuncts when they are hired that they will have an option to apply for full-time positions.

Lightman, of the FACCC, said about 60 percent of the part-time instructors at California community colleges who are teaching more than one class would like to apply for full-time positions.

A California law passed in 1988 established a ratio requiring that full-time faculty members conduct 75 percent of all classroom instruction at community colleges. But, Lightman said, the state has fallen short of that mandate, and only 64 percent of classes are currently taught by full-time instructors.

Working Conditions that Aren't Working

Many adjuncts also grapple with inferior working conditions, including overcrowded office space and limited or no access to computers, phones and e-mail, and no pay for office hours.

Alberta Grossman, an adjunct instructor of English as a Second Language at BMCC in New York, said her dilapidated work space is humiliating.

Grossman, who shares the room with Hughes and about 100 other adjuncts, said it is impossible to hold a conference there with students.

"It's now prohibited to have a conference in that room, so they

"We are feeling the (power of) our voice more, but it also highlighted how far we have to go."

— Lynn Dodson
President

Seattle Community College Federation of Teachers

ulty members there have health benefits as long as they work about six hours each week, the equivalent of teaching two courses each semester.

"We have access to a puny retirement plan, but it takes years to get anywhere (with your savings)," Hughes said.

In California there is a bill pending in the state Legislature that would enable community college adjuncts to contribute to retirement benefit plans such as Social Security or an alternative plan. The bill also would

establish a minimum matching contribution for the colleges to make to the retirement funds.

"There are a number of college districts (in California) that don't contribute a penny to the retirement plans of their part-timers," said Jonathan Lightman, executive director of the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges. "What we are trying to do is provide some level of dignity to part-timers when they end their careers, so they are not retiring in poverty."

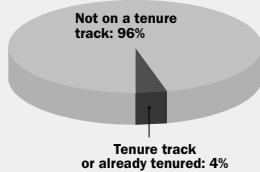
Another California law, passed in the fall of 1999, increased

adjuncts' access to employer-provided health insurance. The measure allows part-time instructors teaching a minimum of two courses — 40 percent of a full-time workload — to qualify for health benefits. Under the old law, only those working a full-time workload could get health insurance.

Still, according to the AFT, the 1999 law does not require colleges to offer health benefits; it only encourages them to do so by matching every dollar spent on health insurance with a dollar from the state.

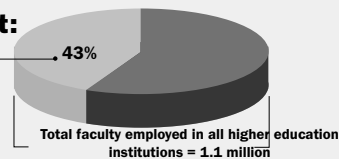
Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?

■ Tenure Status (all community college faculty)



■ Adjunct Employment:

Percentage of adjunct faculty in higher education



SOURCE: THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

set up a table in a resource center where people can have conferences," Grossman said.

At one point, Grossman said, the administration brought in one computer for the adjuncts to share, but the school placed it in a locked room for which the adjuncts had no keys. And because so many adjuncts use that one phone, relying on it can be dicey, Grossman said.

California recently established a fund that matches, dollar for dollar, the money community colleges pay to adjuncts for the time they spend on office hours. At the end of 2001, according to Lightman, 19 of the state's 72 college districts were participating in the program.

Beyond the Battles

But despite concerted efforts by many adjunct instructors to better their circumstances over the years, most adjuncts and others in higher education agree that their morale has continued to decline. And, others point out, the unfair treatment of adjuncts raises questions about the future of higher

education in general.

"When I was at Baruch College, adjuncts were never invited to faculty or department meetings," Ingrid Hughes said. "The curriculum is set by full-timers, and we are just hired to carry it out."

Lynn Dodson, of SCCFT, agreed with Hughes and said morale went up at Seattle colleges after the 1999 law was implemented in Washington.

"(Part-time) faculty were aware they had the power to change things ... we are feeling the (power of) our voice more, but it also highlighted how far we have to go," Dodson said.

Dodson said she worries colleges and universities will continue to hire part-time instructors to replace the large generation of full-time faculty set to retire as part of the Baby Boom.

"We had 17 full-time positions that needed replacements at the beginning of this year, and only a few are being replaced by full-time (instructors)," Dodson said.

The problem, she said, is that the new adjuncts believe they will

eventually attain full-time status, but many never will, unless the system changes.

Craig Smith of the AFT said the increased reliance on and mistreatment of adjuncts begs the question of where higher education is headed.

"We (the AFT) have always said two things: part-time faculty with training (equal to full-time instructors) should be paid comparably, and states and institutions should be working to maintain a highly qualified, tenured faculty," Smith said. "That's the core of higher education, and no one's asking why we are ... dismantling it."

Smith said the institutions and all levels of government are equally at fault and should work together to reform the flawed system.

Julianne Clark believes it's a societal problem.

"Politicians seem to be able to manufacture money out of thin air for things they want. But education is like the beggar child that comes with the tin cup and begs for some kind of leftover," she said. "They (politicians) never face the issue." ▲

In a Tight N.C. Budget, Hundreds of Adjuncts Expected to Lose Jobs

RALEIGH, N.C. — The president of North Carolina's community college system says hundreds of part-time faculty members will likely be laid off this fall because of the state's budget shortfall.

State officials have told the president of the community college system, Dr. Martin Lancaster, to expect anywhere from a 4 percent to a 10 percent budget cut at the colleges. North Carolina's budget could fall short by as much as \$1.3 billion the next fiscal year.

"A 10 percent cut would be devastating, and would mean thousands of positions," said Lancaster. "But even 4 percent would eliminate hundreds of positions."

Though most of the targeted positions would be adjunct faculty, some full-time faculty may be affected as well, Lancaster said.

"Eighty to 90 percent of the budget is people," said Kennon Briggs, the system's vice president for business and finance. "We have to put a face on the problem."

College officials won't know exactly how bad their situation will be until the state's General Assembly convenes later this year.

The expected loss of faculty could not come at a worse time for North Carolina's 59-campus system. Because of the weak economy, many textile, furniture and other companies in the state have laid off workers. In better times, those unemployed workers could turn to community colleges, where they could learn new

jobs skills or pursue degrees.

But if the projected deep cuts take effect, the colleges may not be able to afford even low-paid adjunct instructors, and fewer class slots will be available for the state's 770,000 community college students.

Enrollment at North Carolina's 58 community colleges is at an all-time high. It was up 10 percent — 15,500 full-time students — this fiscal year.

Dr. Fred Williams, president of Robeson Community College, said his college could lose up to \$317,000 in funding next year, following a year when enrollment increased by 22 percent. The college has grown so fast in the last two years that parking has spilled into the front lawn of the campus.

"This will delay completion of their diplomas. It will delay opportunities," Martin said. Coupled with higher tuition rates — lawmakers have hiked tuition 77 percent over the past three years — Martin fears many students will become discouraged and not pursue college at all.

Wake Technical Community College is the second largest two-year campus in the state, with enrollment around 54,000. About 30 percent of the faculty are part time, according to Dr. Bruce Howell, the college's president. Like many colleges, Wake relies heavily on adjunct faculty to teach specific classes such as specialized science or computer courses. These

faculty members would be the first to go.

But faculty members teaching popular general classes could also find their jobs on the chopping block. Howell recently met with full-time faculty to reassure them that their jobs would be the last to be cut, but it could be a Pyrrhic victory of sorts — remaining faculty are likely to get more work with no extra pay.

"I think everyone is preparing for the worst, but hoping for the best-case scenario," Howell said. "However, anything that happens is not going to be good."

Last year, Gov. Mike Easley's office asked the community college system to give back up to 4 percent of its \$648 million budget, which had already been reduced. That cut is expected to have an effect as soon as this summer term, reducing class offerings by 25 percent.

Because faculty cuts appear inevitable, Howell, like other presidents, is making plans to scale back as early as this summer.

Howell said he empathizes with part-time faculty.

"Many will try and find employment somewhere else, which will be hard, or just weather this out," he said.

The last time Howell faced such dire circumstances was about 10 years ago, during a budget recession. Faculty members taught additional courses for free, he recalled, and administrators with teaching credentials

stepped into the classroom. Howell himself taught an American history course. He expects to do the same next year.

The mood is grim among both adjunct and full-time faculty throughout the state, said Jim Davies, an art professor at Rockingham Community College in Wentworth and the president of the North Carolina Community College Faculty Association.

"They're angry, frustrated and demoralized. Morale was already low because of pay. Now they're asked to teach more without more pay," Davies said. He said with more crowded classrooms, professors are concerned about the quality of education.

Now, with their jobs uncertain, adjuncts and full-time professors are beginning to leave community colleges for greener employment pastures.

"People are getting out. They're going into private industry. They're going into public schools. They're fed up," said Davies, who has taught at Rockingham for 26 years. "The main concern I have is that ultimately students are going to suffer. (Budget cuts) to the community colleges are injuring the very thing that can pull the state out of economic crisis. We're the primary platform for workforce training."

Said Davies, "It's really a lose-lose situation." ▲

— By Eleanor Lee Yates