

PART-TIMERS UNITE!

ADJUNCT PROFESSORS STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

Downsizing in corporate America has been reshaping the work-place, molding it into a nation increasingly made up of temporary employees. Distant are the times when most workers felt the safety of long-term commitments, company loyalty, realistic retirement plans, adequate pensions, expected salary increases, and comprehensive company-sponsored health care plans. Part-timers are cheaper: Legally, they do not require benefits such as expense accounts, life and disability insurance, private offices, and the benefits of seniority. The average person today is expected to have multiple career shifts in a lifetime, going wherever business needs and job markets beckon. There is an overall pragmatic thrust to find increasingly efficient production processes. We're addicted to maximum profit, cheap labor, and the bottom line.



Inevitably or not—depending on how pervasive you think market forces are—a model of corporate downsizing has seemingly been adopted within academe, an arena not historically considered to be driven by the profit motive. In the ideal world in which many would still like to believe, the university is a place where the undaunted pursuit of learning can occur without such work-a-day economic pressures. Once a professor secures tenure, so the myth purports, he or she can pursue any and all questions, however critical of governing institutions; tangential to current modes of knowledge, belief, and practice; and however costly the support of such research may be. But in fact, universities and colleges have budget concerns equal to any other major corporation. So, like everybody else in the last ten years, academic institutions have more and more become employers of adjunct, temporary, part-time workers. The effects of this situation are being felt by teachers, administrations, and students alike.

Part-time Benefits

Adjunct teachers now make up between 30 to 90 percent of university teaching personnel, numbers that indicate an incredible demand and desire to employ part-timers. Surveys done by the United States Department of Education/National Center for Education Statistics show that this ratio increased from 22 percent in 1970 to more than 40 percent in 1993. A recent American Association of University Professors report found that that percentage has risen to 65 percent or more for humanities and math departments; and percentages are on the higher end for community colleges.

There are obvious financial incentives to keep such a high ratio of part- to full-time teachers. Since part-time instructors typically earn less than a third of what full-timers earn per course taught, nine or more courses per semester can be taught by part-timers on what it costs to pay one full-time

professor, who generally teaches three courses each term. (Nationally adjuncts earn \$1000 to \$3000 per semester-long course, where full-time salaries start at around \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year.) This radically increases the variety and number of courses for growing student populations while continuing to keep costs low. Since adjunct contracts carry few of the benefits offered full-timers-medical and dental insurance, retirement plans-even more of the budget can be saved for other uses. Moreover, adjunct contracts are usually for one semester only, and can be canceled without prior notice if minimum class enrollments are not met. If administrations can get the job done at lower rates, why not keep expenses down? Due to a growing glut of overqualified unemployed people-M.A.s, M.F.A.s, and Ph.D.s-there are many academics who will teach under less than perfect conditions. (It's not uncommon to have over 400 people apply for a single newly available full-time tenure-track position. And, with the abolition of mandatory retirement, those spaces are few and far between.)

On the positive side, a strong reliance on adjunct employees has benefits for students beyond strictly economic concerns. Adjunct faculty are often professionals in other fields, who lend their expertise for one or two courses per year. Lawyers, graphic designers, engineers, among others, bring "real-world" experience to the classroom that cannot be replicated by "ivory-tower" academics. In fact, some schools have built their reputations on the commitment to having practicing, professional artists teach the majority of its curriculum, to better prepare students for professional careers after graduation. Also, part-timers may not exhibit the fatigue experienced by full-timers overburdened with administrative duties, endless faculty meetings, and requirements to publish and continue research.

Along practical lines, employing a large number of adjuncts allows for greater flexibility in what special fields are taught and when courses are offered. Part-timers may be brought in to teach newer and more esoteric branches of knowledge that are not already covered. They may agree to teach at times undesirable for faculty but necessary for working students: at night, on weekends, and in the summer. With their minions of adjuncts, universities can better respond to fluctuating student needs.

Part-Time Drawbacks

The most troubling result of the excessive use of adjunct teachers is the potential impact on the quality of higher education. Even though adjunct professors bring invaluable knowledge and energy to campuses, they suffer from lack of training and little administrative support with few incentives to pursue professional development. Part-timers are not remunerated for adequate preparation time or office hours. There may be few external incentives to change or update curricula or to publish articles. There is no paid time off for research, no grant moneys to attend conferences, and no sabbaticals for recuperation.

Reliance on part-timers may contribute to a lack of continuity in the core curriculum. Typically, adjuncts have no extra time to invest in a particular school, because they often have to teach-and-run to get to their next job. There is usually no pay designated for attending administrative or departmental meetings, so courses taught by adjuncts may become disconnected from those taught by full-timers. Little contact with students and faculty outside the classroom may diminish commitment to an institution, causing part-timers to feel alienated and less able to represent the school's mission. Ramifications for full-time faculty are looming as well. Increasing numbers of part-timers may lower opportunities for people seeking full-time positions, as tenured professorships are retired and may be converted to numerous part-time slots. Full-time salaries may dip as part-time salaries are renegotiated. Moreover, the shrinking number of full-time positions may increase extracurricular responsibilities for those that remain: counseling students, organizing promotional reviews and search committees, developing new courses and majors, and directing graduate programs.

As disparities and inequities grow rifts are reinforced between full- and part-time faculty. Resentment invades what ideally should be a gracious, cooperative environment. And both groups may become cynical about a university's pledge to offer quality education over against their interest in saving money. Escalating administrative bureaucracies or boosted real-estate purchases may raise questions about a university's priorities. On top of everything else, frustration at the perceived lack of respect may simply drive potentially good teachers away. The profession of teaching is emotionally and intellectually demanding, and without proper financial and collegial support teachers may

become exhausted by the present system.

Part-timers' Perks

Some people choose part-time teaching because they don't *want* a full-time academic position. Adjunct status frees them from administrative duties, committee work, fundraising, scholarly demands, and allows them to pursue other interests and careers. Many professional artists, for example, prefer to teach part-time, allowing for more hours spent in the studio. Accepting a part-time position also allows those who have other, non-teaching jobs many desirable perks: involvement with younger generations, opportunities to share their knowledge, access to institutional facilities and libraries, a chance to build a teaching resume, and an intellectual environment in which to explore theoretical issues and ideas. Being a professor, even if part-time, also proffers a certain social status. However, many people would prefer one full-time tenure-track position, but are forced to cobble together a career by picking up four or more courses per semester, usually at more than one university or college. Traveling from campus to campus, with offices in the trunks of their cars or their backpacks, such academics suffer the most, because they aspire to and carry the course load of a full-time position but without fair compensation and support. Given the rigid hierarchy between full- and part-timers, long-term adjuncts rarely cross over to full-time positions.

These conditions and attitudes are some of the reasons many part-time academic work forces are organizing, protesting, negotiating with administrations, and even seeking alliances with labor unions, in efforts to correct the situation that now seems to be thoroughly entrenched. Two such forces that have been activated in the last several years are in major art schools in the Chicago area, and serve as case studies of the choices and options facing adjunct professors today.

Chicago Adjuncts Unite!

At both Columbia College Chicago and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), part-timers have organized to negotiate new working contracts with their administrations, and may prove to be exemplary of national educational trends. SAIC is a private art school with an enrollment of around 2500. Associated with the Museum of the Art Institute, SAIC was formed at the turn of the last century, and has been growing steadily since. Its offerings in traditional programs of painting, printmaking, and sculpture, were joined by programs in film, photography, video, holography, art and technology, art criticism, and performance art through the '70s and early '80s, making SAIC one of the most avant-garde and influential schools in the nation. In the past ten years, the school has grown from occupying a four-story building attached to the museum in the 1970s, to filling that structure and five more high-rises scattered around Chicago's downtown with classrooms, dormitories, exhibition venues, and studio spaces. The faculty demands have grown concomitantly with the expanding base of students and programs. SAIC is a major employer of professional fine artists in the area, and a great many of them are part-timers. Some artists have been teaching part-time there for over 15 years.

Columbia College has a larger student enrollment than SAIC, enrolling 8800 students, and has a policy of open enrollment. Columbia's programs are aimed at professional training in the commercial arts as well as offering traditional programs in the fine arts. Its photography and film departments have a national reputation for offering students real-life training by professionals in those fields. Columbia has also grown significantly in the past ten years, growing to fill eight high-rise buildings, six of which are in the South Loop, including a full-blown film sound studio, video editing suites, two exhibition venues, and it now houses the associated Museum of Contemporary Photography. Columbia College is also a major employer of area arts professionals, and an even greater percentage of faculty are part-time. Some part-timers have been at Columbia for 25 years. The situation at the two schools is comparable in terms of the basic salary disparity and security gap between part-time and full-time faculty.¹ The following profiles of recent situations at the two schools are shaped by conversations with the part-timers, who rarely have a public forum in which to tell their side of the story.

Collegiality

For many years at SAIC, the part-time faculty had periodic meetings, but to little effect, being both

ineffectual and poorly attended.² In 1995, after a consortium of long-time part-timers began to grow more and more frustrated with their situation, they decided to elect two representatives to the Faculty Senate, which at the time included only full-time faculty. After showing up uninvited at the next meeting they were seated by the Senate, though the larger group had not yet voted to let them officially join. It was an advantageous move for the part-timers, because at that time the school was in a process of a campus-wide self-evaluation, re-examining their programming and financial plans. Part-timers decided to make their working conditions part of this study.

In January 1996, a Part-time Faculty Advisory Committee was formed and a group of its volunteer members agreed to mount a study of part-time faculty positions to clarify how SAIC rated with other schools in terms of differences in pay scale with full-time faculty and other issues. The committee researched various models for educational organization such as the Union of University Professors, consulted the College Art Association guidelines on part-time employment, and studied surveys of private schools; university, state, and city colleges; and other Chicago area schools. By the end of the summer of 1996, they produced a document that reported on the current status of part-timers at SAIC and made recommendations to the administration to grant part-time faculty increases in pay, benefits, job security, and governance (participation in the governing bodies of the school such as the faculty senate, curriculum committees, etc.).

From the outset the committee wanted to proceed in a "collegial" manner in dealing with the administration, working within the mechanisms of the institution to effect change. It was never spoken, but tacitly understood that if the administration failed to respond, the adjuncts might be forced into an adversarial mode. They researched unionization, but determined that it was too risky: Many people have only one- or two-semester contracts, and the administration could simply choose not to renew contracts. Therefore, a majority of part-timers would have little protection under collective bargaining laws.

In the fall of 1996 the Part-time Advisory Committee entered collegial negotiations with the SAIC leadership. The *Chicago Reader* quoted Dean of Faculty Carol Becker as stating, "There has been some real inequity. The institution needs to maintain some kind of fluidity, and we have an obligation to [part-time] people who've been here a long time."³ After considering the committee's specific demands, the administration answered with their own proposal in January 1997. Representing the adjuncts' interest, the committee rejected this first proposal and then both parties proceeded to begin straightforward bargaining.

There was overwhelming support for the committee across the board from part-timers during this bargaining process. Some meetings called by the Part-time Faculty Advisory Committee attracted over 100 part-time faculty members to attend, which at SAIC, which has about 400 adjuncts, was unprecedented. According to people in attendance to the February 1997 meetings, Dean Becker and the other administrators openly recognized that part-timers as a unified body were a significant force within the school. Though never officially solicited, many full-timers and students lent support to the part-time efforts.

In February of 1997, the Part-time Faculty Advisory committee voted unanimously to recommend that part-time faculty at large accept an offer made by the SAIC administration in settlement, including increases in remuneration, benefits, governance, and job security.

Salary minimums were established for unranked and adjunct faculty, substantially raising those at the bottom of the pay scale. SAIC recently formalized the unusual practice of granting official "adjunct" status to those instructors who have taught at the school for at least three years and have demonstrated a record of effective teaching, consistent service, good student evaluations, professional activity, and who have been recommended by their department chair. Part-timers may apply for adjunct status, but the school is under no obligation to grant it. For many of the newly won benefits at SAIC, it makes a significant difference whether you are unranked (a part-time instructor at large) or adjunct. All part-timers are receiving an across-the-board raise of four percent annually for three years (total of 12 percent), in addition to the annual institutional pool raise, which varies year to year. Medical and dental insurance is made accessible and the school is accountable for its implementation. The school pays a portion of an adjunct's fees, and a voluntary, employee-funded

group insurance plan is available to all other part-timers who have 12-month contracts. For adjuncts in particular a retirement plan was implemented for pension contributions to a TIAA-CREF fund (for every one percent contributed by the employee, the employer matches with six percent), and all adjunct faculty receive paid life insurance in the amount of twice their salary with a minimum coverage of \$20,000. Unpaid leaves will be available to all part-time faculty on the same basis as full-time faculty and options for continuing any employee benefits during the leave will be the same as for full-time. Faculty enrichment and professional development grants have been made available to all faculty without regard to full-time or part-time status. Part-timers also earned considerable institutional presence throughout the school. In addition to various unpaid committee positions, part-timers have three seats on the Faculty Senate, and representation on the academic steering committee and in departmental chairs meetings; these latter positions are paid.⁴

Long-term appointments for adjunct professors is still a thorny issue. Currently the SAIC faculty handbook allows for up to two-year contracts for part-time faculty. Notification of non-renewals of contracts has been standardized, as has an appeal process to this notification. No progress has been made on instituting part-time tenure. The administration of SAIC has initiated steps to establish regular sabbaticals for adjuncts.

Generally, the concessions won by the part-timers at the School of the Art Institute were deemed a great success. The mammoth amount of volunteer work by the Part-time Faculty Advisory Committee was duly rewarded, but further efforts seem daunting. General interest among part-timers has slacked off considerably after the initial demands were won. There are still large discrepancies between full- and part-time benefits, but the major headway made by the committee is a significant step to achieving better working conditions and being included in the administrative life of a school.

Unionize

Part-timers at Columbia College took another route, favoring unionizing over the collegiality pursued at SAIC.⁵ Professors had come together in an informal group to discuss working conditions for several years. The group had mounted many petition drives and surveys amongst part-timers to make demands on the administration for better pay and benefits. The administration refused to believe that the group, formalized as the Part-time Faculty at Columbia (P-FAC), represented a majority of the adjunct faculty, stating that their part-timers weren't teaching for the money, because they had other professional jobs. Part-timers constitute 80 percent of the faculty at Columbia College, and teach 70 percent of the total credit hours there, but are poorly paid, receive no benefits, and have no say in decisions regarding curriculum or administration. P-FAC circulated their own survey among Columbia part-timers, and found that the administration was wrong: While some professors didn't need the money made from teaching there, a far greater number did. And, they were in dire need of health insurance. Many were working a number of part-time jobs to make ends meet. With these results, P-FAC went to the administration in the summer of 1997, inviting them to form their own investigation committee. The administration did nothing.

At this point, the members of the committee began to put out feelers to unionize. They decided to steer clear of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) aligned with the AFL-CIO, which is the union of the Chicago Public School Teachers and many other educators in large urban areas, because it did not offer specific local autonomy. P-FAC felt its specific issues would get lost in the large organization with its national agendas. The American Association of University Professors, another option, was rejected because of its outdated policies. Instead Columbia College part-timers contacted the Illinois Education Association (IEA) of the National Education Association,⁶ which represents teachers across the country in suburbs and smaller communities, mostly K-12, and has twice as many members as the AFT. IEA was begun as a professional organization in the 1850s as part of the reform movement to institute free public schools nationwide. In the 1960s, after the AFT union was formed, the IEA became a legally recognized union to pursue collective bargaining with school administrations. P-FAC was attracted to the legal resources and organizational assistance offered by IEA, which allowed Columbia to have its own local charter and remain an autonomous bargaining group.

In order to become a legal union with collective bargaining rights, Columbia part-timers had to show that one-third of the people effected by the proposed union were willing to join. In the fall of 1997, P-FAC began canvassing part-time instructors, and easily gained the support of over 50 percent. After

that, by dictate of law, an election was held in February 1998 to determine if part-timers wanted to unionize. In a resounding victory that took the administration by surprise, 80 percent of Columbia part-timers voted in the election, with 80 percent voting for and 20 percent voting against unionization. They adopted a constitution, instituted bylaws, elected an Executive Committee, and became legally recognized as a bargaining unit to negotiate terms of contracts.

At the time of this writing, the union is still in negotiations with the Columbia College administration, so details of demands and concessions were not yet available. IEA representatives trained faculty and administration in interest-based bargaining, as opposed to the adversarial confrontation usually associated with unions threatening strikes. Common interests are articulated and built upon, so that the parties are working together, with the supervisory additions of union mediators, as well as the administration's lawyers. Columbia part-timers' demands are similar to those desired at SAIC: higher salaries, health insurance, and a role in governance of the college. Columbia part-timers must teach a minimum number of courses per year, over a certain number of consecutive years to be eligible to join the union. Dues, initially, will be around \$42 per semester.

The Columbia part-timers feel that their efforts to organize were a great success, and will eventually help the success of the school. With better conditions and union representation, adjuncts may become more a part of the educational community, have higher morale, and in the end, become better teachers. The IEA has taken its success at Columbia as a sign that part-timers may need unions at many colleges across the nation. The union is researching a membership that may cut across school lines, so if a part-timer teaches at three or four schools, his or her interests -access to health care and legal services-would be served by a union.

Conclusion

Unionization at Columbia College and the collegial negotiating seen at SAIC may be the wave of the future for part-time teachers in the United States. Other initiatives in California and Massachusetts are reaching similar conclusions. If part-time teachers are given more respect and more livable wages, the appeal of the profession may begin to attract more talented people back to the teaching field, while augmenting the positive attributes part-timers already offer to universities and campuses across the country.

Reported by NAE editors Franklin Cason, Jan Estep, and Kathryn Hixson.

notes: 1For students SAIC costs around \$20,000 per year to Columbia College's \$9500; SAIC adjuncts are paid \$2,906 for one course, and Columbia part-timers \$1,482. Harold Henderson, "Revenge of the Part-Time Professors," Chicago Reader, Friday, December 12, 1997, 34.

2The following account of events was related in a lengthy conversation with Brian Sikes, who has taught part-time at SAIC for many years. Sikes is a working artist who exhibits his work at commercial galleries and not-for-profit exhibition spaces around Chicago.

3Henderson, 35.

4Each Faculty Senate representative will receive payment at his/her salary rate equivalent to one course per academic year for each year of service, and the Academic Steering Committee Representative will receive payment at his/her salary rate equivalent to two courses per academic year for each year of service.

5This account of events at Columbia College is informed by a conversation with John Stevenson, an adjunct professor in Liberal Education at Columbia, and designated public relations liaison for P-FAC. Stevenson has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Chicago and has been part-time teaching since 1991.

6Conversation with Tom Suhrbur of IEA. Suhrbur is a union employee who helped to work with P-FAC to organize the part time faculty at Columbia College.

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"Statement from the Conference on the Growing Use of Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty," Academe, January-February 1998, 54-60.

Ken Silverstein and Alexander Cockburn, "Back to the Middle Ages: The Rise of the Lumpen Teacher," CounterPunch, May 1-15, 1998, 1, 6.

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