Adjunct Faculty at the Community College: Second-Class Professoriate?

> Frost McLaughlin

This article discusses employment of part-time faculty at the community college level, including historical reasons for their current status, alternatives to this status, and specific steps to change it.

Making up over half of the faculty on most community college campuses, part-time professors play an extremely important role in the education of community college students. Yet this critical component in community college education often faces less than desirable teaching conditions. Salaries, already low for full-time community college faculty, are substantially lower for part-time faculty, ranging from $1,639 per credit hour in California to $128 in North Carolina (Mosby). Further, contact with other professors can be nonexistent for part-time faculty, especially if they teach at night. The dilemma of contingent faculty is well publicized in both the popular and the academic press, as this CNN column illustrates:

> How's this for the job *not* of your dreams: It typically requires an advanced degree, and a workweek somewhere in the 60-hour range, with work on weekends likely. The pay is low, there are no benefits, no job security. To get by, in the course of any given week, you'll likely have to commute to several, often widely-scattered job sites. At none of those places will you have an office—or sometimes even a mailbox—to call your own. (Delaney par. 1)

Academic organizations as well as the popular press deplore these conditions. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Community College Humanities Association, and eight other college organizations (including the American Historical Association, the American Mathematical Society, and the Modern Language Association) published a joint statement of good practice regarding employment of adjunct faculty as well as an agenda for action ("Statement"). In addition, the American Federation of Teachers has posted *Fairness and Equity: Standards of Good Practice in the Employment of Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty* on their Web site. In short, nearly everyone connected with higher education is aware of the situation and the need for change. Yet partly because the employment of contingent faculty in community colleges is fairly complex and partly because prevailing budget con-

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straints have restricted faculty raises in general, seemingly few changes have been made to improve the status of such faculty.

The Emerging Second Class

One of the complexities of adjunct employment is the varying motivation for adjunct instructors to teach. For some, a part-time teaching job is simply an add-on to a full-time career elsewhere, a chance to impart a love and understanding of one's field to aspiring students. For others, teaching part-time is precisely the job they desire, minus an adequate salary. For still others, a part-time faculty position is a potential link to what they hope may later turn into a full-time faculty position with a career path and adequate salary; at the very least, part-time teaching affords them experience in their field of choice. Trying to hang on until a full-time position becomes available often forces part-time faculty to accept what amounts to more than a full-time teaching load at more than one institution for less than half the pay of full-time faculty and no benefits. Add this to what appears to many to be a gradual erosion of full-time faculties in general, and the employment of contingent faculty becomes one of the most contentious issues in higher education today.

Acknowledging that part-time status fits some individuals more comfortably than it does others does not allay underlying fears of exploitation of part-time faculty or erosion of full-time faculty. As one vice president of instruction points out, there are two types of adjunct faculty: one group is content to teach part-time because they have other primary interests; the other group "desperately want[s] a full-time job [. . .]. And whenever [discussion] comes to salary increments or benefits, the professional people are 'trotted out' as an example of how part-timers don't need [increments or benefits]. So I think these two groups often get played against one another" (qtd. in Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron 112).

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Although the need to increase part-time salaries and convert some part-time positions to full-time is basic to the adjunct issue, it is unlikely that a large number of these positions will be made full-time in the near future or that the rate of pay for part-time instructors will improve dramatically. Here's why: Adjunct instructors provide administrators flexibility in staffing, a way to "staff up" for heavy fall enrollments and to "slack off" for lighter spring loads. Part-timers can be called at the last minute for a section added the final day of registration, and they can be "let go" at the last minute when a section does not "make." In this way the cost of more expensive faculty teaching courses with low enrollment is avoided. The bargain price of part-time faculty and the flexibility they provide are hard to resist, particularly once that price has become an established part of the college budget.

Given the national budget "crisis" in higher education and the business

model many state legislatures are currently using, it is unlikely that the proportion of adjunct to full-time faculty members will be significantly reduced in the near future. Therefore, other ways of improving conditions of contingent faculty at the community college need to be explored. Some ideas that bear investigation are finding ways to

- creatively enhance the salaries of part-time instructors. For example, can significant benefits be offered at lower cost for adjunct instructors?
- strategically employ contingent faculty. For instance, are there certain disciplines that gain more than others by having faculty members who practice in their field? Are some disciplines more vulnerable to exploitation than others?
- reward adjunct professors who have taught for several years. For example, are there ways for experienced adjuncts to become actively involved in departmental and institutional affairs?

Much has been written to characterize the conditions surrounding part-time employment. Perhaps more widely known for its description of the marginal existence reported by part-time faculty, *The Invisible Faculty* also has a useful discussion of what authors Judith Gappa and David Leslie call *integration*—the degree to which part-timers participate as members of the academic community. These authors found that "even where there is universal dissatisfaction with pay, benefits, and other tangible support, part-timers who feel as if they are part of a collaborative faculty seem to have more positive feelings about their work and about their involvement with the institution" (186). Another work about adjunct faculty, *Strangers in Their Own Land,* by John Roueche, Suanne Roueche, and Mark Milliron, gives numerous useful examples of colleges that are attempting to change the part-timers' feeling of alienation to one of inclusion. As described in a dissertation presenting survey data on adjunct professors in northern Virginia community colleges, the desire of adjunct faculty to connect with their full-time peers is evident (Huffman 102).

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Current Alternatives

Although the worlds of academia and industry are far apart, the feelings of alienation and underclass status affect part-timers in both worlds, though perhaps to a lesser extent in industry. Part-timers, regardless of where they work, are often paid lower salaries and promoted less frequently, and they often feel as though they are respected less than full-time workers. One tactic used by U.S. companies to attract part-time workers at a lower rate of pay is to provide important benefits instead of high salaries. For example, many companies use health benefits as a way to increase company loyalty. Officials at UPS, Wegman's supermarkets, and Freddie Mac con-

tend that good part-time benefits are, as a manager at UPS puts it, "definitely a retention strategy" (Demby par. 20). Sometimes companies "charge part-timers and full-timers the same for health insurance" but base other benefits, "such as retirement plans and paid vacation time," on salary earned or hours worked (Demby par. 21). These are benefits that could be offered to long-term adjunct professors; membership in a group health plan is particularly desirable to part-timers. Another benefit offered by some colleges to part-time faculty and their dependents is free tuition (Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron 103). Partial payment of tuition at state universities is another benefit states could offer part-time faculty members at community colleges.

This sort of creative compensation makes the low salaries of adjuncts a bit more palatable, but it does not address the fear of a rapidly eroding full-time faculty. To address the sense that full-time positions are being replaced by multiple part-time positions, community colleges could be strategic about the fields in which they hire part-time faculty. Instruction in some courses is significantly enhanced by experienced practitioners, while other courses have little to do with practice in the workplace. Community colleges could actively seek practicing professionals in fields like computer science, dental hygiene, or journalism, where currency and practical experience matter, and reduce the number of adjuncts in fields where such experience is less important, particularly in core academic courses like history, literature, and math. The trend has been to use part-time or temporary faculty in core courses because of the increasing numbers of first-year students enrolling in them. In contrast, those fields that would be enhanced by having current practitioners teach them—courses in "business, journalism, the health professions, and the performing arts"—have decreased dependency on adjunct instructors (Benjamin 6). To be "smart" about employing adjunct faculty, administrators should concentrate on hiring part-timers for courses where practice enhances instruction.

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Although a lower rate of pay often means lower job status, status is obviously not entirely a matter of money and benefits, particularly in academia, where salaries are lower than industry equivalents anyhow. The lack of opportunity for part-time faculty to be promoted, to acquire new knowledge and skills, and to participate with their full-time peers in academic endeavors can also be perceived as resulting from a lower status, even when such a status is unintentional. In both industry and academia, when full-time workers voluntarily become part-time workers they seem to retain the status of their full-time counterparts. Because they have already established their value to the organization during their full-time careers, and have been fully integrated into the organizational culture, these part-timers generally do not feel like second-class employees. (Interestingly, they often retain their full-time rate of pay as well after retiring to part-time status.) In con-

trast, those who begin as part-timers generally do not feel like full-fledged members of the academic culture at their schools. How can professors who join the faculty as part-timers be sufficiently integrated into the academic culture to prevent feelings of marginalization?

Gappa and Leslie describe integration as being "the effort institutions make to ensure that their part-time faculty members are successful, valued, and supported in what they do" (180). These efforts include "orientation programs, relationships with [full-time . . .] faculty, opportunities to participate in governance, and professional development programs" (180). Not surprisingly, the authors found vastly different degrees of integration among institutions and sometimes among departments within an institution. Sometimes the department chair is the sole point of institutional contact with part-time faculty; sometimes the entire (full- and part-time) faculty mixes on a regular basis (180).

One way to integrate part-time faculty is to provide career development to those who are employed over several years through preferred or tiered status. Rider University provides an example in its three-tiered ranking, the highest affording "health care, life insurance, and retirement benefits, as well as limited job security." This model provides "incentives for regular evaluation of adjunct teaching and rewards good teachers with more predictable and stable teaching assignments. In this way, adjuncts are more fully included as part of the campus scene" (Frakt and Castagnera).

Another model for conferring status on part-time faculty is job sharing. At Bates College, for example, which sometimes employs a pair of professors to share a single position, job-sharing professors "receive salary and benefits proportional to that of comparable full-time faculty members in terms of training, years of experience, and professional achievement." These part-timers are also expected to "share proportionally in academic duties like advising and committee work" (Tobin).

Although perhaps more stable in terms of enrollment numbers than their two-year counterparts, private four-year colleges are not the only ones making the effort to integrate part-time faculty into the academic culture. At the Community College of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania, part-time faculty attend departmental meetings, participate in committee work, and perform academic duties such as selecting textbooks, reviewing curricula, and developing departmental syllabi (Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron 111). Part-time faculty at Lord Fairfax Community College in Middletown, Virginia, are represented on the faculty council, participate in committee work, and serve on search committees for vice presidents and deans. Another way to include part-time faculty in the academic culture is to offer grants like those offered for professional development by Northern Virginia Community College. These include five $900 grants awarded to adjuncts annually "for the development of teaching aids, research, equipment, or another service project that will be beneficial to the College and/or campus where the applicant teaches" ("Adjunct Faculty" n.p.). These grants are not only monetary awards; they allow part-time professors to enhance their credentials, making them more valuable both to their college and to the outside world.

Specific Steps toward a Higher Status

The first step an institution should take regarding its adjunct faculty is to inventory its members so that the college knows (a) how many and in what areas adjunct faculty are hired, (b) the longevity of each adjunct, and (c) the trends in adjunct longevity across departments, including evaluation procedures and salary determination (Schwalm 124). Part of this inventory should be a survey of adjunct faculty for their individual perceptions, goals, and suggestions. This kind of self-examination affords a community college the information it needs to determine what its priorities are and how best to achieve them. The inventory should reveal whether the institution is hiring part-time faculty strategically or haphazardly. If the latter, efforts should be made to change the balance of part-time faculty so that full-time faculty teach as many core courses as possible and part-time faculty are hired to teach "specialty classes in selected disciplines," such as the health professions, to enhance "program quality" (Fulton).

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In hiring, it is critical that the same standards be used for part-time faculty that are used for full-time faculty. No concessions should be made for part-timers in terms of credentials, experience, or talent. The same is true of part-time faculty evaluation. It is probably worthwhile to observe new full- and part-time faculty members during their first year of teaching at the institution, after which the procedure for experienced full-timers should suffice for part-timers as well. Treating part-time faculty differently when hiring, evaluating, rehiring, or firing suggests that they may be qualitatively different from full-time faculty. Gappa and Leslie concur, viewing supervision of contingent faculty as vital to program quality. The institution should relegate the responsibility for part-time faculty to whoever oversees full-time faculty in the same discipline. If part-timers are supervised separately from full-timers, there is a danger that different standards will be applied to them. Gappa and Leslie point out that such rigorous supervision requires that the necessary resources—"release time, administrative support, and incentive pay"—be given to whoever is responsible for it (265).

One alternative to hiring multiple part-time professors to teach one or two courses is to hire two professors to share a full-time position. This alternative is more complicated than hiring multiple adjunct professors because of the need for job stability in a shared full-time position, yet it would be appropriate for those part-timers who teach the same courses over a long period of time. For example, if a part-time biology professor and a part-time chemistry professor both teach two courses in their fields year after year, they might share a single full-time faculty position. With this sort of job sharing, each faculty member could teach a half-load without benefits or a half-load plus one course for benefits. He or she would also perform half the academic duties of a full-time position. This has proven effective in many cases, with job sharers reporting a much higher level of satisfaction in the

professional treatment they receive than do their part-time counterparts (Wolf-Wendel, Twombly, and Rice).

Integrating part-timers into the full-time departmental culture can be surprisingly simple. For instance, part-time faculty should "contribute to the choice of topics to be covered" in professional development done in-house. "This will make the program more applicable to their needs and enhance participant motivation" (Davis 120). Adjunct instructors who are given the same introductory information year after year would profit more from interacting with their full-time peers on issues related to their discipline or to pedagogy in general. Often both full- and part-time professors need to take graduate courses, rather than three-day seminars, to refresh their knowledge of their academic fields. Full or partial reimbursement of tuition encourages faculty to develop professionally, and part-time professors need this development over the long haul just as full-time professors do.

Sometimes the simplest ways of including part-timers are the most effective. For example, listing part-time faculty with full-time faculty in directories and on Web sites is an obviously good idea and has only a small maintenance cost. For part-timers who do not job share, participation in committee work should be voluntary. Inviting them to institutional and departmental meetings is also relatively simple, as is rewarding outstanding part-time performers (Gappa and Leslie 274) along with outstanding full-timers. Rewards can be in the form of public recognition, nonmonetary remuneration (payment of tuition or conference fees), release time, or opportunities for grants, such as those offered by Northern Virginia Community College. These rewards increase the opportunity for professional development of part-timers and recognize their professionalism at the same time.

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Finally, it is that very feeling of professionalism, of shared academic culture, that part-time faculty seek and sometimes do not find on their campuses. Because community college departments are smaller than those in many four-year institutions, community colleges often lack the organization by academic discipline that can provide a sense of cohesion and camaraderie for full- and part-time faculty at four-year institutions. Regular participation in faculty meetings can substitute at community colleges for departmental functions, as long as discipline-specific information is passed along to part-time faculty. Because part-time professors are sometimes hired in a last-minute, high-pressure situation, the normal scrutiny of their credentials, experience, and references may be less rigorous than usual. Sloppy hiring can produce substandard faculty, both full- and part-time, but the last-minute nature of expanding enrollment makes this more likely with adjunct faculty. If standards are carefully monitored and those responsible for hiring are allowed simply not to staff a course when a suitable instructor cannot be found for it, the quality of adjunct faculty can be sustained. Both rigorous hiring practices for

contingent professors and their routine inclusion in collegiate activities contribute to their status as full-fledged members of the academic community, even if some choose not to participate.

In conclusion it must be said that while genuine attempts by both administrators and full-time colleagues to raise the status of part-time faculty are critical, they can do little to address the most glaring reason for the underclass status of part-timers—low salaries. All the goodwill in the world will not buy the groceries or pay for a child's braces. Hence, no discussion of improving the lot of contingent faculty should end without restating the need for state legislatures to invest more money in this human resource. Our part-time faculty members are as vital to community college education as any physical or technological resource we are currently funding with public and private money. The need to find more financial support for these members of our academic community remains urgent.

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