

Reclaiming a Sustainable Higher Ed Workforce

A growing movement of part-time faculty union members and activists is raising public awareness of the unsustainably long hours, low pay and insecure, time-limited employment of nearly three-quarters of the people employed to teach undergraduate students at U.S. colleges and universities.

Those who know these numbers find them shocking—even unbelievable—despite the fact that we’ve been living with them for far too long. In 2011, the latest year for which we have a full count, colleges and universities employed 1.8 million faculty. Of that number, only 436,293 were full-time, tenure-track faculty. More than 1 million of those professional educators were part-time/adjunct faculty or graduate employees.

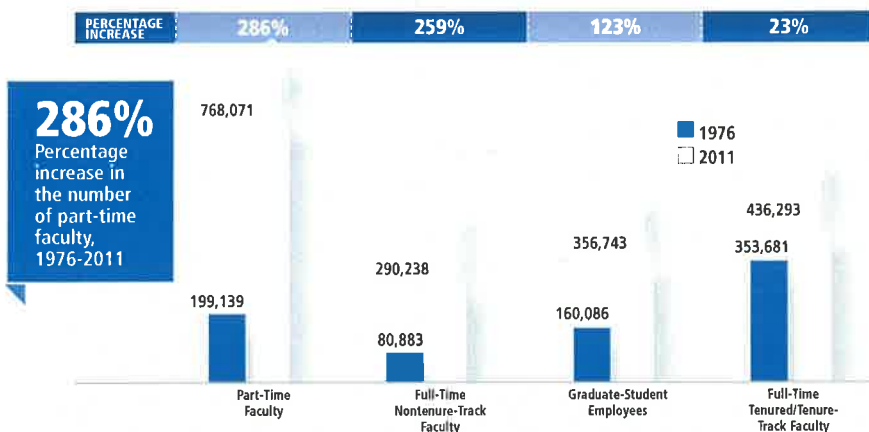
The AFT has been working for decades to expose the alarming trend that shows a complete flip in the proportion of full-time, tenure-track faculty to nontenure-track and part-time faculty since 1976. We want the public to understand this reality and the implications for students.

But the dramatic higher education workforce shift is not information that institutions routinely share. Thus, our locals and state federations, and other labor and advocacy organizations, frequently encounter questions and challenges that reflect outdated beliefs—and some outright myths—about part-time faculty, their role in educating college students in the United States, and the conditions under which they do that vital work.

BECOMING CONTINGENT

The Growth of Nontenured Faculty, 1976-2011

In 1976, full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty outnumbered part-time faculty by 43 percent. By 2011, the ranks of part-time and nontenure-track faculty had swelled to outnumber full-time faculty members by almost 2.5 to 1.



NOTES: Percentage growth is from 1975 for full-time faculty members, and from 1976 for all other categories. In 1976, graduate-student employees included both full- and part-timers; in 2011, all graduate-student employees were defined as part-time.

SOURCE: Analysis of IPEDS data by John W. Carris for AAUP

Why do so few people seem to know who is really teaching on college campuses?

The federal government is not collecting data that show the full extent of who part-time faculty are and the conditions under which they teach. At one time, the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty provided a treasure trove of rich information on all who taught in higher education. But that ended in 2003, when the U.S. Department of Education stopped collecting valuable granular data about the academic workforce. Now, we rely on broad but more limited data from the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

To regain a sense of the full picture, the AFT joined with the other members of the Coalition on the Academic Workforce to

other institutions. Only 20 percent (28 percent of those 55 and older) have ever been employed in a full-time college teaching position, tenure-track or otherwise.

Q: Aren't part-time faculty pretty much demographically the same as full-time faculty?

A: Like full-time faculty, part-time faculty are overwhelmingly white, which reflects the historic inadequacy of nearly all American educational institutions at identifying and cultivating the talents of people of color. In this survey, 88 percent of part-time faculty were white, 3 percent were African-American, 2 percent were Asian, and 7 percent reported "some other race."

Relative to tenure-track faculty work, however, part-time faculty work is highly feminized: As has been reported in other studies, in this survey, women—55 percent of respondents—were overrepresented among part-time faculty relative to both the overall faculty population (which is 38 percent female) and the general population.

What part-time faculty are paid, and why

Q: Since part-time faculty work part time—they don't do service or research—you can't even compare their pay to the pay full-time faculty get, can you?

A: Many part-time faculty do research and service, both of which are often unrecognized and unpaid.

But when we compare apples to apples, part-time faculty are generally paid far less per unit for their instructional work than full-time faculty are paid. One study by an AFT affiliate, the Lecturers' Employee Organization at the University of Michigan (AFT Local 6244), found that this inequity persists even when corrections are made for hours worked per week, hours spent on teaching, and seniority of the faculty members involved—despite abundant data illustrating that the quality of nontenure-track faculty members' teaching is at least as good as that of tenure-track faculty.

Note that the savings achieved on the backs of part-time faculty are not accidental; they are intentional, and often sold to students and families who are desperate for relief from skyrocketing college costs as a means of keeping college affordable. For instance, in a recent review of the fiscal health of the City College of San Francisco, California's Fiscal Crisis Management Advisory Team observed that the strong advocacy of AFT 2121—the faculty local there—for part-time faculty has "negated any significant short-term cost advantage associated with part-time faculty," and described City College's practice of paying its part-time

faculty 86 percent of what it pays full-time faculty for the same duties as "not acceptable," threatening to close the college for financial mismanagement unless this changed.

Who wouldn't want high-quality education on the cheap, if it were possible? Ironically, though, the creation of a vast faculty underclass has not resulted in higher education that is more affordable or accessible to students. Parsimonious treatment of part-time faculty is outstripped by institutions' hiring of administrators and construction of amenities, and—most importantly—by massive state disinvestment from higher education. According to the Delta Cost Project, "even additional savings from shifting to part-time instructors have not been enough to offset the costs associated with continued hiring [of nonfaculty professionals] and rising benefits expenditures. Compensation costs per FTE student have continued to rise modestly at most four-year institutions as a consequence of these staffing, salary, and benefits changes. Tuition prices increased even faster, however, as tuition dollars replaced revenue lost from other sources."

(Note: This analysis of cost and value doesn't even consider the taxpayer costs of government assistance to part-time faculty who are eligible for food stamps, Medicaid and housing assistance—something the AFT will be working to quantify this year.)

The academic job market and its impact on part-time faculty

Q: I know part-time faculty members who didn't finish graduate school; if they wanted full-time jobs, wouldn't they have done that?

A: Ninety-two percent of part-time faculty hold graduate degrees. Sixty percent have master's degrees or the equivalent; 32 percent hold doctorates.

The picture of how educational qualifications compare with employment status is even starker when we break down respondents according to the type of institutions where they teach. Of survey respondents, 334 teach at community colleges, where the appropriate credential for faculty depends on the program. While a master's degree is the traditional qualification for entry-level undergraduate teaching at community colleges, a certificate or an associate or bachelor's degree may be an entirely appropriate credential in other programs (vocational-technical programs like welding, for example). Yet even at these community colleges, 48 percent of respondents have a master's degree or lower; 38 percent have doctorates. Of the 549 respondents who teach at public or private four-year colleges or universities, nearly half have doctorates.

Other important fixes—like moving money from administrative costs into sustainable faculty employment and services that are vital to student success—don't require new money; they require a powerful coalition united to produce changes in institutional, state and national priorities.

How to create a sustainable academic workforce

Q: I see a lot about part-time faculty in the news. Can I assume that means the issues are being exposed and things are about to get better?

A: As part-time faculty consider their job situations as a whole—wages, benefits, working conditions—59 percent say they believe that either a fair amount or a lot of improvements are needed; 36 percent say that over the last few years, things have gotten worse for part-time faculty at their institution(s), while on average, only 17 percent say things have gotten better.

Q: I'm a part-time faculty member, and I hardly even see my colleagues. I can't believe many of them would be interested in forming a union. Are they?

A: An overwhelming majority of part-time faculty agree that the formation of a union would be an effective means of improving some of the working conditions that rankle the most.

Specifically, 65 percent think that a union would improve part-time faculty pay and benefits. They're right about this; according to repeated studies, union membership shifts the compensation curve for part-time faculty for the better. According to the 2012 Coalition on the Academic Workforce survey, for instance, "the presence of a union on campus also appears to have a positive impact on wages for faculty members employed part time. The median pay per course at institutions where part-time faculty respondents were not represented by a union was \$2,475, as compared with \$3,100 at institutions with union representation."

In addition, 58 percent think a union would improve job security. This, too, squares with the Coalition on the Academic Workforce data and the history of AFT locals' wins on job security for nontenure-track faculty, full- and part-time (see below): "19.4 percent [of respondents who were union members] indicated having job security, as opposed to only 3.9 percent of respondents without a union present."

Q: This is such a systemic problem that it will have to be solved from the top; a union on any given campus wouldn't make a difference for part-time faculty, would it?

A: AFT members are fighting to end contingency and to replace the contingent system of academic employment with sustainable faculty jobs. We've won important parts of this fight at individual bargaining tables, and our wins there point the way to what a more sustainable system of faculty employment can look like.

Notable contract wins for AFT part-time faculty include:

- [State University of New York United University Professions, AFT Local 2190](#)

Annual salary increases, with extra pay for reaching career milestones; health insurance eligibility for those teaching two or more courses per semester; vacation and sick leave.

- [City University of New York Professional Staff Congress, AFT Local 2334](#)

10.5 percent pay increase over three years; health insurance eligibility after two semesters of teaching; 100 new lecturer positions to be filled by longtime adjuncts; office-hours pay.

- [Rutgers University AAUP/AFT, AFT Local 6324](#)

Salary minimums and annual increases; appointment preference to those with 10 semesters of service; written explanation of non-appointment to those with four semesters of service; professional development fund; office space; parking fees capped at \$25 per year.

- [Community College of Philadelphia, AFT Local 2026](#)

10.5 percent pay increase over five years; 50 percent subsidy of health insurance; 1-to-1 matching of retirement contributions; seniority-based pool system for course assignments and procedure for conversion to full-time Visiting Lecturer status; sick leave and two semesters of pregnancy leave.

- [Henry Ford Community College Adjunct Faculty Organization, AFT Local 337](#)

5 percent salary increases over three years; seniority-based preference for reappointment; compensation for service on committees; contractual mandate for consideration of internal adjunct applicants for full-time vacancies; ownership of intellectual property.

- [University of Michigan Lecturers' Employee Organization, AFT Local 6244](#)

Salary minimums, promotional increases and annual increases; appointments of increasing length (up to seven years) with increasing service and favorable performance review, for which process is contractually negotiated; health, dental, vision and life insurance for those at 50 percent appointment or over; retirement plan.

