

Oakton Adjunct Faculty: Invisible No Longer

ADJUNCTS—THE FORMERLY INVISIBLE FACULTY

The proportion of college students and courses taught by part-time (adjunct) faculty has increased nationally over the decades until today it has reached 70 to 80 percent in community colleges. The public face of colleges rarely includes that fact, in part because it has happened gradually over the years in response to pressures, especially financial pressure. According to data from the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), Oakton follows this trend, with 79.5 percent of all faculty part-time (contingent or adjunct), and on a basis of Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), 64.5 percent of course hours are taught by adjunct faculty (1). On average, 2.13 adjunct faculty equal one FTE, for the average teaching load for an OCC adjunct is 7 hours per semester, slightly less than half-time (recalculated from the ICCB data, using estimates: see Note 1). These data are from official tables, but there is no equivalent data on how much adjuncts are paid at each Illinois college. The fact that adjuncts are paid far less than full-time faculty, with few or no benefits and limited job security, adds to the reasons for not being all that proud of substituting them for much more expensive full-timers. From ICCB data for 2012, at Oakton the average full-time faculty salary was \$88,501 a year (administrators earned \$124,903), plus \$15,019 in benefits and an additional average annual stipend for additional responsibilities for a total (2012) of \$95,171. The total average salary plus benefits paid to the full-time faculty in 2012: \$110,190. Most adjuncts do not work close to the maximum number of hours; the average OCC adjunct works about 7 hours a semester, or 14 per year. At the Oakton average for adjunct faculty reported in the ICCB data, \$1,150 per

credit hour, that is an annual income of \$16,100. Some of our adjunct faculty earn more, others less. An adjunct working at the maximum allowed (27 hours a year) would earn, on average, \$31,050, or 28 percent of full-time pay and benefits.

The point about these numbers is not that anyone is being paid too much; I'm sure I join my colleagues at being pleased the full-time professionals (administration, staff and faculty) are well paid. What is disconcerting is that in a resource rich area, the college's budget is being subsidized in major part because of the unequal pay given to part-time (adjunct) faculty who do most of the teaching and serve on the front lines of services to our clients daily.

In 1993 a book was published about adjuncts called *The Invisible Faculty*. This book was among the first to recognize that adjuncts are not easily classified by discipline and rank as are the full-time faculty. They are rather identified by attachment to the college and its community through part-time and full-time work elsewhere, orientation to seek full-time employment, life stage (from first entry into teaching to the semi-retired) and even marital status.

Surveys of adjuncts have been few and far between until very recently. Those we did have until about 10 years ago simply included adjuncts in surveys given to full-time faculty, and had no questions that addressed the unique concerns of our part-time professionals. Even today, now that the role of adjuncts has become a national concern, most surveys, even long ones, mainly ask questions about the work and satisfaction with it. The first surveys addressed to adjunct concerns began to appear about 6 years ago. Oakton was one of the first, with the AFA/IEA survey of 2008. In the 2013 adjunct survey at Oakton we are breaking new

ground by looking into the effects of part-time academic work on our personal and professional lives. This OCC survey is a volunteer effort by the Adjunct Faculty Association and the 140 adjuncts who took time to fill it out. The following results, however, are my responsibility and the interpretation is not one of the Union, but is my own.

WHAT SETS ADJUNCTS APART AND WHAT UNITES THEM

Oakton adjuncts represent the main *Invisible Faculty* types, recognized even before 1993. About one fourth of our part-time faculty are semi-retired. A fifth are working full-time elsewhere. The largest group of OCC adjuncts consists of those teaching part-time at two or more colleges and universities (more than one-third of our adjunct faculty). Much of the remainder are free lancers, content to teach part-time at one place--OCC.

We adjuncts are also divided by two major categories: seniority through years at OCC, and our type of affiliation with Oakton through our lives outside. What I have found is that the categories of part-time faculty in the emerging literature are inadequate in describing the OCC experience. Adjuncts link Oakton and other community colleges with their communities in ways the full-time faculty cannot. Unlike the full-timers, adjuncts have a wealth of experience beyond the academic world, with years (and careers) in government, industry, non-profit organizations, public schools and universities. Some 30 percent report teaching experience below the college level, and more than 75 percent have taught elsewhere including other community colleges before being hired at Oakton. So regardless of different backgrounds, most adjuncts share a love of, and identification with teaching. The survey shows the vast majority (83%) find that teaching at OCC is a

“fulfilling” experience. In this, OCC adjuncts are reporting the same motivation as do national surveys of adjuncts and full-time faculty as well. In fact, up until the recent adjunct surveys, studies of faculty that included adjuncts reported that the two faculty types have very similar attitudes and practices in their work. It is only when questions designed to tap the adjunct condition are included that the full story emerges.

So although adjuncts may be divided into distinct types, we are united in our orientation to teaching and serving our students and college. But service is often perceived as a one-way road, giving service to the college but getting little in return. The surveys show that the large majority of Oakton’s adjunct faculty want to be a full-time faculty member here, even many among those who report they are semi-retired or employed full-time elsewhere. There is obviously a large discrepancy between adjunct desires for full-time employment and the ability of the college to grant it. This is a problem that has no immediate solution, and it is chronic and appears throughout the survey results. This orientation is also hard to understand, as many expressing it are not in a position to take full-time employment due to other commitments in their personal and professional lives.

In my opinion, a sense of not being recognized drives much of this desire to be full-time, where it is felt that hard work and academic credentials are rewarded with full pay, benefits, security and inclusion. Substantial majorities agree on our survey questions implying that OCC needs to overhaul and redesign its orientation to adjuncts. These responses state a desire that the situation of adjunct faculty be included in the OCC Strategic Plan, in its programs for diversity, that an OCC adjunct be appointed as a coordinator of adjunct affairs, that there be

proportional representation rather than tokenism on committees, and in establishing a committee of adjuncts to investigate OCC's climate of inclusiveness for adjuncts. It is not surprising that adjuncts want advantages considered routine for full-time faculty, such as Merit lane recognition, emeritus status for retired faculty, tenure and sabbatical leaves. Benefits do not exist for adjuncts, nor do vacations, holidays and many other normal employee benefits. It can be noted here that while a number of suggestions for simple recognition and inclusion were made along these lines for adjuncts in the 2013-2017 OCC Strategic Plan development process, not one was incorporated in the final document submitted to and approved by the OCC Board of Trustees. This negative experience led to the questions that found significant support in the 2013 survey. While this observation may appear negative, it also represents a great opportunity for everyone at the college. It would be much more practical to grant many of these adjunct recognitions at little or no cost to the college, considering that satisfying demands for full-time employment are not possible. Now that the 2013-2017 AFA/IEA contract has been negotiated and approved, the financial matters have been dealt with. It is to the non-financial matters that we are now free to turn.

The other side of a desire for recognition is the OCC adjunct faculty's sense of contribution to the organization as well as to the students. A majority of our adjunct colleagues state that they are working full-time at a part-time job right now at OCC. Questions on satisfaction show that adjuncts find much that they appreciate about their participating in the OCC community, as well as the intrinsic satisfaction in the work itself. Yet survey questions on salary and job security demonstrate a consistent demand for a salary more in line with the full-time

faculty and security from unexpected reductions in course/work load from one semester to another. These concerns will have to be addressed eventually. Again, we can be optimistic, when a number of adjuncts were granted full-time hours in the new contract, but not in the best manner, as will be discussed here.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A PART-TIME LIFE STYLE

The adjunct life style is not easy, even for those supported (as retirees) on pensions, or salaries as full-time employees elsewhere. Even so, there are variations among us of the impact of working part-time while lacking adequate compensation and job security. Some OCC part-time faculty have additional duties to teaching; 28 percent on the survey include other capacities: nurses, librarians, coaches and tutors. The status of these professionals is often precarious in many additional ways, while the rest of us face threats to our teaching hours and job security. Professional tutors are paid little more than the rate paid to student employees, and part-time librarians are being excluded from faculty status while their pay is being cut. Meanwhile, the teaching hours available to most adjunct faculty are being limited and/or reduced. Not only are work reductions created by a ceiling of maximum hours imposed by the Affordable Care Act and the Illinois Biss law. The creation of 60 affiliated adjunct positions with a guarantee of 30 FTEs has the effect of reducing the average teaching hours for the other 478 adjuncts from an average of 7.05 to 6.06 LTEs. Thus we have a new class of privileged adjuncts who are able to teach twice as many hours as all the others. So the creation of the affiliated adjunct positions has the beneficial consequence of providing health insurance to 11 percent of the adjuncts, but with various unintended consequences, such as distorting the

allocation of teaching hours at the department level and reducing the number of courses available to the adjunct faculty in general. In particular, the new positions were offered to adjuncts solely on the basis of their having heavy course loads already, not on the basis of need for health insurance coverage.

All adjuncts know of the precarious existence many of us face, and the AFA survey data provide some very specific examples. Some 26 percent report living mainly on the little salary paid by OCC and other part-time work (if any). Although most report other income, 54 percent still report “Meeting your expenses is a constant worry/concern.” Only 28 percent report having adequate savings for retirement, about the proportion who are already semi-retired and on pensions. Twenty two percent report having serious doubts about an academic career. Almost 40 percent report having considerable stress. As for the work itself, it has its own intrinsic satisfaction, being a fulfilling activity for 83 percent. A large majority report they are willing to sacrifice to serve OCC and its students. An amazing 70 percent report they will adjunct as long as their health permits, although there are differences among adjuncts in surprising ways. Chief among them are the differences between the male and female adjunct faculty.

GENDER INEQUALITY AMONG THE ADJUNCTS

What was most surprising to me on analyzing the results of the survey was the condition of our women adjuncts. Our female counterparts are often more dependent on part-time income, worse off and more precarious than we males are. First, the OCC adjunct workforce is 50.4 percent male in the ICCB data. In comparison the full-time OCC faculty is 59 percent female, as it is predominantly female in statistics of full-time community college faculty nationwide. What is

surprising for the OCC adjunct faculty is that in a college with a predominantly female administration, Oakton women adjuncts are even more precarious than their adjunct male counterparts. They have less seniority, report fewer skills, are less likely to have an academic degree in addition to the minimum of one masters degree, are teaching/employed for fewer hours, yet report they worked at more paid types of activities (advising, counseling, teaching, committee work, etc.) and attended more department meetings. While they are being paid for fewer hours, they report being at OCC more days a week and are as likely to report working at night at OCC (about one third of us did, Spring semester). Women adjuncts report “working full-time at a part-time job” in 59 percent of their surveys, while less than half the men do, although the men report working more hours. Females report less likelihood they will be at OCC in three years, and are less satisfied in general with their work experience, aside from compensation. However, female adjuncts report better acceptance by full-time faculty than do male adjuncts. One possible explanation for this gender difference is that adjuncts reporting low seniority reflect the larger gender division at OCC; most of the new hires and those with few years at OCC are female, while the adjuncts with most seniority are majority male.

Gender continues to appear in life conditions reported by the adjunct faculty. Women report having no health insurance twice as often as men among our adjuncts. Forty five percent of women adjuncts report considerable stress, compared with 29 percent of male faculty. Men state they will adjunct as long as health permits in 79 percent of their surveys, while 64 percent of the women do. Perhaps as a result of their marginal position at OCC, 42 percent of women report they are willing to sacrifice for OCC and its students, while 62 percent of the men

do. While about the same proportion of male and female faculty report they are married or partnered, males say they are supported by their wife's income in 29 percent of the cases, while 65 percent of the women faculty say they are.

GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT OAKTON ADJUNCT FACULTY

I mean to make this report more than a series of numbers. The story I see in them is one of marginality; people who work hard to make themselves professionals and be professional, but do not feel treated and recognized as such. Even within our ranks we have groups who have less stability and recognition than the little that most of us part-time employees have. There are cases of individual administrators, full-time faculty and others, departments and divisions where adjuncts are treated unequally, capriciously and without understanding. Some of us experience the basic marginality of adjunct life more centrally than others, and some of us have a more dramatic experience of adjunct marginality. But for all of us, it is there constantly as a reminder of our marginality.

The blatant inequality experienced by a majority of OCC faculty members casts a pall over the college and its people. It is embarrassing for full-time Oaktonites to attend a meeting, ask for support, extend invitations and speak of "us" when there is an extreme division among "us." As one woman commented about race, "It is not the main thing, but if we continue to ignore it, it becomes the only thing." Full-time faculty would like to talk about their trips abroad, the private schools their children are attending and other interesting features of their private lives, but it is awkward to do so in the presence of colleagues who are suffering from poverty. Adjunct faculty who want to participate and be recognized for their education, field and expertise, come to be stereotyped as the token adjunct. It

becomes embarrassing to go to an open meeting or campus event and find you are the only adjunct present. It is frustrating to receive an e-mail announcing a new program for faculty development and exchange, and when you download the form, find that it is only available for full-time faculty. Inequality poisons the whole atmosphere of a community, as has been pointed out so many times in other contexts. Yet, here on a campus with highly educated members and leaders, we remain with an invisible faculty, because it is easier not to face some problems than to recognize them when they are deep and substantial.

MAKING PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT LESS MARGINAL

As I write the AFA/IEA Union Board has completed negotiations with the administration and ratified a new contract for 2013-2017. In preparing for the negotiations, we attempted to be comprehensive about adjunct interests to be considered by including many items on the current survey. The first finding is that regardless of our major differences in seniority and backgrounds, a majority of the 140 adjuncts reported that all items up for negotiation are “Important” to them on the survey. Several items stand out as of highest priority to almost everyone. In order of their ratings, they are:

- (1) Job Security for continuing your employment at OCC and Job Security for continuing your current number of courses/hours each term (tied);*
- (2) Tenure for adjuncts with 5 or more years of OCC experience;*
- (3) Salary Increase for all part-time faculty and Salary commensurate/proportional to full-time faculty pay (tied); and*
- (4) Developing a strategic plan for equalizing part-time and full-time pay.*

Now that the 2013-17 contract has been negotiated, we see that there was no consideration for items (2) and (4), while item (1) was only addressed with the same partial provisions of the previous contract. While a salary increase was negotiated, it was not greater than that offered the full-time faculty, thus fixing in place the same inequality that has characterized the pay schedules that have been used at OCC for decades. In short, of the contract provisions considered to be most important by the adjuncts, only one was partially obtained in the final contract. This is neither surprising nor the fault of the negotiators. The new contract was negotiated on the basis of the old contract; a bureaucratic and rigid process that takes on a life of its own. The legal and financial “experts” that advise the sides to the negotiating teams give the worst possible counsel: any consideration that would be good for the college becomes transformed into a “concession” that must be matched, exactly, by a concession from the other side, otherwise you are giving up power and control. This procedure is a straightjacket that prevents anything other than a zero sum game strategic vision. I don’t consider the result to be all bad, and I support the contract, but it is flawed and requires more than a return to “business as usual.” Instead I propose a continued effort by all parties to improve the campus culture and conditions for our part-time faculty and staff.

WHAT ABOUT BENEFITS?

Although health insurance had become a major issue in the lead up to the negotiations, it is an issue for a minority of the adjuncts. Only 28 percent of those reporting on the survey said they have no health insurance, although almost a third would consider obtaining it from OCC if it were made available. Yet some of

those who said they didn't have insurance reported their family was insured through their spouse's employment. On the other hand, the question was not phrased completely; some may have personally paid for their insurance at great sacrifice and need help to continue doing it. Outside of the normal negotiations, as you know, the administration generously offered to hire 60 adjuncts at full-time hours (but at adjunct pay) in order to qualify them for health insurance coverage. While this "affiliated adjunct" arrangement is a major step towards helping the adjuncts who need health insurance, it should be noted that one of OCC's largest divisions has no one approved for this coverage and a second had only a handful, while the vast majority of these positions was made available to divisions with only half of the adjunct faculty. The application was unequal and not offered according to need for health care coverage. We can only hope that the Deans of the two unrecognized divisions step up and start representing their faculty in future allocations.

In a college dedicated to fair and equal treatment, open access, and acceptance of diversity, it is an anomaly that the large majority of our teaching staff are treated so unequally. This is not just a matter of dollars and finances, but also leadership. The comments on the surveys showed a striking disillusionment with the college's leadership in the response to the Affordable Care Act. Many responded that they had previously considered Oakton to be a good place to work, and now saw the college in a completely different light. One comment well summarizes the reaction: "flowery words and cruel acts." The process leading up to the final version of the strategic plan was a second source of a sense of betrayal, as a plan devoted to "inclusiveness" systematically ignored any reference to the marginal position of adjuncts in the Oakton community.

Adjunct inclusion in an update of the 2013-2017 Strategic Plan would be a good start.

HOW WE GOT HERE

Previously, in official plans, administration and before the Board, the OCC adjunct faculty have been invisible or treated as token representatives of a highly varied group. But when the Affordable Care Act was coming into effect, two major events happened. First, the different regional community college administrations and their legal and fiscal experts met, deliberated, and concluded that there was a huge problem with the formerly invisible adjunct faculty with their potential for being classified as full-time employees qualified for benefits. Their immediate answer was to respond with “business as usual,” and simply cut the hours of all adjuncts in order to keep all of them in the “part-time” status under the law, and not provide health care coverage to a single one. Across the state adjuncts responded to this callous treatment as a slap in the face, and organized. Protests were held, Board meetings were inundated with faculty protesting this decision, and well-meaning but uninformed board members and administrators alike were stunned. Whatever was wrong with “business as usual?” Why weren’t adjunct faculty happy to be part of the college community, albeit an isolated and marginal part that can be mostly ignored? The sad reality of adjunct faculty lives had never registered on the community college leadership, including that of OCC. This sad reality was not created overnight, but slowly has taken effect across the college world over decades. It will not be ameliorated overnight, either. What is most surprising to me is that many forward steps towards inclusive OCC and adjunct faculty relationships are possible without

substantial cost, some are without any cost. What is needed is a new culture of inclusiveness at OCC.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

I continue to be hopeful that we will address these issues in the coming months and years. The economic impacts of new laws regarding health care and employment of annuitants have brought adjunct matters to the forefront, and made our Trustees more aware of our situation, especially when the adjunct community became unified and spoke out in unprecedented numbers in the spring before the OCC Board. When some kind of action became imperative, the Board and administration responded, and negotiated a temporary solution, the “affiliated adjunct” status. This is a stop-gap solution, but it did demonstrate the willingness of the college leaders to do something positive. What is needed now is to build on this spirit of acknowledgement and cooperation, rather than to call off further work on the assumption that the problem has now been resolved. “Business as usual” can no longer be the operating principle for Oakton or any other community college.

While the new contract for adjunct faculty negotiated and approved contains gains for most adjuncts, we are reminded that most of the demands shown on the survey were not met in the contract. Many of these would cost nothing or very little to be implemented. I would suggest that, now that the lengthy contract negotiation and approval process is behind us, that we not return to “business as usual” either as a union, as a college, or as administration. Rather, we need to look on the contract the same way citizens look on an election. The voting is the first step in the political process; now we have to work together, lobby for

improvements, campaign if needed, and raise the awareness of our leadership about the situation of the “invisible faculty.” Remember, “business as usual” only renders us invisible anew.

As a final note, our college leaders have made a substantial commitment to a new program, Achieving the Dream, Inc. This program will require a major change in the campus culture, and tremendous efforts among the faculty, staff and administration to organize and measure results in the classrooms. The role of the adjunct faculty is not defined in this program as yet. As the majority of contacts with the students on a daily basis come through the adjunct faculty, they have to be on board, or the program will be frustrated. Once again, this presents the college with a problem, but also an opportunity to resolve the inclusion problem with the adjunct faculty. Here the adjuncts can no longer be ignored as the invisible faculty. Achieving the Dream [AD] will not succeed without including the adjuncts, and the adjuncts want to be included as equals, as they need to be to make AD work. So simply incorporating the adjuncts into the planning and organizing the AD will begin to resolve an old problem while preventing a new one. Now that the contract has been negotiated and approved, let’s move on to where we need to be and make the best of what we have.

NOTES

(1) These calculations are from official, published data, but those data are incomplete. So I made the assumption that the total number of full-time faculty each worked a full load of FTEs. Since some full-timers have overloads, this would increase the proportion of courses staffed by them. Also, just as the number of overloads is unknown, the number of full-time faculty who are relieved of courses for administrative and other duties is unknown, and reduces the proportion of courses taught by full-time faculty. However, in a previously published report, the 139 full-time faculty represented only 100 FTE due to such course reductions. If the current situation is similar, the estimates given would greatly over represent the courses taught by full time faculty and the hours per average taught by adjuncts would increase somewhat, for there are many more adjuncts than full-time faculty. Similar problems plague other estimates given here. In general, I have done my estimates leaning to the conservative side.

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A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keith R. Johnson, Ph.D., is a sociologist specializing in organizational and occupational studies. Other than teaching at colleges and universities in three countries, he has served as Research Manager at Rotary International's headquarters in Evanston, as a technical advisor in human resource management for the steel industry, and helped start up a graduate school of management in Venezuela. He has published in various fields, including Experimental and Field Work, International Management, Occupations and Professions, Organizational Development, and Statistical Analysis. His 2013 publications include articles in the encyclopedia, *Sociology of Work*. The article "Jobs, Marginal" is a general discussion of the problems of part-time and other marginal jobs across the country and complements this paper. He is chairing a panel on adjunct faculty at the annual meetings of the Illinois Sociological Association in November. Other professional activities are listed in an attachment. He can be contacted at kjohnson@oakton.edu