

Sample Op-Ed

Fairness for Part-time Faculty and other Urban Myths

The popular image of college and university professors is one of well-established, well-paid, full-time, tenured faculty members with the freedom to teach their classes as they choose. Much like alligators in the sewers, however, this image of faculty members can now be largely classified as urban myth.

Today, it is part-time faculty who teach more than 40 percent of undergraduate courses in the United States, and the ratio of part-time to full-time professors grows larger every year. This is largely due to the fact that as full-time tenured professors retire, cost-sensitive institutions are replacing them with part-timers/adjuncts.

While part-time/adjunct faculty make great professors, most are not permitted to have office hours, advise students, conduct research or participate in campus life. Only 17 percent of part-timers receive health insurance, and just 20 percent have a subsidized retirement plan. Most are paid far less for teaching the same courses as their full-time colleagues, and many must teach at several campuses just to make ends meet. These conditions are not only unfair to part-time faculty; they are unfair to the students whom they teach.

What can be done? What should be done? [Name of your state or institution]'s [lawmakers or administration officials] should heed the advice of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). This 1.3 million member union represents more higher education faculty members than any other organization, and has released a report titled Standards of Good Practice in the Employment of Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty. The report provides specific recommendations in the areas of compensation, employment conditions, professional responsibilities and representational rights.

Not surprisingly, part-timers are embracing the report, and they are taking action. Thousands are joining unions like AFT and negotiating contracts that provide increased wages, benefits, job security and protections for academic freedom. In recent years, AFT has organized more than 45,000 part-time faculty members. And, this week (Oct. 27 — 31, 2003), members of [name of your local] will join AFT and other national groups for "Campus Equity Week," a series of events throughout the U.S. that aim to raise the profile of part-time faculty issues. Here in [your city or state], part-time faculty members and their supporters are [one or two sentence description of your Campus Equity Week event].

All [readers or target group] should support Campus Equity Week and fair pay and treatment for part-time faculty. After all, equity and fairness for those who are helping shape our children's future should not be relegated to the status urban myth.

[Your name and title]