

Some quick thoughts on the adjunct experience:

I got into the racket because I needed to make a living and no other job prospects were panning out. At first I was grateful and relieved to have the work, which I frankly got through connections on several campuses. But it didn't take long to know more than academically that my peers and I were being exploited. Nominally, all of us professors were peers/colleagues, but economically and contractually, we adjuncts were definitely an underclass.

During my adjuncting career I taught ENG Comp at four campuses: in the early 1990s, at Genesee Community College (the Inmate Education Program at Attica and Albion correctional facilities); and from 2004-11 at RIT, MCC and Nazareth College. Some semesters I had assignments at two or three locations at once. During one academic year (September to May) I taught a total of 13 sections at three campuses.

For this 13-section load I earned around \$29,000. There were zero benefits, of course. But that was easily my best year in terms of earnings – and my worst year in terms of exhaustion and discouragement, what with the combination of low pay, high levels of disrespect and devilishly complex scheduling and commutes. I also seemed to be favored for early-morning class assignments, which added to the pressure.

The notion of comparable worth doesn't exist within modern academic departments (and probably never did). The gulf between the pay/benefits of "regular faculty" and other teaching staff is wide and rarely bridged. Sometimes an adjunct gets promoted to a non-tenure-track "instructor" position; most adjuncts are stuck on the lower rung for long periods, sometimes for years. "Regulars" love to throw their own history of adjuncting in your face: "Why, when I was an ABD, I put in 12 years..." These storytellers seem to think they're expressing solidarity with the proles, when in fact they're just revealing how clueless they are politically, or how they're just too scared to use their relative power to change things.

Maybe the worst thing I endured, and the thing that made me vow never to adjunct again, was the professional disempowerment: the patronizing treatment, even infantilization. In the modern world of ENG pedagogy, at least in regard to what for decades were first- and second-year COMP & LIT courses, critical reading of literature has pretty much been thrown out. The composition component has filled the vacuum, with emphasis on practical writing skills: basically, your pedagogical task is helping students write short essays in a facile, clear style that a corporate HR person would find attractive.

This new approach is the equivalent of the "back to basics" movement in primary and secondary schools a while back. And so it has provided an opening for textbook publishers (Pearson top among them) to sell reformulated "rhetorics" (a.k.a. style manuals, minus the style) to ENG departments, via a new class of departmental administrator, the "Writing Director." The WD, not to be confused with a department chair, is in charge of imposing one-size-fits-all methods and texts on all sections of what now is styled "College Writing," a course title that does honestly acknowledge the absence of literature. So the WD becomes something like a staff sergeant in the academic chain of command – and he or she is just about as imaginative and flexible as your Ol' Sarge used to be. Forget bringing your own experience or expertise into the classroom.

The combination of a narrowing of purpose – literature out, business-friendliness in – and an added level of departmental administrator affected my own adjuncting life negatively, to say the least: I

thought I had been hired on the basis of my career in journalism and my degree in creative writing. But I was not allowed any authority over course content, and barely any say in choosing texts. This form of disrespect, as real as the economic discrimination, became harder and harder to bear.

My last Writing Director and I had deep disagreements, and we parted company on bad terms. As I said above, I'll never work as an adjunct again. They don't want me, and I don't want or need them. But I did like many aspects of college teaching – the wonderful students I worked with and the great material I managed to sneak in.

Current ENG departmental practices and college/university policies have ruined things for nearly everyone but themselves and their corporate sponsors. Pay differentials, etc., are undermining higher education in ways that administrators refuse to take seriously. But I can't say that, after my years of being an adjunct "professor," the demise of higher education as we know it would upset me too much.