

Some Thoughts on Adjuncting: Becoming an Adjunct Faculty

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Abstract

I received an email from a friend that noted that I was an adjunct professor and wondered how that worked. Having been an adjunct professor at two universities, I felt I had a modicum of experience and proceeded to organize my thoughts. This paper is a review of the definition of adjunct professor, why one would do adjuncting, and advantages and disadvantages. I try to address some rumors like adjunct-pay, being given the least desirable classes, and the adjunctification of many universities. Lastly, I present some thoughts on how to start adjuncting including entry criteria and the preparation-time commitment. A quick search of online booksellers will reveal several books on this subject, published in the last 10 years (Kezar, 2012; Post, 2012; Greive & Lesko, 2011; Cooper & Booth, 2010; Greive, 2009; Beck & Greive, 2008; Greive, 2006; and Fountain, 2005). This paper is not intended to summarize or supplant these texts, but to provide my independent point of view.

Introduction

An email from a friend stated “I noticed that you are ... an Adjunct professor at Pepperdine. I was wondering how that works. I am looking at other career options, and would love to go back to my first love – teaching” Personal Communications, Apryll Nakamura, Jan 5, 2013). Having been an adjunct professor at two universities, I felt I had a modicum of experience and proceeded to organize my thoughts. FINDER (2007) in a NY Times article states that “the ranks of part-time instructors and professors hired on a contract have swelled” (p. 1). There is a need for adjunct faculty in two-year colleges and universities.

Two-year colleges

There definitely is a need in two-year or community colleges. Banachowski (2007) stated that “the number of part-time faculty instructors at two-year colleges has grown steadily since the early 1960s.... and the trend is certain to continue” (p. 1) and Leszinske (2012) added “that the number of adjunct faculty increased by more than 100% between 2006 and 2009 and that an estimated 68% of all faculty working in the community college [sic] are employed on a part-time, contingent basis” (p. 2).

Universities

Some of the reasons for hiring adjunct professors are “financial pressures, administrators’ desire for more flexibility in hiring, firing and changing course offerings, and the growth of community colleges and regional public universities focused on teaching basics and preparing students for jobs” (Finder, 2007, p. 2). Finder goes on to say

Three decades ago, adjuncts — both part-timers and full-timers not on a tenure track — represented only 43 percent of professors, according to the professors association [American Association of University Professors], which has studied data reported to the federal Education Department. Currently, the association says, they account for nearly 70 percent of professors at colleges and universities, both public and private.... [and] the elite universities, both public and private, have the fewest adjuncts. (p. 2)

In summary, Adjunct Professor (2013) states that “Contingent faculty (non-tenure-track faculty) now make up more than half of all faculty positions in the United States” (p. 1).

Definitions

Adjunct faculty

There are several terms that are often equated to adjunct faculty. These include adjunct assistant professor, adjunct associate professor, adjunct professor, contingent faculty, docent, lecturer, non-tenure-track faculty, part-time faculty, post-docs, supporting faculty, teaching assistants (TA), etc. These terms can mean different things in other countries, but my description is a person hired to teach one or two classes. I happen to like this simple definition “An adjunct professor is a part-time professor who is hired on a contractual basis rather than being given tenure and a permanent position” (Wisegeek, 2013, p. 1). A longer definition from Wikipedia starts out similarly.

An adjunct professor is a professor who does not hold a permanent or full-time position at that particular academic institution. This may be someone with a job outside the academic institution teaching courses in a specialized field, or it may refer to persons hired to teach courses on a contractual basis (frequently renewable contracts). It is generally with a teaching load below the minimum required to earn benefits (health care, life insurance, etc.) although the number of courses taught can vary. (Wikipedia, 2013).

Adjuncting

I define adjuncting (a new word, used extensively in online literature) as the activity, profession, or performance of an adjunct professor.

Tenure

Tenure is a term used “in a job and specifically to a senior academic's contractual right not to have his or her position terminated without just cause” (Tenure, 2013, p. 1), and is:

a practice carried from Germany to the United States, was designed to guarantee academic freedom to professors by protecting them against dismissal. Some argue that it also protects incompetent or lazy teachers and sometimes leaves universities saddled with professors in disciplines that have lost currency.... [he further states that] professors with

tenure or who are on a tenure track are now a distinct minority on the country's campuses. (Finder, 2007, p. 4)

Adjuncts are never on the tenure track. Tenure may be offered to full-time assistant professors when they advance to the associate professor level.

Reasons for Adjuncting

You might ask why you would want to do this adjuncting thing. The reason a person might have for part-time teaching will vary by individual, but here are some of the thoughts I've had, and ideas I've heard, on the subject (listed alphabetically).

Exposure

You may want to be exposed to bright upcoming young students who are potential employees for your business or just to keep yourself exposed to the basics in your field. Superstar students are often hired right out of the classroom.

Fallback or experience

You might start adjuncting as a fallback position in case you get laid off from your current job or you might want the experience in order to move into a full-time faculty position after you leave, or retire from, your current employment.

Giving back to society

Some people have a desire to donate their time to a worthy cause and teaching bright young minds can be very rewarding.

Practical experience

You may have expertise or practical knowledge in a particular field or industry and would like to share that knowledge with the next generation of students. Sharing your real-life experiences can be an invaluable knowledge sharing mechanism.

Remuneration

Money is a basic need in most societies and having a little extra income for a vacation or repairs to the house can be a significant reason to consider adjuncting. How much you might get varies considerably and is discussed further below.

Testing the waters

You may want to change careers or start a new one after retirement and are simply testing the waters before retiring or quitting your current job. This is but one of the many reasons why you

might want to start adjuncting. But before you decide, you might want to consider the advantages and disadvantages to becoming an adjunct professor.

Advantages and Disadvantages

You might ask about the advantages and disadvantages of this adjuncting thing. Table 1 is a short list of some of the thoughts I've had, and ideas I've heard; arranged according to the six primary SPELIT (Schmieder-Ramirez & Mallette, 2007) environments. The table juxtaposes the advantages and disadvantages from the adjunct's point of view and from the university administration's point of view.

Table 1. *Advantages (+) and disadvantages (-) of adjuncting for adjuncts and administrators.*

SPELIT Environment	Advantages (+) and Disadvantages (-) to Adjuncts	Advantages (+) and Disadvantages (-) to Administration
Social	(+) No administrative committees (-) No permanent office or computer (-) Time away from family	(-) Administrivia by tenured faculty (+) No permanent office or computer
Political	(+) Fallback/experience (+) Testing the waters (+) Influence	(+) Try-out potential new faculty (-) Adjunct may be poor teacher
Economic	(+) Money (-) No health benefits (-) No benefits for conferences (-) Uncertainty of permanence	(+) Less costly than tenured faculty (+) No benefits (+) Flexibility in hiring/firing-disposable
Legal	(+) No long term commitment	(-) Planning inflexibility (+) Adjunct salaries fixed
Intercultural	(+) Exposure to new talent (+) Meet different people (-) Varied cultural backgrounds	(+) Try-out potential new faculty (-) Student exposed to dissertation faculty
Technological	(+) Access to library resources (-) Buy own computer	(+) State-of-the-art industry experience (+) Practical hands-on experience

This section discussed the advantages and disadvantages of employing adjunct faculty. This topic is discussed in more detail in Banachowski (2007) and Wisegeek (2013). The next section will discuss some rumors you may have heard.

Rumors

You might have heard some rumors about this adjuncting thing. Here are some of the thoughts I've had, based on rumors I've heard (listed alphabetically).

Adjunctification

As more and more adjuncts are hired, the administrative workload (committees, advising students, etc) are taken up by the tenured and tenure-track faculty. As schools grow, more bureaucratic work is being done by the same quantity, or possibly fewer, faculty – this is referred to as adjunctification. Rees (2012a) states

that we as tenure track faculty should try to bring them [adjuncts] up through the ranks. Convert adjunct positions into lectureships. Convert lectureships into tenure-track positions. I'm not saying hire your adjuncts without searching for the best person available to fill the job, but excluding your adjuncts from such openings because they're your adjuncts is just idiocy. If they're good enough to teach your students on a short-term contract, then they're good enough to teach your students on the tenure track. (p. 2)

Rees (2012b) also states that “if we had more tenure-track faculty colleagues, there would be more people to share in the bureaucratic scut work that everybody hates. Instead, they [adjuncts] get more classes and we tenure-track faculty get more technologically-inspired paper to push” (p. 1). Hiring adjunct professors is standard operating procedure at most universities and appears to be standard procedure for the foreseeable future.

Least desirable classes

Yes, adjunct professors may get the least desirable classes. You may be teaching the entry level classes, the large classes, and teaching at hours when tenured professors would rather be at home with their family. But not always – your expertise may be just what the school needs for specialized or upper level classes.

Less money

Yes, the pay is less than salaried professors and you do not get health benefits. Adjunct professors also do not generally get registration, travel, or hotel benefits for attending and presenting at conferences. A website (Adjunct professor, 2013) states “due to the considerably lower salaries of adjunct professors, many universities in North America have reduced hiring of tenure-track faculty in favor of recruiting more adjuncts (and/or Lecturers) on a contractual basis” (p. 1). However, one benefit is that you do not have to participate in all the committees required of full time staff, advising students, and you do not need to do research. If you are adjuncting full-time and depend on teaching as your livelihood, you may have trouble making ends meet. You may need to hold concurrent adjunct faculty positions at two or more schools. Finder (2007) relates a story:

Aletia Droba taught for 10 years as a part-time philosophy professor in the Detroit area. She said she was paid as little as \$1,400 a course at community colleges and as much as \$2,400 a class at universities. Some semesters, Ms. Droba said, she taught as many as seven courses at four colleges, including across the border in Canada. This fall, she landed a full-time, non-tenure track job. She will teach five courses in the fall and spring combined — less than the number she often taught in a single semester as a part-timer. (p. 1)

The typical pay range for adjuncting, according to Adjunct Professor (2013) “for summer 2011, the average adjunct professor salary is \$55,000. If your specialization is biology or nursing, the average adjunct teaching salary will be higher, closer to an average of \$83,000/year” (p. 1). The same article goes on to say that “the range does vary quite a bit, because some small schools pay incredibly poorly for a single course...[and] you can find offers of an adjunct professor salary per course of just over \$1,000” (p. 1). Below, are the *per class-hour* rates for adjunct professor at CUNY as of 2009.

Adjunct Professor: \$87.94/hr – \$107.04/hr

Adjunct Associate Professor: \$79.29/yr – \$97.16/hr

Adjunct Assistant Professor: \$73.53/hr – \$87.29/hr

According to the American Association of University Professors, the national average adjunct professor salary range is between \$37,000 and \$73,000. If you are considering work at a community college, the range will be lower. (Adjunct Professor, 2013, p. 2)

Preparation time

The per-hour rate when you teach a class for the first time or two will be very low because of the preparation time: finding the right book for the class, reading it, preparing lecture notes and slides, and revising them after the first class. If you only teach the class once a year, there is a heavy re-learning process. However, it gets better if you teach the same class semester after semester – new material needs to be added, but you are not starting from zero.

A rule of thumb that I’ve used successfully is as follows. To prepare for a new (4 hour) class, I would devote most of an entire weekend for the upcoming week of class. So most weekends, during the semester, are tied up when you are preparing for a new class. You may be reading, making notes, findings supplementary material, and modifying your slide presentation up until the last minute. Grading of examinations and homework vary with the class and type of work submitted. For example, multiple choice examinations are easier to grade than multipage essays. When repeating a class you’ve taught recently, the preparation time decreases significantly. Slide presentations can be reused, but must be brought current with updated material and information and examples.

Support (lack of)

Adjunct faculty usually do not have access to teaching assistants to help with grading, they do not have offices (or may, at best, share hot desks with others), and do not have their own computers and have to supply their own laptops.

Tenure

Tenure is not guaranteed for full-time faculty, is non-existent for adjunct faculty, and it’s not getting better. Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) stated that 78.3% of the faculty were tenured or

were tenure-track in 1969. That number has decreased to 64.1% in 2011 according to the American Federation of Teachers Higher Education Data Center (2012). This is further supported by the change in faculty from 1997 to 2007; where an American Federation of Teachers (2009, p. 24) report states:

Full-time tenure/on-track faculty increased 8.6%
 Full-time nontenure-track faculty increased 38.2%
 Part-time faculty increased 42.6%

This shows the mix is increasingly towards more adjuncts (part-time faculty). There are many reasons why one would want, or not want, to become an adjunct professor as discussed in this section, and the next section will review the prerequisites for adjuncting.

How to Start

You would start adjuncting by finding a school that is willing to hire you – easily said. Adjuncting starts like any other job search: listings in the paper, advertisements in your professional journals, and listings in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (they have an excellent search engine at <http://chronicle.com/search/jobs/>), or by networking. You can network at conferences, your alma mater (or one of your *almae matres*), at schools where you would like to teach, or with friends who are currently teaching. But you have to meet the entry criteria for the school.

Entry Criteria

The generally accepted minimum entry criteria for adjuncting is usually a master's degree for community colleges and a doctoral degree for universities (How to, 2012a). One exception is the master of fine arts (MFA), which is considered a terminal degree (How to, 2012a). The doctoral degree types can be categorized into three groups: 1) the honorary doctorates, 2) the professional-type earned doctorates (i.e., M.D., D.D.S., J.D., and others), and 3) the research-type earned doctorates. These are discussed in detail below.

Overview of Doctoral Degree Types. According to Eells (1963, p. 19), the doctoral degree types can be categorized into two groups: the honorary doctorates and the earned doctorates. The honorary doctorate is not discussed in this study. The earned doctorates can be subdivided into professional-type and research-type – both are discussed in the following section. The research-type doctorates can be subdivided into three categories: (a) Ph.D., (b) Ed.D., and (c) other research-type doctoral degrees (Malette, 2009). All three categories of these research-type doctorates are discussed in the next paragraphs.

Research-type Doctor of Philosophy. The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree was first awarded in the U.S. by Yale University in 1861 (Baez, 2002, p. 49; Cardosier, 1987, p. 75; Noble, 1994, p. 73). The Ed.D. is awarded for studies in the field of education, but the Ph.D. can be awarded in many disciplines. The first awarded Ph.D. in education was awarded in 1893 at Teachers

College, Columbia University (Brown, 1990, p. 2; Mason 1998, p. 14), although Eells (1963, p. 29) claims that it was given by Clark University in 1892.

Research-type Doctor of Education. The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree was first awarded in either 1921 (Eells, 1963, p. 28) or 1923 (Cardozier, 1987, p. 75) by Harvard University. The Ed.D. was first awarded by the University of California in 1924 (Eells, 1963, p. 29). Cardozier (1987) indicated that the popularity of the Ed.D. increased until incidences of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees awarded were equal by 1941. The Ed.D. continued to be the dominant degree throughout the 1950s and 1960s. One reason for the popularity of the Ed.D. was the lack of foreign language requirements (p. 76). The language requirements for the Ph.D. were relaxed in the 1970s and the Ph.D. has been the dominant degree since the late 1970s (Brown, 1990; Cardozier, 1987; Mason, 1998).

Other research-type doctoral degrees. There are 24 research-oriented doctoral titles that are recognized as being equivalent to the Ph.D. by the Department of Education and the U.S. National Science Foundation (Department of Education, 2008) and the entire list is provided in the Appendix. These doctoral titles include the Doctor of Arts (D.A.), Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.), Doctor of Engineering (D.Eng.), Doctor of Nursing Science (D.N.Sc.), and Doctor of Theology (Th.D.).

Part-time adjunct

The part-time adjunct is very common. This is the person who has a primary source of employment (a day-job) and teaches a 3 or 4 credit class at a local university at night.

Professional adjunct

Many people start adjuncting in addition to their primary employment as mentioned above, but others teach full-time as adjunct professors at two or more universities. These are the professional adjunct and this is their only source of income. In addition to Aletia Droba's story (in the Money section above) about teaching seven courses at four colleges, Finder (2007) in a NY Times article relates another story:

Elaine Zendlovitz, a former retail store manager who began teaching college courses six years ago, is representative of the change. Technically, Ms. Zendlovitz is a part-time Spanish professor, although, in fact, she teaches nearly all the time. Her days begin at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, with introductory classes. Some days end at 10 p.m. at Oakland Community College, in the suburbs north of Detroit, as she teaches six courses at four institutions. (p. 1)

Grad student to TA

Another common entry into adjuncting is the graduate student who needs income and is supported by the university in exchange for teaching. This is a very easy way to become

indoctrinated in the teaching profession while not having to travel (since you are already at school for most of your waking hours).

Conclusions

In this paper I review the definition of adjunct professor, why one would do adjuncting, advantages and disadvantages, and I address some rumors like adjunct-pay, being given the least desirable classes, and the adjunctification of many universities.

An adjunct professor is a person hired to teach one or two classes. Some of the reasons for hiring adjunct professors are “financial pressures, administrators’ desire for more flexibility in hiring, firing and changing course offerings, and the growth of community colleges and regional public universities focused on teaching basics and preparing students for jobs” (Finder, 2007, p. 2). Adjunct Professor (2013) states that “Contingent faculty (non-tenure-track faculty) now make up more than half of all faculty positions in the United States” (p. 1).

The reason a person might have for part-time teaching will vary by individual, but could include exposure to potential employees, fallback job, having specialized experience, wanting to give back to society, remuneration, or testing the waters for a next-career. There are several advantages and disadvantages of employing adjunct faculty from the school’s and the employee’s points of view. Some of the rumors addressed are adjunctification, less desirable classes, less money, significant preparation time, lack of support, and tenure.

The generally accepted minimum entry criteria for adjuncting is usually a master’s degree for community colleges and a doctoral degree for universities. One exception is the master of fine arts (MFA), which is considered a terminal degree.

Author’s Biography

Dr. Mallette is an adjunct faculty at Pepperdine University and the University of Phoenix’s doctoral program and was an Instructor of Engineering at the University of Central Florida. He provides technical and programmatic support at The Aerospace Corporation. Previously, he worked in system engineering and project management of satellite systems at the Boeing Company for 30 years. He received the BS and MS degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Central Florida and the MBA and EdD (in organizational leadership, with honors) degrees from Pepperdine University. Dr. Mallette has published over 80 conference and peer-reviewed journal articles on atomic frequency standards, satellite systems, ground stations, root-cause investigation, genealogy, organizational ethics, and publishing. He is co-author of the book *Writing for Conferences* (Greenwood, 2011), co-editor of *The SPELIT Power Matrix* (CreateSpace, 2007), author of *Images of America: Rancho Mirage* (Arcadia Publishing, 2011), and the *Princess Avocado* (2012) series of children’s e-books. Leo and his wife Kathy live in Irvine and Rancho Mirage, California. They have one daughter and two granddaughters. He enjoys playing with his granddaughters, gardening projects, traveling, and writing.

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Appendix

Degrees Recognized as Being Equivalent to the Ph.D. by the National Science Foundation, in
International Affairs Office, U.S. Department of Education, Feb 2008
(Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2008)

RESEARCH DOCTORATE DEGREE TITLES

NOTE: This is the list of frequently awarded research doctorate degree titles accepted by the National Science Foundation (NSF) as representing degrees equivalent in content and level to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree.

1. Doctor of Arts(D.A.)
2. Doctor of Business Administration(D.B.A.)
3. Doctor of Church Music(D.C.M.)
4. Doctor of Canon Law(J.C.D./D.C.L.)
5. Doctor of Design(D.Des.)
6. Doctor of Education(Ed.D.)
7. Doctor of Engineering(D.Eng./D.E.Sc./D.E.S.)
8. Doctor of Fine Arts(D.F.A.)
9. Doctor of Hebrew Letters(D.H.L.)
10. Doctor of Industrial Technology(D.I.T.)
11. Doctor of Juridical Science(J.S.D./S.J.D.)
12. Doctor of Music(D.M.)
13. Doctor of Musical/Music Arts(D.M.A.)
14. Doctor of Music Education(D.M.E.)
15. Doctor of Modern Languages(D.M.L.)
16. Doctor of Nursing Science(D.N.Sc.)
17. Doctor of Philosophy(Ph.D.)
18. Doctor of Public Administration(D.P.A.)
19. Doctor of Physical Education(D.P.E.)
20. Doctor of Public Health(D.P.H.)
21. Doctor of Sacred Theology(S.T.D.)
22. Doctor of Science(D.Sc./Sc.D.)
23. Doctor of Social Work(D.S.W.)
24. Doctor of Theology(Th.D.)