

A FUTURE FOR ADJUNCTS: FROM PLIGHT TO FIGHT

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Abstract

Much has been written about the poor working conditions facing those responsible for more than 50% of the teaching in American colleges and universities. Adjuncts, contingent academic labor, are hired from term to term, at low wages without benefits. Blame for this situation has focused on the corporatization of the university and the economic stress on higher education in an era of decreased public funding. However, there is quite another side to this story if we focus on the increasing activism and successes of the adjunct organizing movement. When we look beyond the university, we see that adjunct issues are part of the larger conditions facing many American workers in a changing labor force for whom part-time work has become the norm. Adjunct activism then takes on a more urgent and more positive outlook, in which organizing efforts by unions, international organizations of adjuncts such as the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL), and local efforts of adjuncts all provide examples of successful strategies in different types of institutions. This paper closes by addressing a most critical emerging issue—the digitization of education.

Keywords: *Adjuncts; university teaching; unions; education justice*

It is easy enough to talk about the plight of adjuncts:¹ it is lived reality for many of us. In January 2014, the Democratic Staff of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce published *The Just-in-Time Professor*, their report on the responses they had elicited from contingent faculty. They summed up the situation thus:

...contingent faculty earn low salaries with few or no benefits, are forced to carry on harried schedules to make ends meet, have no clear path for career growth, and enjoy little to no job security. (U.S. House of Representatives, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Democratic Staff, 2014, p. 2)

It is interesting to note that the report goes to indicate that the difficulties of adjunct employment are part of a larger picture:

The contingent faculty trend appears to mirror trends in the general labor market toward a flexible, 'just-in-time' workforce, with lower compensation and unpredictable schedules for what were once considered middle-class jobs. (Idem.)

¹ The terms "adjuncts" (or "adjunct faculty"), "contingents" (or "contingent faculty") and "non-tenure track faculty" are the terms most widely used to designate those instructors, many with advanced degrees, who perform most of the teaching on the majority of campuses of community colleges, four-year colleges, public and private universities. While many of these teachers are "part-time faculty," the category also includes some who teach full time and some graduate students. What marks them most strongly is the lack of any expectation of tenure and the dominance of short-term hiring practices, from one semester to several years. The status of these teachers, their problems and working conditions, will be discussed in this paper. We will also consider the causes of the reliance on part-time, non-tenure track teachers in post-secondary educational institutions.

Thus it seems that the plight of adjuncts might have continued unnoticed and unremarked for another twenty years or more if it were not for the growing ranks of fast food workers, retail part-timers, freelancers, car washers and other underpaid workers in a growing precariat² class.

The topic of this paper concerns our future as adjuncts, and how we will shape that future through the fight to improve conditions; my own perspective is that of the anthropology of work, which includes the cultural, social, historic, economic and individual conditions and meanings of work as human activity. Our work as adjuncts is embedded in very large institutional problems: improving our conditions will necessitate changes to the structure and future of higher education, which are, in turn, entangled in political and economic issues that are grounded in fundamental visions of the future of our society. This is a topic of interest to everyone with a concern for the future of higher education in the United States. It is of special interest to many independent scholars who support themselves by teaching as adjuncts; in addition, many adjuncts, excluded from the institutional support that full-time faculty receive, pursue their independent scholarship on their own. The National Coalition of Independent Scholars provides invaluable assistance with access to resources and network support for adjuncts in these circumstances.

I begin by presenting some background of today's situation in higher education as it affects adjuncts, before moving outside the university to situate adjuncts as workers within the conditions of the contemporary meaning of work. Finally, I will highlight some of the gains adjuncts have made, and end with some thoughts on directions for present and future action. A very brief overview of the situation in the larger category encompassing both part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty is shown in Figure 1.

² The "precariat" (a portmanteau word combining 'precarious' and 'proletariat'), is a term first used by Guy Standing in "The Precariat—The New Dangerous Class" in Policy Network (May 2011) to describe people living in economic and social insecurity, with only short-term jobs, and "without a narrative of occupational development."

According to figures from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for 1975 through 2011, part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty accounted (as of 2011) for 70.8% of the faculty of 4,537 public and private post-secondary degree-granting institutions; these include community colleges, colleges, and universities (Curtis, 2014, p. 65). What is very telling is that not only has the percentage of full-time tenured faculty decreased in this period but, most significantly, the percentage of full-time tenure-track faculty (those who expect or aspire to obtain tenure) has been more than halved. In other words, there is proportionately less and less opportunity for full-time tenure-track employment, while the largest growth has been the two groups that lack job security and hopes for career advancement.

One of the most significant factors in the new world of higher education is not only the great number of contingent faculty, but also the major increase in administrators. According to a report by the New England Center of Investigative Reporting in collaboration with the American Institutes for Research, the number of non-academic administrators at post-secondary institutions (community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities) has more than doubled in the last 25 years, at a rate greater than that of student enrollment (Marcus, Jon, n.d.) The article includes a searchable table,³ which I used to examine the position of my own employers, Hunter College, City University of New York (CUNY): the data are shown in Figure 2.

Between 1987 and 2011, full-time administrative positions went up 79.3% while student enrollment increased by 54.6%. These figures are not atypical, either for Hunter or for all the schools listed in the survey. Some are much worse, a few are a little better, but the overall trend is the same: large increases in administration and professional staff with moderate increases in student enrollment. Furthermore, predictions by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that the job market for postsecondary administrators is expected to continue growing. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.)

³ (http://college-table.wqbh.org/college_local).

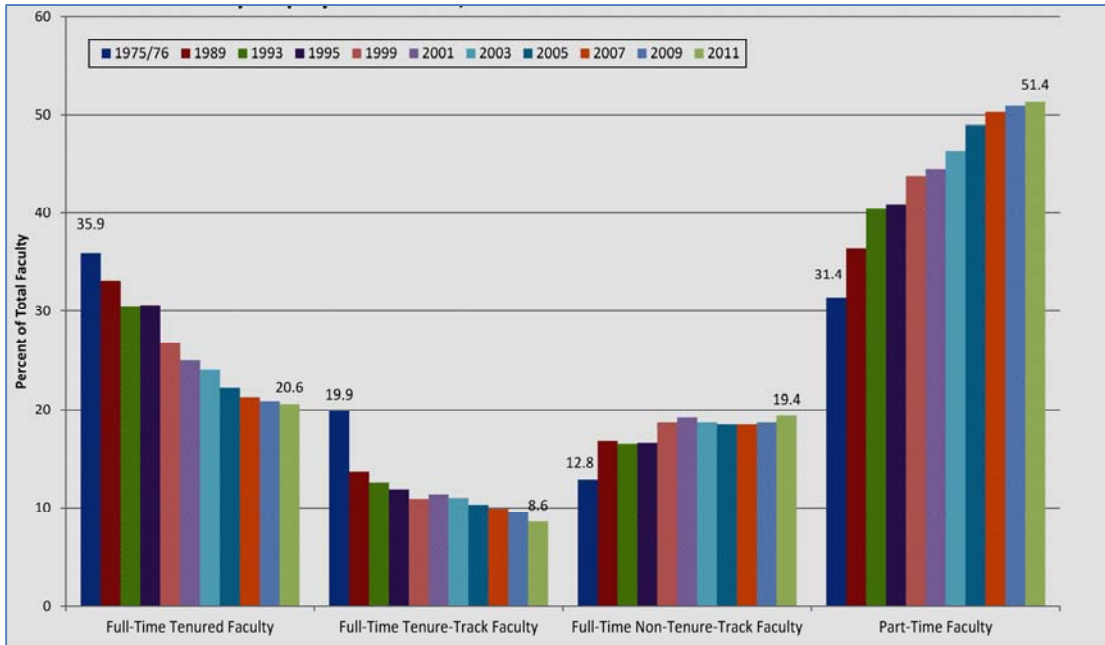


Figure 1. (Curtis, 2014, p. 4)

Notes: Figures in this chart have been updated from those published by AAUP in 2013. 1975-76: Figures for full-time faculty are for 1975 and are estimated; part-time figures are for 1976. Source: US Department of Education, IPEDS Fall Staff Survey. Tabulation by John W. Curtis, American Association of University Professors, Washington, DC.

Administrative Growth CUNY Hunter College, New York State		
Full-time Administrators (1987)	Full-time Administrators (2011)	Full-time Administrators % Change 1987-2011
87	156	79.30%
Full-time Professional Staff (1987)	Full-time Professional Staff (2011)	Full-time Professional Staff % Change 1987-2011
209	235	12.40%
Enrollment Total (1987)	Enrollment Total (2011)	Enrollment Total % Change 1987-2011
11814	18259	54.60%

Figure 2.

According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook of the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job market for postsecondary administrators is expected to grow in the period of 2012-2022 at a rate of 15%, which is considered faster than average for all occupations. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.) The rate of growth for postsecondary teachers is also high (19% for the period) but the Bureau notes that most of those jobs are expected to be part-time (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.).

The developments that we are seeing here in higher education, and especially in public higher education, are the results of global social and economic changes and they are intrinsically connected with developments in the world of work. Some of the major factors that have changed what we know as work are: the increasing influence of financial control in a post-industrial economy, globalization, and neoliberalism⁴ as economic theory and dogma, with its emphasis on austerity for the 99.9%. In such a world, education is reduced to the most utilitarian practices; it becomes focused on training for work, with the threat of joblessness hanging over students from pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) to graduate school. Competition between national economies, classes, and individuals becomes a dominant idea, leaving no room for cooperation or social support or the development of the individual. Schools are seen as an important part of this competition, and teachers are attacked for failure to achieve the rigid standards imposed upon them, even though support for education is cut and cut again in the name of reducing taxes and eliminating state programs. In the United States, this has been expressed in efforts to eliminate as much as possible the role of the federal government in education. There is now legislation in

Congress to decrease greatly the role of the Department of Education, and several of the Republican candidates for President have announced their desire to eliminate the Department entirely. (Bruni, 2015)

In this world, our present and possibly future world, there is no room for education in the humanities, for the development of critical thinking, for the flourishing of the arts or for the ideal of the richly developed human individual. Public higher education is especially badly affected, as those in office who control spending attempt to assess its value with evaluations of numbers of students who complete the degree within a stated time and the salaries of students after graduation. This is particularly true of the underfunded community colleges, now that there are proposals to provide “free” access to them for two years. Although some students may use that free time to prepare for 4-year colleges, much of the emphasis in the plans is focused on the courses designed to help prepare students for a workplace that requires more than a high school diploma, but not much more.

The corporatization of higher education has been exacerbated and accelerated by several factors, especially the current economics of neoliberalism and austerity, and political focus on reducing the size of government and the amount of expenditures on public programs. At the state level, state after state has reduced public funding of public higher education. This has resulted in higher tuition fees and more student debt, and it has also created situations in which the hiring of adjuncts becomes much more reasonable and economically efficient than hiring full-time faculty. In addition, we must consider the political function of the debates about education in general as well as the attacks on higher education in particular. Issues of testing, Common Core, teacher training and assessment have become tokens in the political contests. While conservatives have always been wary of the general liberal intellectual bent of most higher education professors, current struggles over scientific issues such as evolution and climate change have become red flag political issues, with argument over whether—and if so how—they should be taught at all levels of education.

⁴ Neoliberalism and neoconservatism are two political/economic theories that have their basis in classical economic theory and in the social welfare liberalism that developed during the late nineteenth century. Both theories have their modern roots in the reaction to the counterculture of the 1960s as well as the economic stagnation of the 1970s. The focus of the neoconservatives tends to be on international affairs, where they support American military strength and its use to promote American interests abroad, especially the development of democratic regimes. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, while it advocates free trade, focuses more on reducing the size and activities of American government at home, reducing expenditures on social services, and encouraging privatization of many social institutions, such as schools and prisons.

Furthermore, education has now become a big business, as we can see in the development of charter schools. Charter schools are very profitable and their proprietors' have the political clout to make them even more so; efforts to reduce or limit the numbers of charter schools in New York have largely failed, and the continued reduction in funding for public schools only widens the gap. Textbooks, testing, and online materials are also very profitable; teacher training is affected by the requirements of testing and common Core standards and by the companies like Pearson which dominate the business of providing these materials.

Nor is higher education exempt from the spell of privatization. In New York State, we now have a plan in which properties belonging to the State University of New York (SUNY) can be used in joint activities with private companies. In this program, START-UP NY (The SUNY Tax-Free Areas to Revitalize and Transform Upstate New York) businesses are invited to relocate on public university grounds, with a 10-year tax-free period because it is believed they will increase industry-sponsored research and provide some business experience for students. (Myers, 2015)

Results of the program are so far rather meager: one year after Governor Cuomo announced the Start-Up NY program, a Forbes article referred to the program as a "bust" because few jobs had been created in spite of large state expenditures (Sinquefeld, Rex, 2015). Proponents of the project say that it is too soon to judge and that there is continued support from participating universities. Another Forbes reporter wrote that a private institution, New York University (NYU) wanted to expand the program from upstate campuses to Manhattan. (Narea, 2015)

Although these factors may seem removed from the central issue of adjuncts, it is important to see them as the climate in which the adjunctification of the university takes place—a weakening of tenure and shared governance in which administrators take on more and more power, and the control of faculty over course content and university policies decreases. At the City University of New York (CUNY) the administration initiated widespread curriculum

changes with its implementation of the Pathways Program over the protests of the faculty and their union, the Professional Staff Congress. The decrease in full-time professors protected by tenure who can object to the administration's efforts to control curriculum, and the increase in the number of adjuncts who have no job security and very little influence on course content, provide the perfect atmosphere for the administration's efforts to weaken shared governance. Although some adjuncts may serve on the Faculty Senate, their numbers are typically very low (for example, in the Hunter College Senate, 44 of the 100 members are full-time faculty while 13% are Lecturers (full-time), Lecturers (part-time), Adjunct faculty, all other part-time members of the teaching faculty who are not also serving in full-time appointments, and non-faculty department member in the title series College Laboratory Technician and Higher Education Officer.

These figures give some idea of the influence of adjuncts in the Hunter Faculty Senate. These proportions are also typical for other CUNY colleges, while the University Faculty Senate has 120 full-time representatives and 16 part-timers. Furthermore, while increasing Senate membership for adjuncts would go some way toward improving their role in curriculum and internal institutional faculty affairs, it would not address issues of wages, hours, and working conditions which are best settled through collective bargaining.

When we look at all these factors, we come to see the connections between our lives as adjuncts, the institutions employing us and the larger context of global economic, political and social developments. As we begin to contest the role that confines us, we acknowledge our place in "the precariat," as described by Guy Standing in his post, "The Precariat—The New Dangerous Class" (2011): "[members of the precariat] have a more restricted range of social, cultural, political and economic rights than citizens around them." I believe that the term "precariat" very clearly identifies the lives of adjuncts both in terms of their economic conditions and as their role as part/not part of the university, where they do not enjoy either the rights, recompense, or status of the "citizens" who are

the tenured faculty. Standing describes “the precariat’s relations of production [as] defined by partial involvement in labour combined with extensive ‘work-for-labour’, a growing array of unremunerated activities that are essential if they are to retain access to jobs and to decent earnings.” (idem.)

We see ourselves in this description when we think of all the unpaid work we do in class preparation, syllabus development, grading and correcting papers, as well as meeting with and advising students, although our wages are based only on actual teaching hours, and the tenured faculty sometimes like to say that “all adjuncts do is teach.” As Standing points out, “... [A member of the precariat] has to allocate so much time to handling bureaucratic demands, to chasing one short-term insecure job after another,” which has the ring of familiarity to adjuncts. And, he adds, the worker has to devote time and energy to “learning new bags of tricks called ‘skills’ that could become obsolescent before they have a chance to use them.” (Idem.) Adjuncts are increasingly required to learn (usually at their own expense of time and money) how to use social media in teaching, to keep up with changes in the platforms that support their classwork, and to develop online classes or whole online courses in order to maintain their adjunct positions. This is another sign that we are members of the precariat, and another area in which we adjuncts have to extend our fight.

This is not limited to New York City or the United States, but it is part of the global reshaping of the economy and of education, with universities in Europe and Latin America also facing similar conditions (Rhoads and Torres, 2006): Marina Warner has written an article in the *London Review of Books* about the effect of the increase in administrative control over universities on scholars and teachers in England (2015), and at the August 2014 meeting of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) there were more than 200 registrants, representing institutions in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Argentina.

CHALLENGING PRECARITY

Thus we see that we are not alone and that the problems adjunct face are part of a much larger, world-wide, socio-economic and political configuration. How, then, have we lived up to the promise of this paper to move beyond plight to fight? How is the recognition of our precarity a step forward? Most importantly, precarity is not the self-involved, self-pitying concept that is plight; precarity is an objective condition that affects millions of people around the world. It is the result of specific decisions and programs by people in power and, as such, it is amenable to change. Once we recognize precarity, we begin to move beyond plight to fight. It is a big fight, circling out from our own immediate issues to involve many other people and to call for major social and economic changes. We can begin by challenging the conditions of our employment as adjuncts. There are also specific actions we should take as independent scholars. Finally, as individuals and citizens, as adjuncts and independent scholars, we can move forward to challenge the basis of precarity in many areas (see Table 1).

Challenge to the Conditions of Employment in Higher Education: Organization

- **Professional associations, e.g.:**
American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
Modern Language Association (MLA)
- **Adjunct associations, e.g.:**
New Faculty Majority (NFM)
Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL)
- **Unions:**
 - *Institution-wide unions*
 - *Union of all faculty, full- & part-time*
 - *Local branch of national union*
 - *Adjuncts-only union*
 - *Graduate students unions*

Table 1.

The professional associations of some disciplines have begun to address issues of contingent academics in recent years, largely because their PhD members have found it increasingly difficult to find full-time, permanent work and their graduate student members have become increasingly vocal. To cite only two examples, The Modern Language Association has issued a recommendation for a \$7,230 minimum salary for adjuncts for a three-credit course (MLA, n.d.); and the American Anthropological Association, of which I am a member, has made some moderate efforts in the direction of recognizing the issues of contingent faculty, with articles in the peer-reviewed journal *Anthropology of Work Review* (e.g. Sharff and Lessinger, 1995) as well as papers and proposals presented at annual meetings. On a broader scale, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has instituted a One Faculty Campaign to help their chapters and collective bargaining units make gains for contingent faculty.

There are also several national membership adjunct associations, such as the New Faculty Majority (NFM) and the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL), which are important sources of information and as support networks, especially if your school does not have an active adjunct organization yet. The New Faculty Majority (NFM), founded in 2009, works to improve the quality of higher education by improving the working conditions of adjuncts who are now the majority of the faculty in most institutions of higher education. The organization's motto is "Faculty Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions." NFM's activities include research and education about the status and role of adjuncts, advocacy, and information about significant legal cases affecting adjunct organization. NFM is the coordinator of the annual event, Campus Equity Week, during which adjuncts participate in events to publicize their role and their demands for equity on each campus.⁵

The Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) is an organization of North American activists working to improve the working conditions of all non-tenured

faculty, including graduate students. The organization had its start in 1996 at a conference of contingent workers that was held in Washington DC, concurrently with a conference of the Modern Language Association. The founding group expanded membership and developed the organization from its base on the East Coast to become an international organization whose conferences draw participants from the United States, Mexico and Canada.^{6 7}

Unionization is, I believe, the most productive path to take for adjunct progress, not only because the social and economic scope of the problems fall within the realms addressed by union action, but also because collective bargaining gains can be much wider and stronger than just wages. They can extend to conditions of employment, job security, training and many other issues, and they can be readjusted as conditions change. That said, there are many different forms that adjunct unionization can take and this paper can only offer a review of the principal ones. I urge you to look into the variety of unionization possibilities if your institution is not already organized, and to investigate the possibilities for adjunct action within your own union if you are already a member of one.

In some institutions, such as CUNY, there is one stand-alone union which is institution-wide and includes both full-time and part-time faculty. The large size of a combined union is effective in negotiating with the huge, complicated administrative structure of CUNY, which is funded both by New York City and State governments. However, there are internal tensions between full-time and part-time faculty within the union. I have advocated for the adoption of the motto: "One Faculty, One Union.," because I feel these conflicts weaken the union as a whole as well as

⁵ More information can be found at their website <http://www.newfacultymajority.info/>.

⁶ Their next Conference will be held in August 2016 in Canada, at the University of Alberta. Additional information about the organization can be found at their website <http://cocalinternational.org/index.html>.

⁷ These are only two sources for news about activities and organization of adjuncts, but a quick search of the Internet will bring you to many other groups and individual blogs, important sources for information as you build your adjunct association on your campus. One of the most vital sources of information about international adjunct activities and issues is COCAL Updates, archived at <http://precaritydispatches.tumblr.com/COCAL-Updates-Archive>.

requiring an ongoing effort by adjuncts for status and equity within the union. This struggle continues.

There are some adjunct unions which have been formed as local branches of national unions, such as the Kaplan Teachers Union in New York City (Newspaper Guild) and the New School, a private university in New York City (United Auto Workers). The adjunct faculty at Tufts University decided to join the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) which is conducting an "Adjunct Action Campaign" in the Boston area. In this "metro campaign," the goal is to organize all or most of the adjuncts in universities in a given area, thus arriving at a position from which they can dominate the discussion of wages and working conditions.

Some adjuncts tend to reject unionization efforts either out of fear of reprisals by the administration (an anxiety commonly met in all organizing campaigns) or because they identify as "professionals" and do not want to be connected to what they perceive as "blue-collar" activity. This identification with the professorial class, in spite of the actualities of their working conditions and experience, can be described in terms of Marxist theory as "false consciousness" in which individuals' self-image chides the reality of their exploitation. The stigma and lack of status associated with being an adjunct in many institutions lends itself to the denial of the low esteem associated with this condition and an effort to see oneself as part of the higher class. Although this is a topic for a future paper, it is mentioned here as a factor that activists have to acknowledge as they attempt to organize on their campus.

One of the most energetic and broadest organizing efforts currently underway is the growing organization of graduate students who share the insecurity, low pay and lack of benefits or advancement with adjuncts and the non-tenure-track faculty. Graduate students are now a significant part of the contingent picture, with the AAUP reporting them as 19.3% of the instructional staff in 2011 (Curtis, 2014, p. 1). Their efforts are significant, not only because of the gains they are able to make for graduate students but because it appears that they may be able to invigorate

the labor movement by creating unions focused on organizing the unorganized rather than just servicing members. (A. Rhoads and G. Rhoades, 2005; (Kitchen, 2014)

As we consider these efforts at organization to improve the conditions of adjuncts, there are some areas which are especially critical for independent scholars. (Table 2)

Of Particular Importance to Independent Scholars
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognition of scholarship by the departments and/or by the institutions in which we teach• Funding for professional development (travel, conferences) especially if our work is outside the department in which we teach• Control of the online courses and materials we develop

Table 2

It is important that we aim to improve the recognition of all adjuncts as more than people "who just teach." Areas that are particularly significant for independent scholars include recognition of our research and publications, so that they are on a par with those of our full-time colleagues. We should also seek to obtain funding for research by the institutions in which we teach, and their support for adjuncts who seek outside funding for professional development, travel, conferences, and research expenses. Finally, as there is more emphasis on the development of online classes and whole courses, adjuncts must be vigilant about securing protection for their work as well as obtaining recompense for the time spent in development and the provision by the institution of the necessary technical help and equipment. The recent contract at the New School (UAW, Local 702) includes such language to provide for specific additional payments, such as when a teacher converts a course previously taught in the classroom to an online course.⁸

⁸ The AAUP provides Sample Policy and Contract Language on Distance Education and Intellectual Property as well as other

There is also a more general 'to do' list, and we can all find some little piece of it that we can focus on and thus start unraveling the cocoon that shrouds adjuncts in silence and invisibility in the world of higher education.

All of Us	
•	Surveys
•	Organize a union if we don't have one
•	Be active in our union if we do have one
•	Join adjunct organizations such as NFM, COCAL
•	Create wider awareness of adjunct conditions
✓	Bring up adjunct issues at our professional associations
✓	Raise adjunct issues at any political organizations to which we belong
•	Build alliances
✓	Find allies in our own department/institution
✓	Make alliances with student and graduate student organizations
✓	Develop alliances with others who have a stake in higher education

Table 3

TAKING ACTION

A good way to start taking action is by surveying the needs, conditions, and goals of the adjuncts at your institution. It is fairly neutral, i.e., not overtly organizational, and it is a good way for adjuncts to get to know each other and to discuss common concerns. For those of us who remember the days of Women's Liberation, the "consciousness raising" discussions usually led to some action plan. In the same way, drawing up survey questions, circulating

the survey encouraging people to respond, and then finding a way to publicize the results, perhaps in an adjuncts meeting or an online mailing list, may be the spark that leads to further action. The needs and aims of the adjuncts in each college vary so widely that it is important to survey them to see where your efforts at organization should lead. Surveys are also an excellent way to identify and recruit adjunct activists as well as to develop contact lists.

Organization is essential: as the analysis of the adjunct condition has shown, it is not just an individual problem for one person, or on one campus. The issues are national and even international. If there is no union in your institution, and if forming a union is too big a step right now, start with forming an adjuncts group where you can discuss areas of common concern and investigate activities appropriate to your campus. Conditions will vary from department to department and group discussions can lead to some ideas for improvement and suggestions of best practices, such as listing all the adjuncts' names and office hours on the department website, or suggesting that adjuncts be invited to attend department meetings.

If your institution has a union, become active in it and develop an adjuncts committee if one does not already exist. Your adjuncts group can formulate specific items for the union to gain for adjuncts in bargaining sessions, such as job security (guarantees of continued employment after a specific number of terms), health insurance, payment for last-minute cancellation of courses, and provisions for the development of online courses.

In addition to your union activities, it is good to join larger organizations like NFM and COCAL, where you can find information about adjuncts' activities in other places, get new ideas, and broaden your view of the adjunct struggle. The newsletters of adjunct groups also provide important information about significant court cases and rulings of the National Labor Relations Board that affect adjunct organization.

We have to work to create awareness of adjuncts, the work we do and our working conditions. The general public is unaware of the role adjuncts have in teaching

Resources on Copyright, Distance Education, and Intellectual Property on their website www.aaup.org.

the majority of classes at most institutions. The parents of many of our students, and our students for the most part, do not realize how often the “professor” standing in the front of the classroom lacks decent pay, benefits, and job security. The more we talk about adjuncts’ problems in our professional organizations, and the more we raise these issues with our elected representatives, the stronger our organization becomes.

Alliances are extremely important: make alliances with students—they often do not know the issues confronting adjuncts and they are usually very sympathetic and supportive when they learn about them (to paraphrase the NFM Motto: “Our working conditions are their learning conditions”). Make alliances with the full-time, tenured faculty: they are not the enemy, although sometimes they seem like an obstacle; some will be supportive. Make alliances with graduate students, many of whom will be the adjuncts of tomorrow and who are already suffering the same working conditions if they are employed as teachers.

Make alliances with all stakeholders: parents who pay the tuition, students and taxpayers who pay for these exorbitant administrative costs, groups that oppose privatization of education at every level, elementary teachers who oppose the drive to teach to the test, and all progressive social movements and professional academic organizations. As the leaders of the Chicago teachers’ strike say:

We were determined to change the discussion about public education to focus on our students [...] The dialogue about public education can no longer simply assume that teachers are the problem, that no other issues exist. Parents will not be passive actors when it comes to policies that affect their children. And we showed that teachers unions are not merely protectionist organizations but can be a progressive force for education justice. (Bradbury, Brenner, Brown, Slaughter, Winslow, 2014, pp. 2–3)

“Education justice”—now there is a goal we can rally around. The political and economic outlook is gloomy followed by dismal. The attacks on education, especially public education, have become the focus of the neoliberal drive to destroy the economic and

social position of most workers and reduce us all to the precariat. I think that many people who support and repeat the rhetoric of privatization really think that they will be exempt from the deluge, that they enjoy some kind of special status. When they wake up it will be too late. But that is material for a dystopian novel, not a plan for those of us awake, aware, and ready to act.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a lot to be done, but the good news is that beginnings have been made and there are directions in which we can move. We have the numbers and, if we have the will, we can not only improve our own conditions but also take part in the process of creating a better and more just society as well as a meaningful and humanistic higher education. As the Chicago teachers said, the fight is for much more than our own needs.

Yes, it is a lot of work, unpaid work at that, but my experience has been that it is more fun to be a troublemaker than to be a victim. I have found that in social movements—community organizing, civil rights, antiwar protests—there is a great energy that makes us grow. I believe that adjuncts today are on the cusp of being able to turn their frustration into that kind of positive action and help to make wide-ranging social change.

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