



Local 2431 American Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO)
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Robin Bikkal
Westchester Community College Board of Trustees
Hartford Hall
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Dear Ms. Bikkal:

During the WCCFT luncheon, you requested specific information about the situation of adjunct faculty at WCC. Over the past four decades, college budgeting priorities have led to a disproportionate number of transient part-time faculty in relation to resident full-time faculty. As noted in the report Dr. Joanne Russell submitted to the Board in February, the latest available data show that only one-third of class sections taught at WCC are taught by full-timers. (That figure includes classes taught by full-timers as overload.) If the absolute numbers of full-time and part-time faculty members are compared, rather than the number of sections they teach, the percentage of full-timers would be even lower. The Russell report also shows that the discrepancy has been increasing in recent years, and assignments of classes to adjuncts is now quite a bit more frequent at WCC than the SUNY community college average.

During these decades while cheaper adjunct labor became an ingrained administrative habit, the college neglected for the most part to develop policies, procedures, resources, infrastructure, or fair compensation designed to assure and control the quality of instruction provided by its part-time teaching staff.

The list below underscores that point. It consists simply of items that are discussed regularly on all WCC campuses. The list is followed by links to other national sources of information about the issue of increased reliance on “contingent” college teaching faculty. I hasten to add that while WCC is not particularly more “guilty” than any other college of the problems caused by extensive part-time staffing, in the sense that we are all “trustees” of WCC’s mission to offer excellent education to its diverse communities, the adjunct issue should be central to any conversation about our future.

1. Hiring process: Unlike full-time faculty members who are extensively vetted and interviewed before being hired by the President of the College, adjuncts are often hired (by a department chair or assistant chair) with the briefest of interviews, sometimes with no interview at all, because the need to staff classes is sometimes unknown until shortly before a new semester begins. There is no *mandated* hiring process, nor standardized guidance for departments.

2. Reappointment: Again, there is no mandated process for evaluating adjuncts prior to reappointment; by contrast, full-time faculty are evaluated extensively prior to reappointment once a year during their first five years. So-called “senior” adjuncts at WCC have first choice of classes after full-time faculty. (See below: “Earned job security.”) Some non-senior adjuncts who have become known in their departments over time may be rehired early when the needs for staffing classes is known. Many others, however, may not know whether they are rehired until up to the last few days before classes start (even beyond that, in some cases).
3. Evaluation: Some departments are routinely able to schedule and perform classroom observations of their adjuncts (for example, one observation per individual per year for as long as a department determines). Others, particularly departments with a large number of adjuncts, many of whom teach at our extension sites throughout the county, simply do not have the people-power to do the observations. There are adjuncts who have been with the college for years who have never been observed, and others with many years of service who have only been observed once.
4. Earned job security: Under our existing contract there is no way for an adjunct to apply for or receive any sort of guarantee of continuous good-service employment, except to achieve senior status. Senior status is automatically awarded to an adjunct on completion of 20 semesters of teaching at WCC.
5. Office facilities and office hours: Some departments provide shared office spaces where adjuncts can work. This situation is very uneven; for example, one department provides little more than seating in its mailroom along with one desk in a private office for its 70+ adjuncts; and those who teach at the extension sites, especially in the evenings, often have no work space. Shared telephones and computers are hardly a given. Adjuncts are paid by the hour but without a time clock; their contract states how many hours they are to be paid for, the sum of classroom contact hours. The college believes strongly enough in the value of faculty office hours to require its full-time staff to hold them daily, but for a variety of reasons the adjuncts teaching two-thirds of our classes are not required to hold, nor for the most part do they hold, office hours: they would have to be paid for that time, and space would have to be provided. Though they do so on a pro bono basis, many adjuncts find time and place to meet their students outside of class. It is part of the adjunct culture that many adjuncts do not or cannot remain on campus at times feasible for helping students because they earn part of their living elsewhere. The fact that they have little control over their scheduling adds to this problem. Adjuncts’ predetermined time on the clock does not include any preparation time or grading time. Though most adjuncts probably perform those tasks with integrity, the system provides zero incentive for them to do so.
6. Access to resources and information: The ability to use copiers, find supplies, etc, among adjuncts is very uneven. Those who work during daytime hours and “know the ropes” in their department are usually able to get what they need, but others (teaching night classes or at extension sites) either do not have access or do not know how to avail themselves of essential resources. No reliable and consistent campus-wide strategy for communicating essential information to adjuncts has ever been developed. Departments and divisions make do with constantly fluid distribution lists; and IT provides part-timers with email addresses though the system does not accommodate listing the personal email addresses that adjuncts are more likely to use. Through little fault of their own, adjuncts are unlikely to be in the loop for much of the information-sharing that takes place among the College’s full-time faculty and staff.

7. Participation in departmental and other professional activities on campus: While adjuncts are often welcome to participate in certain committees, etc., their external schedules often make it difficult for them to do so. Rarely, if ever, are adjuncts paid for the time they put into such activities. As a result, adjuncts are not able to contribute to the development of curriculum and other academic matters, and they are therefore less informed than they should be about their departments' academic mission. The college can therefore not guarantee to its students that their instructors are aware of the importance of different aspects of the course syllabi they teach from.
8. Difficulty facing academic challenges caused by a preponderance of part-time instructors: Currently there is a great deal of pressure coming from state higher education systems, state legislators, and the general public, to increase the success rates of students at community colleges, particularly among our weakest and most vulnerable students. It is precisely the lower level, high-enrollment courses that have the highest preponderance of adjunct instructors, and it is these courses whose success rates need to be improved. It is difficult to introduce initiatives in course content, methodology, etc., among instructors who are not available to participate in the development and propagation of these initiatives.
9. Increased pressure on full-time staff: The simple fact of an increase in enrollments and part-time instructors without a commensurate increase in the number of full-time faculty means that those full-timers are responsible for an ever-increasing administrative burden. In recent years at WCC, this burden has come down particularly hard on our department chairs, assistant chairs, adjunct coordinators, and curriculum chairs.
10. Salary and benefits: Adjuncts are currently paid \$72.60 per credit hour for their first 12 semesters. Their pay ranges up to \$86.20 on gaining senior status. Full-timers range from \$57,415 annually up to \$121,365. Since a full-time teaching load is usually 470 class-hours per year, even the lowest ranking, most junior full-time instructor's pay amounts to \$122.10 per credit hour, and the most senior professor's amounts to \$258.20 per credit hour. At WCC adjuncts receive no benefits, while full-timers receive health insurance and pension contributions.

If you are interested in further information, including issues beyond WCC, here is a link to one of the national organizations adjuncts have formed:

<http://www.newfacultymajority.info/equity/>

Here are some recent articles about the issue:

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/24/house-committee-report-highlights- plight- adjunct- professors>

<http://futureofhighered.org/policy-report-2/>

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/28/new-report-urges-more-emphasis- adjunct- faculty- conditions- accreditation>

<http://academeblog.org/2014/01/20/its-our-crisis-not-an-adjunct-crisis/>

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/09/19/newspaper-column-death-adjunct-prompts-debate>

Thank you for your interest! Every step any of us can take to improve this situation for all of us is welcome!

Respectfully,

Mel Bienenfeld, President
Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers