

The Bullhorn

The Official Newsletter of the SUNY New Paltz Chapter of the UUP

February/March 2012



Inside This Issue

Our Dirty Little Secret 1

Contract Negotiations 5

Winter Delegate Assembly 6

Among the Majority 8

Faculty Forum 12

UUP/NYS Individual
Development Awards 13

Free Beer 15

PT Labor-Management 17

Labor-Management Notes 19

List of DSI Recipients 22

Dodgy Definitions of Merit 26

Calendar of Events 28

Chapter Committees 29

Executive Committee 31

Are You a Member? 33

Our Dirty Little Secret

by Peter D.G. Brown, Chapter President



Most people familiar with higher education—students, their parents and the general tax-paying public—are primarily focused on the fact that tuition costs always seem to be rising faster than the rate of inflation. As states like New York have gradually reduced their funding for public higher education, an ever greater share of the cost for higher education is being shouldered by cash-strapped students and their parents. Student debt is soaring to \$1 trillion and is even surpassing our total credit card debt.

This model for funding higher education is fairly unique to the United States and would be unthinkable in most other countries. Surely it is not sustainable in the long run and could well lead to another disastrous credit bubble, much like the one caused by the unconscionable dealing in sub-prime mortgages.

The New Faculty Majority

Less well-known is the fact that only a small fraction of tuition is going to the women and men who are actually doing most of the teaching. Over 70% of the teachers at American colleges are contingents, people who are neither tenured nor on a tenure track. Some are part-time adjunct lecturers, so-called “adjuncts,” typically teaching two courses per semester and rarely earning much more than \$3,000 per three-credit course. Others are full-time lecturers teaching at least twice that load, for about one-third more compensation per course.

Adjuncts have short-term contracts that hardly ever extend beyond a semester or a year. They can be laid off (non-renewed) on short notice without the need for the College to provide any cause or explanation. Though most are rehired year after year, the precarious nature of their employment deprives them of the academic freedom that comes with a measure of job security. Over 50 of our own adjuncts have been teaching *a decade or more* at SUNY New Paltz, yet they typically have no more compensation or job security than any new hire coming to us fresh out of school.

We here at SUNY New Paltz are somewhat better in many respects than some of our peer institutions, but the clear majority of faculty teaching our students are contingents. In the absence of any career ladder or job security, adjuncts are the most underpaid employees on campus, and yet they deliver the brunt of the essential courses across much of the curriculum. Without the major contributions by contingent faculty in all schools of the College, we simply would not be able to deliver our GE program or even many of our majors.

Contingents at New Paltz

Although the number of contingent teachers here fluctuates, the numbers have been fairly stable over the past several years. Since adjuncts are taken on and off the payroll at regular intervals, for the most accurate snapshot it is best to look at

Continued from p. 1

the data toward the end, rather than at the beginning, of any particular semester. Below is a breakdown of contingent and tenure-stream academic faculty who were on the payroll December 7, 2011, which does not appear to have changed much when compared to the most recent data from February 2012:

Contingent Titles Tenure-Track Titles

Adjunct Lecture	235	Assistant Prof.	98
Adjunct Instructor	62	Associate Prof.	108
Lecturer	53	Professor	44
Instructor	5	Dist. Prof.	3
Visiting Asst. Prof.	1	Dist. Teaching Prof.	2
Visiting Assoc. Prof.	1	University Prof.	1
Subtotals:	357		256

Grand Total: 613
 Contingent: 58%
 Tenure-Track 42%

These are the numbers that are part of our own dirty little secret at New Paltz and are not to be found in any of the College's publications. Contingents constitute the clear majority, even without the 62 adjunct instructors, whose responsibilities are other than classroom teaching.

Growing Wage Disparities

While there have been a few minor improvements, the overall picture has gotten considerably worse for contingents. Even with across-the-board salary increases, the pay gap between adjuncts and everyone else continues to widen. In the decades since 1970, adjuncts' per-course compensation at New Paltz has actually plummeted by 49%, when adjusted for inflation, while that of the College President has grown by 35%.

In 1970, an assistant professor's starting salary here was 10 times what an adjunct received for teaching a single course. By 2008, an assistant professor was making 17 times what an adjunct was making per course, a hefty 70% increase. Back in 1970, President Neumaier was making 32 times the adjunct compensation per course. In 2008, President Poskanzer's salary was over 85 times what our adjuncts were making per course. This whopping 165% increase is truly staggering.

Addicted to Adjuncts

While generally doing quite well for themselves, college administrators everywhere are

doing their best to contain overall costs. What led us to this predicament was not some nefarious conspiracy to push higher education onto the backs of underpaid, precarious academic labor. The shift from tenured to contingent labor occurred incrementally over multiple decades, as short-term solutions gradually became common practice over time. Administrators felt strong pressures from trustees and legislatures to curb costs, to make do with less, and they gradually became addicted to the widespread use of contingent academic labor.

The study of addiction shows us how easy it is to habituate oneself to harmful practices, how it becomes necessary to put on a false front and cover up the dirty little secret by deception and denial. High school students looking at prospective colleges, as well as the general public and alumni donors are more impressed by new buildings, especially athletic stadiums and sports complexes, than by paying a living wage to the faculty providing the crucial classroom instruction in those buildings.

Contingency Hurts Everyone

Contingency not only hurts the increasingly underpaid and precariously employed teaching faculty, which is bad enough. It also hurts the tenured and tenure-track faculty, a minority at New Paltz and across the country. Their course load and general workload is increasing, as fewer tenure-stream faculty are available for advising, committee work and other forms of service, from which adjuncts are systematically excluded. The overburdening of tenure-stream faculty takes precious time away from their teaching and research tasks. Many of us daily experience this first-hand.

The hiring of contingents is typically far more casual than that of tenure-track faculty. As individuals, contingents may or may not be excellent teachers. With no available promotions or career path, adjuncts are rarely evaluated in any systematic way, since most departments have little time or incentive to do so. The often casual and unprofessional process of both hiring and non-renewing adjuncts dishonors the entire teaching profession.

Since adjuncts are excluded from faculty governance at New Paltz and most other institutions, colleges are deprived of adjuncts' expertise in such critical areas as curricular development, assessment, instructional support and planning. Widespread contingency and poverty wages also demean and cheapen the entire

the pay gap between adjuncts and everyone else continues to widen

teaching profession. With few or no opportunities for professional advancement, institutional loyalty is often weak, leading to workforce instability and high turnover. Many of our best adjunct teachers abandon higher education for more rewarding careers elsewhere.

Harm to Students

Perhaps worst of all is how contingency harms our students. Poor teaching conditions make for poor learning conditions. The instructors that students are most likely to encounter in their first college years are the ones receiving the least amount of institutional support. When adjuncts lack such basic facilities as office space, computers and telephones, they are less likely to be accessible for out-of-classroom interaction with students, for informally sharing their academic experience or for writing recommendations.

Without any job security, contingents lack academic freedom, which can result in the kind of self-censorship that prevents students from being exposed to the most cutting-edge or controversial viewpoints. More than anything, students need to be academically challenged, not coddled. Courses and grading can be less rigorous when instructors are overly dependent on favorable student evaluations for their annual renewals.

Finally, students are discouraged from choosing a profession in higher education as they realize how poorly most of their teachers are being treated. Our adjuncts' abysmal working conditions graphically refute the entire notion on which the American Dream is founded, namely that higher education will lead to a successful and secure job in the middle class. Our students are neither dumb nor blind. They can see what awaits them if they decide to pursue a teaching career in higher education: all their hard work, good grades in college and advanced graduate degrees are likely to result in a huge mountain of debt and a dead-end teaching job at near-poverty wages.

Overcoming Contingency

As bad as the situation is, it is certainly not hopeless. Any addiction can be cured. Once we confront and clearly face higher education's dirty little secret, we can begin to devise ways to mitigate contingency and gradually move toward a less harmful, fairer and more sustainable model of higher education staffing. UUP's [Petition for Educational Quality, Fair-](#)

[ness and Equity](#), signed by over 2,000 members of the College community in the fall, lists seven concrete steps that we are urging the Administration to consider:

- recognize publicly the enormous and invaluable contributions of contingent employees at SUNY New Paltz;
- support UUP's efforts to ensure that part-time adjuncts have appropriate working conditions and are compensated equitably, so that they receive compensation comparable to lecturers per course;
- strengthen academic freedom, educational quality and stability of the faculty by increasing job security;
- eliminate the arbitrary minimum and maximum number of courses that may be taught by part-time adjunct and full-time contingent faculty;
- institute hiring practices that reward the competency and years of service of contingent employees;
- establish class sizes that support quality teaching and learning for all teaching faculty;
- preserve and protect existing personnel, programs and services at SUNY New Paltz.

Thus far, [the Administration has publicly responded](#) to only one of these points, alleging that our adjuncts, who typically receive about \$12,000 a year for teaching four courses, are compensated fairly. We hope that the Administration will in due course respond to the other points, and that we can have a productive dialogue on decreasing contingency and mitigating its worst effects.

Seeking Solutions

As professors, we need to come down from our ivory towers and confront the dirty little secret, to learn about the working conditions of most of our colleagues teaching here and elsewhere. Contingency in higher education is not limited to the United States, but has unfortunately become the norm in many other countries, as well. We all need to become better educated about this and get more engaged in finding solutions that are both fair and affordable. For its part, UUP will be hosting a Faculty Forum in April with a panel of distinguished speakers to address issues of workload, contingency and academic freedom.

students can see what awaits them: a mountain of debt and a dead-end teaching job at near-poverty wages

Continued from p.3

**burning up
and throwing
out workers is
a 19th-century
labor practice**

Any long-term solution to the staffing crisis will ultimately require that we dramatically reverse the recent trend of underfunding higher education. Our students will become the stewards of our nation’s future, and trying to educate them on the cheap is as great a threat to our national survival as any military or terrorist threat might be. We need to urgently reorder our priorities so that funding public higher education is considered at least as important as fighting wasteful overseas wars of choice or supporting a bloated transportation security system that needs to screen every man, woman, child and elderly person before they can board a plane.

While UUP has long advocated for better working conditions and was one of the first higher education unions in the nation to obtain health insurance for its “part-timers,” its leadership is typically dominated by tenured faculty, who tend to focus on issues other than contingency. Last year, however, the chapters at Albany, Cortland, Oneonta and New Paltz jointly introduced amendments to the UUP Constitution to strengthen the union’s representation of contingents and provide them with a greater voice throughout the union’s 29 chapters in the SUNY system.

New Faculty Majority, which I co-founded in 2009, is the only national organization advocating exclusively for contingent equity. NFM held a summit meeting in Washington last month, which brought together for the first time representatives of all the stakeholders in higher education to discuss contingency. This national conference was attended by contingent and tenure-track faculty, students, administrators, parents,

community groups and legislators, as well as by leaders of disciplinary and accrediting associations. I extended a personal invitation to President Christian, who unfortunately was unable to attend. One of the attendees was Professor Michael Bérubé, President of the Modern Language Association, whose report on the summit can be found on p. 8 of this issue.

Working Together

Our Administration has stated that it seeks to decrease its reliance on part-time faculty in areas best served by full-time faculty. UUP shares this goal, but we would urge that our long-serving and qualified part-time faculty members receive priority consideration for promotion to these full-time positions. Burning up and throwing out workers is a nineteenth-century labor practice that should remain a relic of the past. Similarly, we hope that a portion of those additional resources coming from higher tuition can be used to begin closing the wage gap between tenure-stream and contingent faculty.

We may never be able to return to the enviable situation of decades ago, when the vast majority of teachers at New Paltz and elsewhere were on a tenure track. In the meantime, let’s work together to mitigate the staffing crisis in higher education—for the sake of all the faculty, tenured and non-tenured, for the sake of our students and the quality of their education. We can start by lifting the veil surrounding the dirty little secret of contingency and engaging in a robust discussion of how best to move toward a staffing model that is more effective, equitable and sustainable.

