

## **Best Practices Document Adjunct and Contingent Labor**

### **History of Advocacy for Adjunct Faculty in ATHE**

The Association for Theatre in Higher Education ([ATHE](#)) has a long history of considering the needs of adjunct and graduate instructors in the academy. Beginning as early as 1993, ATHE's Theatre as a Liberal Art Focus Group and the Advocacy Committee recognized the importance of assessing the situation of adjunct laborers in theatre and performance departments.

What followed were a number of initiatives to gather data including a 1996 equity survey, inclusion of discussion in a 1997 ATHE town hall, and inclusion of adjunct concerns within the 1999 ATHE Strategic Plan. An Ethics Task force also took up this issue in the 1990s. Notably, the Leadership Institute has always taken the casualization of labor into account in its materials and practices in its case studies and advocacy tools.

Initiatives in Advocacy between 2006 and 2008 framed itself as an employment task force. The Adjunct Task Force met under the Advocacy Committee in 2012 and 2013, holding panels on the issue. Adjunct labor concerns often move between the agendas of the Professional Development Committee and the Advocacy Committee. This detail, seemingly trivial, is telling. ATHE, like many organizations, struggled with its role as an advocate for laborers thought to be exploited or at least underpaid. They felt that ATHE needed, in this sense, to advocate for adjuncts. On the other hand, the Professional Development Committee was most often dedicated to networking practices and the creation of materials for advancement within the academy.

Our work from 2015–2017 felt equally split between the desire to advocate for the end of an exploitative system and wanting to provide professional development and guidelines for faculty who identified as adjuncts. This best practices document attempts to do the work of professional development while providing data to support the particular challenges of teaching in Theatre and Performance Studies departments, which often combine artistic practice, process oriented pedagogy, and academic coursework on performance. Theatre departments (and to some extent arts departments more generally) engage complex labor models that modify many of the advocacy recommendations made in the humanities and social sciences. Attention to these issues was important to our survey, which complements the large-scale work done by the Adjunct Project, the New Faculty Majority, AAUP, and the MLA. The results of ATHE/ASTR's poll are available on our website and are considered in Theatre Topics, Vol. 27.1.

### **Theatre Arts Adjunct Needs**

Unlike many other adjunct laborers in the academy, some adjunct instructors in Theatre Arts and Performance Studies, particularly in creative practice, *do* want part time positions that will allow them to balance their creative practice in the non-academic world with teaching. They do, however, want well-compensated part-time positions, benefits, research funds, and the accrual of status that affiliation with a university can provide.

Our survey also showed a significant incidence of adjunct laborers who are also staff members who receive their benefits through their staff positions rather than through the teaching they do as part of, or as a supplement to, their staff positions.

Some respondents openly discussed the fact that family income/spousal benefits are what allowed them to teach in a contingent position. Unlike other forms of teaching invested in the professional reputation/private sector expertise of faculty (i.e., engineering, business, law), arts adjuncts with standing in the community often lack health insurance and other basic benefits because their private sector employers do not provide it.

Arts professors in general face intensive mentoring loads and adjunct instructors are not spared this form of work. Many adjuncts expressed regret that they could not do more of this work because they could not afford to do so, either in terms of time or money.

Arts professors who teach particular techniques (i.e., dance) can have a harder time obtaining a full-time position because of the assumption that they are not trained in such a way that they can teach a full-time, diverse set of courses.

Arts Adjuncts are often saddled with debt, in part because many MFA programs require them to take substantial loans in order to complete degrees. Unlike many (but certainly not all) Ph.D. programs, the assumption of being fully funded for at least part of graduate education is not an option.

The gendered nature of adjunct teaching in the arts needs special attention here as well. Of the 223 respondents to our survey, 61.4 percent were women.

### **ATHE Survey—2015 and 2016**

In 2016, ATHE administered a survey of self-identified adjunct faculty. This survey had three parts:

- 1) A 29-question survey that gathered quantitative data on working conditions with 223 respondents.
- 2) An administrator survey of 29 questions was answered by 29 self-identified chairs and administrators.
- 3) A longer narrative survey with 32 questions had 49 respondents. All of these participants received a free ATHE membership for a year.

A smaller subset of 12 interviews were conducted with contingent faculty selected by interest and with a mind to balancing demographics in terms of gender, race and type of institution.

**The quantitative data from the first survey revealed the following:**

Demographically, 61.4 percent of respondents were women, 81.2 were white, 4.5 Latinx, .4 Asian American, .4 Native American, 2.2 African American, 5.4 did not wish to say, 4.5 other, and .9 percent multiethnic. Other demographics showed 44.5 percent had an income of over \$60,000, 32.1 percent held Ph.Ds., 38.5 percent held MFAs, 15.4 percent MAs, 10 percent BAs, and 5.4 percent had other degrees. Twenty percent of respondents were still completing Ph.Ds.

In addition:

- Fifty-nine percent of respondents were seeking a full-time tenured position.
- Fifty-three percent had been adjunct instructors for more than five (5) years, of which about half (25.5 percent of a smaller set of 157 respondents) had been looking for full time work for over five (5) years.
- Forty-eight percent taught 1–3 courses, which would be considered part-time; 34.9 percent taught 4–7 courses, which would be considered full-time at most R1 and SLAC institutions; and 17.1 percent taught 8 or more sections.

Although we did not calculate a mean salary, 52.6 percent of courses taught were compensated at the rate of \$2,000–\$4,000 per course. Insurance was not offered in 74.9 percent of the adjunct positions, 13.9 percent received research support, 12.1 percent received parking or transportation assistance, and 54.7 percent had an office.

**Administrator Survey**

Deliverable advocacy was not so easily derived from the less conclusive results of the small survey of administrators. Of the respondents, 39 percent revealed that more than 20 percent of their courses were taught by adjuncts, 69 percent had been adjuncts themselves (a fact that may have led them to be more likely to complete the survey), and most claimed that conditions were worse or unchanged from the time they were adjuncts.

Their main strategies for advocacy included, publishable data on working conditions, unionization, more ample budgeting for teaching—especially in public institutions, and guidelines for compensating artistic research.

**Narrative Survey (49 respondents)**

Of the 49 respondents for the longer narrative survey, 44 claimed that they could not support themselves on their adjunct teaching income alone. Many reported additional financial support from family members or other jobs.

Debt burdens were greatly skewed. A little over 30 percent of respondents had \$5,000 of debt or less; 20 percent had \$100,000 or more of debt. This data, while hard to interpret, suggests that: 1) a low debt burden might aid adjunct instructors in persisting in the profession because the lack of a debt burden may allow them to live on lower salaries, and 2) a high debt burden with continual low paying teaching work may not allow them to lower debt burdens, and more forthrightly reveals an escalation of precarity and unethical debt burdens.

The question about union representation was answered by 44 respondents, and 36 percent of those were unionized.

Concerning insurance coverage, 32 percent of respondents were insured through ACA/"Obamacare" and 32 percent were covered by other family member plans.

Many spoke openly about the emotional consequences of precarity, financial and emotional labor. Depression, anxiety and resentment were mentioned throughout. Answers were more varied in terms of perception of respect by colleagues. Many respondents felt that students respected them greatly and that one of the real downsides to adjunct teaching was their structural inability to be more available to students.

**Interviews:** The Interview data is still be assessed; however, it offered nuance to many of the issues mentioned above.

**Interpretation:** Our quantitative data largely squared with the findings of the New Faculty majority, with a couple of significant differences. Those are mentioned above in terms of the particularities of arts teaching, the desire for part-time positions, and the particular ways in which theatre arts adjunct instructors often combine many forms of labor to meet their income needs.

### **Recommendations for the Field, non-Theatre Arts Specific**

1. Work for pay equity for instructors alongside the MLA guidelines mentioned below, which recommend a salary of 10,600 dollars per course.
2. Integrate adjuncts into decision-making as appropriate and consider additional pay for meetings, advising duties—i.e. audition preparation, etc., and other non-classroom related labor.
3. Give contracts to adjuncts well in advance of the terms in which they are teaching.

4. Provide offices and access to spaces appropriate for practicum courses in all areas.
5. Offer funds for professional development and research for adjunct instructors, including workshops in practice.
6. Provide adjunct instructors with institutional knowledge, including grievance policies and Title IX training.
7. Provide insurance or health subsidies for adjunct employees.
8. Regularly assess adjunct instructor skills through reviews of teaching and research.

### **Arts specific advocacy tools, Theatre Arts specific**

1. Underlie the importance of theater education generally, using advocacy documents from ATHE and other sources.
2. Educate administrators to give them a basic understanding of hybrid arts labor, that respects the workload expected of intensive collaborative pedagogy, durational lab work in performance, interdisciplinary knowledge, and community partnership organization.
3. Advocate for the recognition of professional experience as factor in salary assessment as one would for industry scientists, engineering and other fields.
4. Recognize the burden of student debt when assessing and setting salaries.
5. For those who do not want a full-time tenure track position, argue for fair contract labor compensation as Professors of Practice (designed for professionals in the field), or contract teachers. To do so, one may use models from other professional schools, disaggregating the value of artists' professional work from their generated "professional" revenue.
6. Examine how adjunct teaching in theatre arts is dependent on other forms of family income, and advocate for fair labor practices for spousal hires, not letting a variegated income profile be an excuse for lower pay for adjunct instructors.
7. Be mindful of labor loads for university staff members who teach, insuring just pay for their pedagogy.

### **ATHE Advocacy Steps**

We will retain discounted rates for adjunct faculty members for membership and for the conference.

We will encourage the creation of travel grants for adjunct instructors at the FGR level and at the GC level for attendance, presentation, and mentoring.

We will continue to place attention on issues of adjuncts and adjunctification in our professional development, strategic planning, and advocacy committees.

We will encourage the Leadership Institute to give attention as to how to advocate for adjunct faculty and non-tenure track appointments

We will recognize the specific needs of ATHE leaders who are adjunct instructors, providing support where possible.

## **Resources:**

### ***Adjunct Labor and the University in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (This information is taken from New Faculty Majority)***

*The modern university increasingly relies on adjunct instructors to provide classroom instruction; at present approximately 70 percent of instructors are non-tenure track and over 50% of instructors are now “part time” or contingent, even though many of them teach a full time course load (this includes graduate student instructors who constitute roughly 20% of part time instructors). The median pay per course, standardized to a three-credit course, was \$2,700 in fall 2010 (\$24,000 FTE) and ranged in the aggregate from a low of \$2,235 at two-year colleges to a high of \$3,400 at four-year doctoral or research universities. While compensation levels varied most consistently by type of institution, part-time faculty respondents report low compensation rates per course across all institutional categories.*

### ***Median Pay per Course in Terms of Union Status***

*The presence of a union on campus also appears to have a positive impact on wages for faculty members employed part-time. The median pay per course at institutions where part-time faculty respondents were not represented by a union was \$2,475, as compared with \$3,100 at institutions with union representation (table 25). This union wage premium is also reflected across institutional types with the exception of the baccalaureate colleges, where median wages were slightly higher for courses where part-time faculty respondents were not represented by a union.*

### ***Median Pay per Course in Terms of Discipline***

*Responses to the survey show median pay per course for most disciplines hovering around the median pay for all courses (\$2,700), although pay in some disciplines*

varies considerably from the overall median. (Notes, 26) On the high end, engineering has a median pay of \$4,000 per course; on the low end, a few disciplines, including mathematics and developmental education, have a median per-course pay closer to \$2,000. Once the data are aggregated into broad disciplinary clusters, the median pay is consistently around \$2,700 (table 27).

### **Median Pay per Course in Terms of Gender and Race**

Survey responses indicated only a slight variation in median pay by gender: women reported a median per-course pay of \$2,700, while men reported earning slightly more, at a median per-course pay of \$2,780 (table 30).

There is even less variation in pay between men and women when we account for institutional type. The median pay per course reported by female and by male respondents is basically identical in two-year institutions, master's institutions, doctoral and research institutions, and special focus institutions. Of those respondents for whom the Carnegie institutional type could be determined, only those teaching in baccalaureate institutions reveal any disparity in per-course pay by gender—\$2,700 for men, as compared with \$2,800 for women (table 30).

Broken down by race or ethnicity, the data suggest that part-time faculty respondents who identified themselves as black (not of Hispanic origin) earn significantly less than other racial and ethnic groups at a median per-course pay of \$2,083 (table 31). By comparison, median pay ranged from \$2,500 per course for Hispanic or Latino or multiracial respondents to \$2,925 for Asian or Pacific Islander respondents.

### **Other Resources:**

MLA Statement on the Use of Part-Time and Full-Time Adjunct Faculty Members (1994): <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Staffing-Salaries-and-Other-Professional-Issues/MLA-Statement-on-the-Use-of-Part-Time-and-Full-Time-Adjunct-Faculty-Members>

MLA Recommendation on Minimum Per-Course Compensation for Part-Time Faculty Members: <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Staffing-Salaries-and-Other-Professional-Issues/MLA-Recommendation-on-Minimum-Per-Course-Compensation-for-Part-Time-Faculty-Members>

AAUP reports on Contingent Faculty: <https://www.aaup.org/report/contingent-appointments-and-academic-profession>