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## **TITLES, TERMS, AND MEANING:**

### *The Exploitation of Part-Time Faculty and What One Group is Doing About It*

Mindy Fiala and Katie Kline

Ever since I came back to school as a "mature" student, I've disliked the term "adjunct." I never really thought about it or asked myself why. When I became one I instinctively used the term "part-time faculty" rather than "adjunct" to describe myself to others and even to myself. Yesterday, five years later, I finally looked up the word "adjunct" in the dictionary.

The first two definitions of the word "adjunct" are: "a thing added to something else, but secondary or not essential to it; a person connected with another as a helper or subordinate associate." The words of the first definition expose, I think, the root of the problem we face as adjunct faculty and help explain why practically all universities, not just UMKC, view us the way they do. We are seen officially as "not essential" to the mission of the university. Yet, we know that we are essential, that a large percentage of composition and other courses at most universities are taught by adjuncts and probably always will be. In other words there is a legitimate need for adjunct faculty.

The other term used to describe what I do is "part-time." Now this one we don't need to look up. In the world of work it means a less than 40 hour per week job. It also implies, I would argue, a certain lack of commitment. For me, and most "part-timers," it's also a misnomer. I teach 15 hours a semester at UMKC which is the most you can teach if you are "part-time." (A full-time non-tenure load in the English Department is 12 hours per semester and a full-time tenure load is 15 hours per year.) Most of my teaching is in Composition. I spend 14 hours a week in the classroom, 6 hours per week minimum in office hours with students, 2-3 hours online, responding to student ideas and revisions, and a minimum of 20 hours per week reading, commenting on, and grading essays. Each student in each of my classes writes a minimum of 4 papers in a series of drafts (each of which I respond to) along with one shorter reading response paper per week. This comes to a minimum of 42 hours per week. This is not part-time work and my job is not unique.

Some courses are taught by part-time instructors because they give students expertise needed in a particular discipline that cannot be supplied by the full-time faculty. In some departments, like English, there are simply not enough full-time faculty to cover the large number of courses taught. Full-time faculty teach a limited number of courses in order to have the time to do research and administrative work. Part-time faculty are paid only to teach. This does not mean that we don't do research in our fields, publish, and volunteer for administrative tasks, committees, etc. We do all these things, but we do them voluntarily. They are not part of our contracted responsibility to the university, which is to teach. Another reason for the use of part-time faculty is to allow departments to be flexible in the number of courses offered in a given semester. Without part-time faculty, this would be virtually impossible.

I have heard many people say that the "corporate model" is to blame for the current situation of part-time faculty: a stipend that barely exceeds minimum wage, no benefits, virtually worthless contracts, in many cases no offices for student conferences, no telephone, and, of course, no computer. However, adjuncts have been exploited at universities long before the recent trend to corporatization began. In fact, I've often wondered if we didn't provide the model. In the last few years, however, some corporations have begun to see the economic value of their part-time workforce and have started paying them well, giving them limited benefits, and viewing them as permanent employees, because permanent part-time employees are more productive than itinerant employees. They know the job, they know the market, they know what they're doing, and they don't need as much training. They are an economic benefit to the organization, just as we are. If, in fact, universities are following the corporate model, they should do a bit more research, since it is changing.

The organizing efforts of the part-time faculty at University of Missouri, Kansas City, began last fall when the adjunct faculty of the English Department met and discussed our situation. Our "contracts" (and I use the word loosely) state that we will be paid \$1800 to teach each 3-hour course and that if a full-time professor's course is cancelled, we will be replaced, or words to that effect. We receive no benefits whatsoever no matter how long we have taught continuously at UMKC (in my case 8 years, in some cases 20 years). We then drafted a statement requesting that:

- our stipends be raised to a living wage of \$4,000 per 3-hour course with an annual cost of living increase (the Modern Language Association recommendation is \$4500 per 3-hour course).
- part-time faculty members be offered 9-month contracts after one year of continuous service.
- part-time faculty be allowed to negotiate some participation in a benefit package.

Our request was sent to the Chair of the English Department, who presented it at a Department Faculty meeting, where it was unanimously endorsed. He then forwarded it to the Dean, where it sat for the next four months.

After sending two more letters concerning the lack of progress on our requests, we invited as many of the part-time faculty of the university as we could find (not an easy task) to a meeting, where we formed the UMKC Part-Time Faculty Association. The officers of this association then met with the Dean of Arts and Sciences who expressed sympathy for our situation and support for our goals, but stated that the money was not available in the A&S budget. He suggested that we meet with the Acting Provost. We have been trying to meet with him since February and are still waiting.

We then sent a letter directly to the Chancellor. In her reply she stated that "part-time faculty compensation cannot be separated from that of the full-time faculty" and that she is "not willing to deal with the compensation system for part-time faculty separate from that for full-time faculty." Her answer suggests that our compensation has been linked to that of full-time faculty. If it had, we would have received some sort of an increase in the last seven years. It is interesting to note that UMKC paid part-time faculty \$1100 per course in 1971 (30 years ago), when a part time faculty member teaching 10 courses per year made roughly the same as a beginning junior faculty member. Such a ratio no longer exists today, when there is no link between full-time and part-time salaries.

Our next step was to hold a two-day rally called "Presentation Days," in which part-time faculty presented their case to the students. It took place in a quadrangle area that serves the maximum number of students and included posters, speeches, music, and handouts. One of the handouts urged students to e-mail the Chancellor and gave a sample format. The rally was a success in that the students were extremely

interested in our message and quite supportive, and we received television coverage on the evening news. We have no way of knowing how many e-mails the Chancellor received. But we received another letter from the Chancellor, written on the second day of the rally, reiterating what she had already said while adding that she believes "that part-time faculty do a fantastic job for UMKC" and that we are underpaid. Her letter ended with the admission that "I have received many emails on this subject. To the extent that you have the capability to convey this response to others, I would appreciate it."

We have also urged our membership to attend as many faculty meetings as possible. UMKC is in the midst of a new Blueprint for the Future, a costly endeavor whose goal is "to create the possibility of an audacious new future for UMKC. Its centerpiece is a commitment to UMKC becoming a university that is the catalyst for transforming higher education." We are endeavoring to become part of the process, and to continue to make ourselves visible as a vital part of the university community.

We haven't yet received a raise, benefits, or meaningful contracts, but there has been some movement.

We have raised our visibility. The issue is being discussed in the Faculty Senate. In an Arts and Sciences Faculty Meeting with the Chancellor, a tenured faculty member raised the issue of part-time faculty. A student raised the issue in the Chancellors' Luncheon with Students.

The Chancellor's responses have changed somewhat. She is now saying that the full-time faculty working through the Deans must decide the role and remuneration for part-time faculty, a strategy, in our view, to pit the full-time faculty against the part-timers. We have been told that she will not meet with us, since this is an issue for the Dean to decide. She is not however allocating any additional funding. Therefore paying us more would mean cutting somewhere else.

Our plans for the future are to continue raising the issue before the students, the faculty, the administration and the general public. This is a national issue and we believe strongly that ultimately we will win.

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