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United Adjunct Faculty of New Jersey, AFT #2222

Testimony before Assembly Higher Ed. Committee

Thursday, October 6, 2016

I come here today representing the 3,623 adjuncts at ten New Jersey community colleges\* who are a part of United Adjunct Faculty of New Jersey, AFT #2222.

There are many misapprehensions about adjuncts. People assume that adjuncts who teach in colleges make the same amount of money as full-time professors. They feel that we have other jobs, or are married to spouses who support us, that this is a hobby not a full-time commitment. They also believe what we earn is a lot for someone who teaches a course for fifteen weeks.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As of their last settled contracts, UAFNJ adjuncts earn from $600 to $950 per credit hour which translates to between $1800-$2850 per three credit course.

At Camden County College where I have been an adjunct since 1982, adjuncts make from $690-$790 per credit hour while full-time faculty members and administrators who teach overloads get $1005/ credit hour. Yet, both full-time faculty and adjunct faculty do the same amount of work in preparation and teaching. In fact, most students are not aware of whether they are being taught by an adjunct or a full time instructor.

If an adjunct was allowed to teach full-time, this would lead to an annual salary of $18,000- $28,500. But an adjunct cannot teach full-time at a single institution. So, many cobble together a living by becoming “road warriors” going from college to college to teach.

Both the affordable Care Act and the drop in enrollment in students have adversely affected adjuncts’ ability to earn a living. The Affordable Care Act says that those who work 30 hours or more per week must receive health care. To avoid having to pay for health care for adjuncts, the colleges have further limited the amount of courses an adjunct can teach to 6-9 credit hours per semester permitting the teaching of 12 credit hours only in emergency situations. The drop in student enrollment has further limited the number of courses a college has to fill with adjunct instructors. Adjuncts have been called “precarious employees” which is an apt description. We may get an “offer of employment” sometime during the semester preceding the semester for which the offer is meant. These offers are contingent on enrollment and the need for full-time faculty to make their teaching load. An adjunct does not know whether or not s/he will be

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\*UAFNJ represents adjuncts at the following community colleges: Bergen, Camden, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, and Union

teaching sometimes until the first day of classes. There are many adjuncts who depend on these offers to balance their budgets. A loss of an anticipated course affects many adjuncts negatively. Adjuncts who have been devoted to teaching, yet living on the margin, have to make choices between fixing a car, buying food, and going to a doctor. And, these are people who have advanced degrees and many years in the profession. It is almost impossible to pick up more work at the last minute—especially when enrollment has fallen in a poor economy. In most cases, adjuncts are denied unemployment insurance between semesters because they have “reasonable assurance;” a conditional offer of employment is far from “reasonable assurance.”

You may wonder why adjuncts continue to teach under these circumstances. It is because teaching is not just a job for them—it is a calling. And, it is a calling on which colleges rely in order to be able to offer students an education with tuition kept as low as possible. An affordable college education at a community college is one that is built on the backs of adjuncts. This needs to be changed. Adjuncts need to be fairly paid for their work, expertise, and devotion.

There is also the misconception that adjuncting is an easy way to make a living. Last week I spent nine hours grading a quiz for two classes. I do not give multiple choice quizzes but instead ask students to supply thoughtful answers to questions. It is a better way of building understanding. I give gradable homework almost every day of the semester. In addition to grading homework, I also spend hours preparing for each class. Most adjuncts do not have offices. To make up for this, they are available 24/7 to their students via email. Adjuncts have to meet with students in the courtyard, in a hallway, or wherever semi-private space can be found. There is nothing easy about this work.

We understand that a recession affects everyone including both the colleges and the students who attend. But when a college, such as Camden CC, has an operating budget of $37,026,172 and only approximately $2,019,780 (5.45%) is allocated for adjunct salaries, questions have to be asked. When you realize that there are 462 adjuncts and only 112 full-time instructors, questions should be asked.