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## The Problem With Adjuncts As Entrepreneurs

By Elaina Loveland

**ADJUNCTS ARE MORE** catered to than ever. Adjunctopia.com helps part-time faculty find jobs. Academic publishers Allyn & Bacon/Longman and Houghton Mifflin host Web sites exclusively for adjuncts. A cover story about an adjunct English professor was published this past summer in *The Washington Post Magazine*. People are beginning to recognize the role adjuncts play in the higher education community, and nearly everyone has some advice to give.

Jill Carroll, an adjunct in Texas, has this recommendation: adjuncts should think of themselves as entrepreneurs. The article, "Less Whining, More Teaching," written by Scott Smallwood and published in the August 2001 edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, urges adjuncts to approach teaching part-time as a business. In the piece we meet Jill Carroll, who earns approximately \$54,000 per year teaching 12 courses at several different campuses. Since the article's publication, Carroll has proven that she is certainly a businesswoman. Besides teaching, she now has self-

published a manual called *How to Survive as an Adjunct Lecturer: An Entrepreneurial Strategy Manual*, maintains the AdjunctSolutions.com Web site, offers e-mail consulting services to fellow adjuncts for \$65 an hour and writes monthly for *The Chronicle*. I wondered, was Carroll on to something? Could adjuncts really approach



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teach like a small business? As an adjunct at the community college level, I am grateful to have the opportunity to teach and gain experience so someday I might be able to make teaching my primary vocation. In the meantime, however, I work in publishing during the day and moonlight as an adjunct. I decided to put Carroll's entrepreneurial theory to the test.

This past summer, I spent my evenings teaching American literature at a Virginia community college, as a well as a continuing education course



at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School. During the day, I imagined with my new found entrepreneurial attitude that I could quit my day job and make the switch to working only as an adjunct in the Fall. By approaching teaching as a business, I thought, I could really make this work. I could teach the maximum number of classes at two or three campuses, continue teaching continuing education classes at other institutions and try to find health insurance through an association. Then, I did the math.

One campus I taught at paid \$1583 per course and allowed a maximum of three courses per semester. Another campus paid \$1500 per course and had the same course limit. Also, I could teach the continuing education course for \$1500 each term. If I taught the maximum number of courses at each campus, I would make \$10,749 per semester or \$21,498 per year. If I also taught two courses in the summer, I could add approximately \$3000 to my earnings, equaling \$24,498 annually for teaching 16 courses a year. It occurred to me that perhaps I could teach more than that and earn a higher wage at a four-year college. I quickly realized that this would be virtually impossible, especially with the high cost of living in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The verdict was clear: I could not afford to quit my day job.

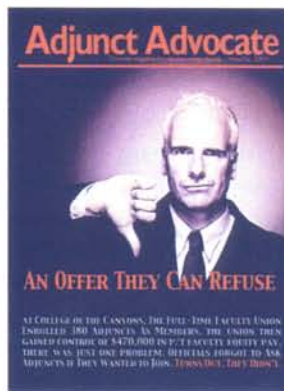
It is no secret that the landscape of higher education has been changing for some time. In 1998, the American Federation of Teachers, reported that between 1970 and 1995, there was a 226 percent increase in the hiring of part-time faculty compared with a marginal 49 percent increase in the hiring of full-time faculty. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) March 2002 report, "Part-time Instructional Faculty and Staff," shows that between 1987 and 1998 alone, the total number of adjunct faculty rose almost 10 percent.

The moral of the story is that while an entrepreneurial approach may work for some, it will not work for most adjuncts. Carroll's business approach to part-time teaching is based on several assumptions. First, for adjuncts to think like entrepreneurs, they have to be in demand. This is easier for adjuncts who teach in disciplines that have fewer qualified candidates. Second, many adjuncts do not have a predictable routine for courses each year. If an adjunct has been teaching at an institution for several years, s/he may have developed a strong relationship with the department and be offered almost the same schedule each year. For most adjuncts, however, this scenario is rare, and out of the question for adjuncts who are new to the field.

Furthermore, the entrepreneurial strategy requires that adjuncts live in a metropolitan area with several college campuses where they can teach. Using myself as an example, even this won't always guarantee entrepreneurial success. In addition, if adjuncts were able to approach teaching as entrepreneurs, they would be able to set their own rates in order to be competitive in the marketplace. Institutional salary scales make this difficult to do.

The idea for adjuncts to adopt a business attitude is indeed innovative and may solve the low-wage dilemma for a few lucky adjuncts who can be entrepreneurial. However, the fact of the matter is that an endorsement of entrepreneurship in higher education will not solve the problem of institutions paying adjuncts low salaries. According to NCES, in 1998, full-time faculty earned an average of \$63,976 compared with part-time faculty, who earned an average of \$13,871. At two-year colleges, part-time faculty earned even less—\$10,476.

In fact, the promotion of entrepreneurial strategies to the masses is problematic. It is egocentric to try and make as much as we can by teaching everywhere instead of working to ensure fair wages for adjuncts as a group. The integrity of the profession is at stake. Rather, efforts should be made to solve the problem of substandard wages rather than encouraging individual adjuncts to find ways into higher tax brackets. ✍



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