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# Press Release

## **Contingent Academics Petition to Investigate Higher Education's Adjunct Instructor Labor Practices**

5100+ Adjunct Faculty and supporters protest poor wages and job conditions

**New York, NY, July 30, 2014:** A small group of writers and activists has launched a petition to David Weil, the new head of the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division, to investigate the wages and employment conditions of adjunct faculty in American higher education. Since its launch on July 11, the site at Change.org (<http://tinyurl.com/ovfq23d>) has gathered over 5,100 signatures from adjuncts, tenure-track faculty, students, parents, concerned citizens, and at least two academic administrators. The petition runs until September 30th, when it will be presented in person to Director Weil. The petition organizers are also meeting with Senator Tom Harkins's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee staff to discuss the issues presented in the petition. We also hope to meet with state senators such as New Mexico's Howie Morales, who has written state legislation to improve adjunct working conditions and pay.

Contingent faculty members now make up more than 1 million of the 1.5 million people teaching in American colleges and universities, according to the Modern Language Association. Since 1975, full-time faculty hires have increased only 23% while part- and full-time adjunct hires have increased 286% and 259%, respectively. Fewer full-time tenured faculty means faculty overloaded with administrative work and unable to give students the attention they deserve. By 2011, part-time adjunct hires comprised 51.4% of faculty. Full-time tenured and tenure track employment has shrunk to represent only 20.6 and 8.6%, respectively. Adjunct hires (full & part-time) comprise closer to 75% of faculty in 2014 at both public and private institutions. The drastic increase in part-time faculty means fewer office hours available for student advising and mentoring relationships.

Adjunct professors are now teaching approximately 60% of classes and 100% of them at some institutions, where they are also the only faculty. Contingent hiring conditions hinder pedagogical innovation because of time constraints and because adjunct faculty are almost never allowed on curriculum committees or given academic freedom protections meant to encourage experimentation. The average remuneration for a course is \$2700, which covers only hours in class, not preparation, grading, or meeting or communicating with students, which takes far longer. The average annual income of adjunct faculty is \$25,000—about what WalMart workers make at minimum wage—and only covers

**For Immediate Release**

Page 2 Contingent Academics Petition to Investigate Higher Education's Adjunct Instructor Labor Practices eight months of the year. Most adjuncts have no health, retirement, or other benefits and cannot afford to retire from teaching.

Part-time adjuncts teach as many as 6-8 classes at multiple institutions to make ends meet. Hours spent on the road could be better spent with students, class prep, research. The lack of sabbatical time also hinders professional development and research, which hurts students as well, if educators cannot stay current in their fields. Given how inextricably faculty working conditions are tied to student learning conditions, this knowing overuse of contingent professors is contributing to the erosion of American higher education at precisely the time it needs to be strong.

The petition's authors are Ann Kottner (Adjunct Professor, York College, NY City College of Technology and New Jersey City University); Miranda Merklein, Ph.D. (President, Santa Fe Community College-AAUP); Joseph Fruscione, Ph.D. (Former Adjunct Professor, George Washington University [1999-2014]); Dawn Fels, Ph.D. (Former English Faculty and Writing Center Director, George Mason University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA); Brianne Bolin (Coalition Against Corporate Higher Education and Adjunct Faculty, Columbia College, Chicago); Karen Lentz Madison, Ph.D., (Contingent Senior Instructor University of Arkansas; New Faculty Majority Foundation, Board of Directors; College English Association, Past President; MLA Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession, Immediate Past Chair); Seth Kahn, Ph.D. (Co-Chair, Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor, Conference on College Composition and Communication and Professor of English, West Chester University of PA); Robert Craig Baum, Ph.D. (Dean of Academics, Lebanon College); Maria Maisto, M.A., ABD (President/Executive Director, New Faculty Majority and the NFM Foundation, Adjunct in English, Cuyahoga Community College); and Melissa Bruninga-Matteau, MA, PhD (Associate Professor of History, Martin Methodist College and Adjunct Faculty, American Public University).

For more information about this petition, please see signer Joe Fruscione's article at PBS News Hour's Making Sen\$e:

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/when-a-college-contracts-adjunctivitis-its-the-students-who-lose/>