

# Academic Apartheid



Academic Apartheid:  
Waging the Adjunct War

Edited by

Sylvia M. DeSantis

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P U B L I S H I N G

Academic Apartheid: Waging the Adjunct War,  
Edited by Sylvia M. DeSantis

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This volume is dedicated to all adjunct educators who have suffered  
through the sting of second-class citizenship.

The first lesson of power is that we are all alone;  
the final lesson of power is that we are all one.

—Lynn Andrews

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## FOREWORD

Many academics trace their choice of profession to a teacher who stirred their souls. Epiphanies first experienced at the hands of inspired teachers may shape the rest of our lives. The example such teachers set for us, not unlike that of a beloved parent, gives us a foretaste of the satisfactions of a life devoted to the pursuit of the true, the beautiful, and the just. The exemplary power of such teaching is compounded by the fact that it is in school where we first thrill to such noble ideals. In answering the call to an academic vocation we hope to live our lives in a community committed to liberty and equality, fairness and justice. It's the rare academic who does not take pride in belonging to an *honorable* profession.

This is why, when that honor is threatened or besmirched, academics are unusually prone to anguish.

I was a young college president during the social turmoil that roiled the land in the sixties and early seventies. Within a few years, students, faculty, and administrators at virtually all our institutions of higher learning were serving on committees charged with drafting legislation that would bring their institutions into alignment with newly emergent values of racial diversity and gender equality. By century's end, most colleges and universities had taken steps to discourage, if not disallow, discrimination based on race, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation.

Once institutional traditions came into question, academics far and wide opted to reform institutional policy to conform to the evolving social consensus. By changing their ways of doing things, they legitimized the same changes in society at large. Institutions that resisted the social transformation were forced to go along, at first prodded by federal legislation, and then, as the new social consensus took hold, encouraged by social pressure.

Once again, we find ourselves in a moral predicament of this kind. From coast to coast, in educational institutions of every kind, adjunct faculty are subjected to discrimination and exploitation. They know it, tenure-track faculty know it, administrators know it. The essays in *Academic Apartheid* eloquently make the case. For every example of discrimination and inequity cited, a thousand more exist. The awful secret is out, and we can no longer avert our eyes. To save our honor, we'll have to deal with this injustice as we did with those that troubled us in the

sixties. If we do not close the gap between our principles and our practice, we forfeit our honor.

I won't belabor the immorality of paying adjuncts a fraction of what other faculty earn, and of denying them benefits, office space, parking rights, and a voice in departmental and institutional policy. The insults and humiliations chronicled in these essays are reminiscent of the degradation and injustice that roused us to act against racial, gender, and other indignities.

Of course, there's a reason that things are as they are. There is always a reason, one which seems cogent enough until suddenly, one day, it doesn't. What began as part-time teaching to meet a temporary need or plug a gap in the curriculum has evolved into systemic institutional injustice.

The practice of two-tiered pay scales is also found in Industry. For example, auto workers are forced to accept contracts in which one group is paid twice that of another—not for reasons of merit, but in order to hold down costs. No one takes exception to cost-cutting, but forcing one group to subsidize another that's doing comparable work, while humiliating them to remind them of their place, is what the world now recognizes as the ignoble policies associated with apartheid.

By working for a pittance, adjunct faculty are serving as involuntary benefactors of other faculty, administrators, and students. In the same way that the work of slaves subsidized the nation, adjuncts are forced to subsidize the university. That Academia has fallen into a practice that warrants the label "apartheid" is inconsistent with both academic and American values. Honor requires that we examine the practice and take steps to grant equal status and equitable compensation to those who, for whatever reason, are classified as adjunct faculty.

How might this be done? Although the essays in this book are more descriptive than prescriptive, they do contain the seeds of possible solutions. Coming up with a plan to end exploitation is never easy, and no doubt will require that we do what we did forty years ago: charge college and university committees, consisting of all stake-holders, with devising an equitable solution.

The adjunct issue has grown to huge proportions. During times of diminished resources, it's hard to enact costly reforms, but we must act. We need to consider all claims and possibilities. Everything must be on the table, even hitherto off-limits matters such as tenure.

As anyone acquainted with adjunct professors knows, they are, on average, as conscientious, committed, and capable of sparking epiphanies among their students as the "regular" faculty they subsidize. We shame

ourselves by treating them shamefully. That we ourselves are the beneficiaries of their victimization only strengthens the case for righting this wrong.

Let me suggest a slogan—Part-Time, Full Status, Equal Dignity—to guide the deliberations of what I hope we will soon see on every campus in the land: a “Committee on the Status and Compensation of Adjunct Faculty.”

If colleges and universities tackle this threat to their honor with the same determination and integrity they brought to the issues of civil and women’s rights, they will find a way to end the exploitation of those now relegated to the back of the bus. We rose to the challenge before. We can do it again. The longer we wait, the more intractable the underlying economics will become. To get started towards a solution, we have only to listen to the voices of these essayists, and include their like in the committees charged with hammering out a new and equitable academic compact.

—Dr. Robert W. Fuller  
October 26, 2010



## PREFACE

These stories have earned a voice.

This collection grew out of a similar anthology to which I contributed but never saw published. The email congratulating me on the essay's acceptance was followed a few months later with an apology. Both of the anthology's editors had scored tenure and decided that they no longer had time and/or interest in publishing a collection of have-nots' essays. Stunned at the irony, I appreciated their honesty if not their decision.

In response, another contributor queried the group, asking if anyone wanted to continue the project. I jumped at the challenge...and then promptly lost the co-editor. Busy with commitments, irritated at my to-do list, and stunned by the amount of work needed by us to find a publisher, she resigned.

Alone, in possession of about a half-dozen stunning essays, and disappointed once more, I debated whether to drop the project. I had other writing on which to focus, in addition to a full-time job and a part-time curriculum development gig. Most importantly, the misery of my adjunct days was behind me. Why dredge up that pain and celebrate it like unwanted flotsam left by a careless tide? Would I be enraging the administration for whom I used to teach? *Did I care?* As one who loathes political expediency and its undeserved rewards, I wanted to continue the project but hesitated still.

Shortly thereafter I endured a most unpleasant conversation with a recent Penn State University hire, a fresh new face on the tenure track celebrating his ability to "get out of teaching" his first semester. Around the same time I took additional work "tutoring" online to supplement my income to satisfy an insatiable student loan lender. The work required a graduate degree, the ability to review and comment on, in 30 minutes, a paper of any length, from any school, on any topic, written on any level, from high school student through Ph.D. candidate...and paid \$1.00 less per hour than a local burger place.

Exhausted, penniless, and working multiple jobs *again* (all in higher education), adjuncting and its horrors didn't seem so far away anymore. The perfect storm of being chatted up by the smarmy academic one week and seeing my absurd pay stub the next broke open the memories of pain, injustice, and disgust. I hadn't buried them so deeply after all.

But this time, I had a plan. And a powerful choice.

Join me in celebrating this anthology's honest and heartbreaking collection that exemplifies perseverance, uncovers exploitation, and resonates with courage.

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Thank you, Dr. Phelan, wherever you may be, for making a difference in this student's life.

Thanks to my exceedingly patient partner, Dax Finley, for all those nights I left you to entertain the Züsinshmertenzen, et al. whilst I closed the door to work in solitude. Thanks, as always, to Maria and Glenn; Mom, your support is unmatched and Glenn, thanks for the legal advice...and Salty Dogs (though, thankfully, not at the same time).

And, finally, *thank you* to all of the contributors of this anthology—for sharing your stories (sometimes at personal risk of job loss), having faith as the publication process unfurled, and trusting me with your collective voices.





## INTRODUCTION

Grey clouds pregnant with snow hang low in the cold, dusty air. I park my ancient car, pull my coat around me, and slog through the dark November morning towards the English building. Only two months into Sophomore year and I've already blown a test. I dread facing this particular teacher because she's so remarkably nice. She has taken the time to learn my name and has read my essays to the class, calling them exemplary work. I'm feeling fairly shameful at my recent poor performance.

I squint into the shadowed hall and look around for Dr. Ignatio's doorway, tripping over a chair. She sits against an unused wall, papers overflowing into her briefcase, elbows propped on a tiny table. Pushing my most recent English test towards me, she tells me to sit and asks why I have done so poorly, surmising that the low B is the effect of getting to class late the morning of the test. I often look tired, she observes, and guesses that I probably commute (correct) and perhaps work a job in addition to taking classes (right again).

Dr. Ignatio praises my work, lets me know she will be making extra-credit work available to everyone, and tells me she expects me to take advantage and set my grade right. In rapid-fire, she then suggests I declare English as my major since I've already left the pre-med program and am a skilled writer. We have a productive meeting sitting on folding chairs shoved unceremoniously into a forgotten slice of hallway at my elite, private university whose tuition I can ill afford. She praises me in a way I have sought desperately since leaving high school, and all I can do is wonder why we are whispering in a drafty breezeway instead of a proper office.

When I ask, she looks shocked for a moment, stunned into a temporary silence and I wonder at my own boldness. "I'm part-time," she says briskly, "and this is the only space they could find." I remember with amazement the way she looked at me directly, rather than with the whisper of a glance most professors threw my way, and told me I was gifted at a time in my life when I felt hardpressed to tie my shoes without feeling the weight of failure. I also remember a slight embarrassment for this amazing professor who resigned herself to having office hours at an old table in the hall. It seemed odd to me then, a clueless student, and it enrages me now.

That hallway meeting with a profoundly caring professor was my first—albeit second-hand—taste of adjunct inequality. Almost a decade would pass before I sat in a proverbial hallway myself, scrambling for work, sweating over contracts that might or might not be renewed at semester's end, worrying over my fragmented living. More than ever before colleges and universities employ contract workers to teach undergraduate courses, with many of us miraculously cobbling together a living without benefits, fair pay, or simple resources like office space or a phone.

Using adjuncts to help increase a school's financial solvency is neither new nor surprising but is, as elucidated by many of this collection's essays, horrifying in its human toll. The price this financially expedient behavior extracts from our educators—the same individuals who are consistently expected to be patient, manage expectations, work personal finance miracles, and eat crow—is exorbitant. What does it mean for higher education when an individual in the fast food industry makes *more per hour* than an adjunct who may hold three degrees?

I suspect I was always destined for disappointment as an adjunct after having been treated handsomely as a graduate student; during my tenure in my master's program I was afforded everything I needed to succeed: respect, office space, preview books, and freedom mixed with careful guidance that helped me to grow into a thoughtful, well-rounded instructor.

Conversely, as a Humanities adjunct in a department populated solely by instructors borrowed from other departments, I experienced insane jealousy, vicious rage, and hyperbolic accusations. While some adjunct gigs allowed me to keep a sense of dignity, others opened me to inconceivably inappropriate behaviors specifically targeted at my part-time, temporary status—the kind of cruel harassment that would be considered grounds for legal action in almost any other field.

Academic apartheid is rampant in higher education, and the contributors to this anthology face this trend daily, usually without respect or resources, often in poverty. You'll find this collection frank, satirical, bitter, and bold. Some essays resonate with pain and fury, others with quiet acceptance, many with frustration.

The ivory tower's walls are high, especially for those living on its borders.

# THE INCREDIBLE INVISIBLE ADJUNCT

RUTHI ROTH ERDMAN

Once you've been invisible for a few years or decades, you kind of get used to it. Similarly, after you've mastered such arts as thrift store shopping, finding free scrap wood for the woodstove, and drying clothes on a line, poverty seems almost normal. With enough experience, overwork and lack of respect become normal, too.

But in the summer of 2002, I made a terrible mistake. I suspended my career as an adjunct at a regional state university to take a temporary two-year position as project staff for a faculty collective bargaining organization. For my initial training, I was flown to Washington, DC, where I was astounded to find myself staying in a posh hotel and dining at luxurious restaurants—all at the expense of my new employer. My employer also provided me with a cell phone, full medical coverage for myself and my children, and a salary of \$36,000 a year—apologizing that the salary should be higher, but the project had only so much funding.

For those two years, my children did not qualify for reduced lunches at school, and I no longer qualified for an Earned Income Credit. For two years the term “weekend” took on meaning for me; it now had connotations of relaxation and time for my own projects, not a marathon of paper-grading. Evenings, similarly, were my own, not dedicated to grading today's assignments and preparing tomorrow's. For two years, I was paid mileage for all work-related travel, plus hotel and meal costs. For two years, I had reasonable workloads and decent pay. For two years, I got to experience how the other half lives.

When I went back to adjunct teaching, the full horror of my mistake soon came home to me. Deprivations and insults to which I had become more or less numb over the years now pricked at me as they stood out in sharp relief against my two-year hiatus. The 2006 transition back to my fourteen-year career felt like a precipitous fall from grace. For example, though I had taught at my university steadily since 1988, I found upon my return that I was, forsooth, a *new hire* and would not receive any medical benefits until my second quarter of employment. I had to scramble to find a catastrophic health plan whose premiums I could afford on my now-reduced salary.

What was I thinking to lift my nose temporarily from the grindstone of adjunct life, to assume visibility when I would have to relinquish it again, to taste respect and luxury when I would have to lose them? Now that I have experienced “weekends” in the exuberant American sense of the word, I resent giving over my weekends to exhaustive (and exhausting) essay assessment for which I am paid so much less (\$20,000 to \$25,000 a year for teaching full time, until the new union raised my income to the \$32,000 I still make today). Having miraculously surged upward into the middle class for two years, I chafed at having sunk back into the category of “working poor”...or perhaps, considering my graduate degree, the “genteel poor”?

I must confess that my graduate degree is not a Ph.D.; I have only a Master’s degree which, as I long to say before the Board of Trustees, ABSOLUTELY explains why, after over twenty years of teaching at this university, I earn less than a high school drop-out who has checked groceries at Safeway for five years. But given that the university for which I teach is in the business of granting degrees like mine—and an MA is the highest degree it awards—isn’t it a bit odd that the institution places such a low value on them and holds them in such contempt?

“Contempt” is not too strong a word for the attitude some tenured faculty have, not just toward the MA degree, but toward adjuncts in general. While many TT faculty are sympathetic toward adjuncts, there are those who fight to deny us ANY advancement at all. When my university’s Faculty Senate was discussing the perimeters our faculty bargaining unit would take, a few tenured faculty argued that no adjuncts, not even those teaching full time, should even be included in the bargaining unit. “I’ve worked hard to achieve my status as faculty member,” one tenured professor fumed, “and I don’t want to see the definition of ‘faculty’ watered down.”

And adjuncts HAVEN’T worked hard? I suspect that my tenured colleague doesn’t realize that at my university, there are about 40 adjuncts who have earned terminal degrees—nearly all Ph.D.s. Many of these have also taught longer than my tenured colleague himself. And surely a Master’s degree plus ten or more years of teaching amounts to something, especially at a *teaching* institution? Furthermore, many adjunct faculty members at my university have publication records—astonishing considering their publications earn them no tenure, merit, or promotion.

But how can the tenured faculty know this? Such facts are not publicized or spoken of at my university; the invisibility of adjuncts must be maintained for the comfort of everyone else.

An adjunct colleague and friend of mine with a Ph.D. from a respected university published a book a few years ago based on her doctoral dissertation. The book won prestigious academic awards and was eventually purchased by over 400 university libraries. The dean of our college actually included my friend in a small reception for newly published faculty. At the reception, the dean raved over my friend's book and announced—quite accurately—that my friend was one of the most productive scholars in the entire college.

But this same friend's achievement won her nothing at all in any measurable terms. She did not receive any merit or points toward promotion, as a tenured or tenure-track faculty member would have. Her impressive publication record will never win her the Distinguished Faculty Award for Research, because adjunct faculty aren't eligible to compete for it. There is no official, institutional recognition of her achievement in research and publication. So when my tenured colleague claims he has "worked hard," he probably is genuinely unaware that non-tenure-track colleagues have worked just as hard as he has, earning Ph.D.s and publishing academic works.

Of course, even adjuncts without terminal degrees or publication records generally "work hard." The annual full teaching load for a TT faculty member at my university is 36 load hours—rather high, because this is a teaching and not a research institution. But for an **adjunct** faculty member to be considered as carrying a full load, the count is considerably higher—45 load hours.

Now, here's an odd thing. Even an adjunct teaching the full 45 load hours (15 credits per quarter Fall, Winter, and Spring) is still often classified as "part time," while all TT faculty, regardless of their work load, are classified as "full time." When faculty and administrators discuss TT versus quarter-contract issues, they speak of "full-time faculty" versus "part-timers." I have taught as many as 55 load hours a year and still been called a "part-timer." Adjunct colleagues of mine in English, History, and Philosophy teach as much as an unbelievable 65 load hours a year, but that doesn't make them "full time." By what perversion of language can 65 load hours be called "part-time" when 36 is "full-time"?

That's not the only perversion of language used at my institution to misclassify adjuncts. My colleagues and I are not only "part-timers"; we're also "temporary" or "non-permanent" employees. For years, I obtained a copy every quarter of the faculty records and gaped at my name under the classification of "PT Temp." It boggled my brain every time. But I'm not the worst case. "Temporary" colleagues of mine have taught

here for 30 and, in two cases that I know of, 35 years straight. (Did they get retirement parties when they finally wore out? Don't make me laugh.)

It seems to me as a philologist that these misnomers, if they once were accidental (a carryover from a time when adjuncts really WERE part-time and temporary), are no longer so. The misnaming is deliberately perpetuated, I suspect, in order to keep adjunct faculty in their place.

Yet even if we were all part-time and temporary, that wouldn't justify excluding us from bargaining units or denying us pro rata pay. Why should someone teaching half as much as someone else be paid only one-sixth as much? And why shouldn't part-time employees vote on their union contracts along with full-time employees, just as they do in every other industry that has collective bargaining?

In justice to my university, I must point out that in recent years, there has been a considerable increase in sympathy and respect for adjuncts among some TT faculty, including the Senate and the department chairs. The verdict came down solidly in favor of including adjuncts in the bargaining unit. And about five years ago, the Faculty Senate decided to give adjunct faculty what the students had already had for years—representation on the Faculty Senate. Adjuncts still may not vote for their department senators, but now they may vote, as a body, for two adjunct senators to represent all 350+ of them.

When I became Adjunct Senator three years ago, I immediately saw the formidable challenge before me: to find something to contribute to the discussions at the Senate table. Even though each of my fellow senators represents ten to twenty people while my adjunct colleague and I represent over 350, a considerable portion of the Faculty Senate agenda does not apply to my constituency. As the Senate has consisted for decades only of TT faculty, the focus tends to be on their issues: tenure, promotion, merit, and such. To them, non-tenure-track faculty still tend to be invisible.

The good news is that some complaints about the treatment of non-tenure-track faculty that I've brought up in the Senate have actually been heeded. For instance, two years ago the other NTT senator and I pointed out that the university-level Distinguished Faculty Awards for teaching, research, and service, which had been granted annually for over 30 years, were open only to tenure-track faculty, excluding me and all my NTT colleagues. The Senate actually passed a resolution creating a new, separate award for which only NTT may compete and which is only for teaching. And it came with the same honors as the original awards: an equal monetary prize, a slot to make a speech at Honors Convocation, and a framed professional portrait hung permanently in the administration building.

I was thrilled this year to be the second winner of the award. Heaven knows I could use the cash prize, and it comforts me to know that though I may be officially a “temporary” employee, my portrait in the administration building is permanent. That’s the good news, but there’s still bad news. Even with this great progress, academic apartheid must yet prevail. While the tenured winners’ portraits are all along one wall in a continuous succession from the 1970s to this year’s winners, the two NTT winners so far are on a separate wall, with a separate—but equal—plaque. (Doesn’t anyone realize that *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was overturned?)

With this award, I have achieved more visibility than I ever dared to hope for, and almost certainly all I’m going to get. I’m delighted with it, but that doesn’t mean that my colleagues, as a body, are yet fully recognized for their existence, their great numbers, or their contributions to the university. The cloak of invisibility has not entirely dropped, as is reflected by the fact that most Senate matters still apply only to tenure-track faculty.

I have decided that there is one kind of recourse available to invisible people: noise. So as Adjunct Senator, I have made it my policy whenever a “generic” topic comes up—say, classroom technology upgrades or the Finals Week schedule—to stand up at the microphone and say something, anything, just to make myself, and therefore the adjuncts I represent, conspicuous.

Adjunct faculty and their issues have long failed to register on the radar screen of the universities where they teach. And so I see my role as analogous to that of the littlest Who in Dr. Seuss’s *Horton Hears a Who*: to break the sound barrier for my invisible cohorts and insistently squeak, “We are here! We are here!”





# OF IMMIGRANTS AND ADJUNCTS

LORI MAYBEE REAGAN

## **“How Much Do You Make?”**

When my oldest daughter, Hayley, started kindergarten two years ago, I became friends with the mother of Hayley’s new best friend. I discovered after several months that “Norma” and her husband “Eduardo” had come to the United States legally from Mexico on tourist visas over ten years ago and simply decided not to return home again. They found jobs, bore two American daughters, became home owners, and resigned themselves to never returning to Mexico again to see their aging parents and growing extended families. Norma works as an evening shift manager at a McDonald’s restaurant from 5:00 PM to 1:00 AM, five days a week. She oversees a crew of, on average, twelve workers. She shifts between Spanish and English as she talks with her crew, takes customer orders, fills out paperwork and fills orders, and manages problems and people. When she is able to go home—around 2 AM—she slips into bed and sleeps until 7:30 AM, when she rises to make breakfast for her husband and daughters. After they go to work and school, Norma tries to sleep a little longer, then wakes up again to put her house in order before picking up her children from school. She is able to spend a little time with them, guiding them through homework assignments, before making an early dinner that her family eats without her as she readies herself for her shift.

As Norma and I oversaw our daughters’ play dates, our conversations often turned to our jobs. She hated hers; I sort of enjoyed mine. As an Adjunct Professor of English and Women’s Studies, I have a wealth of flexibility in my job denied to Norma in hers. I am usually consulted about what courses and what hours I can teach before the semester starts. I select my own textbooks and plan my curriculum. In contrast, Norma’s work hours are long and the job arduous and menial. My work hours at the university are not very long. Much of my “work,” however, I perform at home—after my children go to bed, when my husband can watch the children for a couple of hours, on weekends. As such, this part of my work—the part I complete at home—is unpaid and virtually invisible to

the university that employs me and to the neighbors who try to account for my being home so much if I am a working woman.

That semester, I taught two classes of twenty-five students that granted three credit hours to each. Although my lecture time only totaled six hours per week, I am also required to maintain office hours, so my six hours became nine. Add in the preparation time and the time needed to design assignments, grade 150 papers, 50 mid-term and 50 final exams, attend mandatory Adjunct meetings, and answer email, and my part-time job feels like it is “part-time” in name only.

Despite my work challenges and time crunches, my job bears little resemblance to Norma’s. There is, however, one commonality that binds our jobs together: pay. More specifically, *low* pay.

After spending time together and forming intimacies around our family roles, Norma asked me a question that violates a basic American taboo. “How much do you make?” she asked. I was a taken aback and immediately defensive. My salary has long been a sore point with me because my pay is low, embarrassingly low. Every adjunct knows and, indeed, even many professors could attest that if we calculate all the time we invest in our jobs, our hourly wages would not even come close to meeting Federal Minimum Wage standards. Once, when my husband and I were buying our first home together, the mortgage company we were using required me to write a letter explaining my low pay and forecasting a time when I would be making much more money; the last part, the higher-paying job, has yet to materialize. I remain quiet, sometimes pretending I have not heard the question when the subject of money comes up, because I do not want to admit my low pay.

Since Norma has confided in me her immigration status, I ultimately feel obliged to tell her the truth. She is shocked at the number I state. She is not shocked, however, by the fact that it is very low. What shocks her, I soon learn, is that she and I make roughly the same annual salary. She says, “But you hardly ever work, and I work all the time.” In a way she is right. She puts in so many more hours toiling in a physical workplace. However, I invested many more years in pursuit of my training, taking out a number of student loans to pay for this access into a higher-paying career and spending many days and nights in dogged pursuit of this goal. Moreover, much of my work, as I mention above, is not tallied as work—the course preparation, the grading, responding to emails—because it produces no income. I beg to differ with Norma: it is just as much, if not more so, work.

## The Unacceptable Transfer of Effort

In their work lives, historically and currently, immigrants, especially field laborers, are often forced to pay rent to their unscrupulous employers for the “privilege” to live in ramshackle accommodations. They are often forced to shop in the “company” store, again owned by their employer, and made to pay exorbitant prices for the products found within. One of the newest trends in the adjunct world appears to be an updated version of the treatment long endured by immigrants. To describe our situation, Lynn Truss’s term, “the unacceptable transfer of effort,” seems apropos. In *Talk to the Hand*, Truss argues:

In common with many people today, I seem to spend my whole life wrestling resentfully with automated switchboards, waiting resentfully at home all day for deliveries that don’t arrive, resentfully joining immense queues in the post office, and generally wondering, resentfully, “Isn’t this transaction of mutual benefit to both sides? So why am I not being met half-way here? Why do these people never put themselves in my shoes? Why do I always have to put myself in theirs? Why am I the one doing this?”<sup>1</sup>

Although Truss is discussing a frustration she finds in the relationships between consumers and service providers, her point is equally valid when applied to the relationship between the Adjunct Professor and the university or college which employs her. She is called upon too often to compensate for an employer that does not meet her half-way.

In my case, I am not granted an office. I am, instead, allowed access to a commons room. Should I need to conference with students, we will be often be joined by other adjunct professors and their students. Sensitive subjects can rarely be broached, because there is no guarantee of privacy. As I do not have an office, I have no way to receive telephone messages, so I disperse my cell phone number to students. Paying my cell phone bill, of course, is my personal responsibility. I am allowed to use a communal copier, which serves all adjunct professors and the wait times can be exceedingly long. Because of this, I often make copies at a copy store, an expense for which I am not reimbursed and that cuts into my small salary. I answer email on a computer I have purchased myself using a service provider to which I pay a monthly fee. I pay a fee each semester to park on campus while full-time faculty and staff are granted privileges at no costs to themselves. Finally, if I am asked to teach an on-line course, I again

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Truss, *Talk to the Hand* (New York: Gotham Books, 2005).

shoulder the additional associated-costs—access to broadband or wireless computer networks.

A reasonable question to ask is, “Why do I do this?” Indeed, why would anyone who has invested so much time and money to learn a skill take on such a low-paying job? This is a question that invariably comes up when adjuncts congregate together: Why do we do this? Our answers are almost all cliché. We love to teach. We do not do it for the money. We like to keep our knowledge-bases and skills fresh. We enjoy the environment offered by jobs in higher education. We all loved our own college experiences and enjoy being around students today. These answers I have come to feel are not good reasons. Indeed, something must be very wrong for so many of us to do this voluntarily. But therein lies the rub. Is the adjunct role a “voluntary” one? As I have talked to so many of my colleagues and as I have mulled over my own situation, I have come to feel that the adjunct role is not voluntary, but is instead highly coerced.

Here again I find many parallels between the situations of the adjunct laborer and the immigrant laborer. Our situations, of course, are not entirely analogous and to suggest so would be unfair. Adjunct professors are not held in check by threat of deportation or by societal limitations such as not being fluent in speaking English or functionally literate in reading and writing it. Most of us adjunct laborers are not subject to overt racism or hostile working conditions.

Of course, I can quit my job any time. My income is supplemented (many times over) by my husband’s. And the loss of income would not be too severe for my family to overcome. I am a citizen of the United States and I am welcome to apply at many other businesses. I have the requisite paper-trail of a birth certificate and a social security number. This is a factor that does not correlate with many immigrants’ economic prospects: my job loss would not present an insurmountable obstacle. I could find employment at my current rate of pay with little challenge.

The university could also decide not to renew my contract. Indeed, the contract I am asked to sign states that I acknowledge that my contract is no guarantee of future employment and the university can revoke my position at any time and for any reason. This is a much likelier course of action than an alternative one, the one that keeps me and so many of my colleagues in the adjunct pool: the prospect that our part-time roles could become full-time positions.

## **A Feeling of Inferiority**

Not every adjunct works on the assumption that if they are competent, and even distinguish themselves at their jobs, she will be granted a job at a higher status and a full-time rate of pay. But many of us do. This hope, I have found, is actively fostered by our supervisors. Indeed they must do this to counterbalance the implicit threat contained within our contracts, the one constant reminder of our precariousness within the university. The university considers us temporary laborers. Further language found in my own contract highlights this temporariness. It tells me that I have no right to serve on any university committee and no authority to counsel students in either an official or an unofficial capacity. I have taught part-time at the university for eight years now. In that time, four full-time one-year renewable positions have been posted. Adjuncts, especially, are encouraged to apply for these positions. This is our carrot, we believe, the reason we have labored under these unacceptable conditions: the real possibility of full-time employment.

I have seen almost every one of my adjunct colleagues vie for the positions. Numerically, they each have a slim chance of being rewarded with the job. But as each job has been filled, three of the four by persons applying from the outside, each adjunct faced an obstacle that none had counted on—her “knownness” to the hiring committee is virtually her undoing. The hiring committee, three out of four times, has preferred to fill the position by the “exotic” commodity, the person coming from another university or another state, the person the committee has no reason yet to dislike or to disrespect, the person who has not proved her unworthiness by allowing her labor to be exploited in an unequal capital exchange with the university in her capacity of an adjunct.

Thus it becomes clear to the adjunct that she is viewed by her superiors as inferior, as unworthy. This depreciation of our esteem by others quickly taints our own self-esteem. “What else can we do?” we lament amongst ourselves. “If we quit our jobs, others would line up to take our places. We are powerless.”

This, I feel, is the real crux of the matter, the real reason I can no longer subscribe to the adjunct role as voluntary. We are repeatedly reminded that our role in the academic community is a small and temporary one. Indeed, we are discouraged by policy and by tradition from even associating with full-time faculty. They trot off to their more important meetings while we scramble to make copies or to meet with students in crowded communal rooms. They are guaranteed due process should the university ever decide to fire them. We are let go immediately,

quietly, and for no cause. We are kept marginal and any attempt to ingratiate ourselves or to ask for acceptance into the wider university culture is forbidden.

Sadly, this describes my situation. If I read the above paragraphs to Norma, substituting the word “adjunct” for “illegal immigrant,” she could easily claim my situation as her own. It matters little if we perform these jobs—part-time, low-paying academic ones, or full-time, low-paying labor jobs—willingly or even if we absorb immense satisfaction from them. The end result of executing these jobs is a permanent stain of inferiority, a continuing reminder of our unworthiness to participate in the full fellowship of the university community, and, ultimately, a theft of our dignity.

This separation and ensuing loss of esteem, after all, was the very factor that made racial segregation so immoral, decreed the U. S. Supreme Court in their landmark case, “Brown v. the Board of Education.” They wrote then words of stinging rebuke that are still applicable today: “To separate them from others of similar [...] qualifications [...] generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Supreme Court. Brown v. Board of Education. 1954.