

## Part-time faculty in English composition:

### A *WPA* survey

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Concern over exploitation of part-time faculty in community colleges surfaced some time ago.<sup>1</sup> Activity this past academic year indicates that profession-wide associations are now studying the problem in preparation for making recommendations for the welfare of all faculty and students involved in part-time instruction. For example, the Council of Writing Program Administrators devoted program sessions at the annual meetings of both MLA and CCCC to an examination of the issue of part-time English composition teachers. The articles in this issue of *WPA* reflect some of that discussion. Furthermore, ADE, CCCC, and WPA committees are at work to set forth position statements for the profession.<sup>2</sup> An AAUP subcommittee on part-time faculty has recently completed its study and published a report on the matter.<sup>3</sup> This article is a part of WPA's effort to examine the use of part-time faculty in the branch of the profession that concerns writing program administrators, the use of part-time faculty as writing instructors. This article is based on an analysis of survey data collected with a questionnaire mailed to the membership of the Council of Writing Program Administrators at the close of the 1980 fall term.

#### **Analysis of the Survey Data<sup>4</sup>**

Of approximately 400 surveys mailed, 156, or 39 percent, were returned in time to be included in the study. Sixty-three percent of the reporting institutions are public; 37 percent are private. Of the reporting institutions, 19 percent enroll fewer than 2,000 students; 25 percent enroll 2,000-4,999 students; 21 percent enroll 5,000-9,999 students; and 35 percent enroll more than 10,000 students. The survey data reported applies to the fall term of 1980.

**Number and qualifications of part-time faculty.** The institutions reporting employ 4,584 composition faculty of whom 2,263, or nearly half, are part-time faculty.<sup>5</sup> The credentials and experience required of these part-time faculty are diverse. While 44 percent of the reporting institutions require a Ph.D. as a minimum qualification for full-time faculty, only 2 percent require it for their part-time faculty. Fifty-nine percent of the reporting institutions require an M.A. as a minimum qualification. This means that 41 percent require that part-time faculty hold no more than a B.A. or B.S.

The range of years of teaching experience of part-time faculty reported in this survey is from zero to 15. The mean number of years of teaching experience of part-time faculty is four.<sup>6</sup> In 80 percent of the institutions reporting, the average teaching experience of part-time faculty is five years or fewer.

**Credit hours taught.** Overall in this survey, part-time faculty teach 23 percent of the total departmental credit hours.<sup>7</sup> However, among the institutions reporting there are significant differences in the percentage of total departmental credit hours that part-time faculty teach. Twenty-one percent report that no courses are taught by part-time faculty; 42 percent report that part-time faculty teach up to one quarter of the English courses offered. At 25 percent of the reporting institutions, between 26 percent and 50 percent of the composition courses are taught by part-time faculty. At 9 percent of the colleges, the figures are 51 to 75 percent. At 4 percent—six institutions—between 76 and 100 percent of the total departmental credit hours are taught by part-time faculty.

The table below uses the type of reporting institution as a point of comparison to show the percentage of total departmental hours taught by part-time faculty.

Percentage of total credit hours <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of institutions reporting		
	Private (BA or beyond)	Public (BA or beyond)	Community college
0	22	18	14
1-25	45	44	41
26-50	18	25	50
51-75	12	8	9
76-100	4	4	0

Using the type and size of the institutions reporting and the highest degrees offered as means of comparison, the tables below show the mean percentage of departmental credit hours taught by part-time faculty.

Mean percentage according to type of institution	Standard deviation
Private (BA or beyond) 23.7	(23.9)
Public (BA or beyond) 23.5	(25.4)

  

Mean percentage according to size of institution	Standard deviation
under 2,000 17	(17.6)
2,000-4,999 23	(19.8)
5,000-9,999 19	(21.3)
over 10,000 32	(29.3)

  

Mean percentage according to highest degree offered	Standard deviation
A.A. 25	(18.9)
B.A. 19	(16.5)
M.A. 19	(20.8)
Ph.D. 30	(30.6)

**Teaching load.** Regarding the maximum teaching load permissible at the repor-

ting institutions for part-time faculty, the mean number of credit hours is 8.4 percent.<sup>9</sup> The following table sets forth the difference among reporting institutions.

Maximum Teaching Load Permissible	
Credit hours	Percentage of institutions reporting
3 or fewer	.8
4-6	27.9
7-9	46.5
more than 9	20.0

The table below shows the number of hours part-time faculty worked elsewhere as reported by 55 institutions.<sup>10</sup>

Number of hours	Percentage of institutions reporting
0	6
3-6	49
7-9	15
above 9	31

The mean number of hours part-time faculty work elsewhere is 7.9.<sup>11</sup>

**Office space and professional responsibilities.** Ninety-three percent of the institutions reporting say that they allocate space for part-time faculty. At 19 percent of the institutions reporting, part-time faculty are not required to hold office hours. Seventy-three percent of the institutions reporting required part-time faculty to hold from one to three office hours per week; 8 percent required from four to six hours. In 44 percent of the institutions reporting, part-time faculty fulfill responsibilities on departmental committees.

**Rank and salary.** Only 25 percent of the institutions reporting have academic ranks for part-time faculty and only 24 percent provide any fringe benefits to part-time faculty. The table below sets forth the data on the salary range for part-time faculty at all institutions reporting.

Salary Range Table

Salary ranges per semester hour	Percentage of institutions reporting
Below \$300	30
\$300-399	42
\$400-499	13
Above \$500	15

The following tables show the percentage of reporting institutions that pay part-time faculty \$400 or less per semester hour, arranged according to institution type, size, and highest degree offered.

**Percentage that pay \$400 or less  
 per semester hour**

<b>Type</b>	
Private	67
(BA or beyond)	
Public	68
(BA or beyond)	
<b>Size</b>	
under 2,000	68
2,000-4,999	83
5,000-9,999	75
over 10,000	61
<b>Highest degree offered</b>	
A.A.	95
B.A.	83
M.A.	76
Ph.D.	58

Better salary and fringe benefits were the unmet professional needs of part-time faculty most often listed by institutions responding to this survey. Several other unmet needs followed in this order of frequency: opportunities for advancement (i.e., full-time employment), involvement with full-time faculty and integration into departmental activities, recognition as professionals by peers having full-time status, more knowledge of composition theory and teaching practices, job security.

**Discussion**

This survey leaves a great deal of the part-time faculty situation unexamined. But it does suggest the existence of a few facts that we may not have been fully aware of.

At the institutions responding to this survey, nearly half of the English faculty are part-time; they teach nearly a quarter of the composition courses. In six schools reporting, more than three quarters of the total departmental credit hours are taught by part-time faculty.

Although the range of teaching experience among these part-time faculty is broad (the average—four years—is not high, but is nevertheless quite respectable), four out of 10 of the schools reporting require only an undergraduate degree for teaching freshman composition part-time. Most of the others require an M.A.

In most respects, community colleges seem to be the most exploitative, but the data for every category of institution indicts each type of institution about equally. For example, part-time faculty in half of the community colleges reporting teach up to half the total departmental credit hours. But when compared by the highest degree offered, the percentage of courses taught by part-time faculty at institutions offering M.A.s and Ph.D.s is about equal to the percentage of hours taught by part-time faculty at institutions offering an A.A. Further, while most reporting institutions set reasonable limits on the number of credit hours each

part-time faculty member may teach at their institutions, most have no record of how many hours their part-time faculty work elsewhere.

Only 24 percent of the institutions reporting provide fringe benefits for part-time faculty. Nearly three-quarters of the institutions reporting pay less than \$400 per semester hour. This figure amounts to \$4,800 for a full-time equivalent of four three-credit courses, or a salary rate of \$9,600 for an academic year's work, without fringe benefits: no medical insurance, no hospitalization, no paid vacation, no pension. Here private and public schools, large and small, offend equally, but four-year colleges are marginally less exploitative economically in this respect than community colleges.

Comments by WPAs who returned survey questionnaires emphasize and make concrete many of these summary remarks on the survey data. The selection that follows suggests the seriousness and, in some cases, the honest bewilderment with which our fellow professionals confront this difficult problem. Identification of the type of institution, highest degree awarded, and size of enrollment follow each selection.

Our part-time faculty have only recently become aware of their immense importance in our writing program. They are beginning to organize and lobby for better pay and benefits, and as director of the writing program I have invited adjunct faculty to serve on our freshman English committee. Still, we have a long way to go before injustices are corrected.

—Private; M.A.; 5,000-9,999

Our part-time faculty recently staged a brief three-day "sick-out" because of the small salaries. The administration has promised some relief but we do not know how much.

—Public; Ph.D.; over 10,000

I regard our part-timers as more committed to teaching composition than many of the full-timers are. We have two groups essentially—one with other means of support who do this as a social service, one trying to "make ends meet by part-timing it." The job is no way of making a living and rarely leads to full-time employment.

—Public; 5,000-9,999

Steps are being taken to increase salary. Most of our [part-time instructors] (10 out of 14) are women whose husbands' careers are the primary concern. For three or four people, their teaching is their sole source of income. Four three-credit courses for two semesters will earn them \$7200 a year. No summer teaching is available. They have no guarantee that they'll get to teach from one semester to the next; nor do they know how many classes, which classes or class times until two days before school begins.

—Public; M.A.; 5,000-9,999

Responses to this questionnaire are based on normal practice *prior to* last semester, on arrangements for present *noncomposition* courses handled by part-timers. What in fact has happened here is that [composition] courses formerly handled by part-timers are now being taken [over] by tenured instructors in French and Spanish where declining enrollments left us with what amounted to a make-work-situation. It's a good arrangement from the college's point of view; it allows for the retention of Spanish and French offerings (and instructors), it provides for some genuinely excellent composition classes (since the instructors are generally acknowledged to be first-rate), and of course it saves the expense of hiring part-timers. It doesn't do much for the unemployed English ABD's in the area.

—Private; B.A.; under 2,000

We have a union (AFT) which represents the faculty. The union often pushes for more full-time positions, but lives with the high percentage (30 percent) in some business departments. Unions and management at colleges often support each other on the part-time issue. The union wants higher salaries, better fringes, which it gets. But to finance the raises, the administration keeps costs low by relying on part-time faculty instead of hiring additional full-time faculty although additional hiring is warranted. Therefore, part-timers are condemned to remain such with little hope of gaining a fit job.

—Private; M.A., B.A.; 2,000-4,999

I see that your questionnaire scrupulously avoids discussing women vs. men as part-timers. For example, is the pay the same? When part-timers achieve full-time status are they more commonly men than women?

—Public; M.A.; 2,000-4,999

My own sense is that our part-time instruction is much better now than it was in the hysterical 1960s, when at any given time 45 percent of our part-time faculty was new to teaching. Now, our faculty is much better trained and much more experienced, including as it does a much larger proportion of "older" graduate students, many of whom have been with us a decade or more, dragging out their coursework and delaying completion of their dissertations because of the ugly job market. We also have a large pool of local "talent" to hire as lecturers—unemployed Ph.D.s from our program, faculty spouses, and other well-qualified people who choose to live in this area at the expense of being underemployed.

—Public; Ph.D.; over 10,000

Regular faculty get cost of living increments annually, but the supply faculty have had one raise in 10 years.

—Public; M.A.; over 10,000

The school where I am presently employed has shifted (beginning next year) from all part-time staff (lecturers) to all tenure-track posts. This occurred in large part because the instructors investigated the matter, asked good questions, behaved professionally, and drafted a well-written and documented report on their findings (which included research into procedures and policies elsewhere).

—Public; Ph.D.; over 10,000

Our biggest problem is that the Academic Affairs Office has hired adjuncts without consulting us. We have been sorely disappointed—and burned.

—Private; B.A., M.A.; under 2,000

Although the use of part-time faculty is too often abused, it is *certainly* a help to chairmen faced with fluctuating and uncertain enrollments. Better this than the torture faced by young teachers on first-year contracts or—a worse abuse than either—"term" contracts: full load, full pay; less-than-full load, part-time pay scale!

—Public; Community college; 5,000-9,999

#### Conclusion

The foregoing survey data and the commentary that the reporting institutions have provided certainly indicate that the employment of part-time faculty is a serious and complex issue. Central to the matter are the economic and professional rights of the part-time faculty and the educational rights of their students. More data is needed before asserting any definitive statements on the matter, for while this study reveals some general dimensions of the situation, it does not delineate finely enough some issues of basic importance (precise dollar amounts paid per credit hour, for example). On the basis of the preliminary information this study provides, it is possible to design a means for gathering other essential data. This is my intention.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Leslie Koltai, "King Solomon and the Bowl of Spaghetti," *Community and Junior College Journal* (September 1977), 18-20, and Clara Lee R. Moodie, "The Overuse of Part-Time Faculty Members," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 21 (March 10, 1980), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Serving on WPA's committee are Maxine Hairston, University of Texas, chairperson; Donald McQuade, Queens College; and Ben W. McClelland, Rhode Island College. The committee welcomes information and inquiries.

<sup>3</sup> "The Status of Part-Time Faculty," *Academe*, 67 (February-March 1981), 29-39.

<sup>4</sup> For assistance in this analysis, I am indebted to Patricia Hays, assistant professor of anthropology/geography and consultant for academic computer usage at Rhode Island College. Professor Hays designed and ran the computer analysis, taught me how to read the computer printouts (no mean feat!) and verified the analytical statements against the data. Further, I am indebted to the Council of Writing Program Administrators and to the Rhode Island College Faculty Research Fund for assistance in defraying the costs of this research project. Finally, very many thanks to the many WPAs who took valuable time to respond to this survey.

<sup>5</sup> Since the survey did not define the term "part-time faculty," some reporting institutions included graduate teaching assistants in their data. Wherever possible, I have excluded the data pertaining to graduate teaching assistants.

<sup>6</sup> Standard deviation = 3.09 years.

<sup>7</sup> Since the survey specified only "total departmental credit hours," not "total department credit hours in composition," some institutions may have reported figures on all English courses, not merely on all composition courses.

<sup>8</sup> The number of institutions reporting information for this and the following three tables is: private, 51; public, 72; community colleges, 22. The large standard deviations indicate wide dispersions across the spectrum from 1 to 100 percent with no normal distributions around the means.

<sup>9</sup> Standard deviation = 2.75 credit hours.

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the number of credit hours part-time faculty work elsewhere while teaching at these reporting institutions, 65 percent were not able to provide any information. Therefore, the data on this item represents only 35 percent (or 55) of the reporting institutions.

<sup>11</sup> Standard deviation = 4.26 hours.