

Part I. The Struggle is Real/ Academia's Current Landscape

Once upon a time, as most dark fairy tales begin, being a college professor was considered a respectable job. In the 1960s-1970s, more than half of the faculty in public institutions were unionized, and part-time faculty only made up 20 percent of the faculty population (Bousquet 187, 201). These full-time lines also came with all the bells and whistles one would expect with six to eight years of higher education: office space, medical benefits, and retirement contributions. The future looked promising, even bright.

Today, academia's current landscape is grim. According to New Faculty Majority, citing data from the Department of Education, as of 2009, 75.5% of college faculty are now on renewable tracks, meaning "they have NO access to tenure." Of that percentage, 50% are part-time professors ("Facts about Adjuncts"). While they often carry heavy teaching loads in introductory courses, their wages are dismal, and insulting at best. Some are paid as little as \$1,500 per course (Douglas-Gabriel), with the median pay being \$2,700 ("Facts about Adjuncts"). The so-called new faculty majority, the very professors instructing your children, may qualify for food stamps.

Part I of this collection shares vulnerable, behind-the-scenes looks at professors' experiences in the academic market, which has now been disrupted with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, disruption that has included hiring freezes, the closing of small college campuses across the nation, and restructuring of academic departments. The authors share their stories with brutal honesty. Some are funny. Some are tragic. All are worth hearing.

- In "The Shadow of the Adjunct," Michael Dubson, also the editor of *Ghosts in the Classroom: Stories of College Adjunct Faculty—and the Price We All Pay*, discusses the long-term effects of what it was like to be a career adjunct for 15 years, when he always carried fear. Fear of not getting work. Fear of enrollment declines. Fear of not gaining enough income to scrape by from one semester to the next. He chronicles the long-term effects of what this lifestyle does to academics.
- Jeff Dories, an assistant professor at Florida Institute of Technology, details his roller-coaster ride to full-time employment in "From Tenure Track to Unemployment in Six Months." He relays the often unseen and/or unspoken struggles of parents working in the humanities in academia, including long commutes from home, retrenching within higher education systems, and elimination of entire departments due to politics.
- "Becoming Lystrosaurus: Toxic Environments, Mass Extinctions, and Other Cautionary Tales for Academics" by Dustin Michael is a humorous

but somber take on a husband and wife (both with Ph.D.s in English) trying to find meaningful work in the same area. He states, “Academic jobs have to be open and posted, and even if you happen to beat the dozens and sometimes hundreds of other applicants for one of those, the hiring process takes a long time—half a year or more sometimes.” In the meantime, bills and student loans are relentless. Someone or something must give.

- In “Adjunctivitis: The Plague of Academia,” Marjorie Stewart highlights the freeway flyer experience and explains that when living this reality, “I had three book bags: a Monday/Wednesday/Friday bag, a Tuesday/Thursday bag, and a Wednesday night bag. If I pointed my car in the wrong direction and didn’t realize it within a few miles, I was late for class.” She did eventually land a tenure-track job after many ups and downs, but she’s quick to note she was 57 years old when she did so.
- Lastly, Constance H. Gemson examines what happens when college departments simply disappear. Not only are adjunct professors left scrambling to teach at various campuses with no certainty of future assignments, but the rich interactions that students who would otherwise never meet in real life had with one another, including students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, simply dissipate into thin air.

These tales are not meant to dissuade anyone from their dreams. The call to teaching is a passion, which often is not motivated by financial considerations. But make no mistake about it—the current academic landscape is changing to a contingent, disposable model, and not for the better of the educators or students. Those with idealistic notions of landing a tenure-track job right out of doctoral studies in the humanities, with a three- to five-page CV, are simply naïve. The system is broken.

Works Cited

- Bousquet, Marc. *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. New York UP, 2008.
- Douglas-Gabriel, Danielle. “This Photo Essay Shows What It Really Means to Be Adjunct Faculty.” *The Washington Post*, 24 Oct. 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/10/24/this-photo-essay-shows-what-it-really-means-to-be-adjunct-faculty/>.
- “Facts about Adjuncts.” *New Faculty Majority*, <https://www.newfacultymajority.info/facts-about-adjuncts/>.