

Part II. The Debilitating Effects of Disposability

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an uptick of interest and concern about students' mental health. And for all intents and purposes, this is a good thing. It seems there is a weekly email circulating on college campuses about stress relieving activities to participate in, including petting puppies during finals week, doing yoga in the quad, and making arts and crafts in the library. But what about the professors teaching these students? Is anyone really checking up on them?

Building upon Part I, this section pulls back the curtains on what the system does to individuals. Even the youngest, most bubbly of professors will eventually experience one (or all) of the following in this rat race: mental, physical, and emotional burnout. And let's not forget financial exhaustion. It has been said that "forty-four percent of new teachers leave teaching within five years" within the K-12 system (qtd. in Will). Within colleges, word of mouth indicates it's not much better.

- In "A Dark Night and a Brighter Day for Adjuncts," Maria Shine Stewart deconstructs assumptions those outside of academia hold about professors working at multiple campuses. As she points out, a plumber once said to her, "You must be a good teacher. You teach at three schools." She shows that little do such individuals know that teaching at more than one institution is a matter of survival due to the low salaries, not a love affair with the current inverted setup in which more than half the faculty work part time.
- Christian L. Pyle, an adjunct English professor at Bluegrass Community and Technical College in Lexington, Kentucky, discusses the sometimes unfortunate disconnect between members of the full-time faculty and part-time faculty and how this disconnect further ignites classifications of segregation, disenfranchisement, and marginalization within the academy.
- In "Between a Rock and a Hard Place on a Deserted Island: Negotiated Mental Health on College Campuses Through the Lens of a Rebellious Adjunct Professor," Belle H. Foster cheekily details the four parts to the mental health roller coaster of an adjunct professor: "(1) the new adjunct honeymoon phase, (2) the denial and disillusionment stage, (3) the forget* it milestone (* forget may be replaced with other 'f' words), and (4) panic." She illustrates that while colleges invest thousands of dollars on the mental health of students, which is important, they also need to turn their lens inward because the mental health of the part-time faculty is not OK by a longshot.

- Nooshan Ashtari and Pamela Minet-Lucid convey how the academic system eats its young, making individuals feel bad when they struggle, as if they failed. However, as they note, it's the machine itself that's the problem. They relay what most of us in academia already know: If you have another source of income, or a partner that can help you out, life is easier. If you must take care of someone else, such as a child, an adult, or an elderly person, being a contingent faculty member is virtually impossible.
- In "Ignorance is Bliss," Ann Wiley (pen name) explores the obliviousness in the decision-making processes of academic institutions that is caused by an absence of adjunct perspectives. She shares three different yet overlapping views of this phenomenon: those of students, full-time faculty members, and administrators. As she points out, when individuals are in the dark, whether knowingly or simply because they are out of touch, they cannot and will not help the most exposed populations within their very own department.

The Great Resignation from teaching is a dismal reality. For young people just coming out of college, obtaining a Ph.D. in the humanities is becoming less desirable by the minute. Why? Because they know applying for 100 full-time jobs and receiving 100 rejections will affect a person. It will eventually lead to mental and physical burnout, not to mention hardships when trying to pay back mounting school loans on a shoestring budget. And while dealing with all of this, the new faculty majority are the first professors most students will meet. That speaks volumes.

Work Cited

Will, Madeline. "5 Thing to Know About Today's Teaching Force." *EducationWeek*, 23 October 2018, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/5-things-to-know-about-todays-teaching-force/2018/10>.