

Part III. Knee-Deep in the Trenches/What Now?

Part III is for those in the thick of it. Advice comes in from variety of sources (part-time faculty members, full-time faculty members, administrators, and chairs) from various institutions and locales across the United States. But they all have one question in common: What do we do now? The answer, obviously, varies from school to school and also location to location. It's one thing to gather up the pitchforks and strike at a unionized institution in the North, but what about those toiling in private colleges in the South? If anything is clear, it is that the present-day hiring trend is not sustainable.

- In “This Is What Solidarity Looks Like: A Model of Thick Solidarity at the University of Illinois,” Andrew Bowman, A. Kay Emmert, Shawn Gilmore, and Bruce Kovanen detail their successful efforts to improve the lives of contingent faculty members on their campus, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), with the help of the Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO) and the Non-Tenure Faculty Coalition (NTFC).
- Likewise, Katie Rieger and Sarah Lonelodge share the struggles many young academics face when wading through the glutted job market (“food and housing insecurities, . . . [going] without medicines and treatments, or . . . [creating] online fundraisers to make ends meet—all while working for top-tier universities with multimillion dollar budgets and all while engaging in the same teaching load as full-time faculty members”). Their activist agenda presents possibilities for change.
- Anne Balay, author of *Steel Closets: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Steelworkers* (2014) and *Semi Queer: Inside the World of Gay, Trans, and Black Truck Drivers* (2018), earned her Ph.D. in English, but she never found stable academic work. As a lifetime adjunct and now an organizer, her chapter discusses how she advocates for and organizes adjunct faculty members for SEIU Local 1 in St. Louis, Missouri. She notes that she once worked as an automobile mechanic and that the sense of camaraderie she experienced in that role is missing in work of an adjunct.
- In “Alternative to Nothing: Rejecting ‘Alt-Ac’ Success Stories and Acknowledging Failure,” Daniel S. Brown decries the current system of academics earning doctoral degrees when there are not enough (good) positions in the field, a phenomenon that runs rampant in the liberal arts and humanities. He advocates accepting fewer graduate students, ceasing the exploitation of contingent faculty, and forgiving existing student loan debt.
- Jennifer K. Johnson and Nicole Warwick, full-time lecturers in the writing

program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, stress the importance of cultivating sustainable faculty lines with no end date associated with them. They see this development as necessary in order to retain and support faculty for the long haul.

- In “From Being One to Hiring One: Both Sides of the Adjunct Phenomenon in Higher Education,” Kimberly M. Miller and Joanna Whetstone detail their journeys from adjuncts to their positions as chairs of their respective English departments. They highlight the dos and don’ts they would have liked to follow as administrators, given the chance to choose this path all over again, and they share advice with contingent employees looking for options.
- Finally, Devan Bissonette, who once taught as many as 13 classes at a time to make ends meet, discusses ways contingent faculty can empower themselves within a system that eats its young, including exploring everything from asynchronous learning and pre-packaged courses to strikes and walkouts. He contends that when adjuncts know their worth and power in numbers, they are a force of nature to be reckoned with in academia.

Individually and collectively, these narratives show that while the horizon is not so cheery at the moment, the contingent faculty are now the new faculty majority. Power in numbers is a noted value here, but one must never forget the precarious nature of not being protected. Therefore, it is imperative that those in positions of so-called power (tenured faculty members, chairs, and administrators) become allies and advocate right alongside the adjuncts.