

# How Adjunct College Teaching is Like Slave Labor

The Hollywood image of the university professor as a tweed blazer, button-up wearing young urban professional with plenty of disposable income is an enduring one. If only it were true.

The image defies reality, at least for the vast majority of college professors. On most college and university campuses today, [more than half](#) are referred to as adjuncts or [contingent faculty](#). They are not well compensated. In fact, one might say adjunct work is the modern-day equivalent of slave labor.

The growth in the number of adjunct faculty employed at today's universities and colleges is called the adjunctification problem. Currently about [70 percent of the professoriate](#) in the U.S are adjuncts or non-tenure track faculty (NTTF). Adjuncts survive from one temporary contract to another, usually on subsistence wages, earning [as little as \\$2k per course](#). Many work part time at multiple campuses, driving long distances to stitch together a living doing what they love: teaching.

For some faculty, it is a rite of passage to work as an adjunct for two to fifteen years before earning a tenure-track position. For many, being an adjunct is a permanent condition of servitude. Sure, they could choose to do something else. But when you've spent the last ten years of your life studying Medieval Literature, there are not too many plan Bs available.

Why don't colleges and universities pay adjunct faculty a living wage? In short, it's a business decision. Lower costs (payroll, benefits). Increase revenue (tuition). Net greater profits. Fund more capital projects and attract better executive-level administrative talent with large salaries and

bonuses. Some colleges and [universities \(including my own, Penn State\) try to appease adjuncts](#) by offering them titles, nicer offices and other status-related perks, which cost these institutions little or nothing.

Let's compare the compensation and benefits of a university president and an adjunct professor. University presidents make on average [\\$1 million a year](#). They receive full health benefits and a golden-parachute pension. In comparison, adjuncts earn, on average, [\\$20-25k per year](#), receive no healthcare benefits and usually go without a pension. Tenured faculty make on average [\\$84k per annum](#) plus benefits and a pension or 401K retirement account.

[A white paper](#) sponsored by the Service Employee International Union quotes several anonymous Boston-area adjunct faculty:

"I teach every class that I can get—I always say I am available—day and night, Monday through Sunday. Last fall, I taught six classes, this fall I am teaching seven classes. I would continue with that load, but generally in the spring I am down to five courses—in summer it is three courses—and this is accepting every course offered."

"You never know when your job ends—three times per year your contract runs out. Until a week ago, I didn't know if I would be unemployed in three weeks when the term expires. I spend a lot of time looking for work when I should be focusing on the courses I am teaching."

"There is no retirement plan or savings among myself or my colleagues. You don't think about it because there is no saving when you can barely make ends meet. I can deduct from my paycheck money to participate in [the university's] plan—but most don't do it because we can barely pay rent."

"We do what we can. We are going to have to work until the bitter end."

According to [NBC News's Seth Freed Wessler](#), a growing number of adjunct faculty members receive so little pay that they qualify for food stamps and section 8 housing.

Would you sacrifice at least a decade of your life to become an expert in a subject/discipline and then an adjunct faculty member, just to be relegated to relative poverty and servitude? Is this an economic standard a majority of America's professors deserve?