



A Union of Professionals

AFT News Release

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‘Army of Temps’ Report Reveals Grave Plight of Contingent College Faculty

Explosive AFT report on adjunct faculty exposes alarming number of college and university professors earning poverty wages and relying on public assistance to get by

A new report from the American Federation of Teachers has unveiled the disturbing economic reality faced by millions of contingent and adjunct faculty at the nation’s colleges and universities, with nearly 25 percent relying on public assistance and 40 percent having trouble covering basic household expenses.

“[An Army of Temps: AFT 2020 Adjunct Faculty Quality of Work/Life Report](#)” details feedback from 3,076 respondents to a survey of contingent faculty at two-year and four-year institutions—both public and private. The 52-question survey, completed between May 22 and June 30, 2019, is the first nationwide survey of contingent faculty conducted since 2013. Of the AFT’s 240,000 higher education members, 85,000 are contingent and 35,000 are graduate employees—making the AFT the largest union of contingent workers.

When campuses were shut down in March, adjuncts were given only hours to move their classes online, often without sufficient training or technical support to make the transition successful. Now, they face summer and fall semesters in which enrollment—and therefore their jobs—is in doubt. According to the survey, many were already struggling with food insecurity, limited health coverage and housing issues, now exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

The report illustrates how precarious academic work was even before the pandemic, which has made a dire situation even worse.

- One-third of respondents earn less than \$25,000 annually, placing them below the federal poverty guideline for a family of four;

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of 1.7 million professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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- Only 15 percent report being able to comfortably cover basic monthly expenses;
- Fewer than half of survey respondents have access to employer-provided health insurance; nearly 20 percent rely on Medicaid;
- About 45 percent of faculty surveyed have put off getting needed healthcare, including mental healthcare; 65 percent forgo dental care;
- 41 percent struggle with job security, reporting that they don't know if they will have a teaching job until one month before the beginning of the academic year;
- For 3 out of 4 contingent faculty, employment is only guaranteed from term to term; and
- A plan for a secure retirement is out of reach for most faculty, with 37 percent reporting they don't see a path.

AFT President Randi Weingarten said: “This survey paints a vivid portrait of the economic insecurity of adjunct faculty. Adjuncts anchor their institutions’ instructional work, yet so many are living hand to mouth. It’s sickening, especially when the administrators who employ them continue to rake in record salaries. Adjuncts can’t plan their lives more than a semester ahead, and even those plans are laid to waste when a disaster like the coronavirus hits.

“It’s no surprise that adjuncts are fighting back through their unions for voice, respect, job security, proper benefits and higher wages. This is a funding issue as well, which is why the AFT is fighting for federal funds for state and local governments to invest in higher education.

“Rather than cutting more, which gives students a ‘Why bother coming back to school?’ message, colleges should reduce contingency and offer adjuncts conversions to full-time and multiyear contracts. They should pay adjuncts properly and offer them adequate health insurance.”

Over the last four decades, the academic labor pool has shifted dramatically: 40 years ago, 70 percent of academic employees were tenured or tenure track. Today, that figure has flipped: 75 percent of faculty are not eligible for tenure, and 47 percent hold part-time positions.

The AFT and our affiliates are committed to using political advocacy and collective bargaining to improve the lives of contingent faculty and the communities they serve.

The full report [can be read here](#).

Follow AFT President Randi Weingarten: <http://twitter.com/rweingarten>

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