

SLAVE LABOR IN CCNY: The Plight of the Adjunct

BY JANE LOEKLE

Have you always assumed that your teachers have it easy, that they work few hours, make good pay, and get cushy extended vacations? You might be right in thinking that your teacher spends only nine hours a week in the classroom, makes over \$25,000 per year, and gets four months a year off, what with inter-session and summer vacation. But this is less and less often the case. As CUNY has lost money, it has hired fewer and fewer full-time faculty members. Instead, the university hires part-time Adjunct Lecturers.

What does it mean if your instructor is an adjunct? How does he or she differ from a regular professor? A full-time faculty member is hired on a one to three year renewable contract. After he has taught at a CUNY college for five years, he is eligible for tenure. If he gets it, he can never be fired; he has ultimate job security. Even if he neglects his teaching duties and becomes a second-rate instructor, the school cannot get rid of him. On the other hand, the adjunct is hired by the semester. Every four months he is technically out of work. He is often hired a week or less before a new semester begins, so that he cannot even order his own texts. His job depends upon funding and enrollment. He has no security.

A full-time faculty member teaches from nine to twelve hours a week. His starting pay is around \$12,000, and, if he's tenured, he

probably makes over \$25,000 per year. He receives paychecks all year round, even if he's not teaching summer courses. If he does choose to teach in the summer, he is paid in addition to his regular pay. His union takes care of him. An adjunct, however, is paid by the hour, \$23 per hour. By the law he cannot teach more than nine hours a week within the CUNY system. Twenty-three dollars an hour sounds pretty good, doesn't it? But think--he is paid only for the nine hours he is actually in the classroom, not for student conferences, not for lesson planning, not for paper correcting, not for keeping up with the latest research in his field. Work it out for yourself. There are fourteen weeks in a semester, so your "rich professor," if he is an adjunct, earns less than \$5,800 per year--before taxes. How can he live on that? He can't. If he is lucky, he is independently wealthy or has a spouse who works. If he's like most adjuncts, he has to supplement his income in some way--any way he can. He can drive a cab on weekends; he can work during the day and teach at night; he can work at a private college part-time too, for even less pay; or he can work simultaneously at two branches of CUNY, quaking all the while because it is illegal to do so and he may be caught and fired. In the summer there are no paychecks and no unemployment benefits for him. He is rarely offered summer courses because full-time faculty get first

dibs on this extra work and money. In the summer, he has no time to recuperate from having worked two jobs all winter, he has no time to do research, to write; he must work or starve. If he has no savings and he gets sick, he's in trouble; for he cannot join the union, and he has no benefits.

Well, you say, adjuncts may have to work more hours for less pay, but surely it's just a process of trial by fire and only young, inexperienced teachers have to go through this. It is true that some adjuncts are beginners. However, it is also true that many have been trapped in this position for a long time, unable to find full-time employment. They hold doctorates, they are dedicated teachers, they are no longer young. But, you may argue, any educated, highly-trained person who is willing to work under such conditions must be crazy! I wouldn't work for less than a quarter of what someone else is paid to do the same job. I wouldn't work for a boss who offered me no security and no benefits of any sort.

Let's take a further look at this. In the English department at CCNY, as at any branch of CUNY, an adjunct is almost always hired to teach basic writing: English 1,2, and 3. As the student population of CUNY has been changing over the last ten years, and more and more incoming students need to learn to write in college, the full-time faculty member also teaches these courses. He has tenure and cannot be fired, so he must earn his pay by teaching these new, underprepared students. But usually, he has been trained to teach literature, not writing. Often he resents having to teach writing, finding it either beneath him, boring, defeating, or all three. He considers the writing courses unrewarding, he is bewildered by these new students, and he wishes he could teach only literature. This is certainly not always the case, but all too often it is.

An adjunct generally teaches only composition--two courses a semester or maybe even four, if he is working

at more than one school. Usually, especially if he is young, he has done his graduate work in the teaching of writing. He is trained to teach writing, and he wants to do just that. He doesn't consider it lowly; he knows it's a demanding profession. He doesn't think of basic writing students as dumb; he simply acknowledges that they are beginners.

The adjunct works hard. If he is a good teacher, he has his students write constantly, and he gives each essay careful attention, offering fully developed comments, guidance for the beginning writer. If he cares about his students, he allows ample time for conferences with them because he knows that individual attention helps people to learn. If he teaches two classes of twenty students each and has his students write ten papers a semester, he will correct four hundred papers in fourteen weeks. If he requires his students to revise all of their papers, double that figure to get eight hundred. If he teaches four courses at two different schools, double that figure again; he has now got sixteen hundred essays coming to him in fourteen weeks!

The adjunct may well work forty hours a week or more and be paid for only nine of those hours. He is either grossly overworked or plagued by financial worries. As there is never any guarantee that he will be rehired, he is in constant fear for his job. Is he crazy? Sometimes an adjunct starts out dedicated and eager and burns out within a few years. Overworked, defeated, despairing, such an adjunct will leave teaching and go into a different field, one more secure and lucrative. Administrations that allow this to happen cheat the students, for dedicated teachers trained in teaching the skills that underprepared minority students need to learn are scarce. In other cases, the adjunct does not burn out. He holds on tenaciously, telling himself that things will eventually get better, that he's

bound to find full-time work if he can just wait it out. He's got no security, he makes only \$5,000 a year after taxes; but he loves his students, he loves teaching, and he dreams that some day he may be able to do the work he wants to do without having constant worries. He holds on even though he knows that his chances are slim, that for the last five years the CUNY system has been firing full-time non-tenured faculty, not replacing retiring faculty, and depending more and more on the slave labor of adjuncts to save money.

Why don't adjuncts organize to demand union benefits and higher pay? A worker who has fifty others waiting for his job is in no position to bargain. The solution will not be reached easily. Ideally, full-time faculty members would teach literature, creative writing, whatever they are trained to teach and enjoy teaching. Ideally, adjuncts would be paid an equitable salary and offered some security. Why do these inequities in the system exist? I don't know. But I do know that they will continue to exist until adjuncts band together and refuse to be slaves. ◻

Jane Loekle
Adjunct Lecturer in
ESL at CCNY

BOOK KEEPERS (4)

wanted

Part-time hours: From 8 am to 11 am

MUST BE ABLE TO DO A TELLER'S JOB

Call- (212)- 590-9339

free advertising

For a free advertising in S.U.F.A.,
send informations to: Tonny O. Romero

Day Student Senate, Finley 331
690-8175-76

students for bilingual education

**BILINGUAL STUDENT: GET ORGANIZED
AND STRUGGLE FOR A BILINGUAL
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.**

Who Are The Students For Bilingual
Education?

We, Students For Bilingual Education, are an organization established in this campus (CCNY) with the objective to orientate, educate and mobilize the bilingual students around the problems that afflict bilingual education in this college.

Our student organization has been struggling around the necessity of creating at CCNY a Bilingual Education Department in the School of Education, that serves the needs of our students. As part of the struggle for the formation of the Bilingual Department we have struggled to maintain open old lines, to bring more professors, to expose racist professors, to establish a course of foundations of education that responds to the needs of our students. SBE has confronted the administration in an active and militant way in these struggles.

To canalize the courage of the students the top administrators (Chandler), with the help of its sequel from the School of Education, called a Task Force supposedly to solve our problems. So far nothing has changed: The number of professors is still the same; the idea of a Bilingual Office is still in the air; the resources in the library are inadequate; there is not a permanent secretary for the program; there is a lack of new courses for bilingual students in areas such as: special education, vocational, etc.; the program does not have full