



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

NEWSBRIEFS

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Part-Time Faculty Vote Union In

By Steve Babson and Anne Cottongim

The part-time faculty at Wayne State University are now officially represented by the Union of Part-Time Faculty (UPTF) after a vote of 442 in favor of the union and 57 against. Before the vote, our part-time faculty members were working without any union representation.

Each fall, most of the freshmen and sophomores arriving on campus are welcomed to Wayne by faculty members who are neither tenured nor on the tenure track. Some of these faculty are full-time lecturers represented by the AAUP-AFT, and some are graduate assistants represented by the Graduate Employees Organizing Committee (GEOC). But the rest— some 900 faculty members each semester— are part-time “adjuncts” paid a poverty-level wage that ranges between \$1,750 and \$3,500 for a three-credit class.

Obviously, they can’t make a living at that level of pay. Indeed, “some part-time faculty have to teach five and six courses a semester at multiple institutions just to make ends meet,” according to Thomas Trimble, a part-time faculty member and active supporter of the UPTF. Even with this “sweated” labor, most adjuncts do little better in terms of hourly wages than the average fast-food worker.

Trimble and his fellow adjuncts hope to change all that, with implications that directly impact the quality of education at WSU and the work environment of full-time faculty.

The Growing Ranks of Part-Time Faculty

Universities have become far more dependent on part-time faculty in recent decades, and Wayne State has the dubious distinction of being a

trend setter in that regard. The move away from full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty at Wayne accelerated in the mid-1980s, reaching a point in 2000 when “unranked” faculty— that is, faculty without tenure or tenure-track status— taught an estimated two-thirds of the classes at Wayne State. This, unfortunately, put

Wayne at the bottom of the list among Michigan’s 15 public universities according to “HEIDI,” the state’s higher education database. Since WSU has fewer graduate assistants and lecturers than either the University of Michigan or Michigan State, it’s a good guess that part-time adjuncts have shouldered most of this load.

The reasons for the growing reliance on part-time faculty are as varied as the schools and departments that use them (see the table on page 4). In professional schools like law and business, the full-time practitioner working in the field can provide valuable insights on the profession. The arts also benefit from the special knowledge of, say, orchestra members who can provide music lessons for performing students. In both cases, the adjuncts are not so dependent on their part-time

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pay, and they may enjoy the prestige and personal satisfaction of teaching in the university. In the humanities and sciences, part timers can also fill in for faculty on sabbatical, teach specialized courses, or take on last-minute assignments if course enrollments spike upward.

But the major force driving the use of part timers is economics. The labor market is flooded with unemployed and underemployed academics, and university administrators can hire them on the cheap, pay them a “piece work” wage by the class, deny them benefits, and summarily discard them whenever they please. Individual adjuncts tolerate this abuse because their educational achievement may be too specialized to gain employment elsewhere— they can’t, in other words, just “exit” the market. Many of them love their chosen profession and want to keep teaching while they search for that elusive entry-level job in the full-time faculty.

The result is a perversely self-perpetuating cycle: because administrators can use adjuncts as a cheap alternative to the cost of a full-time faculty position, there are fewer such full-time jobs, and the ranks of the underemployed grow accordingly— thus replenishing the supply of cheap labor available to university administrators.

The Issue of Quality

For a university striving to improve its retention of students, the issue of part-time faculty is central, particularly in the lower-level introductory courses where incoming students are most likely to encounter adjunct faculty.

Most part-time educators are hard working and conscientious teachers who want their students to succeed. Some of them were once students at Wayne, and others, through continual reappointments, have developed an affinity for WSU. But there is only so much they can do when they have neither the office space nor the time to meet with individual students on a consistent basis. They are not paid for such

academic counseling in any case, and they have even less access to secretarial support and things like photocopying than full-time faculty.

For those who have to take on multiple teaching assignments at several schools to make ends meet, their ability to communicate with students is diluted all the more. One part timer active in the union drive at Wayne recalls a particularly hectic semester when he was teaching at seven different institutions. Each week was a blur of continuous travel to widely separated locations, his teaching materials stacked in separate briefcases by the door to his house, to be grabbed on the run as he went from one class to the next. Imagine his (and his students’) surprise one evening when he went to pull out his sociology materials and instead found his anthropology notes.

As most adjuncts will tell you, quality suffers when their work is underpaid and their efforts spread across multiple institutions. They are not rewarded for research or publications and they are at the mercy of department chairs who can punish the smallest deviation from their views. Their renewals are almost entirely dependent on student evaluations. Since they are not represented on faculty committees, their views are rarely incorporated into the department’s pedagogical strategy. They are the day laborers of the academic labor market, and many become understandably bitter about their low pay and professional isolation.

All too often, full-time faculty tolerate this abuse of part timers because the use of adjuncts allows them to do more research or take on the upper-level courses they would rather teach. The long-term harm to the quality of teaching and the retention of students is harder to see.

A Virtuous Circle

Improving the working conditions and pay of part timers will cost money, but there is good

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Letter to Lansing: Stem Cell Research

The best of our elected representatives care about the issues and their constituents; *all* of our elected representatives care about votes, and they pay particular attention to constituents who take the time to write or call them.

They assume—correctly, in our opinion—that such activists are opinion leaders and will influence others. A letter or email may not change their mind, but any communication on a particular issue will draw their attention.

A member of our Political Action Committee, Adrienne Aluzzo, has written the letter below to her representative in Lansing concerning the issue of stem cell research. This is an issue we regard as important to the interests of all WSU employees and citizens of Michigan. If you find her argument compelling and want to send your own amended version of the same message, please feel free to borrow from Adrienne's letter. (If you want to download a copy, go to our website, <http://www.aaup-aft.wayne.edu>).

If you don't know who your representative is, you can easily find out at http://house.michigan.gov/find_a_rep.asp. If you send her/him a letter or email, please email us a copy at aaupaft@wayne.edu.

Representative Gino Polidori
N0694 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Representative Polidori:

As a member of the American Association of University Professors-American Federation of Teachers at Wayne State University, I am writing to urge you to support House Bills 4616, 4617 and 4618.

As you know, Michigan has one of the most restrictive stem cell laws in the country, even more restrictive than current federal policies. These proposals would lessen state restrictions on stem cell research by removing restrictions on embryonic stem cell research, allowing for the creation of stem cells through nuclear transfer and strengthening the ban on human reproductive cloning. These changes would bring Michigan in line with federal laws and with the laws of many other states.

I believe very strongly, and recent public opinion polls suggest I am not alone in my belief, that

"I am not alone in my belief, that stem cell research offers tremendous hope to people who suffer from diseases and disabilities."

stem cell research offers tremendous hope to people who suffer from diseases and disabilities. We are talking about cells that are used only with the consent of donors and those which will be discarded anyway.

My godfather has Parkinson's disease and I have watched it rob him of his vitality and love of life; it pains me to know that he languishes, while lawmakers posture over issues that the majority of their own constituencies don't support.

I urge you to help Michigan become a leader in the life sciences and support potentially life-saving research, by supporting these proposals. Your vote matters to me, and I will remember it the next time I place my own vote on Election Day.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Aluzzo
WSU Metadata Librarian, Technical Services
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reason to believe that it will also improve the quality of education at WSU and the retention of students. Adjuncts should be better rewarded not only for the teaching they do, but for the counseling of students who need individual attention. Paying adjuncts for the value they represent will improve their morale and commitment to Wayne and will reduce the financial incentive for replacing full-time positions with underpaid part timers.

This was the conclusion of the joint committee established in 2000 by the AAUP-AFT and the university administration. The committee recommended that no more than 30% of undergraduate credit hours in any single college be taught by part timers and that adjuncts be rewarded with some measure of fringe benefits. The Faculty Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate also endorsed this view, recommending that benefits be pro-rated for those part timers who teach two classes in any given semester or who have taught at Wayne in three consecutive years. None of these recommendations were implemented.

It is therefore left to the members of the Union of Part Time Faculty to bargain collectively for the changes that will improve their lot and the quality of

Wayne State's education. The AFT provides organizers and staff support for the UPTF, and it brings to the bargaining table the know-how it has acquired in negotiations at colleges and universities across the country. At the University of Michigan, the AFT's Lecturers Employee Organization (LEO) has represented part timers as well as full-time lecturers since 2003, when the 1,200 academics LEO represents in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint voted overwhelmingly for union representation. Wayne State's part-time faculty will be able to draw on LEO's experience as they develop proposals to improve compensation and benefits, access to resources, due process for evaluation of their teaching, and a matching degree of job security for those who pass muster.

Above all, these previously invisible members of the academic community at Wayne State will finally have a collective voice.

Part Time Faculty By College*

- Liberal Arts – 230 (60 from English)
- Education – 156
- Metropolitan Programs – 151
- Fine and Performing Arts – 140
- Pharmacy – 53
- Social Work - 49
- Engineering 41
- Law School – 23
- LISP – 15
- Business Administration – 13
- Nursing – 4
- Medicine – 2

* Part time faculty who taught at WSU in the last semester before the union election.

Go to www.aaup-aft.wayne.edu for an electronic copy of this newsletter.

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AAUP-AFT**

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