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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the overuse and underpay of part-time faculty at Illinois' Parkland College, and throughout American higher education in general. The proposed State of Illinois Senate Bill No. 1376 limits the use of part-time faculty to a supplementary capacity, or for use only when full-time faculty is unavailable, and will likely exacerbate the gross undercompensation of part-time faculty, who receive only one-third the per-credit-hour wage of full-time faculty. As the use of part-time faculty increases, colleges appear to be exploiting these instructors through low hourly wages and no benefits. The American economy and rapidly changing technology have also had some adverse effects on the educational system, prompting higher costs and depleting funding. Gradually, unions and state legislatures are addressing the inequitable compensation of part-timers. Hopefully, with a growing national awareness of the inadequacies of current educational funding, these inequities will soon begin to be rectified. If they're not, the state of education may pay a heavy price. (YKH)

On the Over-use and Under-pay of Part-time Faculty in America's Colleges

Seth Mendelowitz

Parkland College

ON THE OVER-USE AND UNDER-PAY OF
PART-TIME FACULTY IN AMERICA'S COLLEGES
A Work in Progress

State of Illinois Senate Bill No. 1376 has fueled, at Parkland College, the growing anger over the excessive use and deplorable compensation of part-time faculty. The proposed bill begins,

> In order to enhance the quality of community college instruction and provide for a more equitable treatment of community college faculty members, it shall be the policy of the State of Illinois that part-time teachers (i) be used solely to supplement and not to replace any existing full-time tenured or nontenured faculty member, and (ii) be used solely in those instances in which a full-time position cannot be generated or when specialized services that no full-time tenured or nontenured faculty member is competent to render are required.

More significantly, this bill would require that at least 75% of all full-time equivalent teaching positions be held by full-time faculty members. Parkland College's Director of Governmental Relations and Professor of Accounting (and, until last year, Vice President for Fiscal Services), Kevin Northrup, sent a campus-wide e-mail which drew angry reactions, as he suggested that the proposed bill is "an insult to our high quality part time faculty..." Never having had a reputation for being particularly sensitive to the plight of part-time faculty, Kevin did not or pretended not to recognize the far greater insult of compensating part-timers, who teach almost half of our classes, at about one third of the rate of full-timers.

Nationwide, approximately half of the college courses are taught by grossly underpaid part-time faculty. It is a sad irony that our institutions of higher education, places that are supposed to reflect the most noble of ideals and goals, have led the national trend toward exploitative use of part-time labor. In no other profession would we expect half of the postgraduate-degree professionals to work at low hourly wages with no health benefits, and yet in higher education this has become an accepted standard. As one Associate Professor of English at Parkland put it, "community colleges...were working the part-time scam earlier and more cost-effectively than most other large businesses. They were right there, on the cutting edge, with McDonald's, Burger King and telephone soliciting rackets."

According to the February 6, 1994 *Washington Post*, "Between 1969 and 1992, the number of part-time workers in the United States grew to 20.4 million from 10.8 million, an increase of 88.9%..." Almost half of the part-timers went into part-time work involuntarily. It is significant that the largest employer in the United States is currently Manpower, Inc., a temporary employment service agency. But as the American Federation of Teachers noted, in its recent study on *Part-time Faculty Issues*, "American universities, colleges, and vocational-technical institutes rely more on part-time professionals than does any other professional enterprise in the United States." They point out that "among 'professional specialty occupations' only the two categories of dancers/choreographers, and musicians have a higher incidence of part-time employment."

In the past twenty years, the number of college courses, nationwide, being taught by part-time faculty has doubled. The National Center for Education Statistics indicated an 80% increase

in part-time faculty members in two-year colleges just between the years 1974 and 1978, during which time full-time faculty increased only 11%. In 1971, Parkland College had 120 full-time faculty and seventy part-time; during this past fall semester, there were 160 full-timers and 314 part-timers. Whereas the ratio of full-time faculty to full-time equivalent (FTE) students had been less than 20:1 during Parkland's first few years, today (less than thirty years later) the ratio is approximately 40:1. According to the study by the American Federation of Teachers, Illinois is the state with the fourth highest proportion of part-time community college faculty.

One wonders how institutions that promote such admirable ideals and meaningful human services, as our community colleges do, can also promote such indecent employment practices. There are, of course, various speculations as to how, precisely, this situation evolved. In the prosperity of post-War World II, the United States government (in great part to strengthen ourselves for the cold war) began rapidly expanding opportunities for higher education. With the greater educational opportunities, as well as the greater incentive to go into the growing field of higher education, the number of people earning Ph.D.'s began escalating. By the 1970's, there was an abundance of people seeking to teach in colleges, as well as of graduate programs geared toward training academicians. But America's apparent prosperity was declining (or, perhaps more precisely, America's cold war-targeted tax dollars were steered toward such grand technological projects as Star Wars), while college enrollments were nonetheless expanding. At Parkland College, for instance, the number of FTE students increased 67.8% (from 2,725 to 4,572) between 1971 and 1980, and has continued to increase, the current FTE number of students being 4702 this Spring, 5002 this past fall.

Analysts have also pointed out that as other social programs, such as Social Security, Medicate, and Medicaid, are requiring increasingly large proportions of public funds, education is increasingly underfunded. The exploding costs of the prison industry in America is notable as well. The number of inmates in federal prisons has tripled during the past fifteen years, America's prison system now being the second fastest growing public spending category, after Medicaid. From a cynical perspective, one might conclude that Americans do not begrudge the tax money that will go toward incarcerating people so much as the tax money that will go toward providing the educational opportunities that will help prevent people from ever being incarcerated. For all the talk about how expensive college tuition is, the annual cost of imprisonment is about ten times the average annual expense of college.

Educational costs have skyrocketed in great part due to the need to keep up technologically. When industry spends more on technology and services, it does so for the sake of commensurate gain in profits; but education must "keep up" without having profit to make up for all those extra costs. With this in mind, much of the rhetoric that blames colleges for their own financial straits proves to be premised upon false measures. The National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education compared the rising costs of college education to the Consumer Price Index in order to demonstrate that colleges have been fiscally inefficient. But James L. Doti, a professor of economics and president of Chapman University, pointed out, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, that "higher education is a labor-intensive industry rather than a capital-intensive one--that is, a college is more similar to a law firm than to an automobile manufacturer. Thus, a more relevant price index is the Services Consumer Price Index..." Whereas the C.P.I. shows a 55% cost increase since the base period of 1982-84, the Services C.P.I. indicates a 100% increase for the same period.

The A.F.T. *Part-time Faculty Issues* study states, "Between 1960 and 1993, the consumer

price index increased 488.2 percent; medical care 903.1 percent; education (per-pupil expenditures) 1,360.4 percent; and auto repair, only 550.6 percent." But, they add "that while technology can reduce labor costs and improve productivity for some enterprises, those that are labor-intensive (like education) will remain more expensive."

Larry Mitchell, of the Modern Language Association Committee on Professional Employment, writes, "...institutions have offset the skyrocketing costs of student services, library acquisition, technology, financial aid, security, compliance with federal regulations, and so on, by cost-saving strategies in the area most under their control--faculty hiring and salaries." With great understatement, the Modern Language Association states that although adjunct (temporary and/or part-time instructors) "teach a significant number of courses...they do not usually receive pay and benefits commensurate with the professional services they render." While Parkland College pays part-time faculty better than most Illinois community colleges, part-timer compensation (per credit hour) is about one third (if one includes the fact that they do not receive medical benefits) of the average per-credit-hour compensation of full-timers. When a student signs up for a course, she or he has a 45% chance of getting a teacher who is being compensated at one-third of what the faculty of the other 55% of courses are earning. In Parkland College's own self-studies (done occasionally for submission to our accrediting institution, North Central Association of Colleges), it has acknowledged that "Like full-time instructors, current part-time instructors are experienced, both in teaching and in other professional employment." Part-time faculty are full-fledged professionals, with many years of teaching experience and, in many cases, many years of service to Parkland (in fact, more than one third of Parkland's part-time faculty have taught for more than ten semesters at Parkland). A few different surveys done on campus suggest that approximately half of these instructors would like to have full-time teaching positions. Instead, many teach the equivalent of full-time (by augmenting their semester limit of 12 credit hours with summer semester teaching) and gross less than $18,000, and without receiving any benefits. A part-timer who has been teaching at Parkland for twenty years earns the same as a first year part-timer.

One long-time part-timer at Parkland, Jane Thompson, wrote,

> I spent many years preparing myself in my area of expertise. I continue to read extensively, attend conferences, and attempt to remain open to new ways to serve my students more effectively. Some of the most rewarding experiences in my life have involved my teaching here at Parkland and participating in college activities--student club meetings, the annual international dinner, field trips, and many more. I continue to believe that Parkland is an invaluable resource with a vital mission to fulfill.

Many in higher education are beginning to worry that we will gradually stop attracting such dedicated faculty as this, as higher education increasingly gains a reputation for exploitation of faculty. Jane Thompson was instrumental in the unionizing efforts of part-timers three years ago. In a letter to part-timers, she wrote,

> We who serve as part-time faculty here at Parkland teach because we love teaching and are devoted to our students and to our careers as college educators. Those of us who have become involved in this organizational [unionizing] effort have done so because we are convinced that *when faculty members have representation, feel valued, and believe that*

they are being fairly compensated for their contributions to the college, the quality of education that their students receive will be enhances.

In his 1993 book, *The Cost of Talent*, former Yale University president Derek Bok raised concern about the decreasing quality of teachers that can be expected if we do not manage to make the field more attractive financially. Surely, the prospect of having a fifty percent chance of earning less than $20,000 annually, without benefits, is not going to attract a large proportion of America's motivated workers to the field of education. Regarding teachers in general, Bok writes, "Teachers today typically rank somewhere near the bottom third of their college classes. They are further below the average in college grades and test scores than they were in 1970... Once hired, they often work under conditions that deaden motivation..." Bok cites the considerably lower college board scores of educators compared to other professional, as well as the inordinately low percentage of Phi Beta Kappas going into education.

Nationwide, college faculty (particularly part-timers) are turning toward unionization in the hopes of making the profession more attractive. Even full-time faculty are recognizing that the treatment and compensation of their part-time colleagues is a commentary on how much they (the full-timers) are valued as well. Not only does this over-use and under-pay of the hypertrophied part-time segment of faculty reflect upon the regard in which the field of higher education is held, but it also places greater responsibility on full-timers to do the program development, student advisement, and other duties that should, ideally, be spread among a much larger number of faculty.

Both unionizing as well as government measures (such as Illinois Senate Bill 1376) to address the inequities are regarded with anger by administrators and people at large who are concerned about their property taxes and who would rather close their eyes to the gross inequities that exist around them. Many prefer to be angry at the unions rather than to acknowledge and address the inequities that have forced people to turn to unions. In his second campus-wide e-mail at Parkland, regarding SB 1376, Kevin Northrup communicated what tends to be a strong public sentiment, that "The Community College System has taken a firm stance to oppose any legislation which would: Decrease local control of governance of our individual community colleges, and Impose unfunded mandates upon our colleges, taxpayers, and students." Of course, when Kevin states that "The Community College System" takes this stance, he apparently does not consider as part of the community college system those faculty members (quite likely the majority) who would welcome such legislation.

Generally speaking, Americans have a healthy skepticism toward being controlled by larger agencies, whether it be unions, government, religious institutions or otherwise. Particularly in the shadow of the Reagan years and amid the Gingrich congressional influence, we are suspicious of government mandates and weakening of local control. However, as a nation, we also tend to recognize how much uglier our workplaces and neighborhoods were and would continue to be if the national government had never stepped in with anti-trust laws, labor laws, union protections, and civil rights laws. In other words, we are also leery of being controlled by corporations, as well as by corrupt and prejudicial local constituencies.

Rousseau pointed out that those qualities in humans that render government necessary are the very qualities that make governmental abuses inevitable. This sentiment in great part undergirds our American system of checks and balances, with local, state, and federal governments hopefully serving as checks upon one another.

Similarly, we benefit from on-going tension and balance between private enterprise and public spending. Unfortunately, the legacy of Reagan has been, as Paul Goldberger of the *New York Times* put it, "to have devalued completely the importance of the public realm and to have raised dramatically the value we place on the private realm..." The excessive neglect of the public realm is evident in the gross over-use and under-pay of part-time faculty, and this can only bode badly for the field of education. As Derek Bok puts it, "No reasonable person would deny the importance of the private sector or dispute its claim to a generous share of exceptionally talented, creative people. The question is how large that share should be and what claims can reasonably be made by occupations, such as school teaching and government service..." Bok also makes the unarguable point that although few people enter education to make a lot of money (as should remain the case), "prospective teachers need to earn a minimum amount to support their families and live a life they consider adequate...the most talented candidates are especially responsive to higher pay."

A former part-time instructor at Parkland had written, anonymously, in a Humanities Department newsletter, "My frustration isn't really ever about my own status as part-time or full-time. Now I'm wondering if I even want to be a part of a profession that, in addition to the typical racial/gender discrimination, has developed and depends on its own system of oppression, exploiting more than half of the people within the profession. I don't think I could feel any better about it regardless of which side of it I was on (part- or full-time). How can we, as a profession, be our most effective when there is that awkwardness of status and money dividing and splitting?"

That this situation does indeed divide faculty is exemplified by this, written in the Spring 1994 *Common Ground*, Parkland's part-time faculty newsletter: "From a top administrator at Parkland College in response to two considerate (full-time) faculty members who dared raise the issue of part-time recognition: '*Keep the bottom line in mind. More for them means less for you.*'"

The division of faculty has come to the fore again in the past year. Ostensibly to encourage early retirements, Parkland's full-time faculty salary negotiating committee developed, with the administration, a Professor Emeritus status that would allow retire faculty to teach part-time at Parkland, receiving the pro-rated wages of their last full-time year for their part-time instruction; for these wages, they (like part-timers in general) would not be obligated to do any work beyond the teaching of their classes, and they would also retain seniority in selecting which classes they would teach. This means that a retired former full-timer could teach at Parkland for up to $7000 per three-credit course, in contrast to a part-timer who, even if s/he has as much experience as his or her retiring full-time colleagues, would receive approximately $1800 for doing the exact same work. The implementation of the Professor Emeritus program has been stalled so far by the part-timer union. Some administrators at Parkland contend that the program would, ultimately, help part-timers by opening more full-time positions sooner, but there still seems to be no absolute assurance being made that retiring full-time faculty will in fact be replaced by new full-timers. Full-timers nearing retirement, feeling a sense of entitlement to this Professor Emeritus option (which had never, until it was created over the past two years, been a consideration), resent the intrusion of the part-time union. Unfortunately, the indignance of many of these full-timers toward the part-timers seems not to be matched by indignance at the abysmal compensation that part-timers receive (and that many of these retiring full-timers apparently would disdain receiving).

Were part-timers being properly utilized by colleges (to bring in faculty for courses, such as in business or in health fields, where one may find qualified instructors who have well-paid full-time professions, but who, as tends to be the case with the dentists who help out in Parkland's Dental Hygiene program, teach more as a service than for the income), then the issue of compensation would not be so critical. But by gradually extending the use of part-time faculty, colleges have failed to demonstrate the national leadership that we should expect from our institutions of higher learning. We should be embarrassed that UPS had a much-publicized nationwide strike over the excessive use of part-timers, while we show few signs of acknowledging the proverbial elephants in our academic department offices. It would be a shame to think that in those very institutions where citizens are supposed to be able to learn how better to participate in and contribute to our society, we are demonstrating an attitude of, "Well, there's nothing we can do about it."

Nationwide, college and university leaders should be helping to organize and to pressure our federal and state legislators into recognizing that we are gradually steering a dangerous course. In the short-term interests of protecting tax dollars, we are establishing a long-term erosive pattern. Should the United States social security system become partially privatized, it would not be so dire as it will be if the institutions that are to embody free exchanges of ideas were to continue privatizing their various functions. Rather than lead to protect colleges and universities against moneyed interests, administrators are rapidly developing commercial partnerships. In his essay "Digital Diploma Mills," David F. Noble writes that college campuses have been identified as lucrative places for businesses:

> ...a change in social perception which has resulted in the systematic conversion of intellectual activity into intellectual capital and, hence, intellectual property... The first [phase]...entailed the commoditization of the research function of the university, transforming scientific and engineering knowledge into commercially viable proprietary products that could be owned and bought and sold in the market. The second...entails the educational function of the university, transforming courses into courseware, the activity of instruction itself into commercially viable proprietary products that can be owned and bought and sold in the market.

Whereas education has always been a labor-intensive service institution, it is threatening to become a capital-intensive manufacturer of workers. The more beholden we become to private industry, and the more teachers are replaced by technology, the less universities and colleges will be open forums for the exchange of ideas and for the education of a citizenry capable of questioning and challenging moneyed interests.

One central function of the United States government has traditionally been to retain a balance between protecting individuals' rights to pursue wealth and to protect people at large from oppression and excessive exploitation by moneyed interests. Should the latter half of this equation erode, then obviously the former erodes--the greater the dominance of private capital interests, the fewer individuals there will be who have the opportunity to pursue prosperity. And the more that the diverse functions of education are replaced by narrowly utilitarian functions, the more susceptible Americans become to tyranny by the few.

The trend potentially works against even the long-term interests of the vast majority of moneyed interests. David Wessel, the Chief Economic Correspondent of the *Wall Street*

Journal, wrote, "The issue isn't whether the government should expand its role in higher education. Doing so is one way for it to arrest the trend toward widening inequality and help spur growth. With ideas and skills, as opposed to natural resources, increasingly important to economic growth, the social benefits of a better-educated population are large." Wessel has pointed out that even in such areas as automotive repair, employers have found it beneficial to hire students who have earned Associates degrees, with all the accompanying liberal studies courses, rather than students who have only studied car mechanics; with engines (and technology in general) changing so rapidly, employers benefit from hiring people who can learn and communicate. But these more spontaneous and amorphous capabilities of humans will not be as broadly-developed should educational institutions begin allowing its human resources to be replaced by technology, and its diversity to be replaced by utilitarianism. Out of fostering short-term interests, we may be doing vast damage to our long-term interests.

Gradually, unions and state legislatures are attempting to address the inequitable compensation of part-timers. In California, the legislature is considering a bill that would mandate, according to the AFT's *On Campus*, "pro-rata pay for community college part-time faculty who would be compensated on the same scale as full-time faculty..." Another bill in California would create 2,000 new full-time faculty positions in the community colleges over the next five years.

Illinois Senate Bill No. 1376 is not likely to get much attention. But hopefully with growing national awareness of the inadequacies of current educational funding, we will soon begin seeing rectification of the inequities, or we may pay, in the long run, a heavy price.

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