

Adjunct college faculty growing in state, nation

Tenured professors teaching a lower percentage of classes



George Kochaniec Jr. © News

Howard Flomberg, a part-time business teacher at varying times since 1978, conducts a class at Metro State. Flomberg said many of the 700 adjunct teachers at Metro are growing resentful because they don't receive the standard benefits that come with full-time employment.

**By Berny Morson, Rocky Mountain News
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The congenial professor with an office full of books and time for rambling after-class discussions is an endangered species in Colorado.

Under heavy budget pressure, the state's colleges and universities are increasingly delegating teaching duties to part-time employees - called "adjuncts" - who are hired for a single course, or to instructors who earn far less than professors and do not enjoy the job protection of tenure.

School leaders say part-timers bring real-world experience to practical courses in engineering, business, education or journalism, balancing the more theoretical approach of full-time faculty.

But they do not relate to students in the same way as traditional professors, says Metropolitan State College of Denver President Stephen Jordan.

"I can remember the times that we would go from class back to the department offices and sit down and talk with faculty," Jordan said of his days as an undergraduate at the University of Northern Colorado. "When we don't have full-time faculty, we deprive (students) of one of the most important parts of the collegiate experience."

Connecting students with traditional professors during their freshman and sophomore years could reduce Metro's high drop-out rate, Jordan said. Metro loses 38 percent of its students during their freshman year.

Fewer than 40 percent of Metro courses are taught by traditional faculty members, and many Metro students don't see an actual professor until their junior year.

Situation not unique

The issue is not unique to Metro - or Colorado. Nationally, 65 percent of higher education teachers in 2003 were not traditional tenured professors or employees working toward tenure, according to a survey by the American Association of University Professors.

Just over 43 percent of faculty were in the nontenured categories in 1975, the AAUP reported.

"Part-time faculty often don't even have basic things such as offices, campus e-mail addresses, campus telephone number," said John Curtis, the AAUP's research director. "It makes it very difficult for students to have access to those faculty outside of class."

Metro's Jordan raised the issue last fall with the legislature's Joint Budget Committee. He'd like to raise the number of courses taught by traditional professors to 60 percent.

But Sen. Abel Tapia, D-Pueblo, the JBC chairman, said earlier this month that he sees no short-term improvement in higher education funding.

That could change over the next few years, since Gov. Bill Ritter has cited higher education as a priority, Tapia said.

No state agency keeps employment records on all Colorado schools.

But officials at several schools report a decrease in the number of courses taught by traditional professors.

During the 2005-06 school year at the University of Colorado's Boulder campus, a traditional professor stood in front of only 28 percent of classrooms, compared with 40 percent in 1997.

One reason why is that nontraditional teachers earn far less than regular professors.

Instructors - full-time employees, but without the job protection of tenure - earn an average salary of \$47,000 per year at CU, compared with an average of \$88,000 for traditional professors. They are hired on three-year contracts with no guarantee of renewal.

Pay for adjuncts hired to teach a single course for one semester can be as low as \$4,000 in the journalism school to as much as \$10,000 for specialists hired in the college of engineering.

Instructors receive health and retirement benefits; adjuncts do not.

Suzanne Hudson earns \$36,000 a year as an instructor in CU's composition program. She teaches three courses a semester.

Hudson, who has taught at CU for 17 years, says instructors fear their contracts will not be renewed if they cross someone with power on campus.

"I feel very insecure," Hudson said. "It shouldn't be this way. If after seven years

we've proved ourselves to be worthy teachers and servants to the university, then the university ought to allow us to stop reapplying for our jobs every three or four years."

Budget pressures key

Seven years is the probationary period for tenured professors. Public school teachers receive tenure after three one-year probationary contracts.

Boulder campus Chancellor Bud Peterson said CU is not able to make long-term financial commitments to instructors.

"When you've got budget pressures, that influences how long a commitment we can make," Peterson said.

"I don't feel like we're in a position to make a career commitment to these individuals," he said. "If we could do that, we'd increase the number of tenure-track people."

Of the instructors' fear that they will be the first to go if CU's finances worsen, Peterson said, "I'm afraid that's not far from the reality."

At Metro, part-time business teacher Howard Flomberg said many of the 700 adjuncts are growing resentful of their working conditions.

"They don't get health care. They don't get vacation. They don't get, basically, anything," said Flomberg, who has taught computer courses off-and-on at Metro since 1978.

Flomberg also had a career in business and gets health care as a veteran.

Pay for a single course at Metro ranges from \$2,550 to \$3,000 per semester, with the majority at \$2,865.

Some adjuncts cobble together a full-time job by teaching at two or three schools.

"They're all teaching for the state, so they're really employed full time by the state, but because it's part time at two or three institutions, it's not full time as far as benefits are concerned," Flomberg said.

Some Metro students say adjunct professors have fewer teaching skills.

Full-time professors "just have more confidence in themselves," said Justin Fierstein, 20, a junior majoring in business. "The less-experienced adjuncts just really stick to the book."

But Chelsey McKinnon, 19, said she has better rapport with the adjunct faculty.

"The only real difference I see is, the real professors feel that they're more of an expert and are a lot more closed-minded, whereas our part-time professors that are working in the field have a very different insight," said McKinnon, a junior majoring in marketing.

She's had no problem contacting her adjunct professors, who taught more than half of her courses.

"The ones I've had will give you their e-mail, and they're really good about responding that way," she said.

Veronica Laroche, 28, a sociology major, had problems a few years ago when a part-time professor misrecorded her grade. It took weeks to clear up the mess, which threatened her financial aid.

"So you're in a round robin of events that could be solved with a full-time faculty member on campus and available," she said.

Who's who

College and university teachers fall into several categories:

- Tenured professors: Traditional professors with job protection.
- Tenure-track professors: Employees working to achieve tenure during a probationary period.
- Instructors: Teachers hired on a contract basis. They do not have tenure and contract renewal is uncertain.

- Adjuncts: Teachers hired for specific courses. They don't have long-term contracts, but can be hired multiple times.
- Teaching assistants: Graduate students who preside over classes.

Producing credit hours

Colleges and universities measure productivity by the number of credit hours students complete. Most courses carry three credits toward graduation. The number of credit hours produced by full-time faculty members with tenure or eligibility for tenure has declined in recent years. Part-time teachers or instructors not eligible for tenure account for more credit hours. Here is the percentage of credit hours produced by traditional faculty members at selected Colorado schools:

Campus '99-00 '00-01 '01-02 '02-03 '03-04 '04-05 '05-06

University of Colorado, Boulder 45% 44% 43% 42% 43% 42% 40%

Metropolitan State College of Denver 46 43 41 40 37 37 37

Colorado State University, Fort Collins 53 51 51 47 48 47 43

University of Northern Colorado, Greeley * * * * 59 49 45 * *Figures Not Available Source: University Of Colorado, Metropolitan State College Of Denver, Colorado State University, University Of Northern Col ...*

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