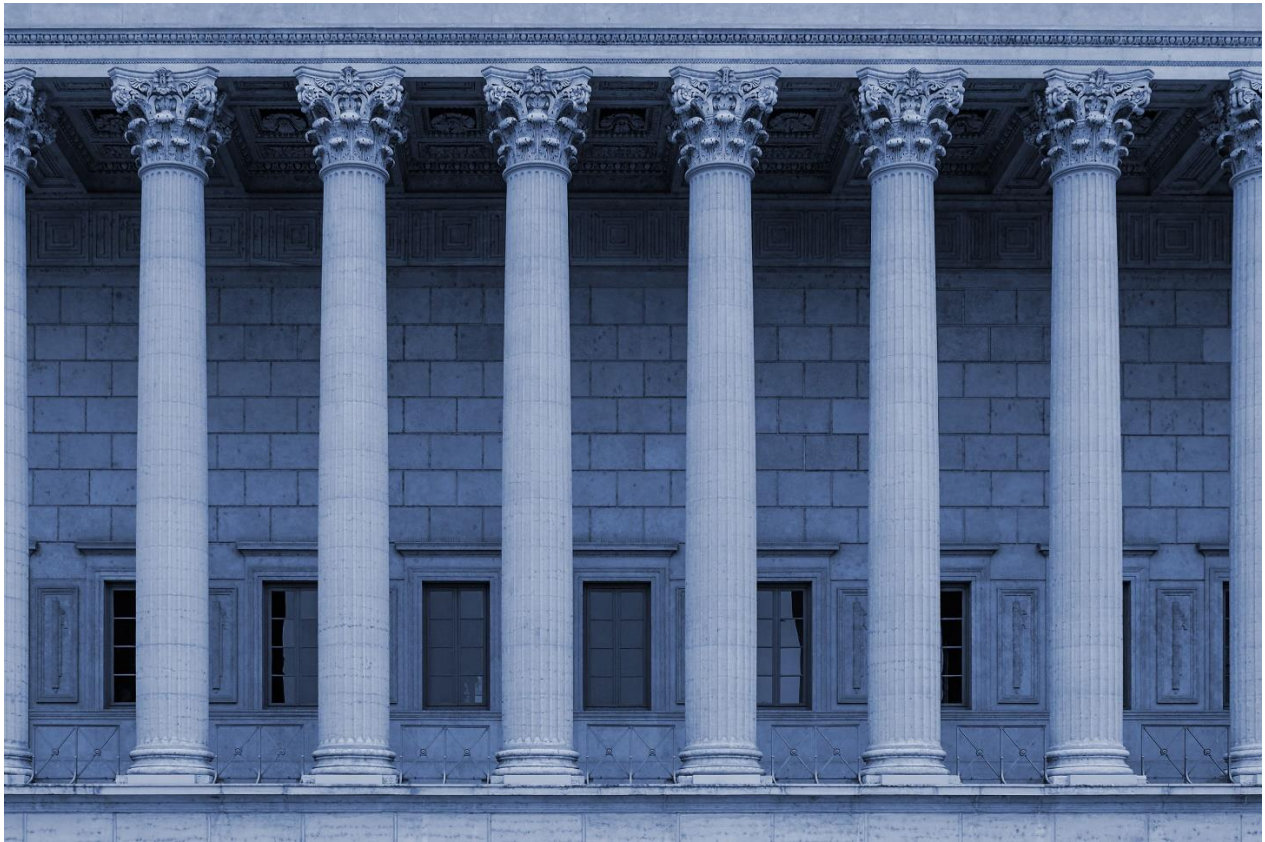


April 11, 2018

# THE RISE OF ADJUNCT FACULTY: A BRIEF HISTORY



A few decades ago, a college professor who only taught part-time was fairly uncommon. Today, non-tenure track and part-time faculty are not only commonplace, they're the majority.

The rise of part-time faculty — often referred to as adjunct professors, instructors or lecturers — has been an ongoing trend for many years now. According to a 2011 study from the [American Association of University Professors \(AAUP\)](#), an estimated 56 percent of college professors are part-time or full-time, non-tenure track faculty members. Newer reports reveal that roughly 75 percent of instructors teaching in classrooms today [are off the tenure track](#). On the flip side, full-time or tenure-track professors make up just over 20 percent of faculty at colleges and universities in the U.S. Even the top schools, including Harvard University and other Ivy

League institutions, often rely on adjuncts or non-tenured professors to fill their teaching positions.

It didn't always used to be this way. This major reversal in higher education has been a swift, and somewhat surprising, phenomenon. In order to understand what's going on at colleges and universities today, it's important to look at how adjuncts replaced tenured professors as the norm.

## How the Higher Ed System Changed So Fast

The move toward hiring more part-time and non-tenure track instructors began about 40 years ago. In 1969, roughly 78 percent of faculty members at colleges and universities in the U.S. [held tenure or tenure-track positions](#). Non-tenure track or adjunct roles accounted for only about 22 percent. Back then, the majority of students at schools in America were educated by tenured or tenure-track professors. Now, many students might take a class from a tenured professor just once a semester, or only in an upper-level course.

What caused this change? First, you have to look at the steady increase in college tuition over the past few decades. Prior to WWII, a college education was considered a privilege reserved for the wealthy elite. Following [the passing of the GI Bill of Rights](#), eight million military veterans enrolled in college. Because so many vets went off to school, this made the idea of getting a college education seem like an affordable, attainable prospect for the average American. Attendance at colleges and universities grew significantly. From the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, many colleges and universities partnered with federal programs to offer grants and student financial aid to students.

In the mid-1970s, the U.S. economy began to falter, signaling the end of the Post-WWII economic boom. The Vietnam War, globalization, the oil crisis and the stock market crash all contributed to the 1973-'75 recession. In academia, college tuition rates and fees rose faster than the inflation rate. Private loans began to replace federal grants as the main source of financial aid for students from middle-class and lower-class backgrounds. Colleges and universities started to lose their state funding. In an effort to cut costs, schools decided to swap out tenured and full-time teaching jobs for a cheaper option: adjunct and part-time professors.

## Why College is More Expensive Now — and What the Cost is for Professors

Today, getting a degree isn't cheap. There are a few theories as to why higher education is so expensive now. Lack of state funding, the availability of student loans, shrinking endowments, the increase in pay for executive and administrative positions, the high cost of new buildings and facility upgrades, and [luxury amenities intended to attract prospective students and their parents](#), might all contribute to the soaring price of higher ed.

As colleges and universities look to trim their budget, reducing the number of tenure-track and full-time professor positions has become quite standard. Currently, many colleges and

universities rely on adjuncts and part-time professors. What was once a rarity — hiring a professor to teach only a few classes — has now become the rule, not the exception.

## The Adjunct Model is Here to Stay

In looking at trends in higher education in the past four decades, it's unclear — and in some ways doubtful — that colleges and universities will start to make a big push toward hiring more full-time and tenure-track professors. At certain schools, adjunct professors have [voted to unionize](#) or are attempting to [negotiate better contracts](#).

Much of the news surrounding the uptick in adjunct faculty is negative or pessimistic. However, others argue that, for adjunct professors themselves, there are potential upsides. In the U.S. and around the world, higher education is considered more valuable than ever before. Some in academia see [an increasing appreciation for lifelong learning](#) and new opportunities in the global marketplace for experienced and qualified teachers.

The reality is that higher education is changing — and has to make changes to support and protect professors. There are many debates within academia about the tenure system, which doesn't work for every instructor with a passion for teaching. Also, not all lecturers want to be on the tenure track. The system of higher education needs to find a way to work with professors who have different career paths and teaching objectives.

## Time for Teachers to Look Beyond the Classroom for Opportunities

No one really knows what higher education will look like in the future. For professors themselves, it's important to remember the pivotal role they play beyond the halls of academia. The [AAUP](#) states that academic freedom is a professor's right to “teach, both in and outside the classroom, to conduct research and to publish the results of those investigations ... Professors should also have the freedom to address the larger community with regard to any matter of social, political, economic, or other interest.”

Along with education, professors play a crucial part in our government and society. Professors have a wealth of knowledge, research skills and teaching experience that is extremely valuable. In many ways, college professors are an instrumental element of the business world. Remember, thanks to the GI Bill, many members of the “Greatest Generation” — the veterans who fought in WWII and then went on to start some of the biggest and most successful companies in the world — were educated by professors at colleges and universities following the war.

## A New Way for Adjuncts to Get Ahead

If some colleges and universities aren't investing in adjuncts, it's time for part-time and non-tenure track professors to invest in themselves. *Inside Scholar* is a resource that works to *bridge the gap between academia and the business world*. By connecting professors with the right tools

and information, *Inside Scholar* helps adjuncts, part-time and full-time instructors find opportunities beyond higher education. *Inside Scholar* also aids companies, businesses, entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and colleges and universities in finding the best and most-qualified professors, researchers and consultants teaching experience and advanced degrees.

It's time for adjuncts to start [acting like free agents](#) and make use of their academic freedom to “teach, both in *and* outside of the classroom.” Keep reading *Inside Scholar* to learn more about the future of higher education, adjunct teaching, and how to navigate the business world as a professor.



### Todd Wallis

An entrepreneur & veteran adjunct professor of 10 years, Todd holds multiple degrees including a Master's in Information Systems from the University of San Francisco, a Master's in Telecommunications Management from Golden Gate University, an MBA from the University of Phoenix, and a bachelor's degree from the University of Arizona.

<https://insidescholar.org/the-rise-of-adjunct-faculty/>