

Senate Bill 746 – Education – Community Colleges – Collective Bargaining

SUPPORT

Dear members of the Finance Committee:

My Name is Jon P. Stanton, Ph.D. I am a research psychologist. I have lived in Anne Arundel County for over 40 years. Almost 30 years ago, I first taught at Anne Arundel Community College as an adjunct. I then went to the College of Notre Dame of Maryland— subsequently re-named as Notre Dame of Maryland University. I remained there as a tenured Full-time professor for twenty-five years. I retired from full-time teaching there in 2014 although I continue to teach there in both the Psychology, Criminology, and Math departments as an adjunct (NDMU refers to adjuncts as “associate faculty”, incidentally). I also began in 2016 teaching again at AACC.

As a career college professor, when I returned to AACC I was horrified by the change in treatment of Adjunct faculty. Twenty-five years ago, the use of Adjuncts as community college was a rather casual affair, and proportionally there were many, many less of us. The department chair would call me and ask if I wanted to teach a course (or courses). Typically, these were off-core time classes, or remote locations (read: courses the full time faculty didn't want to teach). The pay was low, but we were given a roster, a textbook, a room assignment, and a “have a nice semester.” As an academic professional, that was all I required. There was never a problem, classes to teach were always available. Adjuncts were professionals in their field, or retired from full-time teaching. It was more of a “compensated” avocation, or a salary supplement. There were no benefits, there was no private or even semi-private office space. But those things were less important.

That model of adjunct faculty use by the community college has not changed in 25 years. The compensation is still amazingly low (less on a per-hour basis than say, a police officer). The more time one puts into the class, the lower that fixed-compensation becomes on an hourly basis.

As enrollments grew in the early 2000s, so did the number of people graduating with Master's degrees. People with Master's degrees have almost no chance of securing a full-time position at a four year institution, so their professional advancement as a college professor was limited to adjunct faculty positions.

The huge increase in students (more challenged ones at that) did not result in a significantly larger number of Full-time faculty within individual departments. Indeed, why should it? A huge labor pool of adjuncts was there, and the traditional adjunct model use is very low-overhead. Perhaps not surprisingly, Adjunct faculty use rose to levels today such that often 60-70% of courses taught at community colleges are by adjuncts. Is this a match made in heaven? Not exactly.

With so many people in the labor-pool, college demands on these adjuncts increased. Available courses are sent out on a spread-sheet in my department to “qualified” adjuncts to request assignments. “Qualified” means the potential adjunct has attended countless webinars on college policy, training on ever-changing Learning Management Systems, and even departmental retreats—*none of which* is compensated. Academic qualifications and experience is less valued than being a team player. The college creates a surplus of class offering in the hope they will populate. If they lack a certain number of students, the class will be cancelled, and the adjunct is just out of luck. If a full-time faculty member has a class that does not populate, departments will pull the class from the adjunct so they can meet contract requirements of full-timers. Adjuncts are flex-labor like temps as Amazon during the Christmas holidays. This can happen sometimes within a day or two of the class starting—meaning in the middle of the adjunct’s preparation for the course. There is no real adjunct contract, just a check box on a web page which actually states they can revoke it for the above reasons. Other than some community rooms with a few open desks and a microwave, there are no office spaces for private consultations with students (which, incidentally, probably borders on a FERPA violation). If I need to have a serious conversation with a student—be it a grade issue or a career planning conversation, it is probably going to happen in the classroom as one class is leaving, and another is coming in or in the parking lot.

Meanwhile, those adjunct professors struggling to put enough courses together to pay their mortgage often have to hop in their cars after class and strike-off for some adjunct position at another campus or school. I had a non-traditional student recently asked if he could just chat with me for a bit about a career in my field. For me, that seems like a primary function for a college professor. That was not possible with schedules and location problems, and frankly, compensation issues. I think we lost one, there.

Covid has been devastating for many professions. It has especially impacted adjuncts as courses have been slashed, and re-configured for asynchronous learning. Those of us teaching last spring had to reconfigure courses and again, learn new technology. There was no compensation for that. An adjunct either does what they are told, or they don’t get offered courses anymore.

Adjuncts are often forced to teach classes the way the department decides they should be taught, right down to how to set-up the gradebook (which incidentally, the administration monitors—again possibly a FERPA issue). Yet adjuncts are often given no say in how their own classes are to be run. Valid performance reviews do not exist. Finally, if an adjunct has a scheduled class pulled or cut, collecting unemployment is resisted by the college as they readily apply Md. Code Sec 8-909 policy which in *no-way* fits the adjunct model.

Clearly, advantage is being taken of adjuncts—who more and more are being “ridden hard, and put -up wet.” But the current effort to bring representation is not just about the abuse—inadvertent as it may be, but about the quality of the education we are providing students. Low pay, very difficult working conditions, and really a systemic lack of respect for adjunct faculty is adversely affecting the delivery of a quality educational product.

But the abuse of the adjunct model for staffing college courses, however inadvertent it may be, is an inequity unlike any other collection of State employees must endure. This contingent needs to have sufficient representation to allow reasonable compensation and/ or respect for their efforts. I fear if they do not, the business model for higher education will continue to drive the quality of a college education even further down. It is going to get what it pays for. That makes it a community problem. Penny-wise and pound foolish, is no algorithm for higher education.

Therefore, I urge you to vote "yes" on SB 746 and strongly request a favorable committee report.

Sincerely,

Jon P. Stanton, Ph.D.