

The Story of the Affiliated Adjunct

A Report to the Oakton Community by

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Introduction: A Hybrid Academic is Born at Oakton Community College

In the negotiations between the Adjunct Faculty Association (AFA) and the Oakton Administration, 60 “full-time adjunct” positions were agreed as part of the 2013-2017 contract. The positions would be paid at the same level of the adjunct faculty member’s normal pay, but with the security of 12 credit hours per semester for the year, health benefits, and some additional assignments (committees, meetings) at no additional pay. These new positions were named “Affiliated Adjuncts.”

Towards the end of the academic year, I constructed and circulated a survey among these new academics, with 22 responses, a fairly high return rate. This brief report relates what I have found through the survey process and some interviews of the “Affiliates.” The comments presented here show how the nature of the position was understood by the participants. (All comments in this report are from the surveys).

“The insurance is great. The whole reason for the job title is to supply a fig leaf for giving insurance to some people without calling them full-time employees, which has legal ramifications.”

“For over ten years, I have been able to carry a load of 30 or more LHEs per academic year. With the implementation of new policies by the Administration as a direct result of the Affordable Healthcare Act, this was the only way to continue to earn enough to support my family and our lifestyle. The ability to buy into the health insurance plan was also a plus. Previously, I’d had to purchase a private health insurance plan. This benefit saves me around \$10,000 a year.”

“I need Health Insurance!”

Part 1: The Decision

What were the deciding factors in a part-time faculty member's decision to accept full-time work? Part of the explanation lies in their previous part-time work, for the candidates for the affiliate status had heavy teaching loads the previous Spring Semester of 12 LHE hours. On the survey the main reason checked for considering the position was "More job security," which 81 percent chose. Not a reason, but consideration was "Feeling thankful to the AFA for negotiating these posts" (76 percent). A majority also chose: Health insurance coverage (67 percent) and "A sense of being recognized/rewarded" (also 67 percent); "Greater inclusion and participation in the OCC community" (57 percent), followed by "Greater acceptance and respect from full-time faculty and administration" (52 percent). Fewer affiliates chose Income, Other benefits, Opportunity for full-time work later, or Luck for their decision. Almost half were thankful for the Administration for providing these posts. While job security ranked highest, health insurance was the most discussed in the comments. For those who lacked it, health insurance was of critical importance.

Here are the comments on this decision.

"My main reason for accepting the affiliate post was STABILITY"

"I applied for Health insurance coverage and job security."

"My main interest was, second, GUARANTEE OF 12 LHEs and first, HEALTH INSURANCE."

"My main reason for accepting the position was to get health insurance. Nothing else mattered; I would have said Okay to anything to get the insurance."

"My family has health insurance now. That is the ONLY benefit."

"The main benefit is health insurance. Only 1/3 of the affiliates took it. If there were a way to offer the affiliate status to those who need health insurance, that would be great. But I don't know how this could be done."

"I want to be able to teach as many students as I am allowed being an affiliated adjunct."

“What attracted me was the opportunity to continue to teach >27 LHEs, as this is my primary source of income.”

“Becoming an affiliated adjunct was the only way to keep the hours I need to pay my bills.”

“I applied in order to pay my bills, needing health insurance I could afford.”

“If I didn’t want to secure a position because this is my job, I wouldn’t be an affiliate. There are no added benefits.”

“I was seeking greater inclusion and participation in the Oakton community.”

“Anything adjuncts can get needs to be accepted with the hopes of getting more.”

“It was offered to me and I accepted.”

For questions about any concerns that led to hesitation about taking the post, the only concern voiced by more than a handful was “Uncertainty about renewal of the affiliated adjunct position” at 43 percent.

“My concern about applying was the uncertainty of it all.”

“I accepted without hesitation.”

“What concerned me was my commitment to other activities: family, professional, volunteer, Uncertainty about what exactly would be my new responsibilities.”

“My concerns [about becoming an affiliate] were enough time to perform all duties; commitment to other activities: family, church, professional, volunteer... I also have chronic health issues.”

“The affiliated adjunct positions gives little security, because we have to apply every year. We get health insurance, but only for a year. After the year ends, what are we supposed to do about health insurance?”

In retrospect, these affiliates were looking forward mainly to a more secure and recognized place at OCC, along with health insurance coverage. Even with the affiliated position, however, many affiliates voiced concerns that the post would not last, and while welcome, it was not seen to be that much better than their

previous work at 12 LHEs a semester. Other factors, such as more income or opportunity, were secondary.

Part 2: Comparisons

To questions about how their affiliate work compared with previous adjunct work, most responses indicated “No change,” including the affiliate’s length of the work day or week, time spent preparing for classes, and time spent with students. However, more time on average was spent interacting with full-time faculty and administration, and to a lesser degree, with part-time faculty. Work stress and stress at home was reported to be exactly the same, and financial stress was not lower than before. Nonetheless, the affiliates reported they were more satisfied with their academic career choices and with Oakton as an employer, along with less concerns about health insurance coverage. OCC appears to have gotten a bargain by creating these new posts, for the average report that they spend more time preparing for each course they teach.

“Nothing has really changed [on becoming an Affiliate] in the relationships that I have with my Department faculty, staff, and administration.”

“I have always carried a pretty full load. As an Affiliated Adjunct, I am simply allowed to continue to do this.”

“There’s not enough difference to speak of.”

“My spending time on different types of work was mostly the same [as being part-time]. I attended more meetings and became more involved with Oakton, Part-time and Full-timers.”

“Being an Affiliate is almost a Full-time position at a part-timer’s pay.”

While the affiliates were reporting that their new work had changed little, the security and recognition reported in their reasons for taking the post appear to have had a considerable impact, leading to greater job satisfaction with Oakton and with their academic career choices.

“I like being at Oakton”

“I am grateful to have received more consistent work.”

“Obviously I’d rather just be full-time so I can stop teaching elsewhere, but it’s definitely better than just being an adjunct.”

“I enjoyed the vast majority of the extra time spent as an affiliate.”

Part 3: The Details of the Affiliates’ Work

The average work week reported by the Affiliates was 44.7 hours. There was a lot of variation in the hours reported, possibly because the survey did not clarify a difference between “Counselling and Advising” and “Office Hours.” Only Counseling and Advising was included on the survey. So the total may understate the actual work week. The breakdown for a week’s work is: Class preparation: 5.5 hours; Writing and Grading Exams/papers: 6.9 hours; Hours in the classroom teaching and setting up: 14.9; Counseling and Advising: 3.0; Meetings: 2.5; Professional Development: 1.5; Social Activities: 1.0; Research: 2.6; Administration: 1.9; Commuting/Travel between campuses: 4.4.

Studies of full-time faculty time use at four year institutions show a similar total work week, but with less teaching and more research. The College is getting a lot for their money: Full-time work for part-time pay, but with benefits.

Part 4: Selection and Renewal of the Affiliate Contract

Affiliates and others reported wide variations among departments in how affiliates were selected originally, with some departments selecting few or none, others asking around for anyone who was interested in the post. When the application process was made more regular during the Spring Semester, many adjuncts and some affiliates were still uncertain who would qualify or had to apply for a renewal. In fact, one affiliate wrote on the survey that he or she had not reapplied, but planned to do so soon. This was long after the deadline for applications had passed!

Several affiliates responded that they were confused about the process of reapplying. Several others commented that they didn’t like the temporary nature of being affiliated, and wanted it to be permanent. The experiences reported were quite varied, as follows. Of the 21 reporting, 15 reapplied for the post, and

6 did not. Of those 6, one was reappointed anyway, and three reported they would have reapplied but missed the deadline or were uninformed about the process. Two actually wrote that they didn't know until they read in the survey that they had to reapply. Of the 15 who did reapply, one was already turned down, three were extended, 7 expected to be extended, two did not expect renewal, and one didn't know. As a result, half of the Affiliates were extended or expected to be.

"I cannot understand why since we are employed, why we have to renew the employment!"

"I didn't know there was a renewal process. How does that work?"

"I feel it was ridiculous to have to apply for the same job each year. This is a form of torture, and it made me literally sick with worry. Renewal of affiliated status is completely arbitrary. Thankfully, the Dean and Chair are serious people."

"I didn't know that one could go from being an affiliate to being a 'non-affiliated one.' How does that work?"

"How does this renewal work? This process is confusing."

"Uncertainty about renewal continues to be a concern, particularly for those Affiliated Adjuncts (like myself) who opted to buy into the health insurance benefits. Not being renewed would mean losing that benefit as well as losing LHEs, and therefore, salary."

"I don't like the fact that this is a one-year, renewable position. Once an instructor has achieved the position of Affiliated Adjunct, he/she should not have to go through the formal application and interviewing process every year. Especially for some of us, health insurance is an issue."

"I will be EXTREMELY upset if I lose this position. I've already been renewed for 14/15, and I would hope to continue in the position beyond that."

Part 5: Affiliate Satisfaction and Evaluations

Several survey items on a checklist referred to their new Affiliate role. Only one or two respondents chose the alternatives that mixed one role (full-time) with the other (adjunct), except for “An adjunct with some full-time characteristics.” More popular were “Still an adjunct” and “Glorified adjunct, but still an adjunct.” Two-thirds (68 percent) selected “Still an adjunct” or “Glorified adjunct,” or both. In short, although there was a new, legal role of full-time adjunct, most felt that their situation was not really new, merely more stability and benefits as an adjunct. Their comments demonstrated that they were acutely aware that these added benefits were only temporary and didn’t like it.

In general, the Affiliates reported that they were “Satisfied” (but not “Very Satisfied”) with aspects of their new role, and with the role in general. Less satisfaction than satisfaction was found for only one item: “Keeping your adjunct pay level while doing full-time work.” A second was lower than the others, but closer to “satisfied:” “The obligation to do committee and advising work in exchange for benefits.” All other satisfaction questions were reported, on average, as “Satisfied.” The most satisfactory across the board was “Professional development from the experience.”

“WE NEED A LONGER TERM. 1 YEAR IS TOO SHORT TO CANCEL YOUR INSURANCE, TAKE ON OAKTON’S INSURANCE THAT DOESN’T MATCH WITH THE SCHOOL YEAR’S BEGINNING AND ENDING DATE.”

“The problem is the pay is still less than full-time but the affiliate is expected to attend all meetings without compensation. Since I am working more than I have, to attend the meetings isn’t realistic if they are held at various times that aren’t around my class schedule.”

“My concern in taking the post was LOSING INSURANCE AFTER JUST ONE YEAR.”

“The Affiliate should be more than 1 year position if you are getting health insurance and canceling your previous health insurance to be on Oakton’s policy.”

“The affiliated adjunct position should be permanent and we should get full-time pay and benefits.”

Looking forward to eventual return to the adjunct role, the Affiliates checked two main concerns: about the effect on pay (57 percent) and health insurance (48 percent). About their feelings on that eventual return, two stood out: “Will feel ‘demoted’” (38 percent) and “Have a sense of loss” (33 percent).

Part 6: Other Findings

Two clusters of responses were found using some advanced statistics (SPSS) on the data file. These clusters are tendencies, which may not characterize any one respondent, or may overlap.

There is a cluster of responses that are interrelated about stress. Note that the questions refer to whether the respondent is having more, less or the same as when working previously as an adjunct. More Work stress and More Home stress are highly correlated ($r = .82$), and also correlated with More or the Same Financial stress ($r = .60$ and $.57$). These three join dissatisfaction with one’s academic career. It is not surprising that dissatisfaction also extends with Oakton as an employer and Less time available for personal activities, family, social, hobbies, and leisure.

Another set of correlations appear to show that those reporting a More “Long Day/Week” are different from the ones reporting more stress. Instead, those with the “long day” also report more time spent with students ($r = .69$), with full-time faculty and administration ($r = .43$) and with part-time faculty ($r = .49$). However, reporting a long day also correlates negatively with satisfaction with Oakton as an employer ($r = -.39$) but not with one’s academic career. Naturally, a long day correlates with both more reported hours for class preparation ($r = .52$) and more time in class preparation than as an adjunct ($r = .54$). Yet those with a long day were significantly more likely to take the work for a sense of recognition than others ($r = .57$). Curiously, those accepting a long day with more interaction on campus were seeking and responding to recognition, but were not more satisfied with OCC as their employer.

In an unusual comparison, we can compare Satisfaction with the affiliated post with the reasons respondents cited for taking the post in the first place. What we find is that satisfaction is not related to choosing the post for the reasons of job

security, pay, health care or other benefits, but with Acceptance and Recognition. There are different ways of interpreting this result. One is that the tangible benefits of pay, contractual security and benefits were not great, while the intangible Acceptance and Recognition were more salient or better than expected. A second possibility is that when thinking about returning to one's regular adjunct post, those intangible benefits will continue, with stronger relationships with others and greater commitment to Oakton.

Part 7: Relations with Other Adjuncts and Full-time Faculty

Two questions asked if the affiliate had been encouraged to apply (in the first place) by either colleagues or by administrators. Thirty-eight percent had been so encouraged by either or both sources. These respondents are somewhat different from the others, in that they report a higher concern with inclusion when accepting the post and more hours in their workweek after taking it.

Aside from the survey results, several candidates nominated for the affiliate positions were conflicted about the matter of other adjuncts in need of health care and stable income. If the adjunct already had health insurance, the feeling was that it would be inappropriate to claim the affiliate post when someone else needed it more. None of these concerns appeared on the surveys, but in conversations around the time of the nomination and selection process.

When reporting on these findings to the adjunct faculty in general, I received some comments that appear to show some friction between the regular and affiliated adjuncts. The comments were that a few affiliates were less likely to interact with other adjuncts as equals, but one or another acted in a superior way, giving orders or making criticisms of the regular adjuncts. This is unfortunate, and may reflect the reaction of very few of the affiliates, but that is enough to create a bad impression.

On the other hand, the full-time faculty appear to have welcomed the affiliates, at least superficially. I myself was congratulated on becoming an affiliate by full-time faculty, on my appearance at a general meeting. The assumption was that I had been "promoted," since I was seen as being active on campus. Of course, in reality I was never considered for an affiliate position.

Conclusions

The Affiliated adjunct is a hybrid, the result of an experiment being carried out among us without full knowledge of how it would work. Everyone involved, administration, the AFA, the Oakton Trustees, the Affiliates and other faculty are all to be congratulated on taking the risk of doing something new. The experiences of the affiliates who answered the survey are important to take into account, and their suggestions for improvement in the affiliate system are presented at the end of this report.

Here is a brief summary. The affiliates found their experience to be satisfactory in general, and it brought benefits to Oakton in the form of more work, more time given for each course than previously, more security for most, and especially more satisfaction with the affiliate's academic career and with Oakton as an employer. As a minority found the experience to be stressful and unsatisfactory, it would be worthwhile to look further for the difference between them and those who were generally pleased with their experience. Many of the concerns about being an adjunct in general affected the responses. These include the general expectations that being a college professor would be associated with recognition, respect, and inclusion in the campus community, and the three basic problems of insecurity, low pay, and lack of benefits. Also, questions came up about orientation for new Affiliates, Professional Development and support specifically for them, and directions for their supervisors. The need for surveys to follow up this unique experience is clear to me, and I hope the administration will eventually see the need for faculty and staff surveys that are written by and for our own faculty. As in the AFA Adjunct Survey of 2013, we find that affiliated adjuncts are motivated by intangible (and not costly) treatment including respect, inclusion, and acceptance, as well as by pay and benefits.

This is the point where I emphasize that the Affiliated Adjunct Survey and this report from it are not official products of the College or the AFA, but are my own. I especially appreciate the efforts of the Affiliates who responded, and of the AFA leaders who are posting my results on their website. Thank you all.

Suggestions and Comments from the Affiliated Adjunct Faculty Surveys

The affiliated adjunct experiment is not over, but will continue to be worked on and improved. It also has opened the door to consider improving the adjunct experience in general. We can consider the possibility of a “part time affiliate,” in which adjuncts in general have a year contract, providing the job security normal professionals require to plan their lives and organize their courses. The contract could be at any number between 3 and 12 LHEs a semester, with benefits scaled accordingly. These partial benefits, such as partial payment for health insurance, could be provided for such adjuncts, in return for attending some meetings and/or committee duties. If we are all “affiliates,” then no affiliate would be “demoted” and lose health benefits or security, only receive them at a somewhat lower rate if there are workload changes from one academic year to the next. As for now, these are major concerns among the affiliated adjuncts. Other comments follow.

“The affiliated position is not needed. Use the length of time teaching and expertise to fill [full-time] positions by those who have shown commitment to Oakton, are dependable, and are the one experienced...”

“More training for the affiliates, more explicit explanations about opportunities that pertain to being an affiliated adjunct [are needed].”

“Comparing the salary schedule in the Full-time Faculty Contract with that of the Adjunct Faculty Contract, there is a HUGE difference in salaries. I understand that FT Faculty are required to serve on College committees and to oversee schedules and curricula, but we do have the same LHE load requirements / options.”

“Being an Affiliate means actually making less money because the contract only allows for the person to work at one school.”

“I wasn’t much interested in the benefits [of being an affiliate] because my ultimate goal is to get full-time employment at Oakton.”

“My suggestion is perhaps an increase in pay and the opportunity to teach 5 classes. Not having the affiliate position as a temporary one.”

“Affiliated Adjunct positions should be divided more equally around the college.”

“Really, the bottom line is that Oakton needs to hire more full time faculty. They should feel obligated to ‘do the right thing’ and hire more full time faculty. They know they are getting a bargain using adjuncts. I know all colleges do it. Its almost like women getting an average of 71% of the pay that a man gets. At Oakton, the adjuncts get 25% of what the full timers get.”

“VERY DISAPPOINTED THAT AFFILIATED ADJUNCT POSITION WAS NOT EVEN OFFERED AGAIN (in a large department).”

“PROVIDE FOR ANY ADJUNCT THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENROLL IN OAKTON’S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM AND PAY THEIR OWN BENEFITS. IT IS CHEAPER AND BETTER TO JOIN A ‘GROUP’ PLAN THAT BUYING INDIVIDUAL PLAN. AFTER ALL, OAKTON GIVES INSURANCE TO ITS ATHLETES. WE REALLY NEED TO LOOK INTO THIS. ATHLETES GET FREE INSURANCE AND ADJUNCTS DON’T!”

“My suggestions are to give the affiliated adjuncts higher pay and paid vacation benefit time; not much time left for travels or vacationing when obligated to teach all 3 semesters of the academic year.”

“We hear that adjuncts are appreciated. I am sure we are because we work hard and are dedicated, but do not get the pay or benefits of full-time faculty. We add a lot to the college, but are not respected.”