

# Update

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## Part-time Faculty Members

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to introduce some preliminary data regarding part-time faculty at the college level. Part-time faculty members are an important part of the college and university community. In 1993, there were 899,000 college instructors, of which one-third, or 304,000, worked part-time. Since they teach roughly 25 percent of all college level classes, part-time faculty provide colleges and universities the opportunity to expand their curriculum at a relatively low cost. They also free full-time faculty to spend more time on research and to be more selective about teaching assignments.

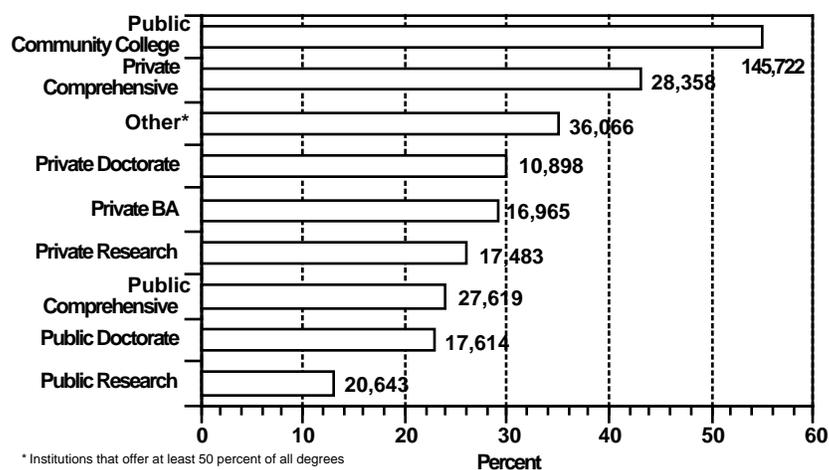
There has been a great deal of speculation about part-time faculty because so little information is available to describe them. In the fall of 1992 the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education undertook a nationwide survey of college and university faculty members to rectify this omission. They surveyed a sample of faculty members in the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:93) that provides the basis for this report.

Part-time faculty are defined by responses to the question: "Did this institution consider you to be employed part-time or full-time?"

Part-time faculty members are not short-term, casual labor. The aver-

Figure 1

### THE NUMBERS OF PART-TIME FACULTY



\* Institutions that offer at least 50 percent of all degrees in one discipline, i.e., nursing.  
Source: 1993 NSOPF

age part-time faculty member has been employed at the same institution for 5.4 years. They teach a relatively high course load, averaging 1.8 classes in each enrollment period.

### Where Do They Teach?

The use of part-time faculty members varies by institutional type. Community colleges lead the list with 55 percent of the faculty members employed part-time. Nearly half (48 percent) of all part-time faculty members are employed in community colleges. (See *Update*, Vol.1/No.1)

Among four-year institutions, private colleges and universities are more likely to use part-time faculty members than public institu-

tions. Research universities are less likely to use part-time instructors than other types of institutions within the public and private categories. (The study does not include graduate teaching assistants.) (Figure 1)

### What Do They Teach?

The majority of part-time faculty members, 88 percent, teach in the classroom, 4 percent provide clinical services, and 2 percent report their principal activity as research. The rest of the assignments accounted for less than 1 percent of the cases each.

One-third of the part-time faculty members teach either humanities or natural science, with health science in third place.

Compared to full-time faculty members, those who teach part-time are more likely to teach humanities, education, business, or fine arts. (Figure 2)

### How Much Are They Paid?

Part-time faculty members who work in research universities make more than those who teach in non-research institutions. This parallels the income trends for full-time fac-

ulty members working at the same institutions. (Figure 3)

### What Else Do They Do?

Part-time faculty members employed elsewhere have 1.7 jobs on average in addition to part-time teaching. One-third of the part-time faculty members work in other educational settings, ranging from elementary school to college. (Figure 4)

### Who Teaches Part-time?

This study confirms that women are more likely to teach part-time than men. Forty-two percent of the women faculty members teach part-time compared to 29 percent of the men.

The only noticeable effect on racial and ethnic diversity introduced by part-time faculty members is the fact that Asians are less likely to teach part-time than other racial/ethnic groups.

Part-time faculty members are either older or younger on average than full-time faculty members. This phenomenon is consistent with the fact that new faculty members may ease into the profession in stages while older faculty prepare for full retirement by cutting back on their course loads or that full-time positions are limited for recent graduates. (Figure 5)

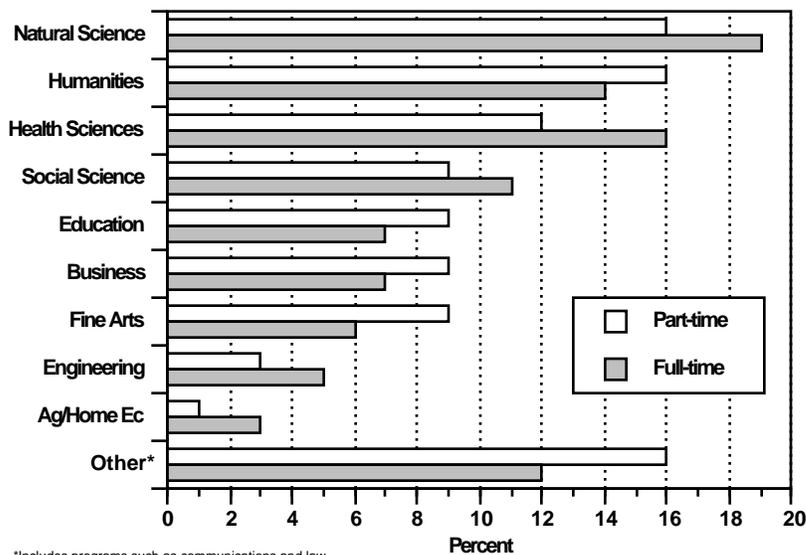
Part-time faculty members are less likely to have a Doctorate or Professional degree than full-time faculty members. This result does not support the proposition that there is a large group of unemployed Ph.D.s eking out a living as part-time professors. The relatively small number of part-time faculty members with a doctorate is explained, in part, by the fact that community college faculty members comprise such a large share of the part-time teaching pool. Community college faculty members are less likely to have a Ph.D. or professional degree than faculty members in 4-year institutions and those who teach part-time in community colleges had fewer graduate degrees than those teaching full-time. (Figure 6)

### Why Do they Teach Part-time?

Part-time faculty members were asked why they held a part-time position. It appears that most

Figure 2

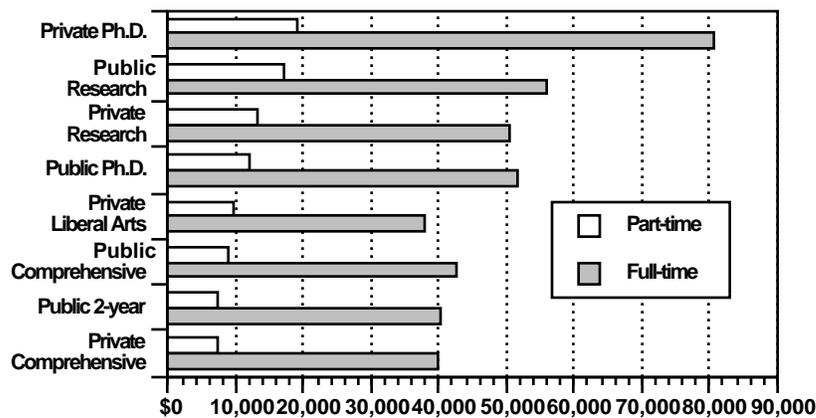
#### MAJOR TEACHING AREAS



\*Includes programs such as communications and law.  
Source: 1993 NSOPF

Figure 3

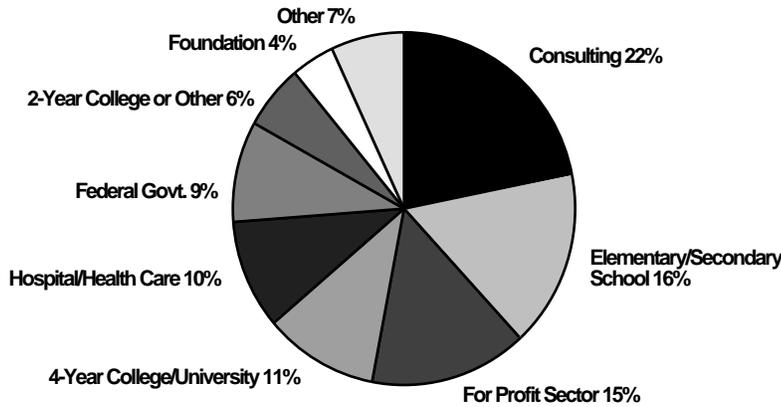
#### COMPENSATION (BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION)



Source: 1993 NSOPF

**Figure 4**

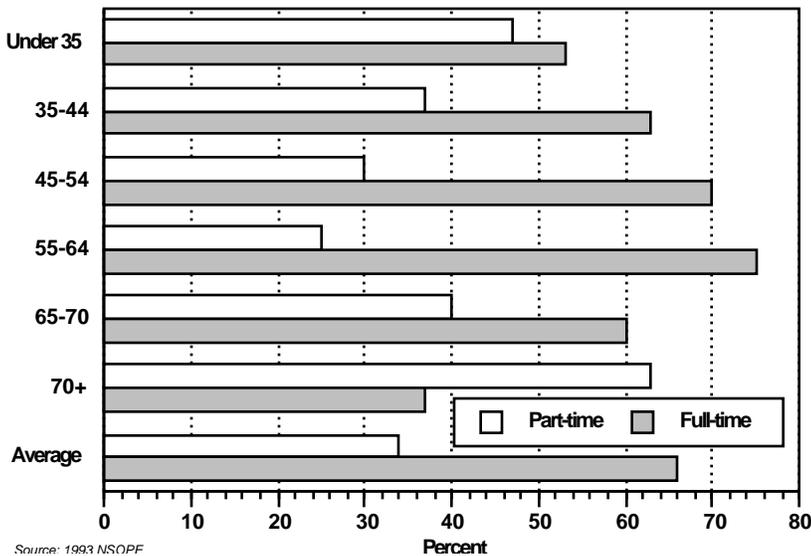
**OTHER EMPLOYMENT**



Source: 1993 NSOPF

**Figure 5**

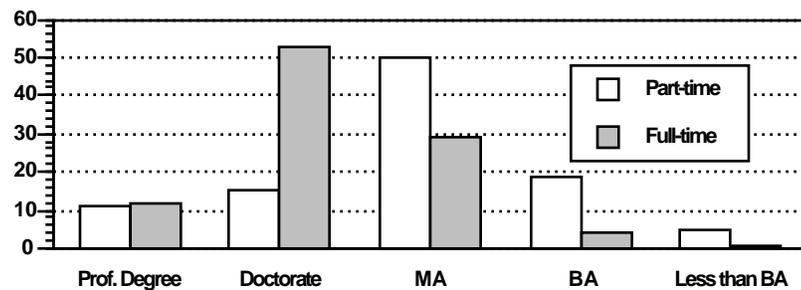
**AGE OF FACULTY**



Source: 1993 NSOPF

**Figure 6**

**DEGREE LEVEL**



Source: 1993 NSOPF

faculty members who teach part-time do so because they enjoy working in an academic environment and want to supplement their income. The fact that 43 percent said that no full-time position was available suggests that many part-time faculty members are waiting for a full-time position. Figure 7 is a rank order of their responses. (Respondents could select more than one reason.)

There are differences between men and women part-time faculty. More men (53 percent) than women (47 percent) preferred part-time work; more men (59 percent) reported supplementing income compared to women (41 percent); and more women (57 percent) compared to men (43 percent) reported finishing a graduate degree.

**Conclusion and Summary**

Part-time faculty members are an important part of America's teaching force. They teach one-quarter of all the classes in colleges and universities. The use of part-time faculty members is not evenly distributed among institutional types, however. Nearly half of all part-time faculty members teach in community colleges. Private colleges are more likely to use part-time faculty than public colleges among four-year institutions.

Three important factors distinguish part-time from full-time faculty. First, the proportion of women who teach part-time, 42 percent, greatly exceeds the proportion of men, 29 percent. Second, older and younger faculty members are more likely to teach part-time than those in their middle years. Both those entering and leaving the profession appear to use part-time teaching as a transition to their new status. Third, part-time faculty members are less likely to have a Doctorate than those who teach full-time. This difference may be explained

by the fact that so many part-time faculty members work in community colleges where all faculty members are less likely to have terminal degrees than those teaching in other types of postsecondary institutions.

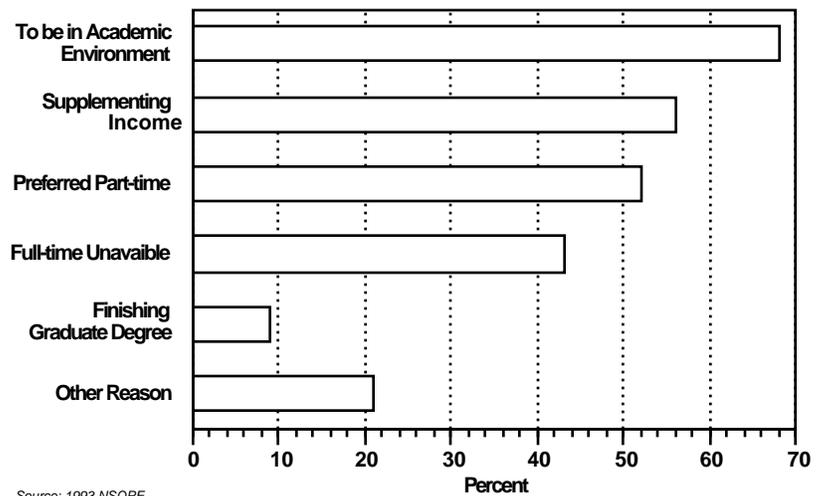
For many part-time faculty members, their part-time status is not their employment preference. Forty-three percent of the part-time faculty indicated they were working part-time because no full-time position was available. For others, teaching part-time is a way to supplement their income. Over half (52 percent) of the part-time faculty preferred working less than full-time.

Part-time faculty members provide colleges and universities with a reliable and inexpensive source of quality instruction. Many bring valuable professional experiences and insight to their classes. They allow full-time faculty more freedom to pursue research and be more selective in the courses they teach.

Part-time faculty members have become a stable part of the teaching capacity of colleges and universities. They return year after

**Figure 7**

**REASON INDICATED FOR TEACHING PART-TIME**



Source: 1993 NSOPF

year to teach their classes, and are not simply temporary workers who disappear after a class or a year. They obviously enjoy their relationship with the academic world, even though it is limited financially.

This preliminary study gives some very general information regarding the role of part-time faculty fills at colleges and universities. It does not address the issues this data raises, such as: why do pri-

vate colleges seem to utilize more part-time faculty than public universities, what types of courses are the part-time faculty teaching (i.e., entry level courses versus mid to upper level courses), and why do women represent such a high percentage of part-time teachers. More data is needed to answer these questions and to help further define the contributions part-time faculty make to college level education.



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