

Thousands of Part-time College Faculty Join the Ranks of Unemployed but are Denied Unemployment Benefits

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June 5, 2010 (FPRC) -- New Faculty Majority (NFM) recently announced a national campaign to help eligible adjunct college and university faculty obtain unemployment compensation in between academic terms. Many instructors don't check to see whether they are eligible. Others are denied on grounds of having reasonable assurance of re-employment, a phrase in federal law whose invocation by postsecondary employers has been challenged, most successfully in California and Washington, by arguing that employment which depends on variables like enrollment, funding, and administrative prerogative cannot constitute reasonable assurance.

Federal law ensures unemployment compensation for unemployed workers, but a narrow exception in the federal law pertaining to academic workers (i.e., primarily K-12 teachers) has expanded over time to include part-time college and university professors who are paid very low wages--often without health benefits or retirement--effectively denying these workers access to unemployment benefits.

NFM is dedicated to achieving professional equity and advancing academic freedom for all adjunct and contingent faculty in American colleges and universities through advocacy, education and litigation. NFM seeks the greatest possible degree of economic justice and academic freedom for all faculty and is committed to creating equitable, stable, non-exploitative academic environments that improve the quality of American higher education.

Adjunct faculty are professors and instructors who work term-to-term, often at multiple institutions, just to cobble together some semblance of a living. They constitute 73% of the postsecondary instructional workforce nationwide, numbering over one million. They have the same responsibilities to their students as full-time, tenure-track faculty, but they usually work for a fraction of the per-course compensation—often without benefits or adequate professional support. Their ability to secure union support is often restricted.

According to Maria Maisto, President of NFM, 'Many adjuncts teach a full-time load and still qualify for public assistance. Work is scarce between terms. Institutions should not obstruct eligible contingent faculty from access to unemployment insurance, one of the few economic rights that contingency, by definition, affords them. In other industries, seasonal employees who face similarly precarious circumstances do not have to prove 'no reasonable assurance'; neither should college teachers who are denied continuing contracts. This situation stems from higher education's overdependence on contingent employment, which is devastating the teaching profession and is detrimental to education.'

The NFM Unemployment Compensation Initiative website (www.nfmuci.org) provides information on eligibility, applying, and on appealing denials. It also includes links to available union resources. NFM will collect statistics about institutional and state practices in order to advocate for clarification of applicable state and federal unemployment laws. The initiative is part of a broader effort to enlist

public support for the reform of faculty employment practices in postsecondary education.

NFM is a membership organization dedicated to improving the quality of American higher education by encouraging stable, non-exploitative work environments, advancing academic freedom, and achieving professional equity for all faculty. Its primary activities are education, advocacy, legislation and litigation.

Contacts:

Maria Maisto, President maria.maisto@newfacultymajority.info

Matt Williams, Vice President matt.williams@newfacultymajority.info

Ph: (202) 580-8341

www.newfacultymajority.org

Contact Information

For more information contact Matt Williams of New Faculty Majority (<http://www.nfmuci.org>)

202-580-8341

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