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ADJUNCT FACULTY COMPENSATION MODELS

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In the following report, Hanover Research studies adjunct faculty compensation models and trends based on the most recent comprehensive survey data from the American Association of University Professors and the American Federation of Teachers.



INTRODUCTION



Higher education institutions are facing pay issues, leading to negotiations and strikes at multiple institutions for increased faculty and grad student pay. In this brief, Hanover Research (Hanover) outlines national trends in adjunct compensation, benefits, and employment contracts at higher education institutions.

KEY FINDINGS

Adjuncts face employment, food, and healthcare insecurity. A 2022 survey of adjuncts indicated that less than one-quarter have contracts providing continued employment, and most are only offered part-time work despite desiring full-time status. In addition, many report food insecurity and a lack of healthcare coverage leading to putting off medical care. Slightly more than half are also relying primarily on their own employment, with only 48 percent reporting other household income.

Adjuncts earn approximately \$3,900 per course on average, with many earning less than \$26,500 per year. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) reports that across surveyed institutions, the average per-course compensation was approximately \$3,900 with rates ranging from \$3,200 to \$4,900 depending on institutional category. According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), more than one-quarter of adjuncts in a 2022 survey earned less than \$26,500 per year and the percentage of faculty below the poverty line has remained consistent with prior surveys.

Adjuncts typically do not have access to medical and retirement benefits. Across all national institutions surveyed by AAUP, fewer than half provide medical or retirement benefits to any adjuncts. Of those that do, most cover some adjuncts employed by the institution but not all. Another survey by the AFT indicated that only 45 percent of adjuncts have employer-provided health insurance.

CURRENT COMPENSATION PRACTICES

CURRENT STATUS

A 2022 [report](#) by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) provides some of the most current and comprehensive data on employment conditions among adjunct faculty. Their major findings, covered below, are based on survey data collected from 1,043 respondents working at two-year and four-year institutions in the United States.

FAST FACTS – 2022 AFT ADJUNCT SURVEY

Figure reproduces findings from the American Federation of Teachers 2022 [report](#).



More than one-quarter of respondents earn less than \$26,500 annually. The percentage of faculty respondents earning below the federal poverty line has remained unchanged through all three [AFT] reports, which is not surprising with real wages falling behind inflation throughout the academy.



Only 22.5 percent of respondents report having a contract that provides them with continuing employment, even assuming adequate enrollment and satisfactory job performance.



For 3 out of 4 respondents, employment is only guaranteed for a term or semester at a time.



Two-thirds of part-time respondents want to work full time but are offered only part-time work.



Twenty-two percent of those responding report having anxiety about accessing adequate food, with another 6 percent reporting reduced food intake due to lack of resources.



Only 45 percent of respondents have access to employer-provided health insurance, and nearly 19 percent rely on Medicare/Medicaid.



Nearly half of faculty members surveyed have put off getting needed healthcare, including mental health services, and 68 percent have forgone dental care.

PERCEPTIONS OF ADJUNCT FACULTY

The AFT's 2022 report, which is the third in a series of surveys conducted in 2019 and 2020, finds that 60 percent of adjuncts make less than \$50,000 per year and that "the majority of respondents told us they are paid less than \$4,000 per course." If these rates of compensation were extrapolated to a full-time, teaching-intensive 4-4 position, the annual pay would be \$32,000. Some 35.8 percent of respondents reported that they have applied for one or more public assistance programs.

Forty-eight percent of adjuncts surveyed by the AFT in 2022 [report](#) having other household income sources (e.g., spouse/partner earnings), so slightly more than half (51.6 percent) of adjuncts may be relying on their positions as their household's primary source of income. A sizable share of adjuncts who are their household's primary earners struggle to cover their expenses. The AFT survey found that only 15.5 percent of all respondents reported that their household "can comfortably cover basic expenses," so the share of adjuncts with either sufficient income or a second source of household income is just under two-thirds of adjuncts, or 63.9 percent. The remaining adjuncts report that they are "struggling" financially to the point of borrowing money, doing without, or not paying some bills (11.6 percent) or that they struggle during winter and summer breaks when they do not have teaching income (24.5 percent).

A 2019 [Washington Post story](#) contends, based on a 2014 congressional report, that 89 percent of adjuncts surveyed worked at more than one college, with 27 percent teaching at three institutions. Among 2022 AFT respondents who are classified as part-time faculty, 63.2 percent reported that they would prefer to be full-time. Potential exceptions include "community professionals who teach college courses as a sideline to their regular careers, or that they enjoy the flexibility that part-time work gives them."

TRENDS IN ADJUNCT COMPENSATION

COMPENSATION OVERVIEW

The AFT report asked respondents how much they earned, on average, for teaching a 3, 4, or 5-credit undergraduate course and found that more than half of adjuncts [report](#) earning \$4,000 or less. These findings are consistent with earlier studies, such as a 2014 congressional [report](#), which found that the median compensation for a three-credit course was \$2,700 and the AFT's [2020](#) adjunct report, which found that more than half of respondents earned \$3,500 or less per course. The congressional report also found little, if any, variation in compensation based on the time required to prepare for and teach a particular course:

Generally, adjunct work is piece work. These contingent faculty usually are paid a piece rate, a fixed amount of compensation for each unit produced, regardless of how much time it takes to produce. In this case, the unit of production is a college course.

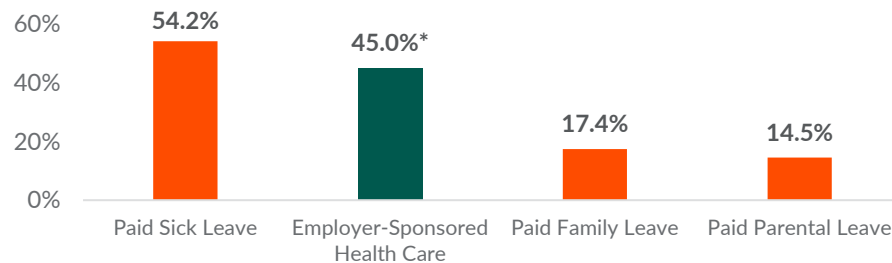
Notably, 41.4 percent of [2020](#) and 45 percent of [2022](#) AFT respondents reported receiving employer-sponsored health care, though only 25 percent of the 2014 congressional [report](#) respondents said the same. Institutions may have broadened their benefits offerings in the intervening years. The AFT overview of current adjunct benefits and compensation curve is shown to the right. Major findings include:

- One-quarter (24.5 percent) reported per-course rates above \$5,000.
- More than one-quarter (28.6 percent) earned \$3,000 or less per three-, four-, or five-credit course.

Among the adjuncts surveyed for the 2022 AFT study, 23.9 percent hold a doctorate, another 5.7 percent are ABD, and 41.4 hold a non-terminal master's degree. Terminal master's degree (e.g., MFA, MLS) and professional degree graduates comprise another 16.3 and 5.6 percent of the sample, respectively. Approximately 6.0 percent hold a bachelor's degree or less.

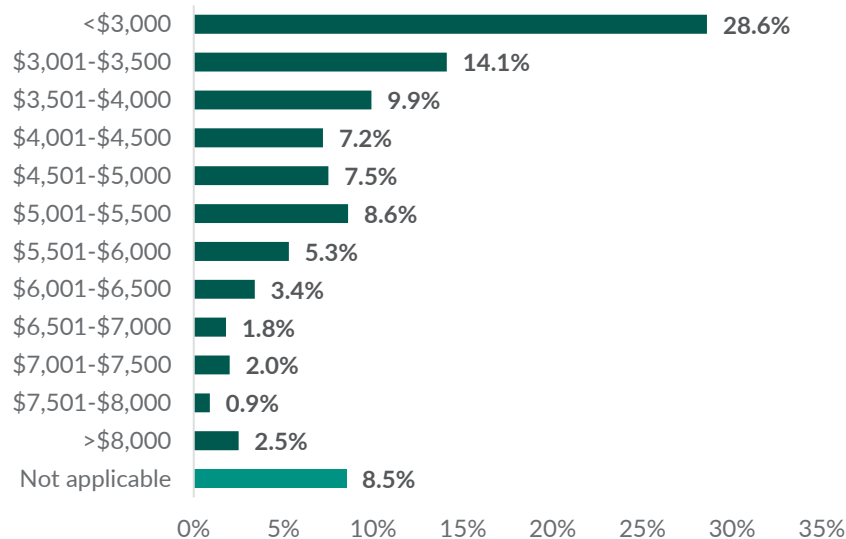
ADJUNCT MEDICAL AND LEAVE BENEFITS

Figure reproduces findings from the American Federation of Teachers 2020 [report](#). Bars depict the percentage of respondents who report receiving each benefit from their employer. The employer-sponsored health care figure (marked with an asterisk) reflects updated 2022 findings. Other items were not reported in the 2022 report.



ADJUNCT COMPENSATION PER COURSE

Figure reproduces findings from the American Federation of Teachers 2022 [report](#).



ADJUNCT ATTRIBUTES AND CONTRACTS

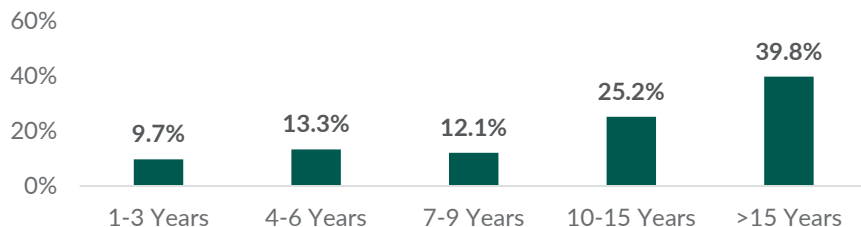
JOB SECURITY AND CONTRACT LENGTH

The majority of adjuncts surveyed by the AFT in 2020 have been teaching in higher education for more than 10 years and in both 2020 and 2022, the respondents most commonly receive a one-term or semester employment contract eight weeks or less ahead of the start of employment. Nearly two-thirds of 2022 respondents (65.9 percent) reported receiving their employment contract less than two months before the start of the semester, and 43 percent of 2022 respondents had less than one month of notice. The most common length of notice was two months or more prior to the start of classes, however, many adjuncts contend that their lead time is inadequate to prepare for their assignments:

Of the 264 respondents who commented on their job stability, an overwhelming 95 percent felt that they had no job stability and did not know whether they would be teaching courses from one semester to the next....More than 100 respondents said that, whatever notice they received for the coming semester's course assignments, it never provided sufficient time to adequately prepare for the course. ([Congressional Report](#))

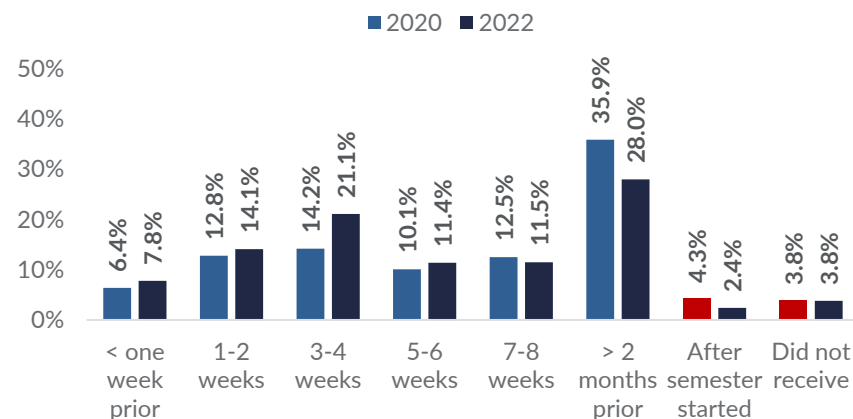
POSTSECONDARY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Figure reproduces findings from the American Federation of Teachers 2020 [report](#). Length of service includes years spent as a graduate teaching assistant. The 2022 AFT report did not update these data.



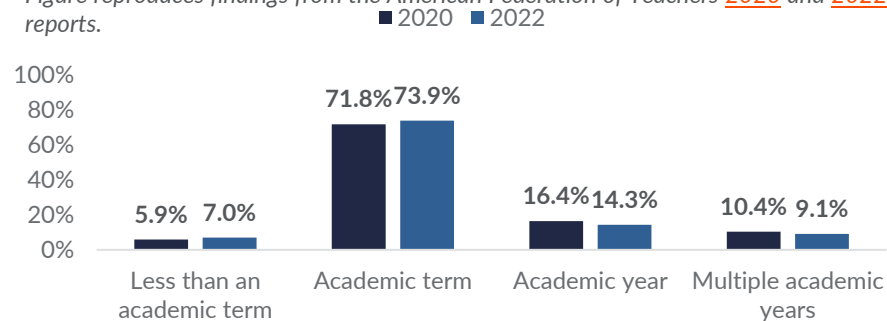
EMPLOYMENT LEAD TIME

Figure reproduces findings from the American Federation of Teachers [2020](#) and [2022](#) reports. Timespans shown are how far in advance of the first day of classes adjunct respondents received an appointment or appointment renewal from their institution.



LENGTH OF AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

Figure reproduces findings from the American Federation of Teachers [2020](#) and [2022](#) reports.



ADJUNCT COMPENSATION TRENDS - AAUP

AAUP DATA OVERVIEW

The average adjunct earns \$3,900 per course and does not have access to medical or retirement benefits, though specifics vary by institutional category. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) studied part-time faculty from more than 450 U.S. institutions for the 2021-2022 academic year. The course sections for which compensation is reported are those that meet the definition of an undergraduate class section for the Common Data Set for 2021-22. Essentially, this category excludes distance learning, noncredit, and individualized instruction such as music or art lessons. Internships and practica are also excluded. The AAUP salary and benefits data are normalized for a nine-month academic schedule and include institutional contributions for benefits where applicable. Benefits categories include medical and retirement offerings.

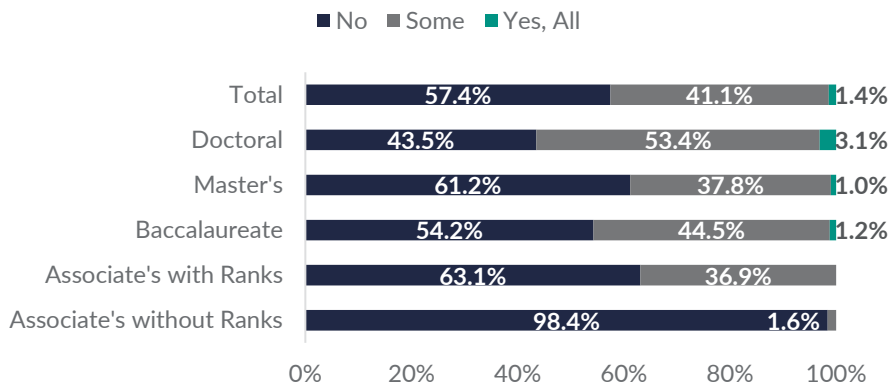
ADJUNCT COMPENSATION

The graph below summarizes the adjunct faculty pay per course section at national institutions of higher education for the 2021-2022 academic year, in thousands. Data derive from the [AAUP](#).



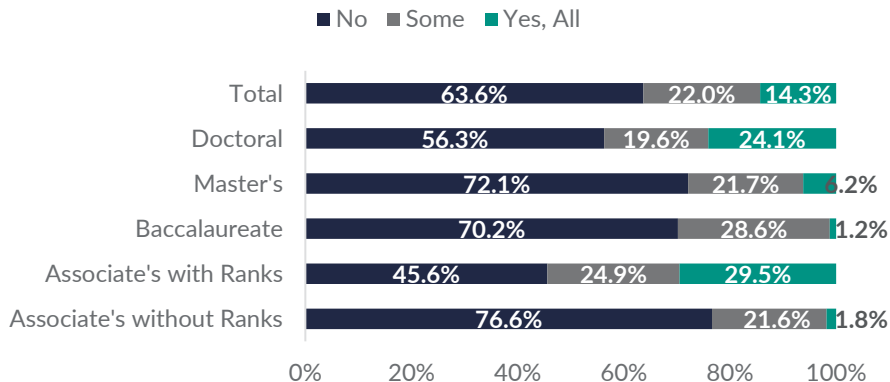
MEDICAL BENEFITS

The graph below summarizes the adjunct faculty benefits offerings of institutions of higher education for the 2021-2022 academic year by institutional AAUP category. Data derive from the [AAUP](#).



RETIREMENT BENEFITS

The graph below summarizes the adjunct faculty benefits offerings of institutions of higher education for the 2021-2022 academic year by institutional AAUP category. Data derive from the [AAUP](#).



ADJUNCT COMPENSATION TRENDS - AAUP

ADJUNCT COMPENSATION

The graph below summarizes the adjunct faculty pay per course at institutions of higher education by state for the 2021-2022 academic year. Arizona and Puerto Rico are excluded due to lack of data. Data derive from the [AAUP](#).

