



A Union of Professionals

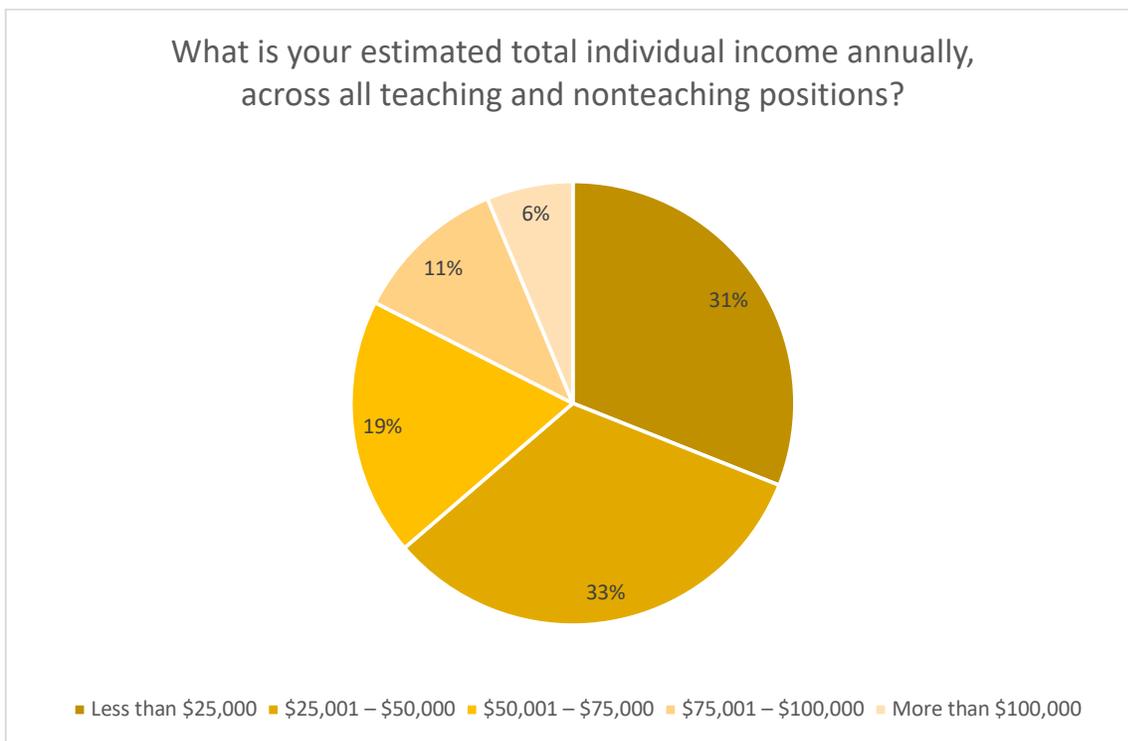
Contingent Faculty Quality of Work Life Survey

OCTOBER 2019

This report is based on the first nationwide survey of adjunct and other contingent faculty to be circulated since 2013. The 52-question survey was completed by 3,076 contingent faculty—adjuncts/part-time faculty, full-time nontenure track faculty, and graduate employees—between May 22 and June 30, 2019. AFT and our affiliates advertised the survey via email and social media. While the resulting sample is not random, taken together with other sources of feedback from and information about contingent faculty and their work/life conditions, we believe that the size of the sample allows us to draw some robust conclusions about the conditions faced by this new majority of college faculty in the United States.

LOW PAY AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

- A third of respondents earn less than \$25,000 a year, placing them below the federal poverty guideline for a family of four. Another third earn less than \$50,000, which keeps them just above the poverty line but trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty—never earning enough to reach financial security but not earning little enough to receive the assistance that would enable them to plan for their future.



The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

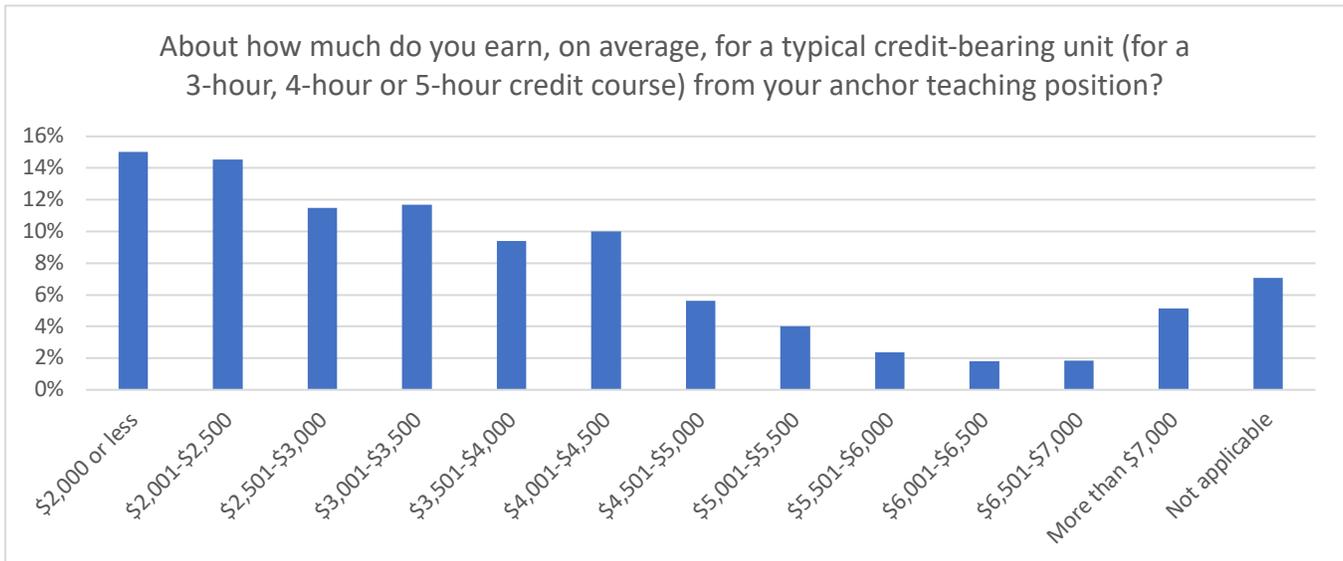
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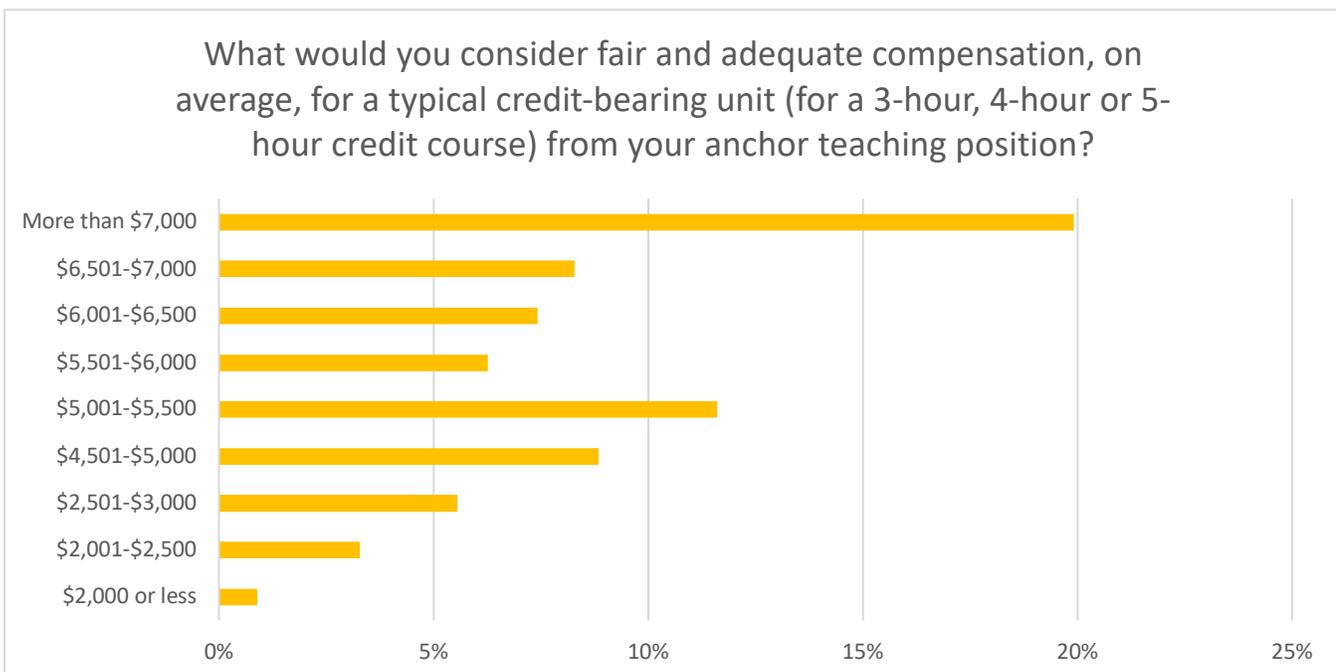
Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



- This low annual income is a consequence of the low pay for instruction. More than 41 percent of respondents told us that they are paid less than \$3,500 a course. Contingent work is not only temp work; it is piecework. As described in a report by the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, “The Just-in-Time Professor,” contingent faculty usually are paid a fixed amount of compensation for each unit produced, regardless of how much time it takes to produce. For these workers, the unit of production is a college course.¹ Teaching a “four-four” load (four courses over two semesters), as is typical of survey respondents, would lead to only \$28,000 in income before taxes and other deductions.



- Contingent faculty members want their contributions recognized with equitable compensation: More than 53 percent indicated that they believe at least \$5,000 a course would be considered “fair and adequate compensation.”
- Contingent faculty are not the only ones impacted by the poverty wages they are being offered. As when Jeff Bezo’s employees collect food stamps or enroll in Medicaid instead of receiving employer-paid benefits, taxpayers bear a significant portion of the hidden costs of low-wage faculty work. A substantial minority of survey respondents subsidized their low wages with public assistance: 25% of respondents applied for one or more public assistance program. (The survey asked about Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, Unemployment Insurance, Governmental housing assistance, and Medicaid). This finding affirms “The High Public Cost of Low Wages” report by the UC Berkeley Labor Center, which found that 25% of part-time college faculty received some form of public assistance.



¹ House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, “The Just-in-Time Professor” (January 2014).