

Post-Secondary Adjunct Instructor Career Path Exploration

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Introduction

This article provides information about a career as an adjunct instructor. This information may be useful in helping those who are attempting to pursue a career in post-secondary education and those who are interested in adjunct or part-time instructor work. The following information will be presented in the order of responsibilities, how to become one, pay and benefits, job outlook, and an interview with someone currently working in this occupation.

Responsibilities:

Adjunct instructors are not full-time employees of a college or university. Rather, they are part-time employees who often teach classes for multiple institutions or work another full-time professional position elsewhere while teaching as an adjunct. Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez, and Muth (2010) in a conversation, stated that, “they are often the ‘outside’ professionals teaching in the applied and specialized career fields such as nursing, paralegal, and design programs.” (p. 24). Adjunct instructors may perform many of the basic duties of being an instructor, like giving and grading class assignments. However, other duties may depend on the institutions at which these instructors work. For instance, Brown (2007) stated that her university, “provided [her] with a full set of materials, including a syllabus, PowerPoint slides, assignments, and a final exam.” (p. 42). This providing of materials means that some of the preparation for teaching classes was offloaded, but at other institutions may be required of the adjunct. Giess and Lenius (2016) suggested that it was important to “Check the institution’s faculty handbook to learn the role, responsibilities, salary and benefits of adjunct faculty to gain insight into the overall role of adjuncts.” (p. 37).

How to Become an Adjunct Professor or Instructor

Dademo (2022) stated that the qualifications of an adjunct may vary depending on the institution or class being taught. Dademo (2022) noted that a master’s degree is often necessary but it may be possible to adjunct with extensive industry experience. Most adjunct instructors follow one of two paths, either have multiple jobs at multiple universities or teach part time while maintaining a full-time, professional position (Dademo, 2022). Johns, Yucht, Holland, Nabinger, and Elswit (2010) noted that adjunct instructors in library sciences often follow that path as many are full-time librarians by profession.

Dademo (2022) noted the process for finding multiple positions as an adjunct. The process starts with building a curriculum vitae. This document lists all your experiences and qualifications, which you can then send out to multiple universities and colleges. In general, adjunct teaching requires considerable self-motivation. To be an adjunct is to have a love for teaching and learning. Because pay is often not that great, it requires being motivated intrinsically by the act of educating.

Pay and Benefits

Adjunct instructors do not receive significant compensation per course. In a survey completed by the American Federation of Teachers more than 41% of respondents said they were paid less than \$3,500 per course. This comparatively low compensation means that teaching multiple courses, or having a primary full-time job is the most cost-effective way to be an adjunct. Benefits often come in the form of professional development and intrinsic growth. Johns, Yucht, Holland, Nabinger, and Elswit (2021) noted that, “. . . even though the pay was low, the experience remained as enriching and fun” (p. 41).

Job Outlook

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the demand for post-secondary teachers will grow in the years to come. Specifically, positions for both full and part-time faculty are projected increase by 12%. Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez, and Muth (2010) stated, “Adjuncts are an important piece of the professoriate and are heavily used, especially at community colleges and in professional programs.” (p. 23). Although this may vary depending on state and/or subject areas, the use of adjunct instructors is currently growing and provides professionals with the chance to teach alongside their own full-time careers.

Interview with Christine Stiles an Adjunct Instructor of Information and Communication Sciences at Ball State University

Christine Stiles currently works as an adjunct professor at Ball State University and has previous experience in higher education at Ivy Tech Community College and Southwestern Michigan College. Her full-time position is at InfoSys, as the Senior Principal of Education, Training and Assessment. Christine Stiles was interviewed by Edmund Osburn and Dr. Edward Lazaros on May 26, 2023. The interview questions, along with Christine’s answers are listed in the following sections:

Figure 2: Christine uses E-mail to contact students and co-workers.



1. What previous experience prepared you for this position?

My bachelor’s degree is in secondary education and foreign languages. I completed a Master’s Degree in Information and Communication Sciences. I assumed a position as an adjunct faculty

member at Ivy Tech Community College. I worked in three of the different regions within that institution. I then worked a full-time position with Ivy Tech during my second year in their software development department. I spent five years teaching for Ivy Tech Community College. I then took a job at Southwestern Michigan College and was the department head of their software development program for five years. Around 2020, I shopped my resume around and secured employment with Infosys, where I have worked for three years. A Professor and Associate Director from the Information and Communication Sciences program contacted me about teaching as an adjunct instructor for Ball State University in the Information and Communication Sciences program. My experience in Infosys has helped me bring life experiences into the classroom. Adjuncts who come from a corporate setting have an edge because they can close the gap between what they learned in school and what is used in the real world.

2. What does a typical work day look like for you?

It is a lot of late evenings because I usually can't start working on my teaching work until after my day job at Infosys. Teaching adjunct for me is like a second shift job. I start by checking my e-mail to see if there are any issues that I need to address immediately. I want to make sure that I am available to help students when they need help, which is important to me. I access the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) course site. I will often post announcements and reminders for my students in Canvas. I want to make sure that students know what is expected in the course. I try to grade student work in a timely manner and provide feedback so students can continue to progress through the assignments in the course.

3. What is your favorite part about your daily work?

The in-class time is the best time for me. The three hours that I get to spend in the class with the students every week is my favorite part. I like interacting with students and helping them with their journey. I like to meet people and build my network and be available in the future for them. We try to have a strong alumni network.

Figure 1: Christine Stiles at her desk, with the Ball State Webpage open.



4. What are the main challenges you encounter with your daily work?

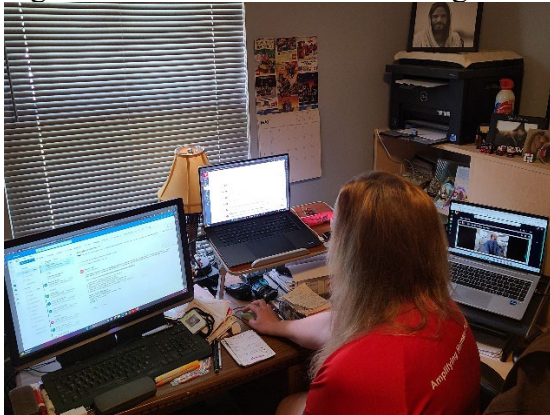
If I send out an e-mail to someone else and I need a response to move forward with the things that I am doing and they don't respond, this is problematic. The communication skills of others is

really telling in terms of if you can work well with them. The main challenge is trying to get people pulled into the activities that I am working on and getting their active participation.

5. What kinds of fun technology do adjunct instructors get to use?

The Center for Information and Communication Sciences laboratory is nice to use. I like to use Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) with students. Trying to figure out ways to integrate these technologies into what we do is exciting. When I first came to Ball State University, I was not familiar with Canvas, but I was familiar with other LMS systems. Canvas has help features that support what I do. I enjoy working with Wingspan which is an LMS. I also enjoy using the Springboard LMS.

Figure 3: Christine uses Canvas to grade assignments and keep track of her gradebook.



6. What advice would you give someone who would like to get into this career?

Don't make being an adjunct your full-time job. I hope that they are getting into this to give back to students and lend their knowledge to students. I don't think you can make a decent income as an adjunct unless you can piece together courses from different campuses. Working as an adjunct as their primary job would be difficult without a partner at home providing financial support.

Conclusion

When pursuing a career as an adjunct instructor it is important to remember that it is not a full-time job. Adjunct instructor pay is often low, but the work can be flexible and fit around a separate full-time position. The value that adjunct instructors bring to the classroom is the real-world experience they can offer. It is important to have a passion for teaching and to find meaning in educating the next generation if you want to become an adjunct instructor.

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