

Casual In Blue: Yale and the Academic Labor Market

This hard-hitting report should be read by all policy makers in higher education, who should consider the long-range implications of the significant downturn in job opportunities in academe.

– James T. Richardson, President of the American Association of University Professors

Nationwide, there has been an explosion of interest in unions among graduate teachers. This past year alone, PhD students from Oregon to Minnesota and Pennsylvania have filed for union elections. UCLA grad students recently voted to be part of a union, and other UC campuses are now poised to follow suit. Closer to home, over a thousand Yale graduate students called last year for negotiations on health benefits and teaching conditions. These efforts have built on a twenty-year history of graduate unions ñ at campuses like the Universities of Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Wisconsin ñ but they also signal a considerable revival. This trend has a simple cause: universities across the US have steadily increased their use of graduate students and adjunct faculty, while shifting the bulk of teaching away from tenure-track faculty. The following report documents how the current PhD generation faces a much different, and in many ways more troubling, academy than their advisors faced a generation ago. Focusing on Yale -- an institution with considerable resources and a reputation for its strong undergraduate curriculum -- this report will show:

- ! Graduate teachers spend more time instructing Yale undergraduates than ladder faculty. Seventy percent (70%) of the undergraduate teaching is performed by non-permanent teachers -- graduate students and instructors not on the tenure track.

- ! Across Yale, the pool of graduate teachers has almost tripled in the last thirty years, while the number of tenure-track faculty has declined.

- ! Yale has preferred to lower the rate of endowment spending rather than maintain or increase the size of its faculty.

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The State of the Problem

A majority of those now teaching in American universities are employed on a part-time basis. This crisis hits graduate students twice: more teaching on one end and fewer full-time faculty jobs on the other.

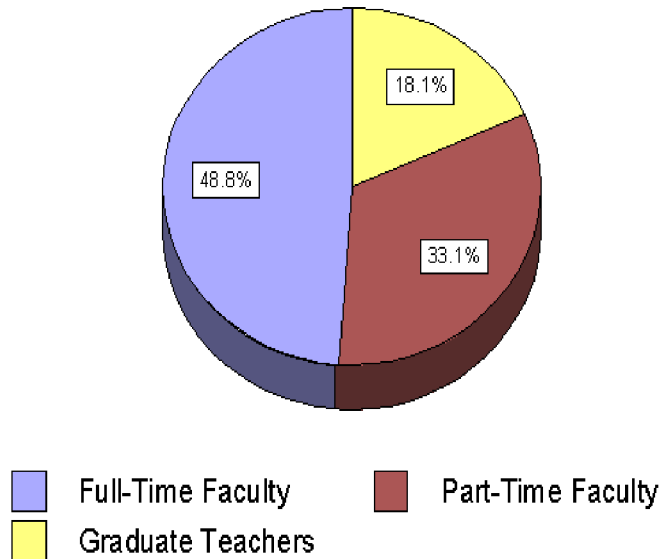
How did this happen?

Teaching at universities has always been done by a mix of full-time ladder faculty, temporary full-time or part-time adjuncts, and teaching assistants (TAs). Historically, the numbers in this last category were small.

However, over the last generation universities have taken advantage of the slack job market for new PhDs to hire adjuncts in lieu of full-time teachers. The use of casual labor -- part-time hires who are paid lower salaries without benefits, job stability or a permanent relationship with the school -- has exploded.¹ A recent study found that there are more graduate teachers and adjunct instructors than full-time faculty in our classrooms.²

Teachers in American Universities

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, April 1996



Universities now rely on casual workers more than virtually any other major sector of the economy. The percentage of part-time college teachers is three times that of part-timers in the economy as a whole.³

This casualization of teaching is the most serious threat facing the academy today:

- ! it undermines the quality of education
- ! it diminishes faculty governance and hampers research; and
- ! it creates a crisis in the job market for those who wish to become faculty.

The Dangers of Thinking Part-Time and Short-Term

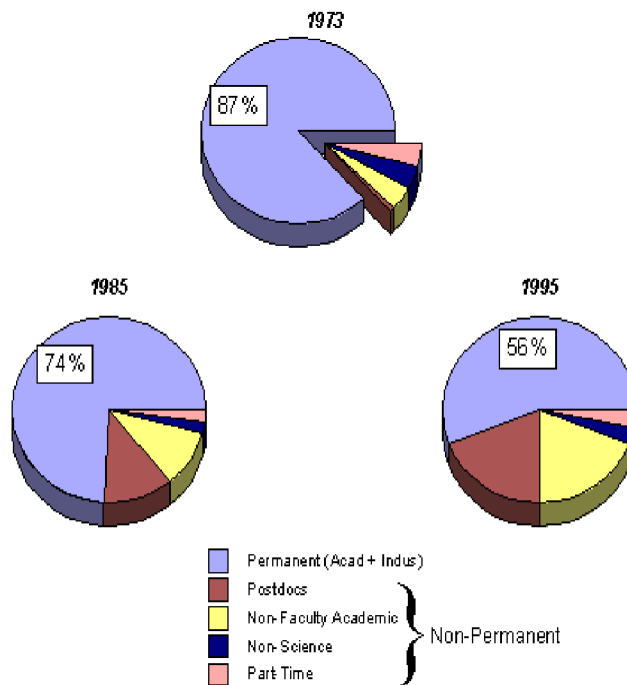
Quality education demands that teachers have a long-term relationship with one another, their students, and their institution. As the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) notes, "It is difficult to develop a coherent curriculum, maintain uniform standards for evaluating students' performance, or establish continuity between and among courses when major academic responsibilities are divided among 'transient' and regular faculty."⁴ Casualization harms education. The effects of casualization on the role of current university faculty are equally serious. With fewer tenure-track teachers, a smaller proportion of faculty have the institutional security that makes collaborative university governance possible. Temporary instructors are less likely to exercise their nominal academic freedom, to follow controversial lines of scholarship, or to advance and defend unpopular positions, because their future employment is particularly contingent.

This restructured academic environment has had a severe impact: faculty today make fewer decisions, and limit themselves to increasingly "safe" areas of research, compared with faculty thirty years past.

The New Job Market

According to US News and World Report, "fewer than half of new Ph.D.s will find permanent employment in academic settings, down from the more than two-thirds who found such jobs 30 years ago."⁵ The logic of this shift is straightforward: As undergraduate enrollments have increased, they have been met by an increased recruitment of graduate teaching assistants and adjuncts, not by increased faculty hiring.

Permanent vs. Non-Permanent Jobs Held 5-6 Years After Receiving PhD from Top 25 Universities (Life Sciences Only)



The result is a glut of PhDs increasingly compelled to work in part-time or non-permanent positions. In the humanities, there is now an army of adjunct instructors -- a new form of "migrant workers" who teach basic courses in the languages, composition, and history at multiple institutions for a flat rate of pay per-course.

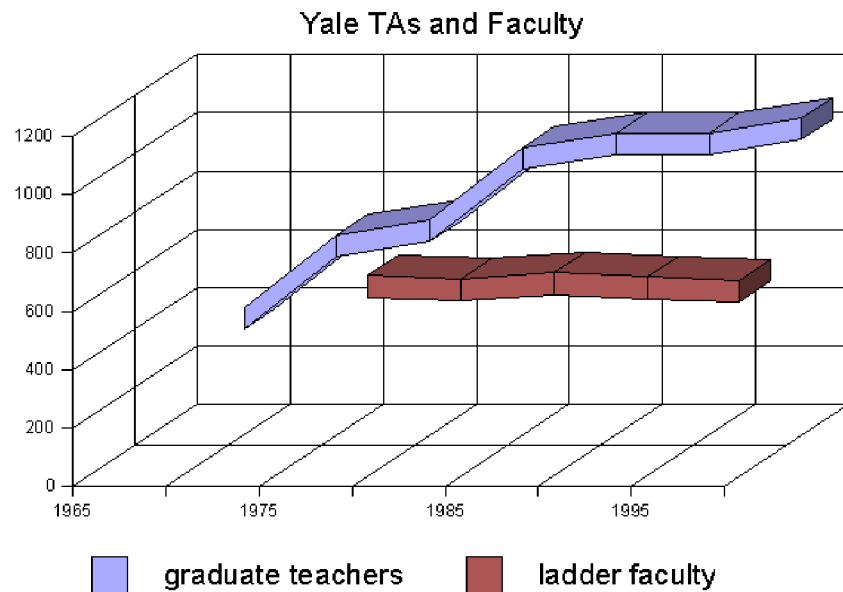
Similarly, the sciences have become flooded with postdocs willing to work long hours with little pay for many years, holding out for the elusive faculty position. A recent study of post-doctoral research in Johns Hopkins Magazine concludes: "Call it a take on the 1990s 'trim the fat' corporate mantra, but the first factor fueling the increase in postdocs is a nationwide trend to cut costs, a phenomenon also linked to the hiring of teaching assistants (graduate students), lecturers and adjunct faculty."⁶

According to a recent report by National Research Council, the proportion of recently-minted life science PhDs finding permanent positions has plummeted. Meanwhile the proportion who must rely on postdocs and non-faculty academic positions (adjunct instructors or glorified lab techs) continues to grow.

Note: "Permanent" includes industry and academy. Non-Permanent includes postdocs and adjunct faculty.⁷

Casualization at Yale University

Despite its educational excellence, Yale is no exception to the trend towards part-time teachers. Over the past thirty years, as undergraduate enrollment has risen with coeducation, and as the standard faculty teaching load has dropped, Yale has shifted an enormous portion of its basic teaching responsibilities onto graduate teachers. Indeed, graduate teachers have become such a critical labor supply here that if they were to suddenly disappear, undergraduate education would come to an immediate halt.⁸



How should we measure teaching at Yale? It is one thing to count people -- for the past 20 years, more people at Yale have worked as TAs than as ladder faculty, and this gap continues to widen

-- but it is quite another thing to measure the work of teaching. We consider three methods. Teaching can be measured according to (1) the name formally attached to a course; (2) contact hours with undergraduates; or (3) evaluation of the students' work.

Method #1: Measuring by Name

Yale prefers to measure teaching by the name attached formally to the course. According to the Administration, 9% of courses have a graduate student's name listed as primary instructor.⁹ By this reckoning, 91% of courses are taught by faculty.

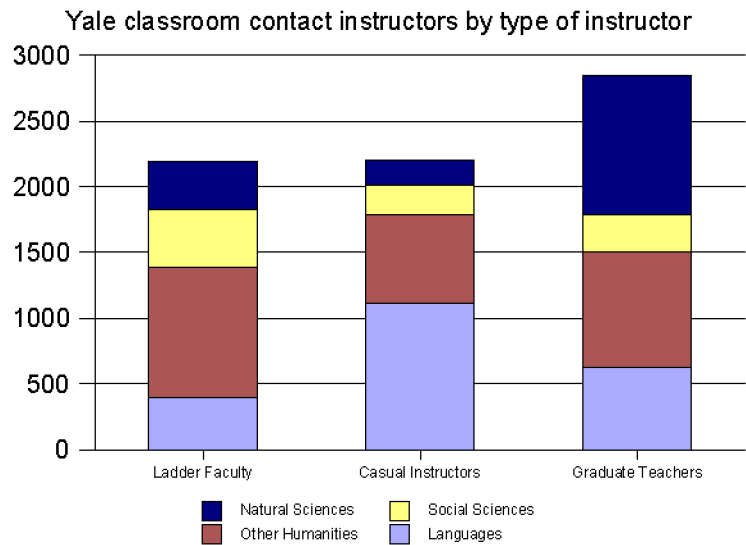
Is this an accurate measure of teaching at Yale? No. It obscures the difference between ladder (junior and senior) and non-ladder (i.e. non-permanent) faculty. It also overlooks the enormous contribution of TAs.

Consider, for example, a history course taught last semester: A faculty member lectured twice a week to 400 undergraduates, and then a fleet of eleven TAs each led two discussion sections a week and graded all the papers and exams. Or a biology lab course, which a faculty member introduced before 10 TAs staffed the daily labs for 4 hours each and graded all the exams and weekly lab reports. These courses could not exist without a graduate teaching staff, so it is misleading to treat them as if they were taught exclusively by the faculty.

Method #2: Quality Time

Professional studies of education use "contact hours" with students as the most accurate measure of teaching, because they reveal who spends time instructing an average classroom or lab: giving a lecture, leading a discussion section or seminar, or running a lab. Students come to college for precisely these kinds of experiences, because they allow for direct interaction with an instructor and their fellow students.

Although it excludes preparation time and time spent grading (areas that rely heavily on graduate teachers), "contact hours" show whom an institution depends upon to do the work of education.



TOTAL CLASSROOM CONTACT HOURS BY TYPE OF INSTRUCTOR

Total: Ladder Faculty = 2198 (30%); Casual Instructors = 2202 (30%); Graduate Teachers = 2847 (40%)

Note: Breakdown by Foreign Language, Humanities, Social Science, Natural Science available on request¹⁰

The above data suggest the following five conclusions:

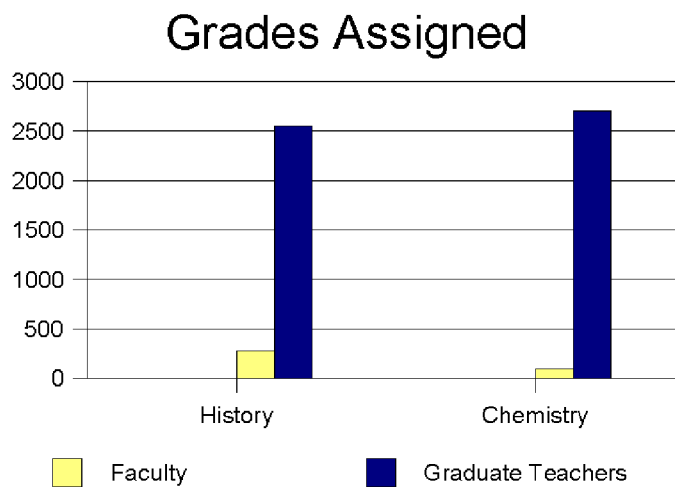
- a. Graduate teachers spend more time instructing Yale undergraduates than ladder faculty. There is a certain amount of work that is necessary to produce a Yale undergraduate education. Graduate teachers do more of it than anyone else. The same form or quality of education could not be provided without employing graduate teachers.
- b. As much teaching is performed by non-permanent "casual" instructors as by ladder faculty. Some of the casual teachers are part-time adjunct lecturers, others are temporary full-time instructors with renewable semesterly or yearly contracts. None have access to the standard faculty "ladder" of promotion (from assistant to associate to full professor).
- c. Approximately seventy percent (70%) of the undergraduate teaching at Yale is performed by teachers employed on a non-permanent basis. Given that most casual instructors and graduate teachers are employed for introductory and intermediate courses, very few of undergraduates' first- or second-year instructors will mentor them through the senior year.
- d. Fully 81% of the teaching in the Language departments is performed by casual academic labor. Over 50% of the teaching contact hours are done by adjunct lecturers and instructors, with an additional 30% performed by graduate teachers.
- e. The Sciences rely on graduate teaching more than any other area. Over 65% of the contact hours are performed by graduate teachers, most of whom supervise undergraduate labs. Science graduate teachers spend about three times more hours than ladder faculty in front of a lab or classroom.

Method #3: The Art and Science of Grading

There is a third way to measure teaching at Yale: grading, the most inescapable sort of academic labor. Disciplines may differ, and pedagogical fashions may change, but grading must always get done. Unfortunately, Yale has refused publicly to release data on the labor-intensive process of evaluating undergraduate work. However, the following two departmental case studies can provide a useful initial guide.

We investigate two departments with large undergraduate enrollment. TA's in these departments lead discussion sections and grade essays

and exams (History) or oversee labs and grade homeworks, lab reports and exams (Chemistry).



History Faculty: 275 Grades (10%); History Grad Teachers: 2550 Grades (90%)

Chemistry Faculty: 100 Grades (4%); Chemistry Grad Teachers: 2700 Grades (96%)¹¹

Graduate teachers do the vast bulk of the behind-the-scenes grading, regardless of their role in front of the classroom or lab. Yale University entrusts graduate teachers almost exclusively with the job of evaluating undergraduate work.

The History of Yale and Casualization

How did a university as prestigious as Yale arrive at such a state?

The use of adjuncts and graduate teachers has a long history. Yale's own official historian, George Pierson, noted that by 1976 there was a "large fringe of graduate students, lecturers, and visiting faculty who were coming to constitute almost a third of the very substantial corps of men and women now instructing in Yale College." For "the discerning eye," he wrote, "the drift away from a full-time professional teaching faculty, and so also away from departmental promotion ladders and discipline controls, would be quite unmistakable, and perhaps disturbing."¹²

The expansion of graduate student labor at Yale made possible a series of much-needed undergraduate curriculum reforms. Most crucially, graduate teaching helped the university implement more extensive programs in expository writing and language instruction -- now the curricular bedrock of Yale's excellence in the humanities.¹³

Quite apart from curricular changes, the increased undergraduate enrollment in the 1960s and 1970s was largely met by an increased reliance on graduate teaching. The table below demonstrates how graduate teachers were used to stabilize the quality of instruction, as enrollment increased while the faculty size did not: ¹⁴

	Students per Faculty, ladder faculty only	Students per Faculty, including graduate teachers
1968-69	8.82	7.6
1975-76	11.28	7.7

In addition, in 1989 Yale's Prown Committee noted that graduate teaching allowed Yale to lower its standard faculty teaching load: "a number of departments have reduced the number of courses expected of full-time ladder faculty. This has also contributed to an increase in the amount of teaching done by graduate students."¹⁵

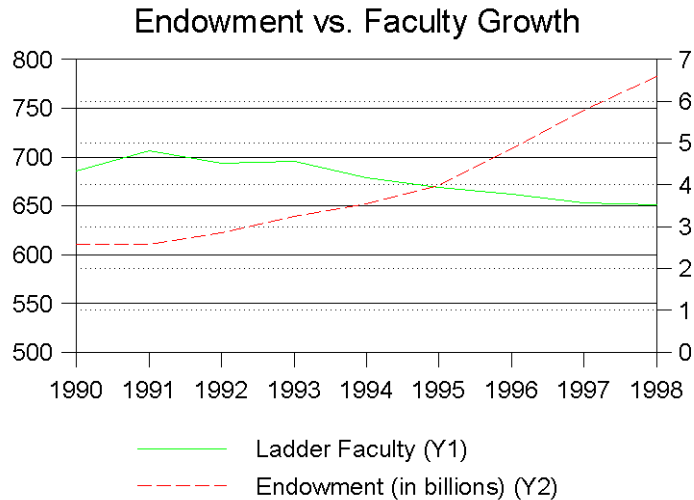
Yale, of course, is not the only university with a history of shifting its teaching load away from regular faculty and to its own graduate students. There are now over 200,000 graduate students teaching nationwide, while there are only 114,000 tenure-track junior faculty.¹⁶ So graduate students should not be surprised when they find that there are not enough full-time jobs to go around. They may have spent their graduate school years working themselves out of the job that they hoped for.

Reversing the Trend: How Yale Could Do Better

Yale can afford to set a higher standard for higher education. In fact, one could argue that generations of Yale alumni have contributed to the endowment fund precisely to make such a higher standard possible. Yale's endowment has enjoyed a higher growth rate than any other, averaging 18.4% returns over the past 7 years. In 1990 it stood at \$2.5 billion; by 1998 it had reached \$6.6 billion.

Endowment vs. Faculty Growth
From 1991 to 1998: Endowment increased 260%; Faculty has decreased 7.5%

During this same period, Yale has argued that in principle no more than 5% of the endowment per year should be spent. In practice, however, Yale has been even more conservative, spending only 3.8% in 1998.¹⁷ Even the conservative increase of the spending rule to Yale's own principled 5% would release an additional \$100 million per year into the operating budget.



Harvard University, in fact, announced in late 1998 that it would release an additional \$100 million into its operating budget to "recruit new teachers, lower class size, improve technology, and preserve threatened library books," thereby bringing its endowment spending up from 3.7% to a still conservative 4.5%. "It really costs that much to stay excellent," said Harvard President Rudenstine.¹⁸ Is Yale falling behind again?

The sum of GESO's recommended TA improvements (see below) would cost less than \$1 million, or the amount of interest the endowment earns in about 7 hours. Nevertheless, Yale continues to maintain a system that provides strong financial incentives to rely upon graduate student labor rather than hire faculty.

There are many things in need of improvement, from graduate housing to English language training, but here we focus on recently implemented policies that contribute to Yale's overuse of casualized academic labor.

Adding Insult to Injury

1. Salary Cap

In 1996, Yale created a "salary cap" which mandates that those who teach during the first and second years not receive over \$12,560 a year for their teaching. Salary above that mark is withheld. Since this cap is over \$4000 less than Yale's own estimate of the 12-month cost of living, this prevents those who teach from earning enough to support summer research.

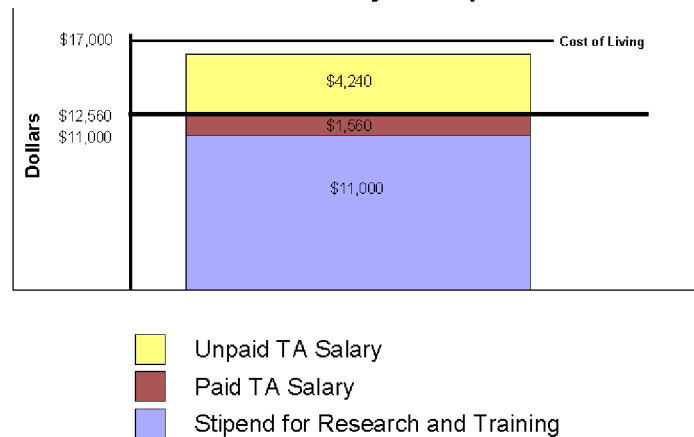
2. Unpaid Teaching Requirement

Every year, more departments make graduate teaching a degree requirement that no longer merits additional pay. These departments tend also to be those that rely most heavily on graduate teachers:

- ! In Chemistry, grad teachers put in 7 times as many contact hours as ladder faculty. Two semesters of unpaid teaching are required.
- ! In the biological sciences, grad teachers put in 4.5 times as many contact hours as ladder faculty. Two (or three) semesters of unpaid teaching are required in the largest departments, and a proposal has been made to extend this requirement to the smaller Med School departments.
- ! In Spanish, grad teachers put in 5.5 times as many hours as ladder faculty. Four semesters of unpaid teaching are required.

3. Uneven Support for Scientific Research

How the Salary Cap Works



As external sources of funding dry up in certain areas of science (e.g. astronomy, theoretical physics, evolutionary biology, math, paleontology), Yale refuses to support graduate students doing research in those areas unless they teach. This provides Yale with a large pool of cheap science teachers.

By contrast, after the first wave of GESO organizing in the early 1990s, all graduate students in the humanities and social sciences (except Economics) have been guaranteed at least one, and up to three, years of university support without teaching. The "dissertation fellowship" teaching sabbatical is not available to scientists.

Long-term Solutions at Yale

Locally, Yale should reverse this trend toward casualization in three ways:

1. Hire More Full-time Ladder Faculty.
2. Eliminate Financial Motives for Relying on Casual Labor.
3. Recognize the Graduate Teachers Union and Negotiate a TA Contract.

First, Yale should expand the ranks of its ladder faculty, demonstrating a commitment to longterm intellectual community over shortterm financial gain. Educational needs should drive budgetary management, not vice versa.

Second, Yale should acknowledge and respect the important contribution of adjunct instructors. Eliminating a two-tiered pay differential between permanent and non-permanent teachers would ensure that casual instructors were only employed for legitimate academic purposes.

Third, Yale should recognize GESO and give the faculty of tomorrow a say in the conditions of their work today. A union provides the most effective response to the specific practices that make relying upon part-time graduate teaching labor so inexpensive and so attractive. A TA contract, by ensuring better teaching and TA working conditions, will mitigate some of the most egregious effects of casualization. Perhaps most important, only an organized TA workforce will have the institutional leverage necessary to change the way universities do business.

A Nationally Coordinated Effort

Nationally, casualization can be reversed if teachers in every tier of academia summon the political will. At GESO we believe that if Yale -- one of the world's great universities, and one of the country's wealthiest -- were honestly to confront the trend to casualization, this effort would reverberate at colleges across the country. If, on the contrary, Yale refuses to acknowledge its growing ranks of non-permanent instructors and compounds the problem, it encourages other universities to follow suit.

We also call for a coordinated nationwide campaign to highlight this trend. Agencies that accredit universities and colleges should censure institutions that rely too much on non-permanent teachers, as should the tenured faculty and professional associations that serve as custodians of their disciplines.

Finally, the nationwide TA union movement -- which allows graduate teachers to work towards system-wide solutions, collaboratively with adjunct and faculty unions -- shows great promise. From Oregon and California to Kansas, Iowa, Florida, Massachusetts, New York and Connecticut, graduate students are turning to unions to protect the integrity of their work. As future faculty, graduate students have the greatest motive, and responsibility, to organize.

Endnotes

- 1 From 1970 to 1992 the proportion of faculty working part-time increased from 22% to nearly 45%. See Linda Ray Pratt, "Disposable Faculty," cited in Will Teach for Food, ed. Cary Nelson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 265.
- 2 The most recent available data appears in Ernst Benjamin, "Some Implications of Tenure for the Profession and Society," Perspectives, April 1997, 16. Data from "Fall Staff in Postsecondary institutions, 1993," National Center for Education Statistics, April 1996.
- 3 Approximately 17% of the U.S. workforce holds part-time jobs. Cf. Pratt, 265.
- 4 Pratt, 265.
- 5 Miriam Horn, "A Practical Turn in Ph.D.'s," US News & World Report, March 29, 1999, 114.
- 6 "The Postdoc's Plight," Johns Hopkins Magazine, February 1999, 58.
- 7 National Research Council, Trends in the Early Careers of Life Scientists (Wash., D.C.: National Academy Press, 1998), 46.
- 8 Yale Office of Institutional Research, "FAS Departmental Trends" (September 1997), table 2, 8; Yale Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching in Yale College, "Prown Report Data" (1989), Appendix B.
- 9 Graduate Dean Thomas Appelquist, "Letter in Response to True Blue," October 18, 1995.
- 10 "Ladder" includes junior (assistant and associate) and senior faculty; "casual" instructors includes lecturer or adjunct positions. A "contact hour" is an hour spent instructing undergraduates (giving a lecture, leading a section, or running a lab). These weekly hours are aggregated over the full academic year. More information, or a more specific breakdown of hours by area, or a more precise description of our methodology, is available upon request. Please include your institutional affiliation with any request.
- 11 These numbers reflect total undergraduate enrollments in courses taught with and without TAs. In courses without TAs the faculty grade all assignments and exams. In courses with TAs, the general practice is that TAs grade all assignments and exams. In some cases, the faculty member may join TAs in grading exams.
- 12 George Pierson, A Yale Book of Numbers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 359.
- 13 Prown Report, 6.
- 14 Pierson, 362.
- 15 Prown Report, 6.
- 16 "Fall Staff in Postsecondary Institutions," National Center for Education Statistics, April 1996.
- 17 For faculty data, see Yale Office of Institutional Research, "FAS Departmental Trends"; Yale Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching in Yale College, "Prown Report Data"; for endowment data, see Yale Office of Public Affairs, Yale University Financial Report 1997-1998; The Yale Endowment 1995.
- 18 "Harvard Taps More of Endowment," The Washington Post, December 3, 1998, A10.

This report was prepared by graduate students in the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO). For more information, email us or call (203) 624-5161.