

Adjuncting

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Adjunct teaching is playing a growing role in the professional development of teaching historians. Schools hire adjuncts on a per-course basis, usually to teach lower-division, required classes. Most accrediting agencies allow these classes to be taught by instructors with master's degrees, or sometimes just a set amount of graduate credit, in the field – hence the large number of Ph.D. graduate students who teach part-time as adjuncts. Adjunct instructors are widely employed by community colleges looking to reduce instruction costs. Universities with small or non-existent graduate programs (and hence no teaching assistants for larger sections) also make frequent use of adjuncts. Within those schools, adjuncts are concentrated in departments, like History, that have heavy lower-division teaching loads relative to their number of undergraduate majors.

Adjuncting is often a necessary part of the graduate school experience and can be beneficial. Ph.D. candidates can get some needed money by adjuncting, as well as the opportunity to build teaching experience. Adjuncting also gives academic and public historians the chance to teach part-time while pursuing other personal and professional commitments. On the other hand, there are also drawbacks to adjunct teaching, including low pay, little job security, an absence of health insurance and retirement benefits, and limited chances for advancement within a department. Too much part-time adjuncting can also be risky for Ph.D. candidates – the demands of teaching can divert time and energy away from research and professional development.

You may find yourself adjuncting for longer than you expected due to other considerations, such as family and geographical limitations. As long as you enjoy the work, you can still be a part of the academic community. Continue your research, writing, and conference presentations. Sometimes departments will fund research and/or conference travel for adjuncts, so don't be afraid to ask for support.

You should evaluate your reasons for adjuncting and do it when it best serves your needs. What follows are a few suggestions on how to make adjuncting a positive experience and how to get the most out of adjuncting, while continuing your career progress:

- Create the best schedule you can. Ask to teach Tuesday-Thursday classes or otherwise try to create blocks of time for teaching and blocks of time for research/writing.
- Keep up with your research and writing.
- Communicate with your department chair about your needs for computers, office space, Xeroxing, and other assistance.
- Maintain good relations with the department secretary.
- Use the opportunity to improve your teaching skills and make yourself more marketable. Create power point presentations to go with your lectures, or try new pedagogical tactics. Use the time now to develop your teaching skills.
- You can both obtain experience teaching introductory survey history courses and ask to teach upper-division courses in your field. This will give you a chance to write lectures

and develop a portfolio of classes you can teach before the pressure of a tenure-track position. Furthermore, you may be able to showcase your expertise in more than one field, for example, teaching Southern history, women's history, and African American history, allowing you to apply for a greater variety of tenure-track positions.

- Create and maintain a portfolio of your teaching experience, including syllabi, letters of recommendation from students (ask a student who praises your teaching to write a letter for you) and faculty (ask to have a faculty member observe your class), and course evaluations.
- If time permits, taking on a role such as running a National History Day program or women's history month program, can help you demonstrate your value to the department. However, undertake time-consuming projects cautiously!
- Maintain a positive attitude. When adjuncting makes your life miserable, it may be time to reconsider your options.

Useful resources:

Grieve, Donald, Ed.D. *A Handbook for Adjunct/Part-Time Faculty and Teachers of Adults*. Cleveland: Info-Tec, Inc., 1995.

Adjunct Advocate

<http://www.adjunctnation.com/magazine/>

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