

When a Job Is Not a Job: Justifications of Part-Time Faculty Work in English and Math Departments at Three Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates justifications by academic professionals regarding part-time faculty working conditions, and it is based on sixty-two qualitative interviews in two disciplines at three post-secondary schools. While each university or college had its own justificatory strategy to claim their use of part-time professors was legitimate, each defined part-time faculty work as something other than a *real job*. The part-time faculty willing to express dissatisfaction regarding their work explicitly want faculty work to be a *real job*. Finally, the organizational structures of each college reinforce their respective justificatory strategies. This includes three different organizational boundaries between full- and part-time faculty members that can be metaphorically described as a wall, gateway, or ladder. Policy implications are identified regarding the need for pro-rata pay and participation in self-governance.

Keywords: sociology, culture, academic career, higher education, part-time faculty, justification, exploitation

On September 1, 2013, Margaret Mary Vojtko, an 83-year-old woman who taught French as a part-time professor, died of a heart attack. She was unable to afford to heat her home between her contract not being renewed after the 2012-2013 school year, and medical bills associated with cancer treatment, (Kovalik, 2013). The story initially appeared as an opinion piece written by an attorney associated with the United Auto Workers for *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and was then reported on by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Ellis, 2013), and NPR (Sanchez, 2013). The issue of

her death created no small amount of controversy, with the original article accusing her employer, Duquesne University, of not caring about her fate, and the university responding with claims it gave her additional support (Walsh, 2013).

Writing an opinion piece for CNN.com, Gary Rhoades wrote,

“The question is: How will we treat working people? Will we, the richest nation on earth, continue to structure employment in ways that reduce large segments of society to near Dickensian conditions of existence? Or can we muster the collective will to appropriately remunerate and honor the work of all working Americans? ...In academia, that means tenure stream faculty, staff, students, administrators, and communities must recognize in Vojtko’s fate the ugly and diminished future of higher education and choose, in big ways and small ways, a more equitable path.” (Rhoades, 2013, para. 14-15)

The National Education Association marked ten years after her death by publishing a series of vignettes with part-time faculty discussing the difficulties associated with their work (Kuimelis & Flannery, 2023), and *Inside Higher Ed* marked the anniversary with an opinion piece calling for both better benefits for part-time faculty and better research on the topic (Kezar & Harper, 2023).

Vojtko’s death fed into a pre-existing concern over part-time faculty working conditions. Stephen Werner compares academic work to a caste system, with part-time faculty framed as a low-status caste with minimal upward mobility (Werner, 2023). The claim of adjunct exploitation has not been universally accepted, however. James Stacey Taylor suspects “adjuncts are already receiving equal pay for their teaching, and just want pay that is, in Orwellian terms, “more equal” than that received by their more successful colleagues” (Taylor, 2016, para. 4). In short, part-time faculty working conditions are a source of controversy within American higher education.

This article examines the perspectives of academic actors from three different academic ranks and the ways in which their positionality and organizational affiliations influence their opinions of this broader debate. I argue that in addition to their rank and position, academic actors can be studied as moral agents. In other words, it is possible to study academic actors as striving for legitimacy, justifying their actions, and denouncing situations they perceive as unjust. I rely on semi-structured qualitative interviews with sixty-two part-time professors, full-time professors (tenured and tenure-track), and administrators. Recruited interviewees came from three postsecondary schools (a private teaching college, a public community college, and a public research university) and two disciplines (English and mathematics). The analysis of the interviews relies on theoretical tools from the pragmatic sociology of critique, which are well suited to understand respondents as moral agents. The interviews occurred from 2007 to 2010, a period where part-time faculty work appeared to stabilize in the US in terms of proportion of workforce and pay.

The findings of this study can be summarized in three points. First, while each institution had its own distinct justificatory strategy to claim their use of part-time professors is legitimate, they all define part-time faculty work as something other than a *real job*. Rather, each institution defines part-time faculty work as either an

avocation, as an elongated job interview, or part of graduate education. The idea that someone can reasonably expect to rely on part-time faculty work as their primary form of income is rejected in all three cases. Second, there appears to be an association between part-time faculty willing to express dissatisfaction and alienation regarding their work universally rejecting the university-supported justification entirely and explicitly want to develop their part-time faculty work into a *real job*. Third, these justifications are embedded within department and university policies, procedures, and contract details, with which they are mutually reinforcing. As different colleges rely on different justifications of part-time faculty work, the relevant organizational structures vary as well. A result of this is that there is always an organizational boundary between part- and full-time faculty members, though it differs how depending on the postsecondary institution. These boundaries can be metaphorically described as a *wall*, *gateway*, and *ladder*.

While I collected the interviews before the COVID-19 pandemic, my findings further illuminate higher education employment trends in the current moment, as will be elaborated on in the discussion section.

PART-TIME FACULTY AND THE GIG ACADEME

The rise of part-time faculty members within the professoriate can be understood as part of a general increase in contingent professional work (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Osnowitz, 2010). American higher education operates within a neo-liberalism, an economic system that prioritizes “individual freedoms over collective liberty and personal responsibility over shared welfare. They also include a preference for shifting responsibility over the provision of basic needs and public goods from democratic institutions to private enterprises” (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 14).

The expression of neoliberalism in higher education was described by Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades (2004) call academic capitalism. As they define it, academic capitalism is a set of organizing principles or a knowledge/learning regime based on academic actors “using a variety of state resources to create new circuits of knowledge that link higher education institutions to the new economy” (p. 1), taking on traits of the new economy, including organizing around dynamic networks to allow for adaptability. In this context, contingent faculty roles are often deprofessionalized through a range of material indignities caused or compounded by imposed economic insecurity. Lack of job security and poor levels of compensation have made housing and food instability surprisingly common among contingent and part-time faculty, with reports of periodic homelessness, reliance on campus food pantries, and wage-supplanting work in the underground economy, including sex work.” (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 15)

Kezar et al. then build on this, noting a shift in neo-liberalism toward a gig economy, where “standard gig economy firms (e.g., Uber) breed a contingent workforce by incentivizing micro-entrepreneurship, say, by offering a convenient way to rent out resources people already possess but underutilize—whether a means of transportation, guest bedroom, skill set, or perhaps simply time and attention” (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 17).

Workers in the gig economy are construed by the system's advocates as empowered with the flexibility of choosing when and when not to work. While some may find gig work practical and lucrative, the vast majority earn well below a living wage. A recent survey found nearly half of all workers in the gig economy today depend on such jobs as their primary source of income... Even if work in the gig economy is plentiful, because wages are so low, many workers find the promised flexibility to be an illusion, since they must work longer and longer hours to make ends meet. (Kezar et al. 2019, pp. 17-18)

The gig academe, therefore, is higher education that works according to the economic and organizing principles of the gig economy. This has several consequences, including a fragmented workforce with many employees classified as contract employees despite being functionally full-time and long-term, deprofessionalization, an unbundling of professional activities (such as separating teaching, research, and service), among many others (Kezar et al. 2019, p. 20).

While the scholars just cited discussed higher education in general, this article focuses specifically on the work of part-time professors and their potential exploitation. As such, another point is worth noting which is that "fully contracted, short-term, and piecemeal work will be falsely cast as freedom from institutional control" (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 148). They explain:

As entrepreneurs, academics are framed as free to be more creative and unconstrained by academic conventions, rules, and policies. Believers in the value of tenure-track policies will be further derided for stifling innovation and advocating conformity. Working across global problems, in global spheres of work, will be touted as superior to long-term ties to an institution and its local politics and demands. (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 148)

This insight echoes a concern from Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) that beneath the rhetoric of freedom and flexibility exploitation is nevertheless present in a gig economy, or what they referred as a connexionist world (pp. 372-375). We will return to this insight and concern in the discussion section.

Part-Time Faculty Work: 2010-2025

The proportion of part-time faculty has steadily risen since 1967, when 20% of faculty were part-time (Feldman & Turnley, 2004), to a peak of 41.09% of the academic workforce in 2010 (Colby, 2025a). Since then, part-time faculty's proportion of instructional faculty has been relatively stable, falling slightly to 37.96% in 2024 (Colby, 2025a). One could argue based on this data that an equilibrium of sorts has emerged regarding the balance of contingent and tenure-track faculty members over the last ten to fifteen years. The institutionalization of roughly 40% of professors at American colleges and universities as part-time positions can be viewed as an expression of the gig academy discussed by Kezar et al. (2019).

The median pay of part-time faculty in the United States was \$2,700 per 3-credit class in 2009 (Coalition on the Academic Work Force, 2012), and \$4,100 per 3-credit course in 2023 (Colby, 2025b). These salaries rarely include benefits (Coalition on

the Academic Work Force, 2012, p. 10). One quarter of all part-time faculty in the United States receive some form of public assistance (Jacobs et al., 2015).

Research also suggests that not all part-time faculty wish to be full-time. A study commissioned by the American Federation of Teachers states that only 47% of all part-time faculty members want a full-time position teaching at the college level (American Federation of Teachers, 2010, p. 4). Additionally, 26% of part-time faculty rely primarily on their position for income, while 57% claimed they primarily did so because they enjoyed teaching (American Federation of Teachers, 2010, p. 10). The desire to be full-time tenure-track is associated with how much one depends on part-time teaching as a primary income source, teaching higher course loads, and having access to professional resources such as professional development funds and mentoring programs (Ott & Dippold, 2018). A later study found that 50% of part-time faculty would prefer to hold a full-time, tenure-track position (Yakoboski, 2018), and according to a survey by the American Federation of Teachers found that 63.2% of part-time faculty members wished to be full-time (American Federation of Teachers 2022, p. 5). This survey also found that 66.7% of part-time faculty thought about leaving academic work in the last two years (American Federation of Teachers, 2022, p. 9).

Charges of exploitation have helped create and mobilize new faculty unions in recent years. Herbert (2017) found a 25.9% increase in the number of certified private sector unions for university professors from 2012 to 2016. While this can be partially explained by the 2014 National Labor Relations Board decision that part-time faculty at religious institutions have the right to organize (Schmidt, 2014), it would appear a general effort to organize part-time faculty developed by the mid-2010's. At the same time, unions for part-time faculty members often met opposition. In 2023, roughly 27% of professors in the United States are unionized (Flannery, 2024, para. 9). That same year, Florida passed a bill that would decertify any public employee union with less than 60% of its members paying dues would be decertified. As a result, "all eight adjunct faculty unions at public colleges and universities in Florida have officially been decertified, according to state records, affecting roughly 8,400 adjunct professors altogether" (Schueler, 2024, para. 1).

We can see from this brief review that there has been a relatively stable structure of part-time faculty work within American higher education for the last ten to fifteen years. This includes the relative proportion of part-time faculty within the workforce, their pay, and benefits. Additionally, there is evidence that a reported desire to become full-time has also remained somewhat stable over the same period of time. It is also clear, based on the rise of unionization efforts, that there is some debate over how fair part-time teaching is to the instructors. Yet, at the same time, there continues to be a large number of people who engage in part-time teaching. The data in this article will highlight implications to better understand these dynamics by documenting how academic actors think about part-time faculty work and its controversies.

THE PRAGMATIC SOCIOLOGY OF CRITIQUE AND STUDYING ACTOR'S ANALYSIS OF EXPLOITATION

The pragmatic sociology of critique (PSC) is a post-Bourdieuian social theory developed by Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thévenot, Eve Chiapello, and others. PSC serves as the primary theoretical infrastructure for this analysis, as it allows us to make sense of various claims regarding part-time faculty members' working conditions and how individuals and organizations may make accusations or denials of their exploitation. This will be complimented by research by Robin Clair (1996) that helps define what makes a job *real* or not. As we will see below, framing part-time academic work as something other than *real* work allows it to be evaluated according to an *academic* form of worth rather than a market-based form of worth, thus limiting accusations of exploitation of part-time faculty members by their employing universities.

Qualification, Equivalence, and Tests of Worth

In PSC, the actions *qualification* and *equivalence* are key to observing how actors assign different types and degrees of worth to people, objects, and events. Evaluation, or the act of qualification, is the *assigning of worth* to an object or actor, substantiating that worth through *justification*, and making it something more than an ephemeral ideal through both discourse and action (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 131). Different regimes of justification or forms of worth that require evaluation occur in different ways. Examples of regimes of justification include market-based worth, which evaluates wealth, and domestic worth, which evaluates rules of etiquette. For PSC, evaluation, justification, and critique are all acts of qualification, as they are all actions of assigning a degree of worth, though in the case of criticism the degree of worth is found lacking. In a very real sense, then, a justification based on efficiency may be a *moral* justification as much as one based on civic duty. In PSC, actors are always making moral judgments, regardless of the realm of life one is currently action within (economic, political, familial, etc.).

Qualification cannot occur until the thing to be evaluated has been translated into a regime's standards and categories, allowing for a particular regime to be applied. "In order to criticize and to explain to somebody else what is going wrong, one has to bring together different sets of people and objects and to make connections between them" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, p. 361). This process thereby establishes *equivalence* in the sense that all objects may be evaluated according to the same form of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, pp. 143-144).

The act of assigning worth is rarely a simple fiat. Rather, evaluation generally requires a *test of worth* of some kind, a social convention actors rely on in their attempt to evaluate, justify, or critique (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, pp. 314-319). A test grants a certain amount and type of legitimacy. In principle, worth can be questioned and re-tested. Further, the outcome of a test is "accompanied by a codification or, at least, an explicit formulation of valid proof" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 212). A test that is unrecorded and not remembered is not a test.

Tests of worth vary in the degree of their results' clarity and scope. Some tests only give vague hints of worth; some offer complicated results that must be interpreted by experts, and others offer blunt answers that anyone can understand. Some tests may be focused on a specific trait, while others maybe focused on the worth of a person as a whole, a group of people, etc.

Genuine vs. Ceremonial Evaluation

The goal of a genuine evaluation, what Boltanski calls a *reality test*, is “to recognize whether this value is materialized in the very texture of reality and to attest it by evidence aspiring to general validity” (Boltanski, 2011, p. 106). Genuine evaluation is necessarily an uncertain activity (Boltanski, 2011, p. 106), as worth is not immediately obvious to the observer.

Alternatively, actors may resort to a ceremonial form of evaluation, or what PSC refers to as a truth test. Partially ritualized, ceremonial tests are “the work of confirmation.” He continues:

[Truth or ceremonial tests] make visible the [relationship between the order of symbolic propositions and the order of the states of affairs whose image they are – and hence to confirm and stabilize it – and this, in particular, by conjugating several modes of representation, such as statements, performances (in the theatrical sense), icons and gestures, between which correspondences are established (Boltanski, 2011, p. 104).

If a test of worth is ceremonial, it avoids the possibility of critique, the possibility that a state of affairs may not harmoniously overlap with a symbolic order. As we will see below, a formal organization such as a university may rely on ceremonial tests to avoid genuine evaluation.

Exploitation and Displacement

No test of worth is perfectly accurate or valid. *Displacement* is the deformation or corruption of equivalence. “The established tests of status are circumvented” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 499), allowing forms of power and privilege to remain hidden yet influential. A test of worth cannot be effective to the degree that displacements occur. “The accumulating displacements help to undo the established tests, which are not only circumvented but have also proved ineffective, since they are less and less capable of furnishing access to the good that they promised” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 499). Displacement is a form of anomie, in the specific sense that it is a failure of regulation (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, pp. 420-422).

At its most simple, exploitation “means certain contributions have not received their just remuneration,” though it is often masked and given a veneer of legitimacy (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 373) as it intertwines with displacements often intentionally created to maintain power. Boltanski and Chiapello continue:

The denunciation of exploitation may consist in demonstrating that beings contributing to the creation of the profit have been forgotten or neglected, or that their

contributions have not been identified in full, or been underestimated. (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 374)

By focusing on how the act of evaluation occurs and may be corrupted, Boltanski and his collaborators emphasize the creative capacities of individuals to understand exploitation in their own normative terms (Boltanski, 2011; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Susen & Turner, 2014). This framework therefore enables nuanced empirical research of exploitation, rather than a researcher merely imposing a claim.

The Realness of Jobs

The discussion of exploitation is complicated by the question of what qualifies as work. Indeed, feminism has long pointed out problems regarding domestic activity being distinguished from work, resulting in a lack of compensation or even recognition (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Robin Clair has studied the meaning of work and its constitution as a “real job” (Clair, 1996; Clair et al., 2008, p. 200). After a study on work done by university students, she concluded a job was “non-real” to the extent that it satisfied one or more of the following conditions:

(1) Enjoyable, (2) easy or nonskilled, (3) temporary or unstable, (4) have a low probability of success, (5) require little trust, (6) are not conducted in their natural time (e.g., a soldier in war time versus a soldier in peace time), (7) underutilize the worker in terms of duration and intensity, and (8) are not the primary means of support (Clair, 1996, p. 253).

Furthermore, Clair argues that many non-real jobs are often part-time, jobs that occur while one is still a student, or are “anticipatory” of real jobs (Clair, 1996, p. 250). Consequently, much of the work done by college students is viewed as non-real. With PSC’s framework in mind, with the addition of Clair’s work on *real jobs*, we now turn our attention to the three post-secondary institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

From 2007 to 2010, I conducted sixty-two semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with people associated with three postsecondary institutions in the Northeastern United States. This time period is key for understanding the use of part-time faculty members at American postsecondary institutions precisely because this is when a *new normal* was established in the relative proportions of part- to full-time faculty, resulting in a period of relative stabilization in higher education over the last 15 years. While the structure of the academic field on issues of contingent working conditions has remained strikingly similar since the interviews were conducted, they also took place prior to unionization efforts over the last decade following the death of Margaret Mary Vojtko; these activism efforts by unions have resulted in the greater publicization of the issues surrounding part-time academic labor, and also an accompanying homogenization of discourse through the dissemination of talking points.

This study relied on theoretical sampling, to ensure it represented a variety of occupational positions (full-time faculty, part-time faculty, administrators, and

graduate students). Potential interviewees were contacted via their email addresses, which were publicly available on department websites and posted course schedules. The names of interviewees and their employing institutions were replaced with pseudonyms. Interviews were roughly an hour long. Unless interviewees requested otherwise, all interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. If there was no audio recording, the author relied on interview notes. The transcripts and notes of interviews were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO. This project was approved by the institutional review board at the University at Albany, SUNY.

The study includes interviews at three academic institutions in the northeastern United States, which were also given a pseudonym to prevent identification of any interviewees. The interviews were conducted with full-time faculty (including both tenured and tenure-track), part-time faculty (including graduate students with adjunct contracts), and administrators, in the English and Mathematics Departments of all three postsecondary schools. English and mathematics were chosen for the study as traditional postsecondary disciplines whose reliance on part-time faculty parallels the general trend across all of American higher education (Blair et al., 2010, p. 51; Modern Language Association, 2008, p. 4). The fact that one is from the humanities and the other is a STEM field allows for another axis of comparison. Interviewees' institutional affiliations, disciplinary affiliations, and positions can be found in Table 1.

The three institutions in this study represent different types of colleges. First, Caussade College is a private Catholic college with roughly 3,000 undergraduate and 2,000 graduate students. Second, Mahican Community College is an associate's degree-granting public institution with over 10,000 full-time equivalent students. Finally, Orange University is a public research university with over 17,000 undergraduate students and roughly 5,000 graduate students. These three institutions are all located within the same metropolitan statistical area in the northeastern United States; as such, some part-time faculty members had affiliations with more than one of these institutions. In some cases, part-time faculty members served as part-time faculty members at multiple institutions or served as an adjunct at either Caussade College or Mahican Community College while obtaining a graduate degree from Orange University.

Interviews and Interpretation

Interview questions and the interpretation of participant responses focused on two groups of research questions. First, what justificatory strategies were commonly used by actors as they denounced or denied the existence of the exploitation of part-time professors? Did the types of justifications vary according to discipline, seniority, or college? Second, what structural and material components facilitated the justifications in actors' accounts? If part-time faculty work was not a *real* job - a key finding in this article as stated above - what was it, and how did this help the employing college avoid the accusation of exploitation? These questions were the basis of interviews with both full- and part-time instructors. This article begins each

section with a brief profile of the college or university. It then documents how each institution defines part-time faculty work as not a *real* job in a different way, and how this definition is embedded in the organization of work at each institution.

Table 1: Interviewees in Study by College, Discipline, and Position

	Tenured/ Tenure- Track Faculty	Visiting or Full-Time Non- Tenure Faculty	Part-Time Instructors	Graduate Students Teaching	Administrators	Total
Community College English	3	0	4	N/A	0	7
Community College Math	2	0	4	N/A	0	6
Community College Staff	0	0	0	N/A	1	1
Master's Granting English	6	1	8	N/A	0	15
Master's Granting Math	3	0	4	N/A	0	7
Master's Granting Staff	0	0	0	N/A	2	2
Research University English	5	0	2	6	0	13
Research University Math	3	0	1	4	0	8
Research University Staff	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	22	1	23	10	6	62

While this article has no interest in objectifying part-time faculty or removing their agency, it is focused on the criteria of evaluation and their associated organizational structures. Similar things can be said about tenure-track faculty members, tenured faculty members, and administrators. Consequently, the empirical analysis of this article is not targeting specific questions of strategy to end part-time faculty exploitation, though a discussion of public policy implications can be found in the Discussion section. Finally, I wish to describe the “moral landscape” of part-time teaching as formed by common justifications, criticisms, and displacements. As such, the purpose of the article is not to morally judge a specific individual Dean, as some pro-adjunct writing does in denouncing *badmin*, or bad administrators (Kottner

2022, p. 171). For PSC, the build toward critique studies structural failures more than the moral culpability of individuals.

RESULTS

The results of this research are presented as a comparison of three case studies. The first case study of Caussade College will set the core argument regarding part-time teaching as something other than a *real job*. The second and third case studies, of Mahican Community College and Orange University respectively, present variations on the core idea presenting part-time teaching as something other than a *real job*.

Part-Time Faculty Work as Avocation at Caussade College

Founded in the early 20th Century, Caussade College is a private Catholic college in the Northeastern United States. While it offers a liberal arts education, the majority of its undergraduates receive professional degrees, and it has a few programs that offer master's degrees. At the time of data collection, Caussade College, part-time faculty members across all disciplines made \$735 per credit hour with no benefits. Most math courses were three-credit courses, paying \$2,205, while English courses were four credits, paying \$2,940.

Pay vs. the Love of Teaching

Many interviewees at Caussade College argued the compensation for part-time teaching was too low, though no respondent specified a legitimate and non-exploitative wage. Part-time English professor Curtis Laskawski suggested exploitation is occurring at Caussade,

I would love to see a day when we get paid what we are worth, and I would like to see myself working somewhere where I can have benefits and I can really, truly feel like a part of the community.

From an administrative standpoint, English professor and Coordinator for the Composition Courses Deanna Tolson agreed with the concern that the pay does not constitute a fair wage. "We're able in the English department, I think, to offer a bit more, because our courses are four credits and not three... But I'm pretty sure they pay better elsewhere. We can't give them the pay they deserve." Math Department Chair Allison Buscemi agreed with Laskawski and Tolson. "We don't pay highly and that bothers me," she admitted. "But then again, I have always found that people who love teaching don't really care."

The claim that those who love teaching do not care about their wage is repeated by several part-time faculty members. We can see motivations beyond money at work for Erica Volz, a hospital administrator with a master's degree in English, when she responded to a question regarding her long-term career plans:

Ultimately my goal was to teach college. I've sort of been stymied a little bit, because I have my master's but not my PhD. or my MFA. So this is about as far up as I can go without getting a terminal degree.

She continues later in the interview, answering a question regarding her future plans regarding teaching at Caussade College:

I'm really torn right now between doing what I love and working for a company that's constantly... giving me raises and has good benefits. It's hard because I like what I do in the healthcare arena and I'm good at it, but it certainly isn't the plan that I had for my life, and part of me just really wants to hold onto this because it is what I wanted to do.

English is something that Prof. Volz is passionate about and doing it in addition to her regular (and well-paying) job is emotionally rewarding, as it is an expression of her love of English. For Volz, that emotional reward is more important for her than a salary, even if she does not think the situation is ideal.

Retirees are also drawn to part-time instruction for non-financial motivations. William Breedlove is a retired high school principal who teaches math at Caussade. Money, he says, "is not my driver... The money all goes basically to my son, [and] my granddaughter." Another retiree is Melissa Vassel, a retired high school math teacher, for whom part-time teaching offers a very minimal financial motivation: "My goal was, when I retired, was I wanted something to do that would pay my health insurance, and [teaching at Caussade part-time] does. That was my goal." If one's sole concern is whether one's pay covers healthcare premiums or as a way to stay active in retirement, his or her personal calculus of whether a job is worthwhile will be different than someone who is trying to earn a living wage from working solely as a part-time faculty member.

Part-Time Work: Inappropriate Unless Avocational

The Department Chair of the English Department, Lori Bash, categorized part-time faculty members into three general groups:

We have some people who are doing this while they're doing their dissertation or while they're going to school, they're going for their Ph.D. And they do this generally because they need the money... Then we have the people who are retired... And then there's another group that survive on adjuncting and those are the ones who [are] adjuncting [at] three or four different schools and if they have two classes in each one, they can live. It's not very good, but you know.

Prof. Bash made a clear normative statement that "it's not very good" to try and live or survive off teaching at multiple schools, inferring that one ought to avoid doing so if possible. Deanna Tolson, Associate English Professor and Director of Caussade's composition program, called this group "frequent fliers." "There are a lot of schools in the area," she said. "So often they'll teach one course for us, a course for Orange University, [and] a course for Mahican. And so, they're flying around to all those different campuses."

The only group that Prof. Bash expressed concern for are those who attempt to "survive" off the wages of part-time faculty work. Importantly, this is the only group that is attempting to treat part-time faculty work as a *real job*. It appears then that, in the eyes of the Department Chairs and satisfied part-time faculty, being a part-time faculty member at Caussade College should be an *avocational pursuit*, something one

may do for the sheer pleasure of teaching, or as something to do in one's retirement or spare time. To the degree that someone accepts that definition, then that individual will likely accept the arrangement of part-time faculty work at Caussade as legitimate and not exploitative.

Work at Caussade College is organized in a way that reinforces the idea that part-time faculty work is avocational and not a *real job*, including course caps, limited workspace, and exclusion from committee work and service, as discussed in the following sections. These organizational characteristics devalue the contributions of part-time faculty members. According to this logic, if one's contribution to the organization is minimal, then there can be no exploitation associated with minimal pay. This effectively becomes a justificatory strategy, since exploitation is based on the idea one is not compensated appropriately.

Course Cap. Limiting how many courses one can teach is one way that Caussade College reinforces the avocational nature of part-time instruction. Part-time professors in the English and Math Department at Caussade are not allowed to teach more than two courses per semester. Allen Valentin, the Dean of Math and Sciences, explained why:

No matter what, there is a rule that is always followed: an adjunct will never teach more than half a load [9 credit hours]. More than that is exploitation. Sometimes I'll get into an argument with a chair who thinks he's helping [the part-time faculty member], but no, no matter why you think it's a good idea, making someone work that much at that pay is exploitative, and Caussade doesn't do that.

It is striking to claim \$735 per credit is not exploitative for eight credits worth of courses, but it becomes so if someone teaches twelve credits worth of courses. The Math Department Chair Allison Buscemi agreed with Dean Valentin's analysis when she comments on the course cap:

[A cap] is sometimes limiting but it's probably better for them [the adjuncts]. Most of them don't want to teach more than two classes. Some people though, adjuncting in three or four different places. That's tough. That is not a good thing. They're all over the place. And that's rough for them.

Dean Valentin and Professor Buscemi are not worried about part-time faculty members who only desire a course or two each semester. They see hiring someone to teach two courses for \$2,205 each as legitimate and not exploitative yet hiring someone to teach more at the same rate of pay *becomes* exploitative or illegitimate. For reference, the standard teaching load of a full-time tenured or tenure-track professor at Caussade is three 3-credit courses a semester.

A reasonable interpretation of this is that the *rules* of legitimacy are different for part- and full-time professors, with the latter being a *real job*, and the former not. This argument suggests that it is good for the adjuncts to be avocational, as it would be exploitative for them to try to make adjunct work a real job at their pay, and most of them do not want real jobs anyway. By enforcing a course cap, Caussade reinforces the definition of part-time work as limited and not *real*, held in contrast to legitimate working conditions as defined by full-time, tenure-track or tenured positions.

Office Space. The Math and English Departments both use office space as an indicator of whether one's job was *real*. All full-time employees at Caussade in this

study preferred to have their interviews in their offices. Meanwhile, interviews with part-time Caussade professors took place in dining halls, coffee shops, and other spaces the part-time faculty members chose.

The Math Department had no office space for their part-time faculty. Instead, there was an alcove in a hallway that had a desk, some chairs, and a whiteboard. “Last year, I would arrange to meet with students and I’d meet them in the library or there’s, like, this little space with a table outside in the hallway near where the classroom where I teach is, and I’d meet students there, but I wouldn’t actually have an office,” said part-time math professor Jack Newsome. “It would be nice if I had a space on campus, even if it was like a shared stuff with a bunch of other adjuncts, to have office hours.”

The English Department, on the other hand, had a space for part-time faculty members. Many of Caussade College’s buildings are former residential homes, and the English Department offices occupy former houses. Bedrooms have been converted into offices and living rooms into administrative assistant spaces. “It’s a fairly nice space,” remarked English Chair Lori Bash, describing the space for part-time professors. “It’s the attic of the house next door. But it was an apartment, it’s not, like, an *attic*. And it has computers in it, and it has a place where they can hang their coats, and have students meet them and that kind of thing” (emphasis in original). Though the situation for part-time professors in English was arguably superior to those in Math regarding office space, there was nevertheless a clear distinction between the office space of full-time and part-time faculty members. *Real* jobs come with *real* offices.

Committee Work and Service. A third way in which Caussade College reinforces a conception of part-time faculty work as avocational was in the delegation of committee work. Mathematics Department Chair Allison Buscemi put it simply: “Adjuncts have no responsibility beyond teaching except to be available occasionally for help [during office hours].” While tenured or tenure-track faculty were expected to sit on committees, part-time and visiting professors were not required or expected to do so. Additionally, no part-time faculty member had formal responsibilities advising students. Given the exclusive connection of service to full-time work, committee-work and advising effectively served as professional interaction rituals (Lawrence, 2004; Lawrence & Corwin, 2003), symbolically delineating who was *real* in the eyes of the Department through assigning symbolically important activities to some (full-time) faculty members and not other (part-time) faculty members.

A partial exception to this rule occurs in the English Department, where the Department offers bi-weekly teaching workshops to part-time professors who teach Composition. However, this is an exception that proves the rule. Although these teaching workshops are an activity in which part-time English faculty members may participate, the form it takes reinforces the distinction between the *real* work of the full-time faculty and the avocational work of the part-time faculty. The workshops are not for full-time faculty members. Furthermore, they are optional and come with additional pay, reinforcing the idea that part-time faculty are only expected to teach their course, and participating in the workshop is beyond their regular duties. It is

therefore not a professional interaction ritual that confirms their membership in the academy, but quite the opposite.

Dissatisfaction and Wanting to be Real

Two part-time faculty members at Caussade stated during their interviews they were dissatisfied with their experience of part-time faculty work. In both cases, their criticism can amount to frustration that part-time faculty work was not *real* enough work. Joy Wine, a part-time English professor at both Caussade College and Mahican Community College, is leaving it to find better paying work:

I'm looking for another job. I took a state test last year. It's very sad. I would love to stay in it, but... I'm 51 and I never had to work before with my husband's job. But I really need to now. I have two kids in college and we really can't afford our house right now.

Wally Perrine works as a part-time faculty member at both Caussade College and Orange University, and he echoes Wine's comments:

[Regarding] part-time teaching, I think I'm in my weaning sort of years with that. I've had a lot, there's not much – I mean, there's enthusiasm, but there's not much anymore. I kind of want to get onto more affordable things you know, higher paying jobs so I can support myself better.

Additionally, he also considers the working conditions very isolating:

There's no interaction whatsoever... [Sometimes,] there's an event somewhere you know. And even if I'm at an event I feel out of place, you know, part-time... Even when we're at an event together, I don't feel like there's any connection. They kind of see me, they know me, we don't know how to relate.

While only two respondents willingly spoke about leaving part-time faculty work, the significance here is that both respondents explicitly rejected the notion that part-time faculty work was both legitimate and not *real* work. Rather, its status as not *real*, with low pay and social isolation, explicitly made it less legitimate and worthwhile.

Case Summary

As we see, Caussade College uses a definition of part-time faculty members that makes their work avocational rather than a real job. Its administrators do not believe the legitimacy of hiring part-time professors, a belief that *scales up* the more they work; a legitimate rate of pay for one course is exploitative for three courses. This justification is then reinforced by and embedded in the organization of the college. Course caps, limited office space, and a disconnection from professional service all reinforce the notion that being a part-time professor is not a *real* job. Part-time faculty who wish for *real jobs* are the most likely to be dissatisfied with work, and also the most likely to quit part-time teaching and seek more lucrative jobs. Other institutions have their own variations on the notion that part-time academic work is something other than a *real* job, as detailed in the next two case studies.

Caussade College clearly distinguishes between part- and full-time faculty members. A hard "wall" of an organizational boundary is erected between them, and

the argument is made that a more legitimate, less exploitative environment occurs if that boundary is respected. To allow or encourage people to work full-time at the pay rates Caussade offers would be, in the eyes of Caussade's faculty members, exploitative. It is thus more legitimate for part-time teaching to remain an avocational pursuit, take organizational measures to limit course offerings, and pay people extra to attend meetings both serve that purpose. The obvious differences in office space also make it clear that part-time faculty members are in a more marginal position at Caussade.

Mahican Community College and the Elongated Job Interview

According to its website, Mahican Community College is an open enrollment institution with over 10,000 full-time equivalent students. At the time of data collection, the minimum salary for full-time faculty tenure-track was \$48,981 a year. Mahican Community College pays substantially better than Caussade College. Part-time faculty members have a college-wide standard pay rate of \$926 per credit hour until they reach nine credit hours, and \$985 per credit hour for any credit hours beyond that. As introductory courses in both English and math at MCC are three credits each, and adjuncts are rarely hired for more than nine credit hours a semester, adjuncts in both departments can be expected to receive \$2,928 per course per semester with no benefits. Additionally, there is no official course cap at Mahican Community College. Despite these differences, Mahican Community College, like Caussade College, also justifies part-time faculty work by denying that it is a *real job*.

Full-time faculty and administrators at Mahican Community College consider part-time faculty members who attempt to make it into a real job by teaching a number of courses, usually at multiple campuses to generate sufficient income, as doing something potentially self-destructive. "When I was younger," Benita Raatz, a former tenured English professor at Mahican Community College who transitioned from full-time to part-time work upon her retirement several years ago, recalled,

There were people who had three different adjunct jobs, trying to put together enough money to live. They would teach three classes here, and three classes at Caussade, and another two courses at night at Orange University. That's just nuts.

Prof. Raatz presented part-time faculty work as not a "real job," and her opinion was that trying to cobble together enough courses at several universities in the attempt to create the income of a real job was unlikely to be worth the effort.

Indeed, many interviewees at Mahican suggested that it would be illegitimate or exploitative if part-time faculty work was a form of *real work*. "What it does is force you to decide whether you're teaching for money or for love," Prof. Raatz remarked. "And if you're teaching for money and you need the money, you can't do this job. It just doesn't pay squat. You know? It's just not worth it." The theme once again emerges that one who teaches "for love" is not necessarily exploited, but teaching for money would be unsustainable and potentially exploitative due to low pay.

Part-Time Work as an Elongated Job Interview

In addition to an avocational pursuit, Mahican Community College full-time faculty and administrators frequently defined part-time work as an *elongated job interview* for full-time positions. Math Department Chair Noreen Rumble recalled, “out of the eight people that I’ve hired, I believe five have been adjuncts. So, it’s a little bit of a mix, but not quite half.... I think a number of people come here as adjuncts in hopes of getting a full-time job here.” Regarding her department, assistant English professor Harriet Right remarked, “As far as I know, every single full-time person here worked part-time first.”

As an elongated job interview, department chairs and other full-time faculty believe someone who teaches at Mahican part-time can demonstrate their ability to teach the students who enroll at the community college, many of whom lack preparation for college-level coursework, and who may be enrolled in remedial classes. Associate math professor Allen Strohmeyer argued, “We like knowing that people coming into our positions here have some firsthand experience with that actual reality... If they’ve been an adjunct here, we say, all right, they know what they’re getting into.”

Service as Indicator of Commitment. At the same time, teaching ability is not the sole metric when considering promoting a part-time employee to a full-time position. Math Department Chair Noreen Rumble, for example, stated that voluntary service for the department or college would be advantageous to someone looking for full-time, tenure-track work:

If they’re interested in full-time job here, they should [volunteer to be on committees for the college]. I need people that are interested in what’s going on. Some adjuncts can’t come to meetings because they have children at home or whatever, but they participate via e-mail. They get involved even if they can’t come to the meetings.

This is very different than Caussade College, where part-time faculty were not expected to do anything beyond teaching, save for possibly be paid to attend a workshop. However, this difference fully conforms to the difference between defining part-time academic work as an avocational activity and defining it as an elongated job interview. There is a (potential) continuity between part- and full-time work, and it is the responsibility of the applicant-adjunct to take on the service work to demonstrate they are worthy of a full-time position.

Concerns Regarding Adjunct Work as Job Interviews

Several part-time professors voiced concerns regarding treating part-time faculty work as an elongated job interview for full-time positions. Part-time math professor Stan Schultz acknowledges potential pitfalls to this approach:

I think it’s definitely a possibility because I’ve seen it happen [where people transition to tenure-track positions], but it’s not always a guarantee either. I mean, I’ve seen people who are adjuncts for a long time and when openings occur, they

didn't get the position. Of course, that leaves them frustrated and... I would guess a quarter to a half, just off the top of my head [but] I have no official statistics. Joy Wine, an English part-time instructor from Caussade College, used to teach at Mahican Community College.

Well, I ended up over here because I left Mahican Community College very bitter because I thought they had unfair hiring practices... I did everything I could to get in there and I know I was more qualified than many people who were hired. I went through the interviewing process three times and had a lot of experience and they hired people – it's not at all like the process [where] they do a national search, and they're looking for a PhD. I don't have a PhD. So, I ended up really devastated. As we can see from these two respondents, justifying part-time faculty work as an elongated job interview only creates legitimacy to the degree that people have faith that the system is fair. To the extent that people feel they are passed over, part-time instructors seeking full-time work may feel exploited or at least unfairly treated. Ms. Vine is, as she described it, "frustrated and bitter" because she feels illegitimately excluded from full-time positions.

Case Summary

Like Caussade, Mahican Community College attempts to organize and define part-time faculty work as something other than a *real job*. However, the most common justification for part-time instruction at Mahican was that it served as an elongated job interview, a way of entering full-time academic work. This differs substantially from Caussade's justificatory regime, which is more focused on framing part-time work as an avocation and somehow *other* to full-time, tenure-track academic work. Part-time faculty members' attendance at faculty meetings and participating in service indicated a commitment to the college by the part-time faculty member. Problems arise, however, to the extent that part-time instructors seeking full-time positions do not view the process as fair. Expecting part-time instructors to participate in uncompensated service in the hopes of being selected for a full-time position can also result in exploitation, particularly if the full-time position never materializes.

The organizational boundary between part- and full-time tenure-track positions at Mahican Community College cannot therefore be described as the impermeable wall that exists at Caussade. Rather, the boundary is explicitly set up as a gateway. Ideally, the part-time faculty who are worthy may pass into the ranks of the full-time tenure-track faculty. However, to the degree a part-time instructor expects their work to be a *real job* in and of itself, or to the degree they do not believe the hiring practices of full-time faculty members is fair, they will not view this arrangement, and its organizational boundary, as legitimate.

A third relationship exists between part- and full-time work at the public research university, Orange University.

Orange University

Orange University is a large public research university of just under 20,000 students, and it is in the same general region as the other two colleges. Department chairs and full-time faculty in both the English and Math Departments expect that the vast majority of their part-time faculty are also enrolled graduate students at Orange University. Steve Raisik, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs within the university's College of Arts and Sciences, observed, "The use of graduate students as part-time faculty members has been a trend over the last five years" for many departments in the College of Arts and Sciences at Orange University. According to Prof. Aaron Benson, Director of the Undergraduate Program for the Math Department, about two thirds of the part-time faculty are graduate students in their fourth year or later. In the English Department, Chair Cal Jackson stated that "75 or 80 percent" of English graduate students spend time teaching as part-time faculty after their assistantship funding runs out after three years.

Unlike Caussade and Mahican Community College, Orange University does not have a single pay scale for all part-time faculty. The English Department pays the university-wide minimum salary for part-time faculty members, which is set at \$2,800 per course, but departments can pay more. The Math Department pays \$5,000 per course, almost twice that of the English Department.

Part-Time Teaching as Professional Development

The claim that Orange University treats its part-time faculty members fairly is grounded in the claim that the university has an obligation to hire graduate students as part-time faculty members, because the experience of teaching part-time is part of graduate education. "Certainly, the people who get hired first as adjuncts are graduate students who are making progress," stated Math Professor Aaron Benson. Professor Max Farmer, Director of Graduate Studies for the English Department, makes a very similar claim regarding the program:

We've never had to say, you can't teach any longer... When there are issues or problems, or if there are student complaints, undergraduate complaints that are particularly notable, we will sit down and talk it out and see what's going on. Talk to the mentor, and talk to the student in question, just to see what's happening, and what might have transpired. And usually, it's sorted out at that level.

Most graduate students employed by their departments to teach part-time are hired on the basis of having "good standing" in the department: They are making progress on their coursework and dissertation, as deemed appropriate by their professors. As such, part-time teaching positions are distributed to current graduate students in ways that often resemble financial aid awards.

Legitimate Compensation: Graduate Development and/or Pay

While the Mathematics Department pays part-time faculty substantially more, the English Department provides more formalized professional development to graduate

students. This arrangement makes sense within the justificatory framework of Orange University, as it expects part-time faculty to be graduate students. The opportunities are related to teaching, including mentoring and workshops.

Mentoring. Teaching mentors are assigned to English graduate students when they begin coursework in either the M.A. or Ph.D. degree programs, and their teaching mentors are assigned based on their research interests. This position is distinct from the graduate student's dissertation committee chair, and different professors often fill the two positions. The formal apprenticeship of part-time faculty members to full-time instructors through the mentorship program reinforces a teacher-student learning model and reflects an organizational view of teaching as part of graduate education. According to undergraduate director Peter Royce, a teaching mentor "goes and observes the class, writes up some brief comments and talks with the student teacher." Faculty observations occur once or twice a year according to Professor Royce.

In contrast, when answering the question of what resources are available to math part-time faculty members, Professor Benson replied,

They just either come to me [as Director of Undergraduate Studies in Math] or they go to one of their colleagues who has taught the course before... For instance, they can come to me if they wanted some – to see past exams or that sort of thing so they get an idea of the level they're pitching it at"

In other words, questions or problems regarding teaching are handled through informal networks within the department.

Workshops. In addition to the teaching mentors, the English Department also offers professionalization courses and workshops, and these take the form of official graduate courses. "This department is very good at trying to professionalize us," said graduate student Cindy Smith. "They give a lot of workshops and things, where we learn how to build a resume, we learn how to have an interview, we learn how to publish papers." These courses are English 810 (English Internship) and English 815 (English Workshop). The internship is a required course, which can be fulfilled several different ways. Fourth-year graduate student Kelly Sanders co-taught a course with a tenured professor to fulfill his internship requirement, though there were many other ways one could do so, including "literally taking a position of intern at [Orange University] press, for example. Some people present a series of lectures to the department."

The workshop course includes matters such as writing curriculum vitae, giving effective job interviews, and publishing scholarly work. All-but-dissertation (ABD) graduate student Tom London described it as a "pedagogy class." He continued:

We workshop our syllabus, and talk about ways – teaching strategies in the pedagogy. You know, kind of – you know how you would structure your class and different examples of ways to approach the class from different situations. So, I mean, that's pretty – my best – so that's like a whole semester [that is] intense... that's definitely useful. Yeah. That's what's going on, and usually that class is in co-relation to like your first semester of teaching. So you come in and you talk about what happened in your class.

Courses such as these codify the department's effort at training graduate students to be full-time professors at universities and colleges. In doing so, the English Department presents itself as compensating its graduate students who teach in appropriate ways. The fact that the English Department can substitute professional development for salary is an indicator that part-time faculty work is not a *real* job, but rather part of an education that will help one get a *real* job in the future.

Non-Graduate Part-Time Professors

Three of the part-time faculty members at Orange University included in this study were not graduate students. One is Wally Perrine, who also works at the English Department at Caussade, and who is leaving academic work to find better paying work. Oliver Street is a part-time professor from the Mathematics Department. A former graduate student, Oliver decided he was happy to end his graduate career with a master's degree, rather than continue to a Ph.D. "Research just wasn't for me," he says. At the same time, however, he enjoys teaching and usually gets three courses a semester to teach. Consequently, he is also able to make an income (\$30,000 with benefits) he seems quite happy with in the short-term, though he admits he isn't sure what he wants to do after a few more years of teaching as a part-time instructor.

Kendra Rawls is quite different. The wife of an administrator, she dropped out of graduate school over twenty years ago to raise their children. She became a part-time professor in Orange University's English Department after her children had gone to college, and when she heard they had a shortage of faculty. As a part-time instructor at Orange University, she has often taught writing-intensive courses, and believes she is often assigned to teach them because graduate students prefer not to, due to the heavy grading load.

Responding to a question about how much she feels like she experiences a sense of belonging in the Department, Rawls admits to being conflicted. "At times I kind of created that [sense of belonging]," she says, "and other times I've gone into a 'caste system' to participate in those things, so I just exploited myself. And other times I'm not sure that I really want to get involved." Later in the interview, she returns to this sense of inner conflict:

Sometimes it bothers me, and other times I just... love it some days. I walk in and I just think, "This is the population I love to work with." I was barely over \$10,000.00, I'm \$12,000.00, something like that, which I think, 'Well, should I really be doing something else?' And I think it won't have the same rewards for me, and I know that. So, I feel like I'm fighting against my own nature sometimes. I have to push myself. But every semester, at the end of the semester, I will be grouching my husband and say, "I don't know. Why am I doing this to myself? Why don't I just to work at Denny's?"

While the three have very different experiences, all three wished to view part-time instruction as a *real job* in and of itself, and all three voiced concerns that it was not. The closest to being satisfied was Oliver Street, who was both younger and, as a math instructor, making more money than either Perrine or Rawls. However, even in Street's case, he doubted this was a sustainable position and was unsure what came

next. Though exceptions to the rule, the experiences of non-graduate student part-time instructors highlight the amount the expectation that part-time professors are graduate students is institutionalized within Orange University's structure.

Debt and Delay Impede Professional Development

Clara Amberson, an ABD graduate student in English, referred to herself as a "disgruntled graduate student" before her interview officially started. During the interview, she explained her earlier comment:

You know, just a cycle of debt and delay... I don't think I'm that disgruntled, but, I mean, everyone knows that we hired tons of adjuncts and so they don't have to hire actual [full-time professors], and they're not well compensated... I mean if I stop to think about it, I find it really almost too much to think about, you know. In a politically sort of conscious academic environment where there's globalization and it's like, so [who are the] sweatshop workers?

Amberson has two concerns. First, she believes part-time faculty members are not well-compensated, comparing working part-time at Orange University to working at a sweatshop. Second, her comment about debt and delay is a reference to graduate assistantships, which pay \$8,000 a year in exchange for the graduate student teaching one course a semester (or helping in the English Department-run University Writing Center during their first year). In the English Department, assistantships end after the third or fourth year of graduate school, at which point many graduate students end up teaching two courses: twice as many courses as they taught during their assistantships yet earning roughly \$2,000 less a year than their assistantship salaries. This is also roughly the time most graduate students transition from coursework to focusing on their dissertation research. English Department professor and Director of Graduate Studies Max Farmer echoed Amerson's concern:

The main reason [it is a problem] in this program is because while you're an assistant, you teach only one course a semester. And typically, when you become a part-line instructor, you're teaching two courses a semester. You actually have to work twice as much to earn approximately, in the neighborhood of the same amount of money. And the other bad news is that this happens at precisely the moment you need to spend perhaps your greatest effort and intensity on the project that is your dissertation. You need a lot more time by yourself to write. So, it's always an issue, and it's typically what slows people down. Typically. So that, if they were going at a certain pace before that, unless they are relatively unusual, they will just inevitably have to spread their time out, and therefore they won't make the same kind of progress they made before.

Amberson's and Farmer's concerns are grounded in the ideal of a good faith effort for departments and universities to provide sufficient financial aid to enable students complete graduate school in a timely manner, and that the current structure falls short of that ideal, creating debt and delay instead. On this specific issue, the higher pay from the Math Department would appear to help lessen the *debt* element of this concern. This article's methodology limits the ability to effectively consider

whether the English Department's professional development activities assist their graduate students obtain successful full-time academic work following graduation.

Case Summary

The use of part-time faculty members at Orange University differs substantially from the other two postsecondary institutions in this study in that it is the only one with doctoral graduate programs for English and Math, and it expects that part-time faculty members will be graduate students. Both departments rely on a rhetoric of professional development to justify the use of part-time faculty. This rhetoric is then buttressed by several organizational characteristics, such as the expectation that a graduate student in good standing can be expected to be given courses, or the idea in the English Department that professional development can be a legitimate substitute for salary.

While part- and full-time faculty members are all viewed as academic actors, the boundary between them now metaphorically takes the form of a ladder. The part-time faculty are equated with graduate students, and are lower status than the full-time tenure-track faculty members. Being a part-time instructor is framed as a valuable learning experience that may help the graduate students obtain full-time faculty positions at another institution. While in some ways this appears to be a more permeable organizational boundary than what exists at Caussade, it differs from Mahican Community College in that the students are not expected (or wanted) to remain at Orange University.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this research, I found evidence of colleges and universities responding to controversies regarding part-time faculty members by using organizational structure to manage and justify the working conditions and compensation of part-time faculty work. In doing so, I make three empirical claims. First, each institution presents part-time faculty work as something other than a *real job*, facilitating a denial of exploitation in the process. Each institution instead has a distinct understanding of the difference between full- and part-time academic work. Second, these justifications move beyond rhetoric and become embedded in the organization of the colleges and universities. Except for Orange University having different pay scales, the English and Math Departments of the universities generally share an understanding of part-time faculty work. Third, respondents who expressed reservations regarding the legitimacy of part-time work rejected the claim it was *unreal* work in various ways.

Many of the characteristics Clair (1996) associated with jobs that are *not real* appear to apply to part-time faculty members in the English and Math Departments at all three postsecondary institutions. Part-time faculty work is defined by all three organizations as temporary and unstable. At Caussade College, part-time faculty members were expected to be engaged in an avocational pursuit, rather than trying to make part-time faculty work into a *real job*. Part-time faculty members at Mahican Community College were viewed as a mixture of both avocational academics and

people engaged in elongated job interviews for full-time positions at the college. Finally, Orange University expected their part-time faculty members to be graduate students who were in their advanced years beyond their assistantships, actively using their part-time teaching experience to build skills and curriculum vitae in preparation for seeking a full-time, tenure-track position on the academic job market.

As the researcher, I did not assume all part-time faculty members aspired to be full-time tenure-track professors. However, I was expecting they would think of their work as a *job*, even if it was part-time, and therefore the calculation would be if their working conditions and wages were sufficient to be non-exploitative. These findings surprised me in that I was not expecting how many part-time professors were happy with it as an avocational position. Additionally, while I was not expecting administrators to admit their institutions exploited part-time professors, I also did not expect them to systematically frame part-time faculty work as a non-job as a *solution* to potential exploitation. Indeed, one could argue the framing of part-time faculty work as not a *real job* was at least partially successful and legitimated.

Defining part-time academic work in this fashion facilitated a denial of exploitation from the perspective of administrators and/or full-time faculty members. These are all ceremonial tests or truth tests, semi-ritualized justification rather than substantive investigations (Boltanski, 2011, p. 104), with most deploying the most common justifications used by their departments. Caussade and Mahican were explicit in their concern for anyone who attempted to use part-time faculty work as a primary means of financial support, while also acknowledging that it was not an uncommon practice. Meanwhile, Mahican and Orange University had defined part-time faculty work as an “anticipatory” position, where one may eventually get a full-time tenure-track position (within the organization in the case of Mahican, or elsewhere in the case of Orange University). Thus, from the perspective of the organization, it may be a hobby, a job interview, or part of their graduate education, but it wasn’t a *real job*. And because it was not a *real job*, the calculations of what constituted exploitation could be changed from those of a market-based regime to an academic regime.

On Part-Time Satisfaction, and the Realness of Jobs

The results of this study are consistent with previous findings that aspiring academics (Jacoby, 2006; Maynard & Joseph, 2006) and those whose primary source of income is part-time faculty work (Baldwin & Chronister, 2002) are more dissatisfied than those who are *voluntarily* part-time faculty. Indeed, the distinction between voluntary and involuntary contingent employment goes beyond job satisfaction and is central to the discussion of the legitimacy of the work itself (Kezar & Sam, 2010). However, the distinction between full and part-time faculty is also woven into the structures of particular organizations and departments and is directly related to particular organization strategies regarding the justification of employing part-time faculty members. As long as one views the activities of part-time faculty members as volunteer work or an apprenticeship, then they will not view the employing colleges as exploitative. If a part-time faculty member expects or needs to live off the financial

income from their part-time faculty labor, then they are likely to find it a rather exploitative experience. The organizational definition of part-time faculty work as a non-real job helps explain this divide.

Questions Associated with an Avocational Faculty

On July 8, 2015, Southern Virginia University posted an advertisement for a “Volunteer Professor” position (Schuman, 2015). This was a part-time volunteer opportunity, and Southern Virginia hoped to recruit a retired professional to fill it. There was no salary for the position, though the volunteer professor had full access to the library and the dining hall, and they were given a room on campus for their use. Unpaid, purely voluntary adjunct positions have also been advertised at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (Associated Press, 2018), and Tulane University (Flaherty, 2019), among others.

This article, with its findings on part-time academic work being something other than a *real job*, would suggest that these positions are not aberrations, but rather an idealized expression of the way part-time faculty work is often organized in colleges and universities. Indeed, if one combines the findings of this article with current demographics of the academic work force, then, over half the instructional staff in U.S. higher education do not have *real jobs*. This state of affairs has raised concerns for many researchers who critique the deprofessionalization of academic work (Rosinger et al., 2016), and its proletarianization (Garrison, 2012).

A justificatory strategy that suggests the work done by part-time and full-time tenured and tenure-track professors is similar (i.e., both teach three-credit university courses), but the former is not a *real job* worthy of *real* compensation, threatens to erode the professional status of the professoriate.

Implications for Public Policy

How does a finding that part-time work fits into a discussion of public policy? There are at least two important implications.

First, this article comes to a normative conclusion that it rejects out of hand the idea that work cannot be exploitative if it is not part of a real job, even if there are people who accept this, as it is a discursive framing that invites abuse. To use Boltanski’s language, it is a displacement *par excellence* that sidesteps effective moral judgement. Second, this article rejects the idea that there is a *silver bullet* that will end exploitation in higher education (or other sectors of the economy). Rather, any changes will be gradual and hard fought.

The findings in this article are compatible with the claim that despite the rhetoric of the gig economy allowing people to have increased flexibility and therefore freedom in their work lives, gig economy workers tend to have less power and economic security. It highlights precisely how the rhetoric of flexibility is more ideological than actual. This is true even if some accept that their part-time academic work is a *side hustle*, not a real job, or otherwise an expression of independent gig work (Nelson et al., 2020). As such, it agrees with the arguments describing the gig

academy one finds in Kezar et al. (2019). A core concern with the gig economy this article highlights is that part-time work *correctly* classified as such may be denigrated. In either case, the promise of freedom is illusory if pay and working conditions are sufficiently problematic (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 18).

Rejecting the claim part-time faculty work is not a real job requires dealing with financial inequities. The status quo found in the three institutions in this study and beyond is one that claims part-time work's compensation cannot *scale up* to full-time without it being exploitative. If that is the case, then it is likely exploitative at part-time as well. The American Federation of Labor explicitly states their goals for collective bargaining include pro-rata pay for contingent faculty. "Part-time/adjunct faculty should be paid a salary proportionate to that paid full-time tenured faculty of the same qualifications for doing the same work" (Stollar et al., 2014, p. 4). In other words, if an assistant professor makes \$90,000 a year, and according to their contract 50% of their time is to be spend teaching 6 courses a year, then the pro-rated salary for a part-time professor ought to be \$7,500.

To state the obvious, this goal is not one that is easily within grasp, but it should be a goal that the academic labor movement aspires toward. Without it, part-time faculty work will remain something less than a real job. This in turn will further deprofessionalize the professoriate.

Second, this article begs the question of what is the distinctiveness of full-time tenure-track employment that sets them apart from part-time faculty. The findings in this article suggest teaching is not, by itself, such a distinctive. This is a troubling question, as a lack of a compelling answer may lead to further deprofessionalization of American professors by the processes of the gig academy.

One potential area of focus is the role of professional service in one's university or discipline plays as professional rituals (Lawrence, 2004) that create professional identities or maintain symbolic memberships. In all three post-secondary institutions, notions of professional membership are carefully managed, though in different ways. Additionally, one may ask if the arrangements at these universities will minimize the potential for exploitation of part-time faculty members as academic gig workers.

The idea of service being important to make academic work a real job is strongly related to a policy recommendation from Kezar et al. (2019): an ideal of workplace democracy that goes beyond standard collective bargaining rights. As they argue:

"Essentially this notion involves applying democratic techniques to the functioning of workplaces including voting systems, debates, democratic structuring, systems of input, due process, and systems of appeal ... In higher education, a democratically controlled workplace would need a more equitable distribution of power than what is afforded through limited shared governance such as a faculty senate" (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 152).

The *bread and butter* workplace issues such as pay and benefits need to be supplemented with the ability to have a voice that can be heard by the organization as a whole. This is true for the full-time tenure-track faculty members, and it is true for part-time faculty. An opportunity to engage in service that is part of the governance of the institution would allow part-time professors to engage in the professional rituals of their colleagues, creating the potential for solidarity. This

would be a different arrangement than at Caussade College, where part-time professors are discouraged from service, and access to self-governance was lacking. It would also be different than Mahican Community College or Orange University, where a potential professional future is used as a partial justification for part-time faculty work. All service ought to be explicitly stated in contracts, stating what is voluntary, required, or (as in the case of Caussade workshops) attached to additional compensation.

Thus, we can see the results of this article supports and deepens the recommendations that Kezar et al. (2019) make in *The Gig Academy*. They support the need for unionization and workplace democracy as important goals to push back against the dysfunctional elements of the gig economy influencing American higher education. They deepen the recommendations by highlighting how much of a challenge is embedded in the idea that some forms of work are not real jobs.

Future Research

Several avenues for future research present themselves. One of the most important may be a need to study the forms of boundary work (Star & Griesemer, 1989) in contemporary American higher education that distinguish full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty members from their part-time counterparts, especially at teaching-oriented institutions. Such a study would benefit from an approach similar to the one found in this article, where both accounts of the distinction and the structure of work are documented and layered onto one another.

Another topic that this article does not speak to is offering an explanation, or at least an account, of which part-time faculty come to express their frustration and alienation, and which continue to express the acceptable statements about part-time faculty work as not a *real job*. One would assume economic positionality and needs are undoubtedly central. Someone who needs a job to be real is much more likely to be frustrated at working part-time within the academic world. Beyond this, however, the interviews did not offer a clear sense of what other factors would influence this frustration. For example, one could imagine ethnicity, gender, and years of experience all play a role. Consequently, this could be an area of fruitful research moving forward.

More broadly, one could argue there is a social problem worth addressing when a field depends on a group's labor while also denying that it is truly work. This is the case with contingent faculty in American higher education. While it is beyond the scope of this article to solve this problem, it is nevertheless important to document it clearly. The interviews still speak to challenges within the world of academic work. As we move deeper into crises involving funding cuts, and state legislatures desiring to monitor and censor what professors are teaching, we must have an even more clear understanding and justification of who has *real jobs*, including *real* employment protections, and therefore who *matters*.

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