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New Form of Adjunct Abuse

For many adjuncts, an extra course assignment can make all the difference in the world. More money, of course, but also the chance to do more teaching at a single institution. And for some, that extra course may result in a total teaching load that moves them up a pay scale or entitles them to health insurance or other benefits.

At San Antonio College, some of those extra courses are coming with an unusual stipulation. Adjuncts are being encouraged to take on extra courses, as the institution can't afford to hire as many full timers as it would like. But San Antonio also has rules — providing benefits and higher base pay — to those who teach 12 credits or more. What to do? The college is asking some part timers to take on the extra courses that bring their total to 12 or beyond, but then to agree in writing to pretend that they aren't teaching 12 credits.

Concerned faculty members provided *Inside Higher Ed* with copies of signed waivers and memos that are used in such situations. A department chair writes a dean a memo saying that a given adjunct will be teaching just over 12 credits this fall, but then adds that the adjunct is willing to sign a form so that he doesn't get the benefits to which he would otherwise be entitled. Then the corresponding waiver, which is notarized, has the same adjunct certify that he is waiving 1 semester credit of pay, so that he will be paid for less than 12 credits, even though he has committed to teaching just over 12 credits. The faculty members who provided the documentation did so on the condition that the adjuncts who agreed to these terms not be identified.

Gwendolyn Bradley, who works on adjunct issues for the American Association of University Professors, said that the practice “seems to mark a new low in the exploitation of adjunct faculty.” She said that the AAUP was requesting copies of the relevant documents to see if it could help those involved. The ability of a college to get adjuncts to sign these waivers speaks to the part timers' need for more courses and income under questionable circumstances, Bradley said, and to the adjuncts' “lack of any job security.”

Deborah Martin, a spokeswoman for the college, confirmed that some adjuncts are given waivers to sign as a condition of receiving certain course loads — and that those waivers involve the adjuncts accepting pay for fewer credits than they are actually teaching. She said that this isn't the first semester that this has taken place, and that it's done “to prevent a class cancellation” when an adjunct qualified to teach a course already is teaching 9 credits and an additional 3 credits would put the adjunct at 12.

She said that this isn't unfair to adjuncts because it only happens after a dean has "explained the situation." (Apparently the dean never explained the situation to the Alamo Community College District, of which the college is a part. Officials there didn't respond Wednesday to questions, but a district lawyer told [The San Antonio Express-News](#) that it didn't know about the policy and would try to stop it and compensate those denied pay in this way.)

Asked if this policy represented an attempt to deny benefits to adjuncts who should be receiving them, she said that wasn't the case. She said that to be eligible for benefits, an adjunct would have to work 90 days at 12 credits and that the full semester is only around 85 days. Asked if some adjuncts might be teaching consecutive semesters and so lose benefits under this scenario, she said "we're not trying to keep them from getting benefits."

Why would the college ask adjuncts to accept payment for a smaller credit load than they are teaching, and to certify this in a notarized form, if this has nothing to do with denying adjuncts compensation they may have earned? Martin said "that's a good question." She then said that Ruben Flores, a college dean who handles adjunct matters (and to whom the waiver forms authorizing pay for fewer credits than adjuncts are working are addressed), would explain the rationale for the system. Flores did not respond to messages.

Martin repeatedly said of the system being used: "It's either that or cancel the class."

Gerald J. Davey, an adjunct at San Antonio College who has served as the adjunct representative on the Faculty Council there, did not sign a waiver, but he has spoken with those who have and is angry about the system being used. Davey said that, in years past, once an adjunct has had a contract for 12 credits, benefits and higher pay scales have kicked in — and that the waivers are an attempt to limit what adjuncts receive from the college.

"It's disgusting that they have sunk to this level," he said.

Because adjuncts need the work, they feel that they "have no choice" but to accept these contracts, even though they are giving up pay (at a minimum for the extra credit hours) and benefits they deserve, Davey said. Adjuncts are being told to "take it or leave it," and so go along with the system, he said. "It's a quid pro quo."

— [Scott Jaschik](#)

*The original story and user comments can be viewed online at
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