

POVERTY

LOW PAY

Life on the Edge of the Blackboard

Florida adjunct faculty survey 2017

HOMELESSNESS



STUDENT SUCCESS



Muhammad Rehan

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Jennifer Copp

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Gary Bachner

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In loving memory of Robert Ryan, who lived for his students and stood with his colleagues to the end.



ADJUNCT FACULTY ARE LIVING ON THE EDGE OF POVERTY

Living out of cars. Skipping meals. Paying medical bills with a credit card. These are the harsh realities facing university and college faculty across the country.

Years of misplaced priorities have taken their toll on higher education. Universities and colleges no longer fulfill the promise of serving the public good. Underfunding and budget cuts are driving down student learning conditions and leaving too many educators in poverty. In response, a national movement has taken shape. Through SEIU Faculty Forward, graduate workers and adjunct professors have united to form unions and improve their working and teaching conditions. Students and community members have joined to fight for change. In the last four years, Faculty Forward has grown to more than 45,000 members, of whom 18,000 educators on nearly 60 campuses joined in the past four years.

As adjunct faculty on several Florida campuses have come together to form unions, their stories about life on the edge – living out of their cars, surviving on food stamps, delaying medical treatment—prompted Faculty Forward to assess how common it is for Florida adjuncts to experience this level of economic stress. Unfortunately, it's clear from a recent survey of 773 Florida faculty that years of austerity budgets and university administrators' misplaced priorities are also taking their toll on Florida's educators and their students. More than 43 percent of the respondents—the vast majority of whom teach at public colleges and universities¹—have experienced at least three indicators of hardship—from having their phone or utilities cut off to taking out a payday loan to using a food bank.² Nearly one in four have experienced at least five of these economic stresses in the last five years alone.³

As revealed in the following report, these shocking statistics, along with the stories of individual faculty who experience their impact, demonstrate a deep systemic issue plaguing Florida higher education. By standing up together and demanding change on campuses and in the state budget, faculty are beginning to change the broken Florida higher education system.



Low pay and
contingent work



Health at risk



Food insecurity



Unstable housing



Defaults, collections,
payday loans



Cost to taxpayers



Gary Bachner

Hillsborough Community College

Gary Bachner went without power for six days this summer, and it wasn't because of the hurricane: Florida Light and Power cut him off because he couldn't pay his bill. He was also without a cell phone for two months this year, relied on food stamps to eat for six months and needed government help one month to cover the rent.

Gary, who first started teaching math and physics at Hillsborough Community College in 2007, never thought he'd have to turn to food stamps, saying that the \$194 a month in aid "was just enough to get by, but it was a lifesaver."

In January, Hillsborough cut one of his classes with less than three weeks' notice. That created an unexpected gap that caught up with Gary by the summer. "The bottom line is that when you do the adjuncting thing, the summer is a really lean time," Gary says. "If you're not prepared to get through the summer you are in bad shape."

Today, Gary's lights are on; his phone is reconnected and he doesn't need to reapply for food stamps. But that's not because Hillsborough raised his \$2,000-per-course pay. It's because he has taken on two additional jobs: as a tutor with a program for disadvantaged students and as an instructor for test-prep giant Kaplan.

A graduate of the University of South Florida, Gary strives "to live the life of the mind. Teaching fulfills that desire. The most rewarding moment for me is that instant where the light bulb goes on over a student's head."

Yet working three different jobs is exhausting. "If you're racing all over town from one job to another," Gary says, "it's difficult to be at 100 percent. I do everything I can to make sure my physical exhaustion doesn't undermine the quality of education I provide my students."

Despite his struggles, Gary sees hope in organizing with fellow Hillsborough adjuncts, who are now fighting for a first contract that raises standards. "When you're one person and you're up against a system, you're at a disadvantage," Gary observes. "But there's strength in numbers. I really believe that by standing together, we are going to have an impact."

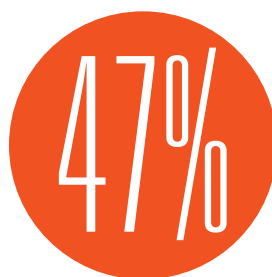
Low pay and contingent work

The stresses Florida faculty experience are unsurprising, given their low pay. Nearly nine in 10 of those surveyed teach part time,⁴ and nearly half of surveyed faculty (49 percent) reported earning between \$10,000 and \$30,000 last year from college teaching.⁵ Less than 7 percent reported earning more than \$60,000.⁶

This reflects the trend in Florida and the country as a whole away from full-time, stable, middle-class faculty jobs and toward hiring adjunct instructors on a part-time, temporary basis. According to the most recent available federal government data, two-thirds of Florida's public 2- and 4-year college faculty (66 percent) work in jobs that do not offer the possibility of long-term job security (tenure), and nearly half (47 percent) are both part-time and off the tenure track.⁷



Two-thirds work in jobs that do not offer the possibility of long-term job security (tenure)



Nearly half are both part-time and off the tenure track

Underscoring the impact of contingent employment on their livelihoods, over 46 percent of surveyed faculty reported that an academic employer had canceled a class with notice of 30 days or less,⁸ and over 28 percent reported that they had experienced short-notice cancellations at least twice in the last five years.⁹ Compounding the problem, several faculty commented that they have never seen pay increases or even that their institutions had actually cut adjunct pay in recent years.





Muhammad Rehan

Broward College

Muhammad Rehan has wanted to be a college professor for as long as he can remember. To prepare for college teaching, he substitute-taught in high schools all over Broward County while earning his master's in public health from Florida International University. Muhammad did find a college teaching post – he's an adjunct instructor in health sciences and biological sciences at Broward College. But his pay isn't enough to support his spouse and two kids, and he went without health insurance last year.

Fortunately, Muhammad says, his wife is a registered nurse, so the family is able to get by on “one and a half salaries.” But there are still serious challenges: After a year of being uninsured and paying a fine, Muhammad and his wife decided to add him to her health plan – doubling their insurance costs to about \$700 a month.

Muhammad still does not have dental coverage and can't afford to replace a crown that came off nine months ago. “It is painful,” he says. “I do my best not to eat anything cold like ice cream or drink anything cold either. I am also very careful not to eat hard foods or anything I would have to chew for a long time.”

Muhammad hopes organizing a union will address these kinds of problems for himself and other adjuncts. “These issues need to be brought to light in order to create change in the future.”

Health at risk

Obtaining health care for themselves and their families is a major problem for faculty, as the overwhelming majority of those surveyed (68 percent) do not have health insurance through their school(s).¹⁰ As a result:

- **Nearly half** have either delayed medical or dental treatment or skipped needed prescription medicines or both in the last five years.¹¹
- **Over one-third** have gone without health insurance.¹²
- **Nearly 13 percent** have relied on Medicaid or Florida's Kid Care program for health insurance for themselves or their family members.¹³

Food insecurity

One in four faculty surveyed have had difficulty putting food on the table: Either they have skipped meals, visited a food bank, food pantry or soup kitchen or have participated in the food stamp program.¹⁴



Unstable housing

Over a quarter of those surveyed have been at risk of being homeless—either because they got behind on their rent or mortgage, received an eviction notice, or had to move in with family or friends.¹⁵ Thirteen surveyed faculty had actually been homeless at some point in the last five years¹⁶—a statistic that remains shocking even after stories featuring homeless adjuncts in the Miami Herald¹⁷ and Guardian.¹⁸





Jennifer Copp

University of Central Florida, Seminole State College, and Daytona State College

Jennifer Copp didn't have to look far for inspiration when she decided to dedicate her life to teaching photography and fine arts to college students. Her parents – both college professors – instilled a love for teaching at an early age.

Jennifer earned her M.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in New York and now teaches at three central Florida schools: University of Central Florida, Seminole State College, and Daytona State College. What Jennifer didn't count on was the erosion in academics' living standards from her parents' generation to hers.

"It's getting worse," she says, comparing her parents' comfortable life with the less than \$19,000 a year she scrapes together. "My mom retired from her position as a professor and college administrator and works as an adjunct now. We really see how working conditions have declined. It's driving out some of our best people and talent."

Jennifer, a single mom, lives with her mother because she can't afford both her own place and child care for her 7-year-old daughter, Sophia. Sophia struggles with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, sensory processing disorder, learning disabilities and severe anxiety, which combine to make school a scary and tearful place for her.

None of Jennifer's academic employers provide her health insurance. While Jennifer's income is low enough that Sophia often qualifies for Medicaid, the program doesn't cover all the services Sophia needs, and many specialists won't accept it. It took six months just to find a neuropsychologist for Sophia. Sophia's psychiatrist stopped taking Medicaid, and her occupational therapist doesn't take it either, so Jennifer pays for occupational therapy out of pocket.

Jennifer takes Sophia to occupational therapy once a week, instead of the three times the doctor recommends. To fill the gap, "I try to learn the therapies and do them myself with Sophia at home," she says. Even so, the fees add up: Jennifer is currently carrying \$10,000 in medical bills and related expenses on her credit card.

Jennifer is determined to improve the situation for herself, her daughter and her coworkers. She hopes that organizing a union "will make our voices heard and secure a living wage for all adjuncts."

Defaults, collections, payday loans

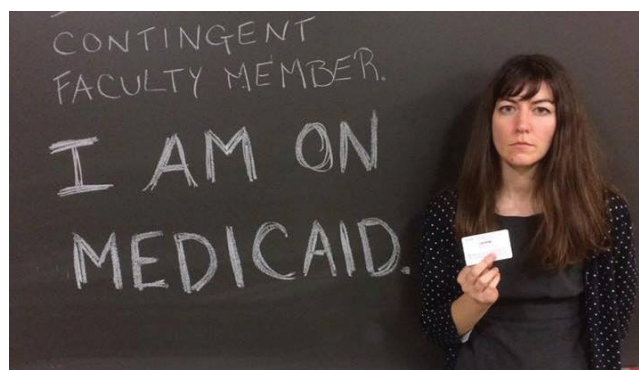
Over one-third of surveyed faculty (35 percent) have had enough difficulty paying their bills that they have defaulted on a student loan, had their phone or utilities cut off, received a debt collection call and/or taken out a payday loan.¹⁹

Going without: Forty-two percent of respondents have gone without phone service and/or delayed needed car repairs.²⁰



Cost to taxpayers

The low wages Florida colleges pay their adjuncts have hidden costs to the taxpayers. Nearly 22 percent of those surveyed have participated in one or more government antipoverty programs, including Medicaid, food stamps and the Earned Income Tax Credit—and/or a family member living with them has used those benefits.²¹ In addition, 31 percent of respondents have obtained health insurance for themselves or a family member through the Affordable Care Act, which subsidizes insurance premiums for many participants.²²





Maria Lizardi
Valencia College

Maria Lizardi knows firsthand the difference that a union can make. Currently an instructor for the Intensive English Program at Valencia College, Maria taught English for 14 years in Puerto Rico where she volunteered as a union representative because “unions are a voice for the voiceless.”

Without that voice at Valencia, Maria says she ends up working many hours essentially for free. While her \$23 an hour pay “looks good on paper,” she notes, “I’m only paid for the hours I spend in the classroom teaching. But I spend at least as much time grading essays at home as I do in the classroom, and I’m not paid a dime for it. I also receive no compensation for the work that I do preparing lessons or advising students before and after class.”

She says she’s never worked in a state like Florida, “where teachers basically have no union representation. Without collective action, it is almost impossible to effectively advocate for our rights and the benefits we deserve for our hard work.”

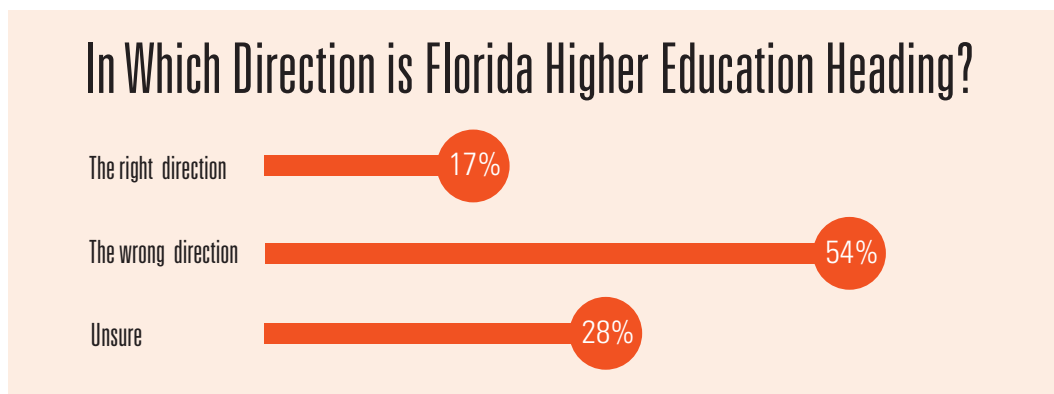
A lack of benefits is also a major concern. “I had major prosthetic knee surgery last year and was off work for three months. I relied on my savings to survive because Valencia doesn’t provide me any paid sick days.” Maria says she was fortunate she worked enough hours that semester to qualify for health insurance through Valencia. But now that the school has cut her hours again, Maria has to pay for her HMO out of pocket.

Maria is supporting a union at Valencia because, “when you organize collectively through your union to advocate for your profession it’s harder for the administration to tell you that you don’t deserve a raise or won’t be receiving the benefits you deserve.”

FLORIDA HIGHER ED IN CRISIS

Wrong direction; inadequate funding

Only 17 percent of respondents think higher education in Florida is going in the right direction, while 54 percent think it's headed in the wrong direction, and 28 percent are unsure.²³ Also unsurprisingly, over two thirds—67 percent—do not think Florida adequately funds higher education. Only 9 percent think state higher education spending is adequate, and 23 percent are unsure.²⁴



Working conditions in America's classrooms affect student success. That's why the public is concerned that the once quintessential middle-class career of college professor is now a low wage job. Nationally, nearly a third of part-time college professors and 14 percent of all faculty live near or below the poverty level. A national poll by Public Policy Polling shows that 60 percent of Americans are concerned that:²⁵

... "despite record-high tuition costs, today nearly half of all college professors are adjunct faculty and 25 percent of them qualify for food stamps and other federal assistance programs."

Adjunct faculty are uniting for a brighter future for higher education

This report provides a glimpse into the severe economic stress affecting those who are educating the next generation of Floridians. This economic stress is no doubt exacerbated by the governor and legislature's decision to reduce state spending on higher education, which is down more than 19 percent on a per-student basis since 2008.²⁶ The shortfalls caused by these austerity budgets have largely been shouldered by faculty, prompting educators at several colleges and universities to organize with SEIU Faculty Forward to raise standards for themselves and their students. Administrators, instead of welcoming faculty as a partner in the fight for increased funding, high-quality education and fair wages, have wasted already scarce resources fighting efforts to unionize. In order to address the crushing poverty described in this report and the resulting adverse effect on student learning conditions, administrators at Florida's public universities and colleges must allow faculty to unionize and join their fight for full funding. Increased investment in higher education and a voice for faculty are both necessary parts of the solution to the problems revealed here.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted online for three weeks from September 15, 2017 to October 5, 2017. Emails soliciting survey responses were sent to email addresses of faculty members at Florida colleges and universities.²⁷ The survey generated a total of 773 submitted responses, the vast majority from faculty who teach primarily at public colleges and universities.²⁸

Interested in making change on your campus?

Join the movement at <https://action.seiu.org/florida>

END NOTES

- 1 Of 751 respondents who indicated the sector they've taught most in over the last five years, 654, or 87 percent, said they taught most of their courses at public colleges/universities. Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question, N=751.
- 2 The survey asked whether respondents had, in the last five years: Taken out payday loan(s); Skipped meals; Used a food bank, food pantry or soup kitchen; Skipped prescription drugs; Delayed medical or dental treatment; Moved in with family or friends; Gone without home internet service; Gone without phone service; Delayed needed car repairs; Been behind on rent/mortgage; Received a debt collection call; Defaulted on a student loan; Received an eviction notice; Had phone, electric, or other utility cut off; Been without health insurance; Been homeless.
These indicators of hardship are an expansion of nine indicators used by Census Bureau. See Julie Siebens, U.S. Census Bureau, "Extended Measures of Well-Being: Living Conditions in the United States," September 2013, p. 5, note 7, accessed October 11, 2017. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p70-136.pdf> That report's list of hardships is: "difficulty meeting essential expenses, not paying rent or mortgage; getting evicted, not paying utilities, having utilities cut off, having phone service cut, not seeing a doctor when needed, not seeing a dentist when needed, not always having enough food."
- 3 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 4 Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question N=766.
- 5 Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question N=762.
- 6 Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question N=762.
- 7 IPEDS, "Human Resources: Full- and part-time medical and non-medical staff by faculty status and primary function/occupational activity, Fall 2015" Retrieved March 8, 2017.
- 8 Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question N=762.
- 9 Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question N=762.
- 10 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 11 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 12 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 13 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 14 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 15 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 16 Two percent. Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 17 Alex Harris, "Part-time professors say they're underpaid and undervalued. Are unions the answer?" Miami Herald, September 2, 2017, accessed October 17, 2017. <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/education/article170752677.html>
- 18 Alastair Gee, "Facing poverty, academics turn to sex work and sleeping in cars," Guardian, September 28, 2017, accessed October 17, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/28/adjunct-professors-homeless-sex-work-academia-poverty>
- 19 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773. Survey_Combined_Final; Analysis Tab, cell DF779
- 20 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773. Survey_Combined_Final; Analysis Tab, cell DG779
- 21 Respondents indicated whether they, their children, spouse/partner or other family member living with them had participated in: Medicaid, Florida KidCare, Food Stamps/EBT, Earned Income Tax Credit, Home Energy Assistance Programs, Subsidized Housing or TANF/Cash Assistance. Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 22 Percentage calculated as share of total survey respondents N=773.
- 23 Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question N=767.
- 24 Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question N=768.
- 25 Public Policy Polling, August 18-21, 2017, accessed November 7, 2017. <http://seiufacultyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/PPP-SEIU-Higher-Education-August-2017.pdf>
- 26 Mitchell, Michael; Leachman, Michael, and Masterson, Kathleen, "A Lost Decade in Higher Education Funding: State Cuts Have Driven Up Tuition and Reduced Quality," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 23, 2017, p.5. https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2017_higher_ed_8-22-17_final.pdf
- 27 A small number (36) of survey responses were administered over the telephone to faculty members by SEIU staff. The rest of the responses were collected online.
- 28 Of 751 respondents who indicated the sector they've taught most in over the last five years, 654, or 87 percent, said they taught most of their courses at public colleges/universities. Percentage calculated as share of survey respondents who answered this question, N=751.

