



## **FLYING UP AND DOWN THE 101**

Part-time instructors compensated less for teaching than full-time faculty

By Barbara Rosenblatt

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Once a week, biology instructor Michael Holmes splits a 12-hour day between the San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles campuses.

Holmes also teaches at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria two days and at Hartnell College in King City one day a week. Between teaching assignments, Holmes works as a biologist at a consulting firm.

Like Holmes, over 70 percent of Cuesta instructors are classified as temporary, part-time faculty. Working side-by-side with full-time colleagues earning considerably more per hour, the part-time faculty struggle with issues of equal compensation and job security. Nicknamed “freeway flyers,” many work three or four jobs to earn a living wage.

“Parity of pay is the biggest issue,” Holmes said. “Currently, we start at 67 percent of what full-time instructors make. Further, full-time instructors move up the scale every year while part-time faculty only move up every four semesters.”

President David Pelham agrees that pay is a concern for part-time faculty. “The most obvious issue relating to part-time faculty is that the pay they receive is not sufficient to support them by itself,” he said. “Part-time faculty who attempt to support themselves just on that income struggle mightily to support themselves and their families.”

Issues of equity of pay are complex because full-time faculty participate in the college beyond time spent in the classroom. They are expected to serve on committees and be available to mentor and advise students.

“Full-time faculty are paid for more than just teaching,” Pelham said. “When our full-time faculty teach during the summer when they do not have the same number of additional duties, they are paid the same as the part-time faculty.”

June Beck, a part-time English instructor, contends the difference in pay hurts students. “The lack of fair compensation makes it difficult to be the teacher you would want to be,” Beck said.

“We are not adequately compensated for office hours. Because of this, full-time faculty are more available. Most part-timers bend over backwards to help students, but ultimately it is unfair.”

Holmes agrees it is difficult to be available for students. “I share a desk with two other people,” Holmes said. “So, I live out of my car. I can’t leave my work anywhere.”

Business education instructor Marilyne Cleeves also believes unequal pay is unjust to part-time faculty. “Pay is the reason community colleges keep as many part-time faculty as possible,” Cleeves said. “The state requires a certain full-time ratio, but the

schools try to keep as close as possible to save money.”

Cleeves sees seniority and job security as major concerns. “Full-time instructors get tenure and can’t get fired easily,” Cleeves said. “Part-time do not get tenure. If the chair doesn’t like you, they can give you smaller loads and phase you out.”

Statewide budget cuts will hit part-time faculty especially hard. As temporary employees, they have no guarantee of employment. As class sections are cut, full-time faculty have “bumping rights.” If a course is cancelled, a full-time instructor can bump out a part-time instructor so that he or she can maintain their full-time load.

“We have already seen a reduction of sections due to budget cuts,” Pelham said. “The first faculty that are impacted by reduction of that type are our part-timers.”

When that happens, part-time faculty can also lose benefits. “We are semester to semester on benefits,” Cleeves said. This can be applied retroactively. If we fall below a 50 percent load we can owe the district money.”

Allison Merzon, president of the Cuesta College Federation of Teachers, says the union is working hard to support part-time instructors. She considers them “unsung heroes” who are vital because 51 percent of student contact with instructors is with part-time faculty.

“We try to keep people informed and educate them about their rights,” said Merzon. “We also want to ensure that budget cuts occur as far away from the instructional core as possible. We are trying

to rally the part-time instructors to make them part of the conversation.”

Holmes appreciates the support of the union. “The new union leadership is very dedicated to part-time rights and equality of all faculty,” he said.

Beck feels her full-time colleagues are very supportive. They are a pleasure to work with”, she said. “Most are magnanimous with both time and support. They will give you the shirt off their back.”

Beck is concerned about the impact of budget cuts on both faculty and students. “If classes are cut, part-time instructors will lose jobs and students will not be able to get classes,” Beck said. “The success of community colleges rests on the backs of part-timers. This will not change.”

Pelham agrees that part-time instructors are critical. “Part-time faculty can bring with them expertise that we might not otherwise have,” he said. “Also, the availability of part-time faculty allows the college the ability to develop schedules that are more flexible for students.”