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Faculty

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Colleges Are Slashing Adjuncts' Hours to Skirt New Rules on Health-Insurance Eligibility

By Sydni Dunn

Allison G. Armentrout, an adjunct instructor at Stark State College, doesn't get paid by the hour. She earns \$4,600 to teach two English composition courses. But now she carefully tracks how many hours she works on an electronic time sheet.

On a recent week, she spent three hours preparing for her lectures, close to six hours in the classroom, and 16 more grading assignments for a grand total of about 25 hours. So she can breathe a sigh of relief because she won't lose her job: She came in under the college's new 29-hour-a-week wire designed to keep her ineligible for health-care coverage under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Stark State, in North Canton, Ohio, is among a growing number of colleges that have limited the number of weekly hours part-time employees can work to keep them below the level at which employers are required to provide health insurance. Under the new law, which takes effect in January 2014, employees of large companies who work 30 hours or more a week must receive health benefits from their employers. Employers who violate the rule could be fined. Colleges in Ohio, Virginia, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania are among those that have acted in advance.

But adjuncts are rarely paid by the hour. Their salary is based on the number of courses they teach, making it difficult for colleges to determine how many work hours are put into each course.

The Internal Revenue Service didn't provide a formula to calculate the workload of adjuncts when the law's proposed rules were announced in January. It simply advised universities to "use a reasonable method for crediting hours of service," adding that it

would not be "reasonable" to take into account "only classroom or instruction time and not other hours that are necessary to perform the employee's duties, such as class-preparation time."

The IRS document also stated that "further guidance may be provided," but gave no indication when that guidance might be coming. The agency has collected more than 500 comments in response to the proposed rules, and it will hold a public comment session on April 23 in Washington.

Kenneth H. Ryesky, an adjunct professor of taxation and business law at Queens College of the City University of New York and a former state tax lawyer, says he submitted a written comment and will attend the hearing. Although his university provides health benefits through the faculty and staff union, he says, he is fighting for clarity.

By limiting the number of hours adjuncts can work as a way to evade penalties, he says, universities are reversing the intent of the Affordable Care Act.

From an administrative perspective, he says he understands that the decision is the "path that makes the most financial sense," but it's abusive because universities are not giving adjuncts the support they need.

The American Council on Education, the American Association of University Professors, and the New Faculty Majority have also weighed in, all warning the IRS of the unintended consequences of the proposed rules.

"Colleges and universities should realize the importance of providing health insurance to employees," according to a recent statement by the AAUP. "We call on them to comply with the law and devise fair methods of calculating adjunct faculty hours, methods that fully take into account the many activities in which such faculty members engage."

Maria C. Maisto, president of the New Faculty Majority, an advocacy group for adjuncts, says her organization recommends that the IRS require every college to do a comprehensive

examination of its teaching faculty and come up with a formula that is correct, "not one that is convenient or saves them money."

'Simply Unaffordable'

Most universities agree, however, that money is a big factor, as adjuncts make up a growing portion of the nation's teaching faculty.

The Community College of Allegheny County, for example, reduced the workload limit for its temporary, part-time adjuncts from 12 to 10 credits per semester. The Pittsburgh college employs about 2,200 adjunct instructors, but most of them only teach one course, so they are not at risk of running over 30 hours. The reduction directly affected about 200 of those adjuncts, plus another 200 temporary, part-time employees.

David Hoovler, executive assistant to the president, says the college's preference was to expand coverage, but it was "simply unaffordable." The institution has an annual operating budget of around \$109-million, and administrators estimate it would cost at least \$6-million to provide health benefits to the 400 part-time temporary employees who would have been eligible.

To compensate for the changes, Mr. Hoovler says, the college gave all of its part-time employees a "modest" increase—\$20 per credit-hour for adjuncts, and a comparable percentage per hour for other part-time temporary employees. The money for those increases came from frozen or eliminated administrative positions, he says. The college is also trying to form a type of group health plan to offer its part-time employees discounted insurance rates, but nothing is definite.

"Our adjunct employees, and others who are affected, are an important part of the college community," he says. "It's the right thing to do to offset the cuts."

Ms. Maisto says she believes Allegheny is the only college making this type of effort, though many are downsizing adjunct work hours.

Some universities, she says, have cut the number of courses adjuncts are allowed to teach from three to two. Some have used a

ratio, such as one-to-one or two-to-one, to determine how many hours are needed outside the classroom for every hour spent inside of it. The rest have adopted their own solutions, estimating the number of hours needed to teach each individual course or carefully tracking and logging work hours. All of those policies are subject to change.

Administrators at the College of William & Mary sent notice to its part-time faculty after Gov. Bob McDonnell of Virginia submitted an amendment limiting part-time employees and adjunct faculty to 29 hours per week, on average, in order to comply with the act's requirements, says Anna B. Martin, vice president for administration.

Michael R. Halleran, William & Mary's provost, says the college has told its adjunct faculty that they cannot go over 29 hours per week, or "meet or exceed, on average over a 12-month period, 75 percent of the course load for a full-time, non-tenure-track teaching faculty member at that institution."

Mr. Halleran says he asked the academic deans to submit a list of people in their respective departments who might exceed the new limit, and fewer than 10 names were submitted. Deans will monitor these people to ensure they do not violate the new rule. The university hasn't ruled out extending health benefits to its adjuncts, he says, but for now its plan is to reduce their hours and courses.

"There's been a lot of confusion and uncertainty," he says of higher education's response to the health-care laws. "I like what we've done because it's accurate, simple, fair."

New Metrics

In the case of Stark State, each course was evaluated by department chairs, deans, and faculty members to determine how many hours were needed to teach it, says Irene Lewis Motts, director of marketing.

"We've never had to determine how long it took to teach a class because our faculty were under contract, and they just taught the classes, whatever the time it took or whatever the time they

wanted to put in," Ms. Lewis Motts says. "We had to put some metrics to it."

Part-time employees were notified in December by the college's provost that they were not allowed to exceed an average of 29 hours per week over a six-month period. The hours are being "monitored carefully" through a logging system called PeopleAdmin, she says. Individual instructors enter data every other week, which is then reviewed by the human-resources department. There are 857 part-time employees at Stark State, she says. Those employees make up more than 40 percent of all employees.

Ms. Armentrout, who migrates among three institutions for work, says many instructors have had to begin teaching at other colleges to make ends meet. Adjuncts are paid by the course, she says.

The scaled-back schedule at Stark State affects adjuncts financially, she says, but "it also creates ethical difficulties with reporting our hours."

"We're not allowed to go over 29 hours, and that includes time spent prepping, grading, e-mailing, meeting with students, attending required meetings," she says. "What is happening—and I'm finding this even with just two classes—because of the grading load, I've been put in a position twice this semester where I've just had to lie about the number of hours I actually worked. I don't want to have to make a choice between having a job or not."

Ms. Armentrout says she has considered reducing the number of pages she requires for her essay assignments, to cut back on the grading time. But, she says, she has to be careful not to violate page requirements set by the Ohio Board of Regents.

Most weeks, she works 22 or 23 hours, she says, so it's not an issue. "But everyone wants to know: What happens if we go over?"

Ms. Lewis Motts says there are no formal repercussions in place now. If someone consistently exceeds the 29-hour rule, affecting his or her six-month average, then human resources will meet with that employee.

But Ms. Armentrout says some faculty fear that if their average work weeks are ever over the limit, the university might not renew their contracts.

"There's potential for a lot of issues there," she says. "There will be a lot more professors working at McDonald's."

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moorejbb · 2 years ago
Quality takes time. If time is rationed, then quality suffers.

Unemployed_Northeastern
Nonsense. Employees are inputs, their work products are outputs, and we just need them to become 13.7% more efficient so as to avoid giving them health care in the wealthiest nation Earth with the most expensive higher education on Earth.

- HR Departments

ot_humanities → **Unemployed_Northeastern**
What's scary is that many of the people who liked your post totally missed the irony.

Unemployed_Northeastern → **ot_humanities**
That is a scary thought, isn't it?

caughtinthemiddle → **ot_humanities**
Uh, the irony was pretty blatant. I'm pretty sure everyone got it and were agreeing. Vehemently.

Oh, I suppose there were one or two Finance VPs who thought it was serious, but they would, wouldn't they? After all, the world of finance in general attracts vampires, who, as we all know, have no souls.

Which explains a great deal about the state of the world today.

inteinte → **caughtinthemiddle**
Pure bigotry

caughtinthemiddle
Yes, I've never been able to get over my anti-vampirism.

amy trumble → **caughtinthemiddle** · 2 years ago
and why should you, they are a class of blood-sucking heathens, who are up all hours, almost-impossible to kill. I

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