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## Response #3 to AAUP Statement

Ken Lindblom

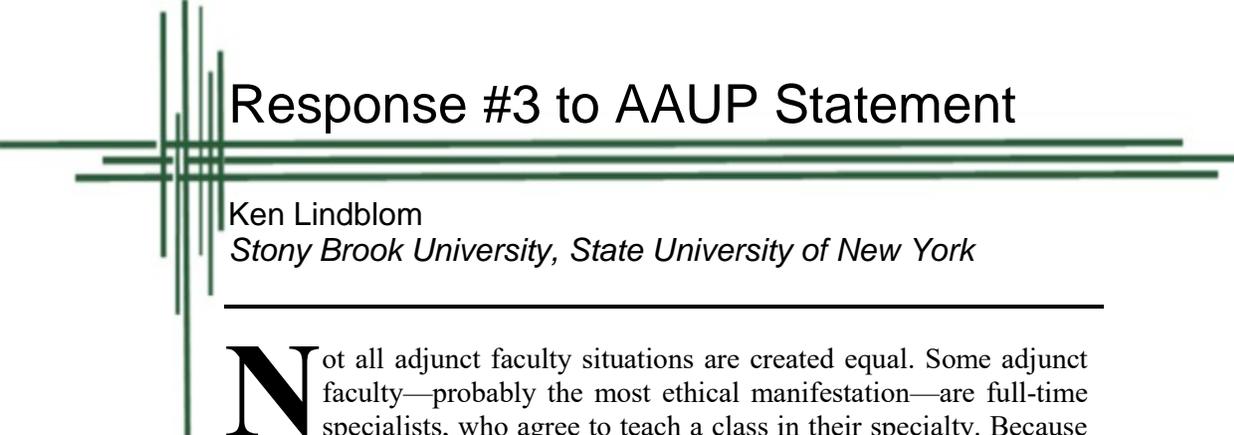
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## Response #3 to AAUP Statement

Ken Lindblom

*Stony Brook University, State University of New York*

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Not all adjunct faculty situations are created equal. Some adjunct faculty—probably the most ethical manifestation—are full-time specialists, who agree to teach a class in their specialty. Because these faculty have full-time jobs, they teach at the college level for enjoyment, for prestige, and/or to give back to the community. The low salary they are paid isn't really right—as their hard-earned expertise is certainly worth more—but no one is really getting the shaft. While I was dean of the School of Professional Development at Stony Brook University (SUNY), we employed many faculty who fit this description, especially in our Human Resources Management and Higher Education Administration programs (please note that in this response I do not represent Stony Brook University).

Close to this situation is another manifestation: the retired professional. These colleagues had finished a full career and were interested in teaching a class or two to keep themselves sharp and to give back to their community. They also no doubt appreciated the prestige of teaching at the college level, and they made good use of the modest salary, which they often referred to as “dining out money.” We employed many faculty members who fit this description, especially in the Liberal Studies program and the program that leads to K-12 administrative certification.

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Ken Lindblom is Associate Professor of English at Stony Brook University, SUNY. His latest book, *Continuing the Journey 2: Being a Better Teacher of Authentic Writing*, co-authored with Leila Christenbury will be published by the National Council of Teachers of English in fall 2018. Ken was active in United University Professions, as a delegate and board member, before he was appointed a dean in 2017.

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Because we have a strong faculty-staff union in SUNY (the United University Professions, or UUP), adjunct faculty who teach at least two courses in a semester earn benefits, including dental and vision, which retired teachers often find very helpful enhancements. Again, the value these colleagues bring to the school far exceeds the salary they are paid, but everyone gets something valuable from the relationship. It's mostly symbiotic.

A third situation for adjunct faculty is different. These are colleagues who have developed high-level expertise and have survived increasingly competitive searches to teach 3, 4, 5, or even more courses per semester in a “part-time” capacity. Many of them have terminal degrees, and the great majority of them have honed their professional skills such that their students receive expert instruction comparable to (or exceeding) full-time faculty. These faculty would prefer full-time status—indeed, they have cobbled together for themselves teaching loads that can surpass full-timers' loads—but full-time positions are not available to them. They earn low salaries, excruciatingly low given their experience and ability, but because they are willing to do it, and because institutions are willing to allow them to do it, they remain in underfunded, underappreciated, and over-exploited employment situations. Stephen Mumme and his colleagues do an excellent job of pointing out problematic issues that arise for these colleagues. We hired many faculty members in this frame in the School of Professional Development, as well, and as dean, the situation was for me, I'll put it mildly, uncomfortable.

Adjunct faculty in the last instance are often in fields that have large numbers of people willing and able to teach in them—such as my own field, English, and other areas in the humanities, or in core subjects like basic math and science. Since students generally pay the same tuition for courses, there is no foundational reason why colleges and universities should not be able to fund full-time faculty to teach these courses. Rather, adjunct faculty should, theoretically, be hired only in cases when there is an unexpected course section that is needed due to a resignation, a death, a leave, an unexpected over-enrollment of students, or some other urgent exigence.

And yet, as Mumme et. al. put it, a “dark side” has arisen: Adjunct faculty have over time been allowed to fill the teaching ranks at colleges and universities, and those institutions have gotten used to depending, quietly, upon that, frankly, exploited labor. The growth in adjunct faculty nationally is not much different from those Mumme et. al. report for Colorado. If current trends continue, adjunct teaching will outpace full-time, tenure-line faculty.

I have been a tenure-line or tenured college faculty member since 1997. From March of 2017 till mid-July 2018, I was appointed as a dean, and for the first time in my career, I was responsible for programs that depended on a high percentage of adjunct faculty, many of whom have the credentials and experience to be employed full time and who would like

to be. The School of Professional Development (SPD) is the university's agent for professional development and for professional master's degree programs in areas in education, human resources, and more. From my perspective, the school's mission is to provide high quality professional education, and to make as much revenue as possible for the university to use elsewhere to fund its research, teaching, and service missions.

As state funding has decreased, the need for institution-wide revenue generation has also increased. The drop in student enrollment—which happened dramatically in education fields nationally in 2009-2011 and has not recovered—has been a tremendous blow to SPD and similar schools. As a result, at SPD we have had to ask fewer faculty to do more work for the same salary. Our colleagues are unhappy about this, of course, but they remain committed to the mission and the students, and they do what is needed.

It would be wonderful to get adjunct faculty more involved in pedagogical decisions and to offer them more professional development and communication together as a faculty group. But, how much time is appropriate to ask poorly-compensated employees to put in on top of the hours they are being paid for? How many meetings should they be asked or required to attend? How much time (and gasoline and parking fees and child care fees) should they be asked to contribute? On the other hand, how much easier should we make their work? Should we provide them with a lock-step syllabus, so they don't have to plan instruction? Should we simply hand them policies and instructional practices, so they don't have to work them out themselves? How much of our colleagues' autonomy and creativity should we cash in for their convenience?

Putting all this together, even the best-intended managers have a difficult time enhancing adjunct faculty salary, status, autonomy, and input while maintaining necessary and expected revenue. That said, the very idea that quietly depending on unfairly-treated colleagues was ever even an option is somewhat sickening. In short, a systemic discrimination has been baked into the ways in which too many colleges and universities operate. This allows chairs, deans, and provosts to throw up their hands in apparently-inescapable surrender (if they choose to do so), while adjunct faculty continue to prop up the very institutions that depend on their exploited labor. There aren't many ways out of this dim labyrinth:

- Colleges/universities can voluntarily choose to decrease their revenue by hiring more full-time faculty and making due with less revenue, shrinking their missions and impact.
- Adjunct faculty can quit the profession—all at once—forsaking years of experience and hard work and giving up extremely satisfying and important work.

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- States can better fund higher education by either moving funds from other areas or raising taxes and/or tuition.
- Faculty groups—with their unions when possible—can work together to obligate institutions to make improvements in the situation.

Clearly, the fourth bullet is the most likely, and as Mumme and his colleagues discuss, AAUP recommendations make a good start. UUP has also done good work in its most recent negotiations by including minimum adjunct faculty salaries in its recent tentative contract.

These changes are also challenging. Full-time faculty, like others in the university, can also silently benefit from the exploited labor of others. Too many full-time faculty—especially at research institutions—can occasionally be heard questioning why adjunct faculty should have the unions' attention. Too few may be willing to share professional development funds—scant as they are—equitably. Too many put their heads down into their own work, not looking around closely enough to see the cost of their comfortable working conditions. Doing nothing perpetuates the problem.

We must also be careful how we make arguments for improvements. Mumme et. al. raise important points regarding the quality of the student experience and teaching expertise at Colorado Community Colleges; however, it is important that we not undercut the quality of adjunct faculty members themselves. If such instructors are unqualified, they should never be hired, period. But if systemic discrimination prevents adjunct faculty from performing at their peak, we should take pains not to imply that these faculty members aren't fully-qualified and aren't delivering excellent instruction. Rather, we must point out how they are being prevented from achieving the best they have to offer, and how the students are being denied the best they can get.

Colleges are communities. There is room for a great many kind of contributor. They need not all be full-time, and they need not be experts of the same type. But each contributing member should be appropriately compensated to at least the degree of value they bring to the institution's mission. Ethics, the rules of fair play, and community decency demand that we look at the situation of adjunct faculty who provide full-time labor and who would prefer a full-time load. Thank you to Mumme et. al., AAUP, and UUP for moving in the right directions.