



**Tolley, K. (Ed.). (2018). *Professors in the gig economy: Unionizing adjunct faculty in America*. Johns Hopkins University Press.**

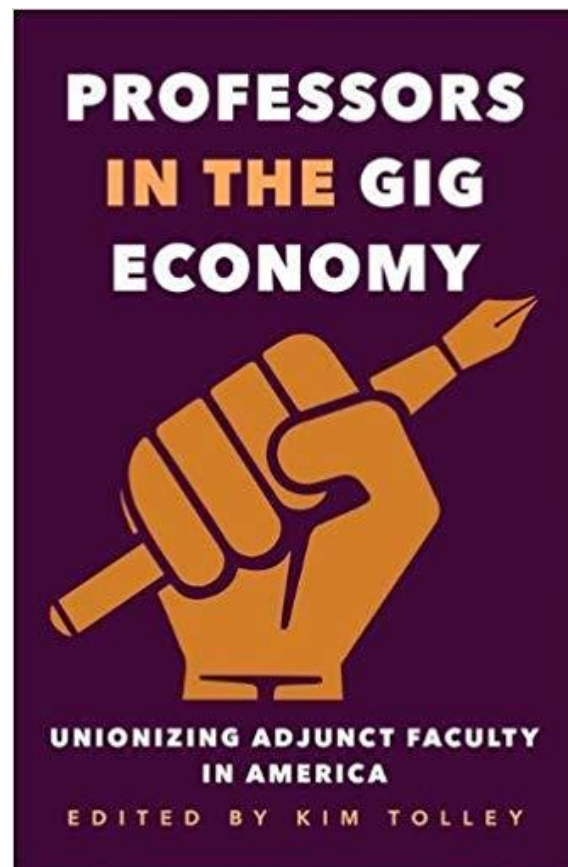
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The challenges facing adjunct faculty in today's gig economy suggest trouble for the future of higher education. According to the American Association of University Professors (2017), adjunct faculty members constitute more than 50% of faculty teaching courses in higher education institutions throughout the United States. With the majority of institutions using part-time adjuncts – who often have to work at multiple institutions to make a living wage – how can this critical group of faculty members earn a better wage? The substandard compensation of adjunct faculty is well-publicized and a significant concern (Morton, 2012). However, adjunct faculty also often lack essential resources such as a desk space or offices, benefits, and the certainty that their courses will not be canceled mere days before a class is to begin. What are adjuncts to do?

*Professors in the Gig Economy* edited by Kim Tolley delivers suggestions to answer this difficult question through highlighting various successful unionization cases across the country. The text also provides discourse through 10 edited chapters, and 240 pages of information about the history of adjuncts and unionization efforts within a variety of



institutional types. Insights into successful graduate/teaching assistants, adjunct, non-tenure track, and tenured/tenure-track faculty unionization processes are provided. It also delivers a glimpse into failed unionization efforts and lessons learned. The text begins with a concise, yet informative, overview of the history of adjunct faculty and their unionization efforts. As an adjunct faculty member new to the world of unions and national labor regulations, I found it both disheartening and hopeful to read that the fight for better working conditions and wages has been going on for more than 50 years. The authors ensure they explain various terminology as it relates to unions and labor laws, so if you are also new to the language, you will not feel taxed reading through it. I gained a deeper understanding of the history, the current national movement, and the future implications of the contemporary political climate toward unionization from the local level to the White House.

Three unions are highlighted continuously throughout this book for their efforts to help gain union representation for faculty members: American Federation of Teachers, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the National Education Association. SEIU alone has represented faculties on more than 60 campuses (Edwards & Tolley, 2018). The success of their efforts is evident in the successful adjunct union campaigns of at least 35 private universities and colleges between the 2012-2013 and 2015-2016 academic years (Ramirez, 2018). Edwards & Tolley (2018) state the increase in unionization efforts will most likely continue to increase due to continuing declines in public support of higher education. However, gaining representation and the right to unionize is only the first step in the process of achieving a better living wage and working conditions for adjunct faculty.

Once an institution has won the right to unionize, the authors highlight a variety of tactics faculty can use within collective

bargaining. Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through their unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine their terms of employment. These new contracts include consideration of pay, benefits, hours, leave, job health and safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more (see, for example, <https://aflcio.org/what-unions-do/empower-workers/collective-bargaining>). Collective bargaining agreements are legally binding contracts, with a history of labor law behind them (Mills & McCullough, 2018).

Many influences shape how faculty units decided to organize their labor movement. On campuses where a strong unity existed between tenured and adjunct faculty, the unionization process seemed to be smoother and more successful. In these cases, both tenured and non-tenured faculty shared concerns such as a lack of shared governance, low pay, and an overall concern for course loads. At another campus, however, faculty decided they would create two separate bargaining units since they felt both parties had differing concerns and that by working together neither would benefit. For me, the take-home message was clear: by working together, full-time tenured/tenure track faculty and adjunct faculty have a better chance of gaining more benefits and completing the bargaining process quickly.

Another significant takeaway from the book was the idea of faculty integrating their institutional missions into their appeal for seeking union representation. For example, Georgetown University faculty won the right to unionize based on their University *Just Education Policy*, which was based on Catholic Social Teaching. This policy was cited as a significant influence in the institution's decision to remain neutral during numerous collective bargaining processes on its campus (Kalmanovitz Initiative, 2015). Pacific Lutheran University used its institutional mission similarly to win the right to unionize. By invoking institutional mission and values

as the framework, adjuncts at multiple institutions have won the right to unionize and therefore gain better benefits.

This volume covered a variety of institutional types: Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), state university systems, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and religiously based institutions. With Kezar & Maxey (2013) finding that part-time faculty are especially prevalent at community colleges, I was disappointed to find no significant examples concerning community colleges in this book. According to Hurlburt & McGarrah (2016), part-time adjunct faculty constitute about 67% of total faculty at community colleges. The addition of community colleges and their unique status in American higher education would have added to the comprehensive look at adjunct unionization and would have reached a broader audience.

While I appreciated the need for educating readers on the history of adjuncts' fight for better wages, many of the chapters seemed redundant. In three consecutive chapters, the authors wrote about the failed unionization of Yeshiva University, and how that has impacted religiously based institutions in their efforts to unionize. Several of the chapters reintroduced the same major unions, causing me to skim through much of the preface material. Better coordination between the chapter authors through the editing process would have been beneficial and would have left space for more discussion. Further discussion around two-year college unionization and more in depth writing about the bargaining process as it relates to faculty and administrator

relationships would have been more worthwhile.

The hopeful message of the book is that the faculty walked away with increased salaries and benefits in each of the examples of successful unionization. The following list highlights several successful outcomes of collective bargaining at U.S. campuses: compensation for last-minute class cancellations; access to health benefits if worked more than 30 hours; participation in retirement plans based on years of service; and increase in access to professional development. These victories can have an impact on the job satisfaction of faculty, which in turn can lead to higher levels of learning and retention rates of students enrolled in their courses.

If you are new to an adjunct faculty role or are interested in how adjunct and other faculty have used participation in unions to secure a better future for themselves, I recommend that you read this book. Tolley has blended the expertise of both leaders in the field of adjunct faculty and experts on unions to give a realistic look inside the unionization process. With the uncertainty in leadership within the Department of Labor, along with continually evolving labor regulations, many aspects of the unionization process may change in the coming years. However, the strategies and wisdom in *Professors in the Gig Economy: Unionizing Adjunct Faculty in America* should benefit any adjunct faculty member. It may just be the catalyst to begin conversations about unionization on your campus if they have not already started.

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