

# What to Expect When You're Expecting... to be an Adjunct Professor

By Andrew Azer, CPA, MST, MPFP

**G**ROWING UP IN A HOME where both my parents were teachers, I always understood and appreciated the importance of lifelong learning and sharing my experiences and knowledge to help others. As a tutor in high school and college, I was overjoyed to watch struggling students get their “aha” moment when everything comes together. However, during my college years I quickly learned that practicing accounting, rather than pursuing a PhD and a career in education, was financially the right choice for me. Several years later, I found my way back to education and became an adjunct professor at the Sawyer Business School at Suffolk University.

Over the past 30 years, colleges and universities have transitioned to employ a higher percentage of part-time adjunct professors, leading to a high demand for CPAs in higher education (*SumNews*, Summer II 2015). A 2013 study by the AAUP Research Office highlighted that the percentage of part-time faculty members had jumped significantly from approximately 30% in 1975 to just over 50% in 2011 (This national study included all academic areas and may not reflect trends at the business schools of colleges/universities in Massachusetts). In addition, although the number of part-time faculty members now exceeds 50%, full-time professors teach three to five courses per semester, with adjuncts usually teaching just one or two.

## Why are so many adjuncts in the classroom?

There are several reasons for this dramatic shift, including a shortage of PhD candidates, the cost savings to the institution and the desire to add professors with industry experience to the classroom.

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A photograph of a classroom setting. A male professor with glasses, wearing a light-colored suit, is leaning over a desk to assist a female student with curly hair. The student is looking down at a book or paper on the desk. Other students are visible in the background, some looking towards the professor. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a window with blinds in the background.

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## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

“The use of adjunct faculty in accounting and tax programs is critical,” said Lewis Shaw, chair and associate professor of accounting at Suffolk University. “It gives students the opportunity to learn from high-level practitioners with current, relevant experience who reinforce theoretical concepts and provide real-world applications.”

The hiring of adjunct professors on a part-time and as-needed basis makes them useful and cost-effective for the institution and provides flexibility to the individual. While institutions do not require an adjunct to have the requisite PhD of a full-time, tenured professor, most require a master’s degree and CPA designation. Preference is also given to candidates with previous teaching experience. Although adjunct professors are much easier to hire due to lower educational requirements, many colleges struggle to find candidates willing to make the commitment to fill the void of the low supply and high demand.

Based on the recruitment challenge, the MSCPA formed a task force of its Academic and Career Development Committee to create resources and mentoring opportunities for those interested in becoming an adjunct. There are three key questions to consider when deciding if this is a good move for you:

1. What are the pros and cons;
2. Do you have the skills to be successful; and
3. What happens when you become an adjunct?

### Pros vs. Cons

For me, there are several pros. An adjunct position allows me to satisfy my passion for teaching while continuing to work full-time in public accounting, without having to take several years off to pursue a PhD. I thoroughly enjoy witnessing the moment a student grasps the material and can dig deeper into the subject matter to bring theory into practice. I have been

personally fulfilled many times over the years by current and former students expressing their gratitude for my teaching style and acknowledging that I have made a difference in their education and career. My classroom experience has also added to my success in the workplace. I’ve developed the necessary techniques to train and mentor staff, enhanced my communication and public speaking skills and increased networking opportunities with colleagues and professionals.

There are also a few drawbacks to consider. Because you are part-time, there are generally no benefits or job security with the position. Your schedule can be unpredictable and your class can be cancelled at any time leading up to the start of the semester. In addition, you can often feel like an outsider to your department or institution, as adjuncts are not involved in the overall planning and decision-making process. You won’t have a dedicated office or workspace on campus and you will need to be creative in finding meeting space outside the class hours. You can

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feel like you're alone and left to fend for yourself; therefore, you cannot be afraid to ask questions. It is important to find someone who you can use as a resource throughout the semester. David Clarkson, adjunct professor at Bentley University, noted that you should, "Find a full-time professor to mentor you on the campus norms, where to go for IT help, where and when to eat, where to park, what to wear, etc. There are a lot of little things that can help make the experience enjoyable and gain the respect of colleagues and students."

## Do you have the skills to be successful?

Teaching requires a mastery of the subject matter, but that's just the beginning. You must adapt to your students and their questions and understand that there is no one way to teach the concepts. Most textbooks will provide important resources such as a sample syllabus, presentation slides and test banks so you won't be starting from scratch. I find that using real-world examples, such as analyzing a public company's annual report, helps to keep the class engaged and brings the materials to life. Take the time to prepare so you're not strictly lecturing or reading from the screens or your notes. Communication skills, both verbal and written, and the use of technology are vital. Most colleges utilize BlackBoard or another form of online system to reach students, so you'll need to become familiar with what is used on campus.

## You're an adjunct: Now what?

After you have been assigned a class, plan to visit the classroom before the first day so you know where everything is and how it works. Walk around to check out what students will be seeing from their vantage point. Once the semester begins, be prepared for a flurry of emails from students

## Thinking about teaching? Search for adjunct positions and post your resume at [mscpaonline.org/careers](http://mscpaonline.org/careers).

looking for help, guidance, clarification and even excuses for why they missed a class or need an extension. Clarkson advises, "Arrive early to class so you can get settled and visit with students. You are a very important person in their lives. Treat them as you would a paying client. After all, they are!"

There are many rewarding aspects of being an adjunct, but it can be extremely time consuming, especially if you teach and work full-time. Expect to commit a hefty amount of time in-and-out of the classroom. I'm fortunate that my firm, Marcum LLP, is extremely supportive of my teaching, even during busy season.

The key is to make time to prepare – and the sooner the better. Generally, I spend about two to three hours per week for each hour of class time: reading the textbook; preparing materials for class discussion; creating and grading exams and other assignments; and responding to student emails and calls. Your prep time will be significantly higher for the first time you teach a particular course.

## Next steps

Are you ready to start a career in education? Here are a few things to know:

- **Do your homework.** Research colleges and universities to find the right fit for you. The MSCPA recently enhanced the Careers Center on its website ([mscpaonline.org/careers](http://mscpaonline.org/careers)) to allow you to search for an adjunct position or post your resume for consideration. In addition, visit websites of colleges in your area and at [higherjobs.com](http://higherjobs.com).
- **Be prepared.** Before you start applying for positions, update your resume to highlight the unique perspectives you can offer the students and have your educational transcripts and reference letters ready to send.
- **Phone a friend.** The MSCPA has resources to help you get started and to provide guidance throughout your journey. For information, contact Barbara Iannoni, [biannoni@mscpaonline.org](mailto:biannoni@mscpaonline.org) or call 617.556.4000.

*Best of luck!* ●

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