

April 22, 2020

Gustavo Giraldo
Director, Illinois Department of Employment Security
1700 W 18th St.
Chicago, IL 60608

Dear Mr. Giraldo:

We are writing to request that IDES take immediate action to address the dire economic crisis facing part-time faculty adjuncts due to the COVID pandemic. Because of the impact of COVID, there can no longer be reasonable assurance that most adjunct faculty will have class assignments for the fall semester. Why is this?

1. Reduced Classes for Summer

Schools have already begun to make significant reductions in classes for the summer term. Classes that will be offered are being conducted via remote or online teaching. These changes will leave many adjuncts who have lost classes or who had summer classes in previous years without income over the coming summer months. And by all predictions, it is likely to only get worse.

2. Uncertainty Regarding Fall Classes

While much is still unknown about the fall semester, most schools project continued reductions in student enrollment and class offerings. This is due to a number of factors—among them are:

- The likelihood of significant reductions in enrollment among U.S. and international students;
- Concerns whether there will be sufficient financial aid to meet students' growing needs during this crisis;
- Whether schools will be required to use online teaching; and
- Schools will continue to give priority to full-time faculty to fill any remaining classes, thus increasing the likelihood that adjuncts will be further shut out of classes.

As reported in the April 17 edition of the Chronicle of Higher Education, between medical and economic worries, most college leaders would “be foolish not to consider among all scenarios a significant drop in enrollment for the fall semester.”

3. Possibility of Transitioning Fall Classes to Online Mode.

Class assignments for the fall were posted by most schools in February prior to the outbreak of the Coronavirus. Therefore, most classes were scheduled to be taught face to face. Because this is no longer certain, many adjuncts will also face the uncertainty of losing classes simply due the difficulty in transitioning to online teaching.

4. Credentials Become an Issue

Should classes do go online in the fall, faculty who are not certified to teach online are further threatened with a loss of class assignments. For the current spring semester, adjuncts were not required to be certified for remote teaching because schools had to make an immediate transition. However, many schools are now anticipating that if classes do go online in the summer and/or fall terms, adjuncts will now be required to become certified in online teaching. On such short notice and at a high cost, many adjuncts could be unable to complete the extensive training offered through programs such as ION or Quality Matters.

As you are aware, the December 22, 2016 program letter from the U.S. Department of Labor to state agencies compelled the use of a higher threshold to determine whether a claimant had “reasonable assurance” of employment after a break between academic terms. This involved considering the “totality of circumstances” that a claimant faced upon the time of their application for unemployment benefits.

We contend that the current pandemic has changed the “totality of circumstances” for all contingent faculty for the foreseeable future. For this reason, we respectfully request that IDES issue a determination that, for the foreseeable future, no otherwise eligible adjunct should be denied unemployment benefits for summer and subsequent terms based on having a “reasonable assurance” of a class in the semester following a break.

The March 27 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act also expands the states’ ability to provide unemployment benefits for many workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including workers who during normal time, would not be eligible for unemployment benefits. We urge that adjunct faculty be considered for these additional benefits and rights.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to (virtually) meet with you to discuss these concerns. The person to contact is Beverly Stewart at bstewart1332@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Respectively,

Beverly Stewart
Region 67 Grassroots Political Activist

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