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## Panel: Age Discrimination Issues in Higher Education - Handout: Age Bias or Anti-Adjunct Bias (S. Jaschik)

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## Age Bias or Anti-Adjunct Bias?

Submitted by Scott Jaschik on August 15, 2006 - 4:00am

"You would have been hired, but it was your age. We are not supposed to discriminate because of age, but, let's face it, we do."

According to a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Friday, a former department chair at Wilbur Wright College used those words to explain to Rosemary Crane why she kept getting passed over for jobs. Crane had years of experience teaching English part time at the college -- one of the City Colleges of Chicago -- and won awards and rave reviews for her work. But according to the EEOC, the college was happy to have Crane teach class after class -- without a full-time job.

Some activists for adjuncts say that the case is important -- beyond the questions of age discrimination -- because it draws attention to the way part timers so rarely win a shot at full-time positions that open up.

Over the course of 11 years at the college, Crane (who is still teaching part time there) applied for full-time jobs four times and never was offered a job. In 2004, there were two openings and Crane didn't even get an interview. She was 68 at the time. The two people hired were then 29 and 30. An EEOC spokeswoman said that she could not reveal too many details about the backgrounds of those hired, but she said that Crane was clearly comparable in qualifications and that the positions were for generalists, so there was not some rare specialty that Crane lacked.

While academe has plenty of people who feel they were unfairly passed over for jobs or promotions, it is the rare case that prompts an EEOC lawsuit. The agency conducts extensive reviews, examines relevant documents, and attempts to work out private settlements before suing, so its involvement suggests strength in Crane's claims.

John Hendrickson, a lawyer for the EEOC, said it was particularly upsetting to find such a case in higher education. "Employers who don't seriously consider older applicants deprive themselves of employees with enormous amounts of real-world experience," he said. "In what we used to call the 'learned professions,' like teaching, it would seem particularly ill-advised and wasteful."

A spokeswoman for the City Colleges of Chicago said that no one at her office or at Wilbur Wright would have any comment.

Some experts on adjunct issues, while stressing that they did not know the circumstances of Crane's case, said that it raised important issues about how adjuncts are considered when full-time positions come open in their departments. Several said that there is an undercurrent of resentment about the ways such searches are handled.

Desna L. Wallin, an associate professor of education at the University of Georgia and author of *Adjunct Faculty in Community Colleges*: [1] *An Academic Administrator's Guide to Recruiting, Supporting, and Retaining Great Teachers* (Anker Publishing, 2004), said that she had heard complaints that adjuncts get favored treatment and that they get ignored.

"It's been my experience that being an adjunct can work either for you or against you," said Wallin, who has been both an adjunct and a college president in her career. "I have seen it happen that if you are really good and consistent, it can be like a trial period for you, and you can have a leg up as you are a known quantity," she said.

The reverse bias, she said, can come about because even when colleges are creating new full-time positions, they tend to want to keep a part-time pool strong. "Some people feel that if you have excellent part-time faculty, you can't afford to lose that because the college needs consistent, high-performing part timers."

Wallin's view is that adjuncts shouldn't face bias one way or the other. "Everybody ought to have the same shot, but that doesn't mean that they do," she said.

Keith Hoeller, co-founder of the Washington State Part-Time Faculty Association, said he thought the EEOC case was "very important" because it may draw more attention to a range of ways that adjuncts are treated unfairly when full-time positions materialize. "A lot of people are saying that the way to solve the adjuncts' problems is to create new full-time positions, but my question is: Who will fill those positions?"

If a college decides to replace two part timers with one full timer, he said, at least one part timer is out of a job and most of the time, both are.

When adjuncts apply, the system of "full-time hegemony" takes over, he said, as full-time professors think of reasons why a national search is vital or why a strong research background is important, even at teaching institutions, effectively diminishing the chances of adjuncts who must spend all of their time teaching.

Why do they do this? Hoeller said "the full timers have to justify being paid so much more, why they have sabbaticals and offices and benefits that adjuncts don't have," adding that for many adjuncts, the search process for full-time positions "is just a polite way of being told that you are inferior."

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