

TRENDS AND ISSUES

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THE CAREER EXPERIENCE OF ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT FACULTY POSITIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The TIAA-CREF Institute fielded the *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey* (FCRS) to examine a range of job-, career- and retirement-related topics in the evolving context of academic workforce models. This report focuses on the experience of adjunct faculty, in particular, academics in adjunct faculty positions (as opposed to “professors of practice.”)

In terms of demographics, the FCRS found that females account for a slight majority (52%) of academics in adjunct faculty positions. Seventy-nine percent of adjuncts work for a single college or university. Two-thirds are employed by a public institution. Approximately two-thirds are in the liberal arts, including one-third in the humanities. Over one-half of adjuncts report household income of \$75,000 or more, implying that a significant share have a spouse or other household member who is employed at a relatively high income.

Forty-one percent of academics in adjunct positions are very satisfied with their academic career; by comparison, 69% of tenured and tenure-track faculty (TTF) are very satisfied. The top reasons adjunct faculty give for not being “very satisfied” with their careers are level of pay (cited by 25%), not having a full-time position (23%), not having a tenure-track position (22%) and lack of job security (14%).

While 23% of academics in adjunct positions are very satisfied with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement, one-third are not (21% not too satisfied, 12% not at all satisfied) and 42% are in the middle ground of being somewhat satisfied.

What do academics in adjunct positions value at this point in their careers? Foremost, it’s the students. Ninety percent say the statement “I enjoy teaching and interacting with students” describes them very well. Next is the intellectual stimulation of an academic career.



Financial Services

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While 28% of adjunct faculty feel strongly that nothing they could do outside academia would provide an equivalent sense of fulfillment, 33% believe that there is work outside academia that could provide similar personal fulfillment. Forty-two percent of academics in adjunct positions would very likely recommend pursuing an academic career to a promising student.

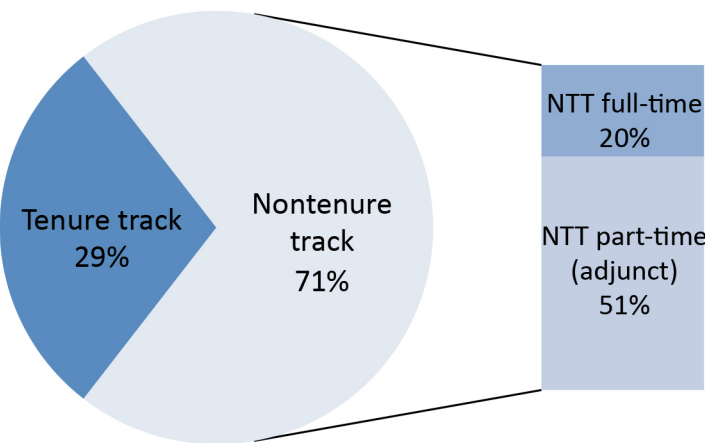
Nineteen percent of academics in adjunct faculty positions are very confident that they will have enough money to live comfortably throughout retirement, 31% are not and 49% are somewhat confident at best. The top reasons cited for a lack of retirement income confidence appear interrelated—28% do not feel that they are saving enough and 33% cite low earnings.

Debt is likely impacting the ability of adjunct faculty, particularly younger ones, to save for retirement. One-half view their debt level as problematic, with 13% considering it a major problem.

INTRODUCTION

Tenured and tenure-track faculty today account for less than one-third (29%) of the academic workforce headcount in higher education.¹ Among those in nontenure track (NTT) positions, 73% are employed part-time and 27% full-time.² Thus, on net, approximately 30% of college and university faculty are tenure track (TTF), 20% are full-time nontenure track and 50% are part-time nontenure track (chart 1). This latter group is commonly referred to as adjunct faculty.³

CHART 1
TENURE TRACK VS. NONTENURE TRACK FACULTY



Source: American Federation of Teachers tabulations of 2012 IPEDS data.

1 Source: American Federation of Teachers tabulations of Fall 2012 data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. (http://highereddata.aft.org/instit/national/instr_staff.cfm).

2 Ibid.

3 Clinical faculty in professional schools are sometimes referred to as adjunct faculty. In addition, “adjunct” is a term that can be used at some colleges and universities to convey courtesy appointments for tenure-line faculty. Neither of these is considered adjunct for purposes of this report; nor are graduate students.

A range of individuals fill adjunct faculty positions. At one end of the spectrum are faculty who bring expertise from nonacademic sectors into the classroom. Sometimes referred to as “professors of practice,” or “executives/professionals in residence,” they may teach upper-level or lower-level courses. At the spectrum’s other end are academics employed part-time. These faculty are often used for remedial, introductory and lower-level courses. They may be responsible for teaching a single course or multiple courses at a given time. Not all adjunct positions involve teaching; in some cases, adjunct faculty may have a research position.

The increased use of adjunct faculty by colleges and universities has become a point of focus within higher education. Broadly speaking, issues raised in this context of adjunct employment involve implications along four dimensions:

- Student learning and outcomes
- Institutional efficiency and cost management
- Organizational functioning of academic units
- The individual adjunct faculty member

This report focuses on the fourth dimension.⁴ More specifically, it considers the experience of academics in adjunct faculty positions. It does not consider “professor of practice” adjunct faculty. In the evolving context of faculty workforce models, the TIAA-CREF Institute fielded the *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey* (FCRS) to examine a range of job-, career- and retirement-related topics.⁵ Five-hundred adjunct faculty were included in the survey sample, along with 1,201 tenured and tenure-track faculty; the adjunct sample was restricted to academics in adjunct faculty positions.⁶

ADJUNCT FACULTY DEMOGRAPHICS

The age distribution of adjunct faculty in the FCRS sample appears skewed to older ages. For example, Table 1 shows the adjunct age distribution of the FCRS sample relative to the sample from a survey by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW).⁷ Analogously, the FCRS sample is also older relative to the sample in a survey by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).⁸ Given this, FCRS adjunct data presented in this report have been weighted to the CAW survey’s distribution. The CAW distribution is used since the data is more recent (2010), the sample size is large (9,238 part-time faculty respondents), and age distribution is reported across a greater number of ranges.⁹

4 Previous TIAA-CREF Institute reports have considered the other dimensions. See Chun, Edna and Alvin Evans, “[Designing and Implementing Strategies for the Development of a Winning Faculty Workforce](#),” TIAA-CREF Institute Higher Education Whitepaper, November 2014; Yakoboski, Paul J., “[Exploring Emerging New Faculty Workforce Models](#),” TIAA-CREF Institute Higher Education Whitepaper, November 2014; Yakoboski, Paul J. and Jean E. Foster, “[Strategic Utilization of Adjunct and Other Contingent Faculty](#),” TIAA-CREF Institute Trends and Issues, June 2014; and Kezar, Adrianna, “[Changing Faculty Workforce Models](#),” TIAA-CREF Institute Higher Education Whitepaper, November 2013.

5 A representative sample of college and university faculty was surveyed by telephone between September 15, 2014 and November 5, 2014 by Mathew Greenwald & Associates. Survey participants were recruited from targeted contact lists obtained from Act One and Survey Sampling International.

6 Survey respondents reported their position as tenured or tenure-track faculty or as nontenure-track faculty. Nontenure-track faculty were then asked whether they had full-time career employment outside academia; those responding “yes” were screened out of the survey, thus excluding “professors of practice.” Next, nontenure-track faculty were asked whether they were currently employed full-time under a multi-year contract at a single institution? Those responding “no” were classified as adjunct faculty.

7 See *A Portrait of Part-Time Faculty Members (A Summary of Findings on Part-Time Faculty Respondents to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce Survey of Contingent Faculty Members and Instructors)*, The Coalition on the Academic Workforce, June 2012.

8 See “Survey of Part-Time and Adjunct Higher Education Faculty,” conducted on behalf of the American Federation of Teachers by Hart Research Associates (January 2010) in *American Academic*, vol.2, March 2010 (AFT Higher Education).

9 The 2004 *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty* would provide a representative sample with which to weight. However, the size of the adjunct faculty population has grown significantly since 2004; accompanying that growth is the possibility of a significant, but unknown, change in the age distribution of the adjunct population

TABLE 1
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF ADJUNCT FACULTY

	FCRS SAMPLE (UNWEIGHTED)	CAW SAMPLE
25 or under	0.2%	1.0%
26-35	12.2	19.3
36-45	15.8	21.7
46-55	20.8	23.3
56-65	28.0	25.8
66-75	20.0	7.9
76 and over	3.0	1.2

Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014); *Survey of Contingent Faculty Members and Instructors*, Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012).

The CAW and AFT samples are not completely analogous with the FCRS since both include “professors of practice.” Seventy-three percent of part-time faculty in the CAW study reported contingent teaching in higher education as their primary employment, implying that approximately one-quarter of the sample were “professors of practice.” In the AFT survey, 24% of respondents taught one course on a part-time basis while also holding a non-teaching job; this provides an approximation for the share of “professors of practice” in the sample, implying that approximately three-quarters of the sample were academics in adjunct faculty positions. The inclusion of “professors of practice” in the CAW and AFT surveys, and their exclusion from the FCRS, should be kept in mind when comparing findings across surveys.

Table 2 shows the distribution of academics in adjunct faculty positions across personal and institutional characteristics in the weighted FCRS sample. Over 60% of adjuncts are under age 55 and almost 30% are under age 40. At the other end of the age spectrum, 13% are age 65 or older. In the AFT survey, 33% of part-time faculty are under age 45, 31% are age 45 to 54, and 36% are age 55 or older. Females account for a slight majority (52%) of adjunct faculty in the FCRS. This closely aligns with the distribution in the AFT study (48% female.) On the other hand, 62% of respondents in the CAW study were female.¹⁰

¹⁰ The CAW study noted, however, that the National Center for Education Statistics 2009 *Fall Staff Survey* reported that 52% of adjunct faculty were female.

TABLE 2
DEMOGRAPHICS OF ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT FACULTY POSITIONS (AGE-WEIGHTED FCRS SAMPLE)

Age (weighted)	
Under 40	29%
40 to 54	33
55 to 64	25
65 or older	13
Gender	
Female	52%
Male	48
Number of institutions employed	
1	79%
2	17
3 or more	4
Higher education sector	
Public	67%
Private	34
Institution type	
Doctoral/research university	29%
Master's college or university	22
Baccalaureate college or university	31
Community college	20
Field	
Liberal arts	65%
Professional	32
Other	2
Household income (2013) [among those reporting a figure]	
Less than \$50,000	25%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	22
\$75,000 to \$99,999	23
\$100,000 or more	30

Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

Twenty-five percent of academics in adjunct faculty positions have household income of less than \$50,000, while 53% report household income of \$75,000 or more and 30% report \$100,000 or more.¹¹ These figures imply that a large share of adjunct faculty have a spouse or other household member who is employed at a relatively high income. The CAW and AFT studies indicated a similar household dynamic. In the CAW study, 61% of part-time faculty reported household income (2009) of \$55,000 or more. In the AFT survey, 75% reported household income (2009) of \$50,000 or more. In both cases, these figures include “professors of practice.”

11. Ten percent of respondents did not report their household income level; distribution figures are among the 90% reporting.

Seventy-nine percent of adjunct faculty in the FCRS sample work for a single college or university; 17% work for two institutions and 4% at three or more institutions. These figures align with those of the CAW study in which approximately 70% of adjunct faculty taught at one college or university.¹² The CAW report noted that “most [part-time faculty] do not fit the prevalent stereotype of the “freeway flyer”—the part-time faculty member piecing together a full-time load by teaching at multiple institutions.” By contrast, in the AFT survey, 55% of adjuncts without a non-teaching job reported having one academic teaching job.

Two-thirds of adjunct faculty in the FCRS are employed by a public college or university. They are fairly evenly spread across institutional types; approximately 30% are employed by doctoral/research institutions and baccalaureate institutions each, while about 20% are employed by master’s institutions and community colleges each. This differs from the CAW study findings. In particular, the CAW study found that 39% of adjunct-taught classes occurred at community colleges, while only 7% were at baccalaureate institutions (29% were at master’s institutions and 22% at doctoral and research institutions).

Approximately two-thirds of academics in adjunct faculty positions are in the liberal arts and one-third a professional discipline.¹³ One-half of liberal arts adjuncts are in the humanities. By comparison, 70% of the CAW sample was in the liberal arts (i.e., humanities, sciences and social sciences).

CAREER SATISFACTION

Forty-one percent of academics in adjunct faculty positions are very satisfied with their academic career; by comparison, 69% of tenured and tenure-track faculty (TTF) are very satisfied with their career (Table 3). Fourteen percent of adjunct faculty are not satisfied with their academic career compared with 3% of TTF.

TABLE 3
FACULTY CAREER SATISFACTION

	ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT POSITIONS	TENURED AND TENURE-TRACK
Very satisfied	41%	69%
Somewhat satisfied	45	28
Not too satisfied	11	2
Not at all satisfied	3	1

Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

The top reasons adjunct faculty give for not being “very satisfied” with their careers are level of pay (cited by 25%), not having a full-time position (23%), not having a tenure-track position (22%) and lack of job security (14%).¹⁴ Only 4% cite both lack of a full-time position and lack of a tenure-track position. Therefore, it appears that the lack of a tenure-track position is not the issue so much as the lack of full-time employment for a number of academics in adjunct positions. No other reason was cited by more than 5% of respondents. Level of pay (cited by 29%) and poor work-life balance (14%) are the top reasons among TTF not very satisfied with their academic career.

12 This figure assumes that all “professors of practice” taught at a single institution. Seventy-eight percent of all respondents taught at a single university.
13 Liberal arts include humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and physical and life sciences, mathematics and statistics. Professional disciplines include administration, law, medicine, business, communications, marketing, engineering, computer science, education, social work, nursing and other health sciences, health, and library science.
14 The survey asked “What keeps you from being very satisfied?” as an open-ended question. Respondents were allowed to cite multiple reasons.

In the AFT survey, approximately 60% of academics in adjunct positions would have preferred a full-time teaching position over their part-time position, while about 80% viewed full-time opportunities at their institution as falling short of expectations.¹⁵ In addition, approximately three-quarters of academics in adjunct positions viewed adjunct salaries at their institution as falling short of expectations.¹⁶

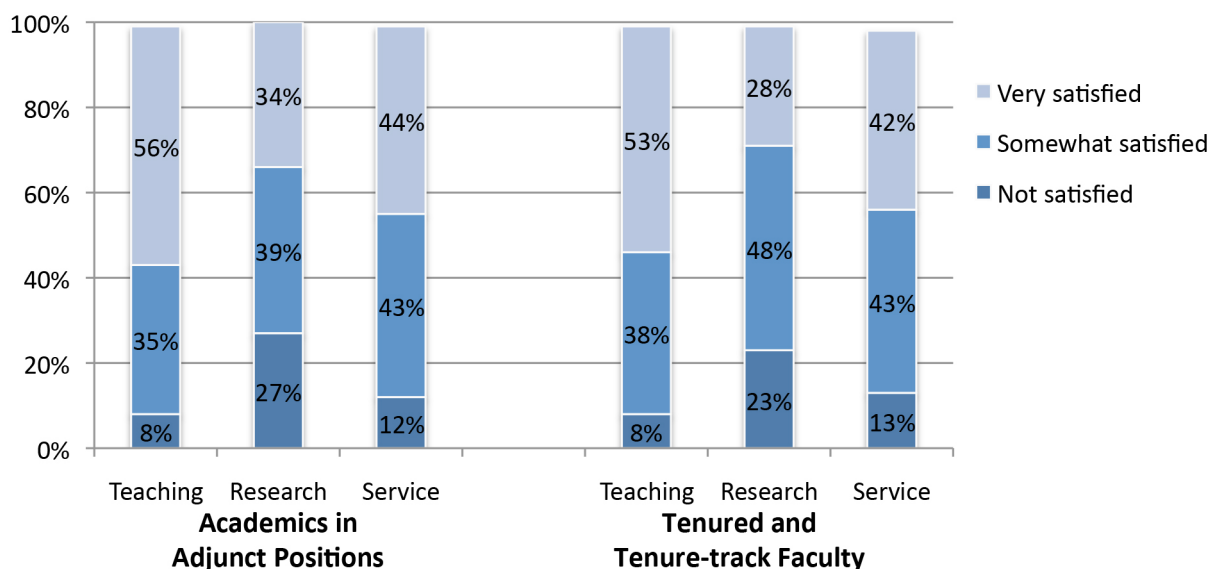
Only 24% of adjunct faculty in the CAW study preferred part-time non-tenure track employment; these were likely highly correlated with the 27% who did not view their faculty employment as their primary job. The rest had sought (26%), were seeking (30%) or planned to seek (20%) a full-time tenure-track position.

Satisfaction with Institutional Support

Essentially all (99%) academics in adjunct positions have teaching as a job responsibility. In addition, 57% report service as a job responsibility and 31% report research. While there are adjunct research positions, it seems unlikely that one-third of adjunct faculty would have research as an assigned responsibility. These responses may instead indicate a “self-requirement” that enables securing a tenure-track position or attaining an adjunct promotion.

Adjuncts reporting each responsibility were asked their satisfaction with the institutional support provided to help meet it. Satisfaction tends to be highest with teaching support; 56% of adjuncts are very satisfied and 35% somewhat satisfied. On the other hand, satisfaction is lowest with research support; while 34% are very satisfied, 27% are not satisfied. Adjunct satisfaction with institutional support for teaching, research and service generally mirrors satisfaction among TTF (Chart 2).

CHART 2
FACULTY SATISFACTION WITH INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT



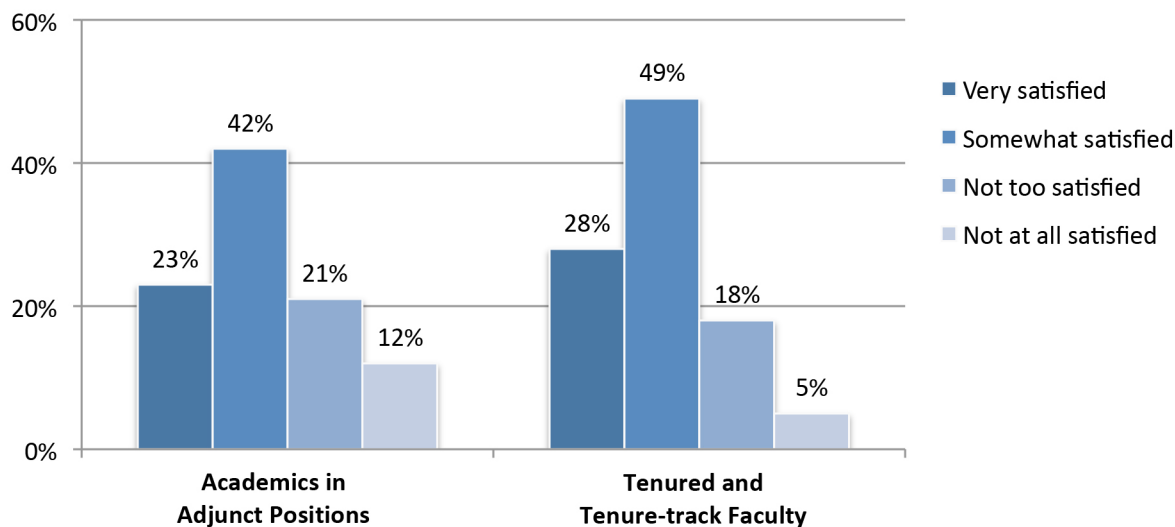
Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

¹⁵ These figures assume that no professors of practice felt this way. Forty-seven percent of all respondents preferred a full-time position over their part-time position and 62% viewed full-time opportunities at their institution as falling short of expectations.

¹⁶ This figure assumes that no “professors of practice” viewed adjunct salaries at their institution as falling short of expectations. Fifty-seven percent of all respondents viewed adjunct salaries as falling short.

The FCRS also asked about satisfaction with institutional support for professional development and career advancement. While 23% of academics in adjunct positions are very satisfied in this regard, one-third are not (21% not too satisfied, 12% not at all satisfied) and 42% are in the middle ground of being somewhat satisfied. TTF are somewhat more likely to be satisfied with this area of support (Chart 3).

CHART 3
FACULTY SATISFACTION WITH INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT



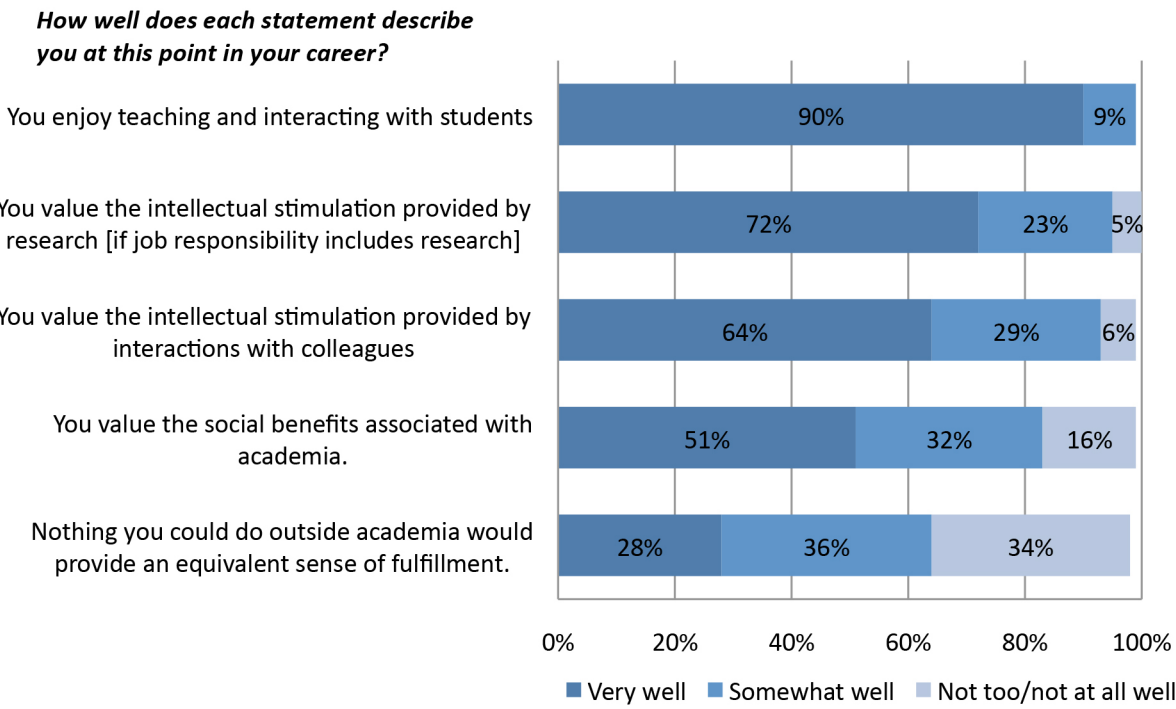
Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

Academic Experience

What do academics in adjunct positions value at this point in their careers? Foremost, it's the students. Ninety percent of adjunct faculty say the statement "I enjoy teaching and interacting with students" describes them very well, and an additional 9% somewhat well (Chart 4). Next is the intellectual stimulation of an academic career, from both research and colleagues. In addition, there are social benefits in the context of academia that are valued. Along all four dimensions, the views of adjunct faculty generally mirror those of TTF.

Almost 30% of academics in adjunct faculty positions feel strongly that nothing they could do outside academia would provide an equivalent sense of fulfillment, but at the same time one-third believe that there is work outside academia that could provide similar personal fulfillment (Chart 4). The corresponding figures among TTF are 36% and 23%, respectively. Finally, 42% of academics in adjunct faculty positions say they would very likely recommend pursuing an academic career to a promising student who asked, and an additional 42% are somewhat likely to do so. The corresponding figures among TTF are 49% and 38%, respectively. Fourteen percent of adjuncts are not likely to recommend an academic career compared with 10% of TTF.

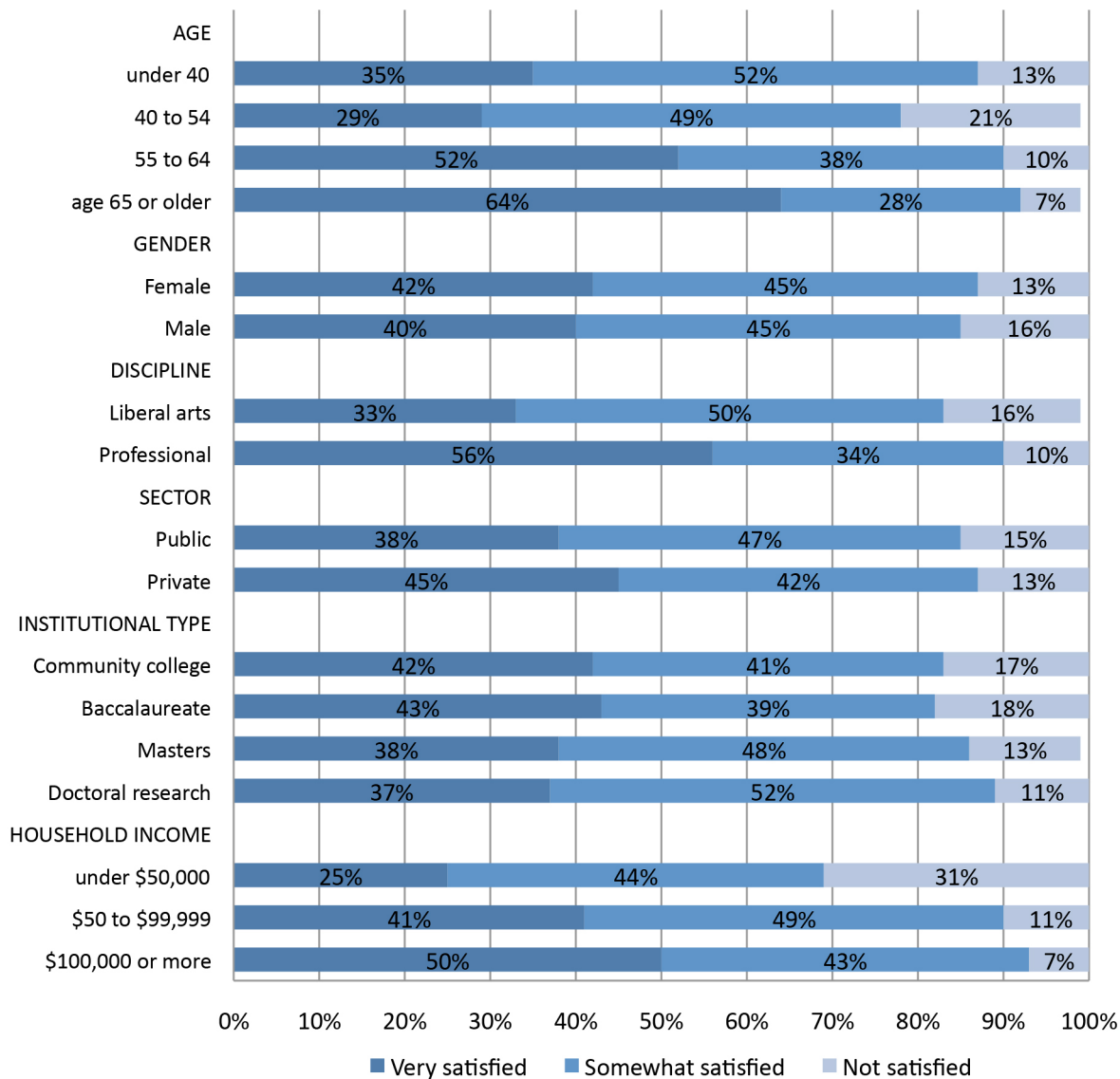
CHART 4
THE EXPERIENCE OF ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT POSITIONS



Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

Across Demographics

CHART 5
CAREER SATISFACTION AMONG ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT POSITIONS



Source: Faculty Career and Retirement Survey, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

Age

Older adjunct faculty are more likely to be satisfied with their academic career; 35% of those under age 40 and 29% of those age 40 to 54 are very satisfied, this increases to 52% of those age 55 to 64 and 64% of those age 65 or older (Chart 5). This would follow if a large share of older adjuncts is retired, which seems likely to be the case. Among those not “very satisfied,” lack of a full-time position, lack of job security and lack of a tenure-track position are cited least often among those age 65 or older.

Younger adjuncts are clearly more dissatisfied with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement; 42% of those under age 40 and 38% of those age 40 to 54 are not satisfied, compared with 21% of those age 55 to 64 and 24% of those age 65 or older. There are no notable differences across age groups in satisfaction levels with the institutional support provided for teaching.

The oldest adjuncts are more likely than their younger peers to feel that there is nothing they could do outside academia that would provide an equivalent sense of fulfillment. The oldest adjuncts are also more likely to recommend that a promising student pursue an academic career; 56% of those age 65 or older are likely to do so compared with 34% of those age 40 to 54 and 41% of those under age 40.

Gender

There is no notable difference in career satisfaction levels between male and female adjunct faculty— 42% of females are very satisfied and 13% are not satisfied; 40% of males are very satisfied and 16% are not satisfied (Chart 5). Male adjuncts appear somewhat more likely to cite lack of a tenure-track position as a reason for not being very satisfied (25% vs. 19% for females), but this difference is not statistically significant.

Female adjuncts are more likely than male adjuncts to be very satisfied with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement (27% vs. 19%), but there is little difference in the percentages who are not satisfied (32% of females and 35% of males). There is no difference between men and women in satisfaction with the institutional support provided for teaching.

Male and female adjunct faculty are equally likely to feel that there is nothing they could do outside academia that would provide an equivalent sense of fulfillment. Fifty percent of female adjuncts are very likely to recommend that a promising student pursue an academic career compared with 35% of male adjuncts; at the same time they are equally unlikely (15% of males and 14% of females) to recommend it.

Academic Discipline

Adjunct faculty in professional disciplines are more likely than their peers in the liberal arts to be very satisfied with their career; 56% compared with 33% (Chart 5). Most of this difference, however, corresponds with adjuncts who are “somewhat satisfied,” as 16% in the liberal arts are not satisfied compared with 10% in professional disciplines. Among adjunct faculty not “very satisfied,” those in professional disciplines are more likely to cite low pay (33% vs. 23%), while those in the liberal arts are more likely to cite lack of a full-time position (25% vs. 14%) and lack of a tenure track position (27% vs. 9%). Those in the liberal arts also appear somewhat more likely to cite lack of job security (16% vs. 10%), but this difference is not statistically significant.

Adjunct faculty in the liberal arts are more likely than those in professional disciplines to be dissatisfied with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement (36% vs. 27%). Adjuncts in professional disciplines appear somewhat more likely to be very satisfied with the support provided for teaching (63% vs. 54%), but this difference is not statistically significant.

Adjunct faculty in the liberal arts and professional disciplines are equally likely to feel that there is nothing they could do outside academia that would provide an equivalent sense of fulfillment. Adjuncts in professional disciplines appear somewhat more likely than those in the liberal arts to recommend that a promising student pursue an academic career, but the difference is not statistically significant.

Household Income

Career satisfaction tends to be lower among adjuncts with lower household incomes—25% of those with household income under \$50,000 are very satisfied and 31% are not satisfied, compared with 50% and 7%, respectively, of those with household income of \$100,000 or more (Chart 5). Among adjunct faculty not “very satisfied,” low pay and lack of a full-time position stand out as particular issues for those with relatively low household incomes; 31% of those with household incomes under \$50,000 cite low pay and 36% cite lack of a full-time position.

Adjunct faculty with relatively low household incomes are more likely to be dissatisfied with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement; 45% of those with household incomes of less than \$50,000 are not satisfied in this regard compared with 29% of those with household incomes of \$100,000 or more.

Adjuncts with household income of \$100,000 or more are more likely than their peers to feel that there are alternatives outside academia that would provide an equivalent sense of fulfillment. There is no difference across household income levels in the likelihood of recommending an academic career to a promising student.

Institution

Academics in adjunct faculty positions at private colleges and universities appear more likely than those at public institutions to be very satisfied with their academic career (45% compared with 38%), but the difference is not statistically significant (Chart 5). The percentage not satisfied is essentially identical at 13% among those at private institutions and 15% among those at public institutions. There is no statistically significant difference in career satisfaction levels across institutional types; the percentage very satisfied ranges from 37% at doctoral/research institutions to 43% at baccalaureate institutions, and the percentage not satisfied ranges from 11% at doctoral/research institutions to 18% at baccalaureate institutions (Chart 5). Pay level is more likely to be an issue among community college adjuncts; 32% of community college adjuncts not “very satisfied” cite low pay as a reason, compared with 29% of those at baccalaureate institutions, 23% of those at doctoral/research universities and 22% at master’s institutions. Lack of a full-time position is least likely to be cited at doctoral/research universities, while lack of a tenure-track position is least likely to be cited at community colleges.

Satisfaction with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement is greatest among adjunct faculty at community colleges and lowest among those at baccalaureate institutions. Adjunct faculty at baccalaureate institutions tend to be the most satisfied with the institutional support provided for teaching (64% very satisfied), while adjunct faculty at community colleges are the least likely to be very satisfied (46%). There are no notable differences between adjunct faculty at private institutions and public institutions in their satisfaction with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement, nor for teaching.

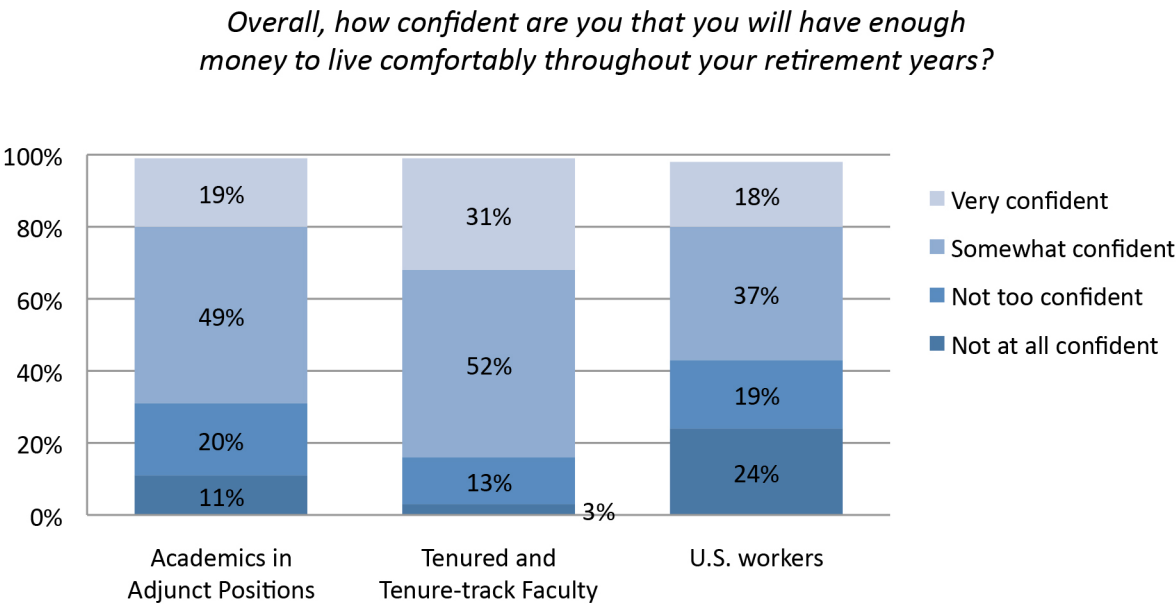
Adjunct faculty at private institutions are more likely than those at public institutions to feel that there is nothing they could do outside academia that would provide an equivalent sense of fulfillment. There are no notable differences in this regard across adjuncts at different classifications of institution.

Adjuncts at public and private institutions are equally likely to recommend that a promising student pursue an academic career. Adjunct faculty at masters and baccalaureate institutions tend to be most likely to recommend an academic career, while those at community colleges are least likely to do so.

RETIREMENT SAVINGS AND CONFIDENCE

While 19% of academics in adjunct faculty positions are very confident that they will have enough money to live comfortably throughout retirement, 31% are not and 49% are somewhat confident at best (Chart 6). This limited level of confidence is nonetheless somewhat better than that of all U.S. workers (43% of whom are not confident), but it is notably lower than the retirement income confidence among TTF (31% very confident and 16% not confident).

CHART 6
RETIREMENT INCOME CONFIDENCE AMONG FACULTY



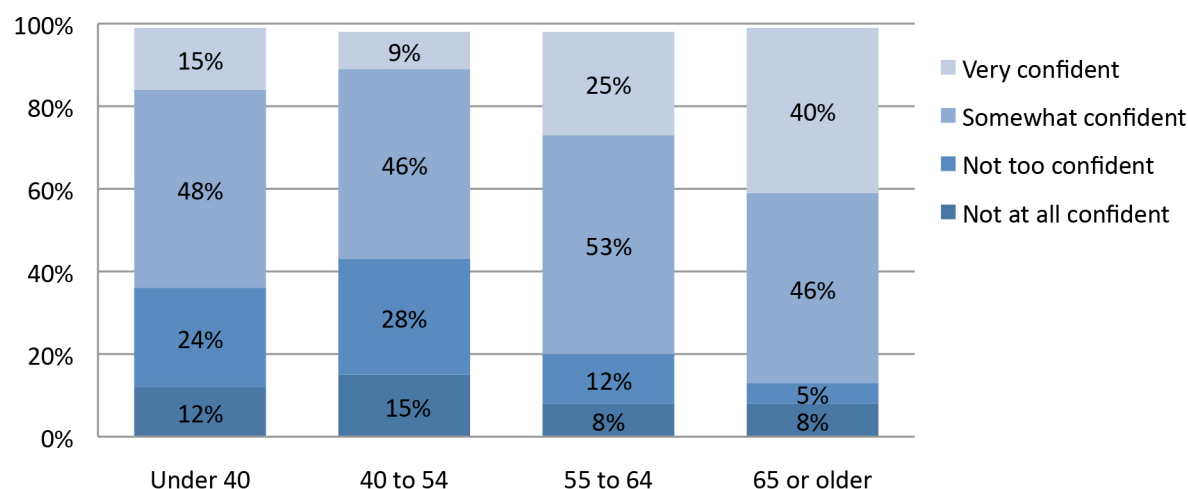
Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014); *Retirement Confidence Survey*, EBRI and Greenwald (2014).

Age and academic discipline are two demographics within which there are notable differences in retirement income confidence levels among adjunct faculty. Fifteen percent of adjunct faculty under age 40 are very confident in their retirement income prospects and 36% are not confident, while 40% of adjuncts age 65 or older are very confident and 13% are not confident (Chart 7). Adjuncts in the liberal arts tend to be less confident than those in professional disciplines about having enough money for a comfortable retirement; 37% of liberal arts adjuncts are not confident compared with 21% of those in professional disciplines.

CHART 7

RETIREMENT CONFIDENCE AMONG ADJUNCT FACULTY, BY AGE

Overall, how confident are you that you will have enough money to live comfortably throughout your retirement years?



Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

In the FCRS, 82% of academics in adjunct faculty positions report that they are saving for retirement, either through a plan at work or by saving on their own. If spousal participation in an employment-based retirement plan is considered, then 89% of adjunct faculty are in a household that is preparing financially for retirement.

Three-quarters (74%) of adjunct faculty in the FCRS have the option to contribute to a retirement savings plan at the college or university where they work (Table 4). This figure appears high relative to the CAW and AFT studies; 41% of part-time faculty in the CAW study reported access to retirement benefits from their academic employer and 39% of adjunct faculty in the AFT survey reported coverage under an employer-sponsored retirement plan at their institution.

TABLE 4
RETIREMENT SAVINGS AMONG ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT POSITIONS

Have option to contribute to a retirement savings plan at work	74%
Contributing to a retirement savings plan at work	60%
Saving for retirement outside of a work-based plan	57%
Saving for retirement in some fashion	82%

Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

In the FCRS, 60% of adjunct faculty are contributing to an employment-based retirement plan. Over one-half (54%) of adjunct faculty without access to a retirement savings plan at work report that they would very likely contribute if they had the option to do so.

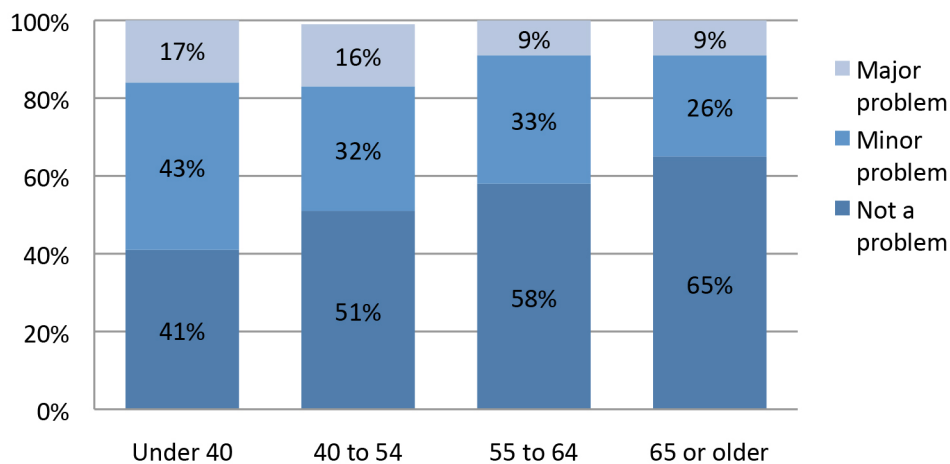
The top reasons cited by academics in adjunct faculty positions for a lack of confidence in their retirement income prospects appear interrelated—28% do not feel that they are saving enough and 33% cite low earnings.¹⁷ This dynamic is evident elsewhere in the FCRS—31% of adjunct savers are not confident that they are saving the right amount for retirement; in addition, 18% are not confident that they are investing their retirement savings appropriately.¹⁸ Other reasons cited by adjuncts not confident about having enough money for a comfortable retirement include inadequate retirement benefits (15%) and a feeling that there is too much uncertainty (12%).

Another contributor to low retirement income confidence may be low confidence in the Social Security and Medicare programs. Twenty-nine percent of adjunct faculty are not confident that the Social Security system will continue to provide benefits of at least equal value to the benefits received by retirees today and 20% are not confident that the Medicare system will continue to provide benefits of at least equal value.¹⁹ Financing retiree healthcare is a particular concern among workers in general, and 34% of adjunct faculty are not confident that they will have enough money to take care of medical expenses during retirement.

Debt's Role

Debt is likely impacting the ability of adjunct faculty, particularly younger ones, to save for retirement. One-half of academics in adjunct positions view their debt level as problematic; 13% consider it a major problem and 35% a minor problem. Younger adjuncts are more likely to see their debt level as problematic—60% of those under age 40 view it as a major or minor problem compared with 35% of those age 65 or older (Chart 8). Female adjuncts are more likely (54%) than their male counterparts (41%) to view their debt level as a problem. And not surprisingly, a greater share (61%) of adjunct faculty with household income under \$50,000 feel this way than those with household incomes of \$50,000 to \$99,000 (50%) and \$100,000 or more (40%).

CHART 8
DEBT AMONG ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT POSITIONS



Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

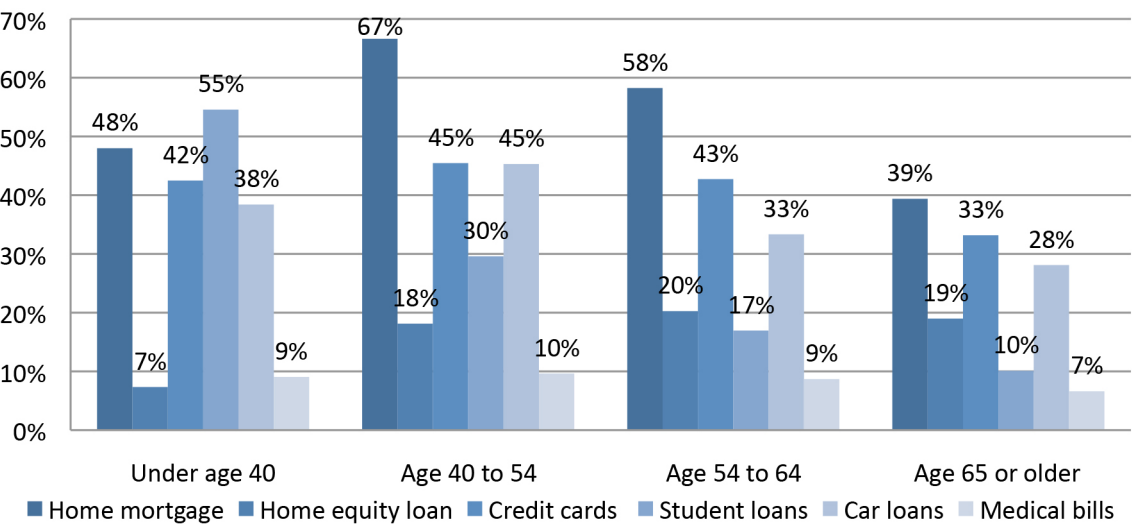
¹⁷ Respondents were asked, “What is the main reason why you feel [not too/not at all] confident about having enough money to live comfortably throughout your retirement years?” They were allowed to provide up to two reasons.

¹⁸ By comparison, 20% of TTF saving for retirement are not confident that they are saving the right amount and 10% are not confident that they are investing appropriately.

¹⁹ Among TTF, these figures are 18% and 12%, respectively. The differences between adjunct faculty and TTF may be related to the age distributions of the two groups. Thirty-eight percent of adjunct faculty are age 55 or older, with 13% age 65 or older. By contrast, 57% of TTF are age 55 or older, with 23% age 65 or older.

Housing is a common source of debt among academics in adjunct faculty positions; 56% of adjunct faculty have a mortgage and 16% have a home equity loan. Other typical debt obligations include credit card balances (42%), car loans (38%), student loans (31%) and unpaid medical bills (9%). Female adjuncts are more likely than male adjuncts to have mortgage debt (64% vs. 47%), student loan debt (36% vs. 26%) and unpaid medical bills (12% vs. 5%). Younger adjuncts are more likely than older adjuncts to have mortgage debt, credit card debt, car loans and, not surprisingly, student loan debt (Chart 9). Those with household income under \$50,000 are more likely to have credit card debt and student loan debt, but less likely to have a mortgage or car loan.

CHART 9
SOURCES OF DEBT AMONG ACADEMICS IN ADJUNCT POSITIONS



Source: *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*, TIAA-CREF Institute (2014).

CONCLUSION

How academics in adjunct faculty positions view their careers differs from the perspectives of tenured and tenure-track faculty about theirs, but the differences are not always as stark as one might expect. In fact, the views are surprisingly similar in some regards. There are structural differences, of course, in terms of salary, job security, and even retirement readiness, but those are not the only determinants of faculty perceptions.

Career satisfaction among academics in adjunct faculty positions is relatively low in comparison with TTF. Forty-one percent of adjuncts are very satisfied with their academic career compared with 69% of TTF. Not surprisingly, lack of a full-time position, lack of a tenure-track position and lack of job security are particular issues contributing to dissatisfaction among adjuncts. Concern over level of pay, on the other hand, is a factor in dissatisfaction common to both adjunct faculty and TTF. Adjunct faculty satisfaction levels with the institutional support provided for teaching, research and service basically mirror those among TTF. Fewer adjuncts, however, are satisfied with the institutional support for professional development and career advancement.

Academics in adjunct faculty positions and TTF are almost equally likely to recommend an academic career to a promising student. Forty-two percent of adjuncts are very likely to do so and 42% are somewhat likely. The comparable figures among TTF are 49% and 38%, respectively.

Differences exist among adjunct faculty. For example, younger adjuncts tend to be less satisfied with their careers than older adjuncts, less satisfied with the support provided for professional development and career advancement, and less likely to recommend an academic career. Adjunct faculty in the liberal arts tend to be less satisfied with their careers and with the institutional support provided for professional development and career advancement than are adjuncts in professional disciplines.

While most adjunct faculty are saving for retirement, few are confident about having enough money to live comfortably throughout retirement. In this regard, adjuncts are no different than the general U.S. workforce. Many adjuncts lack confidence that they are saving the right amount and that they are investing their savings appropriately. In addition, adjunct faculty are not confident that benefit levels in the Social Security and Medicare programs will remain comparable to what retirees receive today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Yakoboski is a senior economist with the TIAA-CREF Institute. He conducts and manages research on issues related to defined contribution plan design, retirement planning and saving behavior, income and asset management in retirement, managing retirement patterns, and topics relevant to strategic management in the higher education and nonprofit sectors. He is responsible for the development and execution of Institute forums on such issues. Yakoboski serves as director of the Institute's Fellows Program and editor of the Institute's *Trends and Issues* and *Advancing Higher Education* publication series.

Prior to joining the TIAA-CREF Institute, Yakoboski held positions as Director of Research for the American Council of Life Insurers (2000 to 2004), Senior Research Associate with the Employee Benefit Research Institute (1991 to 2000) and Senior Economist with the U.S. Government Accountability Office (1989 to 1991). Yakoboski previously served as Director of Research for the American Savings Education Council (1995 to 2000). He was an adjunct faculty member at Nazareth College (Rochester, NY) from 1986 to 1988.

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