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# Letters to the Editor

## Adjunct and “Regular” Faculty

Andy Magid’s editorial (*Notices* 43 (1996), p. 1324) raises a very important issue. This issue is the widespread use of adjunct faculty to teach undergraduate mathematics courses. His description understates the magnitude of the problem.

He notes that “...a disturbing trend to ‘outsource’ the teaching of entry-level core mathematics to adjuncts ... has been proposed and sometimes implemented in a number of institutions.” The use of adjuncts is very widespread. I know of no reliable data but would estimate that more than half of the institutions that teach undergraduate mathematics use adjuncts. At a well-respected local community college there are seventeen regular faculty and thirty-seven adjunct faculty in the mathematics department.

Magid also makes the assumption that every “regular” instructor is a bet-

ter teacher than every adjunct instructor for all math courses. He says, “... mathematics is best taught by mathematicians, where we define the latter as having experience in and ongoing commitment to mathematical scholarship.... The mathematics courses taught by substitute faculty are defective products.” His assumption is that no adjunct instructor is a mathematician (by his definition) and all regular faculty are mathematicians (by his definition).

Thus, every math course taught by an adjunct instructor is “defective”, and every math course taught by a regular instructor is not “defective”. This is too gross a generalization for anyone to really believe. I suspect the percentage of regular faculty who are lousy teachers is about the same as the percentage of adjunct faculty who are lousy teachers. (If an adjunct faculty is a poor instructor, at least that individual can be fired or not rehired.)

In any event, it is the mathematics departments (in most cases) that make the hiring and firing decisions for the adjunct faculty. If adjunct faculty are so bad, why were they hired?

The real tragedy in all this is the exploitation of the adjunct faculty. My experience is that the going pay rate for a one-semester undergraduate mathematics course is about \$2,000. This includes no benefits, no office space, and no clerical support. It does include a text, a syllabus, and a map of the campus. If we assume one three-unit course is a quarter-time load, then 10 hours per week or 150 hours for the semester would be a good estimate for the number of hours required to teach such a course. (This

may even include a few hours for mathematical scholarship.) The pay for this is \$2,000. However, this is without benefits. Assuming a reasonable benefits package is worth about 40 percent of salary, this would be equivalent to a salary of \$1,429 with benefits. This comes out to \$9.53 per hour.

The editorial’s title is “Boycott Cut-Rate Mathematics Instruction!” Better titles would be “Boycott Lousy Mathematics Instruction” or “Equal Pay for Equal Work”.

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(Received November 4, 1996)

## Editor’s Note

John D. Fulton, author of the 1996 AMS-IMS-MAA Annual Survey (*Notices*, December 1996, pp. 1493-1500) was incorrectly identified as provost at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. His actual title is vice-provost. His e-mail address is [fultonj@vt.edu](mailto:fultonj@vt.edu).

## Erratum

Hyman Bass’s paper “Mathematicians as Educators” (*Notices*, January 1997, pp. 18-21) was presented at a May 17-19, 1996, Board on Mathematical Sciences workshop, and is part of the (to appear) workshop summary report “Actions for the Mathematical Sciences”. Copyright 1997 by the National Academy of Sciences. Courtesy of National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.

## About the Cover

“Henon Strange” by Brian Meloon. The Henon map is the two-dimensional analogue of the logistic equation  $H(x, y) = (x^2 - a*y + c, x)$ , where  $a$  and  $c$  are constants. The picture shows a portion of the locus of points where the rate of escape of a point under iteration is the same going forwards and backwards (using the inverse map). Copyright 1993 by the Regents of the University of Minnesota for The Geometry Center, (<http://www.geom.umn.edu>). Used with permission ([permission@geom.umn.edu](mailto:permission@geom.umn.edu)).