

This Connecticut man earns more money working at a grocery store than as a college professor

BUSINESS
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By Libby Kane May 6, 2015 .



(Flickr / robert terrell) The grocery store job pays \$100 more a week than teaching. In January, Matt Debenham got a job at the grocery store in his Connecticut town.

There's nothing unusual about that, except for the fact that 44-year-old Debenham, a married father of two, earns more stocking shelves and bagging groceries than he does working his other job as an adjunct college professor.

"Adjunct" is industry speak for "part-time," an arrangement that's increasingly common at colleges and universities. [The Huffington Post](#) reports that while the majority of college professors are now adjuncts, 60% of them admit to having at least one other job.

In the 2015 edition of its annual report, the [American Association of University Professors](#) listed the average salary for a full-time professor as \$122,171. Looking only at professors teaching at private schools, it's \$148,036, and at public schools, \$115,592.

Adjuncts, however, have a different experience.

In an [essay at BuzzFeed](#), Debenham describes his earnings from working part-time at two different schools:

If I teach undergrad for the Connecticut school, it's just under \$4,800 per course per semester. For the small New York college, it's \$2,000. It sounds like there's a clear winner here, except there's a rule in Connecticut: Adjuncts can't teach more than two

courses at one time across the entire Connecticut State College system, which comprises 4 four-year colleges, 12 two-year colleges, and an online university.

So the most I can make in-state is \$9,600 for a semester, regardless of which state institution I teach in. But there's also no guarantee I'll get more than one undergrad class, and most of the time I haven't; there are too few classes and too many other adjuncts to go around. Meanwhile, there's the graduate program, which pays a fraction of what the undergrad classes do — but Connecticut counts the MFA courses and the undergrad classes as the same thing. So while the pay is wildly different and the credits are different, one undergrad course plus one grad course equals Maxed Out for the Semester.

If \$4,800 sounds like a lot, by the way, that's for 16 weeks of work, which equals \$300 a week before taxes. I have the opportunity to make this twice in a year, for a total of 32 weeks. (The calendar year, as you may know, is a few more than that.) I'm also driving 50 minutes each way, and not getting reimbursed for gas. If it sounds like I'm complaining, I'm actually pointing out that the person who does this work must *really* want to do this work.

Working at the grocery store in his wealthy, "Gold Coast" Connecticut town, however, earns him about \$100 per week more than he gets teaching. Once he's been there for three months, he writes, he'll be eligible for dental and vision insurance, and after six months, for full benefits.

His wife works in New York City, in "an industry not known for its stability."

Debenham explains that one of the most striking parts of his new job is the situations he finds himself in, handing groceries to people who know him as a professor and author, such as students and parents of his kids' friends.

He writes:

It may be a perfect distillation of Education in America 2015 when one of the parents says, "You're, uh, still teaching, though?" and I answer, "Yup!" and we both know they have an older kid who's already going to a \$60,000-a-year college that likely employs the same percentage of adjuncts as the schools where I work.