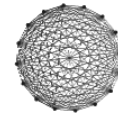


# *Can Crediting Algorithms Save the Adjuncts?*

*Madeline Ashby*

*June 2, 2016*



Society for  
Scholarly Publishing  
Innovative People Advancing Scholarly Communication



Currently, the academic field in North America is in the midst of an ongoing crisis regarding adjunct labor. Simply put, there are more adjuncts than there are tenure track positions, meaning that adjuncts can only find work in a precariat capacity. This has an impact on the larger economies of cities and other spaces, because adjuncts do not have the financial security to buy homes, have children, or make the major purchases that contribute to local economies. In turn, this issue is a reflection of global economic drivers such as rising automation, longer life expectancy, and diminishing full-time work in favor of contract labor.

Concurrent and related to this issue is the aforementioned rise in automation. As algorithms and other forms of artificial intelligence are contributing more and more across all fields. Academia is no different. Algorithms are necessary contributors to computer modeling and other forms of research, and, increasingly, they are contributing to research in novel and distinctive ways that cannot be reproduced by humans.

This chapter will explore the idea of labor relations with regard to machines (including algorithms and other forms or instances of artificial intelligence) and how those issues compare and contrast to issues currently faced by adjunct labor within academia. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to determine whether offering credit to the labor of artificial intelligence can change relations to human labor across the board. Can a rising machine tide raise all human ships?

## *The rise of adjunct labor*

- Thirty-one percent of part-time faculty are living on or near the poverty line: <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/higher-education-college-adjunct-professor-salary/404461/>
- Further, the crisis is not really a crisis, from the perspective of the academic industry. Having flipped the numbers on who is tenure track and who isn't, the academic industry can make a tidier profit and offer more classes to more students, thereby raising the bottom line. "It is merely the latest point in a perfectly consistent, predictable, and totally transparent 40-year trend replacing tenure line and tenured faculty members with contingent instructors. In 1980 75% of university instructors were tenure stream and 25% contingent. Now 25% are tenure stream and 75% are contingent." (see <http://theprofessorisin.com/2016/04/08/starving-the-beast/>)

- More and more new academics are living with crushing debt, which further limits their ability to participate in the economy (see <http://theprofessorisin.com/ph-d-debt-survey/>; this is a crisis for academia in that it is now causing investors to tell high school grads to avoid university altogether).
- This reversal of fortune in the academic industry is also hurting students: "Despite the cost-cutting benefits cited by colleges and universities, relying on adjuncts poses a significant problem for students and institutions as a whole. Lack of institutional support and poor working conditions for contingent labor are a pressing issue, and critics argue that better environments for contingent labor could result in better student outcomes. For example, adjunct faculty often have trouble connecting with students because they lack office space, and thus can't mentor struggling students. Their fragile position as contract workers also means they are less able to be outspoken about campus reform and improvements, and less able to advocate for their students when administrative issues arise." [http://www.salon.com/2012/04/04/the\\_disposable\\_professor\\_crisis/](http://www.salon.com/2012/04/04/the_disposable_professor_crisis/)

### *The rise of algorithmic labor*

Algorithms are already a part of the economy as we know it, and the trend shows no signs of declining. From on-demand services that match cars to riders, to Mechanical Turking and other offerings, algorithms have changed the scope.

- <http://continuations.com/post/96355016855/labor-day-right-to-an-api-key-algorithmic>
- <https://theawl.com/will-the-internet-just-fix-itself-a441c54a303f#.3sm1863rt>
- <http://www.bi.edu/research/bi-research-centre-for-internet-and-society/fair-digital/dates/2016/04/macro-perspective-algorithmic-and-on-demand-labor/>