Adjunct pension issues

If you’re in another retirement system...

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Last year’s Clarion article on adj-unct pensions sparked the most phone calls of any story in years. CUNY has not always done a good job of providing its part-time em-ployees with pension information, and this article clearly filled an important gap. “Adjunct Pensions: A Surprising Return” an-swers most basic ques-tions on the subject and is available on the web. (See page 9 of the February 2004 Clarion at www.psc-cuny.org/ communications.htm.) But when it comes to pension ad-vise for adjuncts, one size doesn’t fit all. CUNY adjunct service is pension-able through the New York City Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS). However, many CUNY ad-juncts already belong to another New York public pension system, and they need to take specific steps to make sure they get the maximum benefit at retirement. Most can still get pension credit for their CUNY teaching, but the details vary. Below is information for adjuncts in several areas:

Faculty who staff who have already retired from CUNY, SUNY, the Department of Education or any other New York City or State agency and are now working as CUNY adjuncts cannot get additional pension credit for their post-re-tirement teaching. But they may open a supplemental retirement ac-count with TIAA-CREF or HRC and deposit a percentage of their CUNY pay into this account via payroll de-duction. There are no matching funds from the employer.

Teachers and supervisors in the New York City Department of Education are already members of the New York City Teachers’ Retirement System. A CUNY adjunct service makes DOE employees eligible for “multiple employment membership,” which will in-crease the salary base TRS uses to calculate their pen-sions. The specifics of multiple em-ployment membership are different for each TRS tier. For information about your tier, contact me at eballeisen@pscmail.org or 212-354-1252.

Before retiring from the NYC DOE, employees need to request a record of service from the Human Resources department of the CUNY school where they work. This doc-ument should be attached to the TRS retirement application. CUNY full-time faculty and staff who also work as adjuncts get salary base credit for any adjunct teaching automatically if their ad-junct work is at their home campus. Full-timers who teach extra courses on other CUNY campuses are also entitled to salary base credit but must take the initiative to give the TRS office their second campus their pension number. New York State employees in the New York State Employees’ Retirement System and the New York State Teachers’ Retirement System may join the New York City TRS in order to get pension credit for their CUNY adjunct teaching. They must be vested in both pen-sion systems before retirement and must retire from the City and State on the same day. At retirement, both pensions will be combined un-der the New York State pension sys-tem. To make this happen, an adjun-cnt must take the initiative to re-quest the transfer to the State. Full-time SUNY employees in TIAA CREF may join the New York City TRS to get credit for their CUNY adjunct work. They must re-tire from CUNY and SUNY on the same day. They will receive sepa-rate pension checks from TIAA-CREF and from TRS. Adjuncts with vested TIAA-CREF pensions from prior full-time CUNY or SUNY work may join the New York City TRS as long as they have not yet begun receiving pension payments from TIAA-CREF. (This group includes adjuncts who previously had substitute full-time lines and adjuncts who once worked in both the New York State and New York City TRS but have both pensions combined at retirement.) New York City employees in the New York City Employees’ Retirement System and the Board of Education Retirement System are not eligible to join the New York City TRS. They must retire from CUNY and get pension credit for their adjunct teaching. However, they may de-pose a percentage of their CUNY pension into a supplemental account with TIAA-CREF or with HRC.

Adjuncts who join the New York City TRS and later get a job that makes them eligible for a dif-ferent New York City or State pen-sion plan may transfer their TRS ac-counts into the pension sys-tem that covers their new position. Alternatively, those eligible for a different New York City pension plan may choose to stay in TRS as transfer contributors.

Adjuncts with further questions about their pension status can con-tact Ellen Balleisen at eballeisen@pscmail.org or 212-354-1252.