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Dr. Wanda Evans-Brewer has been teaching for 20 years, has a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a PhD in Education. She is also living in poverty, one of the educators featured in the documentary 'Professors in Poverty,' distributed by Brave New Films.

Professors in Poverty

Oregon adjuncts relate to message in new film

BY CHRIS THOMAS

About one-third of the part-timers teaching college courses are on public assistance, according to a new documentary that follows some part-time or adjunct professors, at home and on the job.

The message of *Professors in Poverty* is resonating in Oregon, where the trend also has been for schools to eliminate full-time teaching positions and restrict part-timers' hours to bypass paying employee benefits.

It means Heather Toland has a lot in common with her students, and

works a second job when she isn't teaching biology at Chemeketa Community College.

"They are all struggling and working really hard, too," Toland said. "It's more about, 'Yep, we're all in this together' - that's what it feels like to me. We are dependent on Oregon Health Plan for our health insurance; thank goodness for it. It's been a rough, rough road."

According to the video by nonprofit Brave New Films, adjunct professors' average pay decreased by 49 percent from 1970 to 2008, while college presidents' salaries increased by 35 percent during that time. The American Association of University Professors said half of all U.S. professors are now adjuncts.

Traci Hodgson, a history professor who heads the faculty union at Chemeketa, said some state lawmakers assume people teach part-time because they want to - when it's more likely no full-time jobs are available.

"Many of them have an outdated notion of what a part-time faculty member is, or they fall back on the budget excuse," she said. "At the same time, we see more and more administrators being hired. Actually, to do it well, to manage all those part-timers, you need a lot of administrators."

Geology professor Mariah Tilman, who now works part-time in real estate, said she hopes the film opens more people's eyes to the budget challenges in higher ed and changes some stereotypes.

"When you say you're a professor at the college level, they assume you're making a lot of money," said Tilman. "We need to make it clear that we're not. I hesitate to blame the college, because the college is working within the money that is given to them by the state and the public."

Other educators contacted for this report said their health, morale and careers all suffer with the part-time teaching trend, but they try to keep it from affecting their students.

Learn where you can see "*Professors in Poverty*" or host a screening of the documentary by visiting brave-newfilms.org. A trailer for the film is also available online.

Chris Thomas is a reporter for Oregon News Service.