

**HISTORIANS' CONTINGENT WORKFORCE:
WHERE HAVE WE BEEN? WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

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This paper provides the historical context for the move from a predominantly tenure-track faculty to a small core of tenure-track faculty and an overwhelming majority of part-time or full-time non-tenure-track contingent positions. The current recession accelerated a process in higher education employment that began in the 1970s. Addressing this issue is made more difficult by the lack of reliable statistics.

In 2007 the *New York Times* published an article on its front page entitled "Decline of the Tenure Track Raises Concerns." One of the part-time faculty members that the *Times* highlighted was Aletia Droba, who had been teaching philosophy in the Detroit area for 10 years and "some semesters . . . taught as many as seven courses at four colleges, including across the border in Canada." When Ms. Droba landed a full-time job, her work-load dropped to five courses in one academic year. Nevertheless, her job remained non-tenure track.¹

This story illustrates what nearly all authorities regard as a prevailing long-term trend in academia today—the move from a predominantly tenure-track faculty to one made up primarily of non-tenure track, part-time, adjunct, or contingent faculty in both public and private institutions. With a few exceptions, reports on higher education employment show that more than half

of faculty today hold part-time appointments, and approximately 68 percent of all faculty hold non-tenure-track positions—that is, either part-time or full-time temporary jobs.² This paper will describe the historical context for this trend and discuss how much the current economic recession and rising student enrollment have affected it. Although the current environment seems to have complicated the higher education employment picture, fragmentary evidence suggests that the proportion of full-time tenured faculty will not expand in the future, but will remain constant or shrink, as schools hire more contingent full-time and part-time faculty.

The historical pattern down to 2007 exhibited an unmistakably steady increase in part-time faculty employment. Before World War II, universities hired part-time faculty in more informal and ad hoc appointments as visiting professors, clinicians, or in-residence faculty. In this way, institutions retained specialists whose talents helped to increase the prestige of the university and provided an opportunity for specialists to offer unique qualifications that regular full-time faculty did not possess. After World War II, however, the enormous growth in higher education prompted institutions to hire more part-time faculty, less on the rationale of garnering prestigious talent for universities than on the basis of “managerial and financial imperatives.”³ Put simply, it was

cheaper to hire part-timers. This shift in hiring practices at American colleges and universities mirrored broader trends in labor practices across all fields of work since the 1970s, as companies moved toward a non-standard work force made up of part-time or contract labor. It is worth noting, though, that while "professional employees are about as likely as the general workforce to be . . . non-standard workers, faculty members are far more likely than professional employees generally to be in such work arrangements."⁴

By all accounts, the ratio of part-time and full-time faculty members has changed significantly since the 1970s, though there is disagreement about how much. In 1970, according to the 2008 *Digest of Educational Statistics*, part-time faculty represented only 22 percent of all faculty teaching in U.S. colleges and universities. By 1980, they were 34.4 percent. By 1991, they were 35.2 percent. By 1997, they grew to 42.5 percent, and by 2007, they were 48.7 percent. These numbers still tell only part of the story. When taking into account non-tenure-track full-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants, the percentages of contingent instructors increase even more. Again according to the *Digest*, full-time faculty off the tenure track now represent over 15 percent of the workforce. Graduate student TAs constituted 19.4 percent of teachers in

2007. It is worth noting that *AHA Perspectives* recently published an article on the 2007 Humanities Indicators Project that found fully 64 percent of history faculty to remain in tenured or tenure-track positions, while only 26 percent occupied full- or part-time contingent jobs. That report, however, rests on a selective sample of 1,400 four-year schools, excluding community colleges and probably graduate student teachers. All other studies, by contrast, show that just over one quarter of the academic workforce is made up of full-time, tenure-track faculty and that close to 75 percent of the workforce consists of part-time, adjunct, contingent faculty and graduate TAs.⁵ That is, again, 75 percent including TAs.

In many instances, contingent faculty do not receive basic protections for academic freedom, do not enjoy secure employment, salaries benefits, or opportunities for professional development as do tenure-track faculty, and do not get the basic tools of teaching, such as office space or access to equipment, though things are improving. For many contingents, moreover, the term "part-time" is a misnomer, given that they teach more classes with greater numbers of students than full-time faculty. While it is true that most part-timers work at one campus, a sizeable minority—35 percent according to one study—do embody the image of the "freeway flier" who flits between numerous campuses to cobble together full-time employment. Contrary to

some arguments, consequently, that adjuncts provide a lesser education to their students, investigations repeatedly show that adjuncts provide education and receive evaluations that are consistent with those received by full-time counterparts.⁶ Nonetheless, while pay rates vary for adjuncts, they are universally lower than that for full-time faculty. For example, a 2007 article noted that "in California, a community college adjunct receives \$2000 for a sixteen-week, three-unit course, and in Illinois the rate is \$1,224. In contrast, their full-time counterparts earn up to three times more."⁷ No wonder that part timers have been called a class of "untouchables" or the "indentured servants" of academia.⁸

While the historical trend of increasing employment of part-time and contingent faculty is evident, current patterns and future trends are less clear cut. Professional academic organizations including the OAH, are turning their attention to this problem. Nevertheless, much of the research on the specific patterns and practices of employing part-time and full-time non-tenure track contingent faculty remains general and anecdotal. Indeed, the efforts of this committee—the OAH Committee on Part-Time and Adjunct Employment—to put together a comprehensive picture of adjunct higher education employment throughout the country has been stymied by a lack of concrete data. Surely,

there is large need for much better statistical accounting of adjunct employment patterns.

Our committee's most reliable information on current employment patterns comes from California and Connecticut, two states with different situations. At the moment, neither state is appointing many new tenure-track faculty. In the wake of the current economic downturn, California has reduced the number of adjunct faculty, especially at the 23-campus California State University system. This reflects problems deeper than just the current recession. For some time, the California state legislature has allocated fewer funds to fulfill the 1960s Master Plan for Higher Education to provide access to higher education for every eligible high school graduate in California. One response has been to increase student tuition and fees. Another response has been to reduce enrollments in both systems. Remarkably, then, as the numbers of applications rose at all California colleges and universities in fall 2009, course offerings were being cut.⁹ Consequently, adjunct faculty will likely teach fewer classes. (See handout.) Indeed, ALL part-time lecturers were recently notified not to anticipate employment in fall 2010.

Other systems in other states are currently increasing the number of part time faculty. In Connecticut community colleges and the State University system, early faculty retirements,

faculty search freezes, and mushrooming student enrollment have vastly increased the number of classes available for adjunct faculty. (See handout) A similar pattern seems to be unfolding in the City University of New York system, the University of Texas, at both the El Paso and Arlington campuses, the University of North Carolina and in Michigan.¹⁰

Bleaker situations seem to prevail elsewhere. At Rhode Island's Bryant College last fall, the history coordinator expected to cut adjunct sections. At the Community College of Rhode Island--Warwick, the history department chair reported cutbacks due to budgetary pressures. Across the country at Shoreline Community College in Washington State, faculty employment is being cut back to the point that some full-time faculty seemed destined to be reduced to adjunct status.

Overall, the tendency is toward greater instability in employment for contingent faculty. Around the country, faculty unions have recognized the benefits of organizing this expanding group, especially as the proportion of tenure-track faculty is reduced.¹¹ As one union organizer put it, part timers "are so exploited, the only difficulty in organizing adjuncts is finding them."¹²

A study recently presented to the Association for the Study of Higher Education suggested that conditions for adjunct

faculty improved when adjunct faculty leaders were successful in changing negative attitudes toward part timers and in advocating equal treatment for them.¹³ The Issue Brief just released by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, for instance, argues that the growing ranks of part-time, non-tenured faculty who are increasingly permanent members of their departments "should be hired, evaluated, and renewed in a professional manner." The CAW accentuates that "if we are to maintain a world-class system of higher education and help all students achieve success, we must have a strong faculty with the support necessary to carry out its professional responsibilities."¹⁴

Our evidence indicates that the American faculty now consists primarily of non-tenure track and contingent instructors. The situation in California may indicate a step back from the trend toward increasing use of adjuncts; however, other states like Connecticut suggest the opposite. Research on this predicament, however, is regrettably uneven. We appeal to institutions of high education throughout the country to keep better records on the hiring and employment of contingent faculty. The Joint AHA-OAH Standards on Part-Time Employment—adopted by the OAH in 2003 and still in effect—call for history departments to share this kind of information with the OAH. We ask the audience to help us compile such information, and to offer other ideas, and suggestions.

Supplemental Handout:

“Where have we been? Where are we going?”
By Arlene Lazarowitz and Donna Binkiewicz
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Contingent Faculty Statistics

California:

California State University System

Between 2008 and 2009, [the percent of lecturers fell by 16%](#)

On seven campuses the number of lecturers fell by 20% or more:

- Stanislaus (in the central San Joaquin Valley) lost 44%
- Los Angeles (in the heavily Hispanic area of East Los Angeles) lost 27%
- San Francisco lost 25%
- San Diego lost 24%
- San Luis Obispo lost 24%
- Fullerton (in Orange County) 23%
- Fresno lost 20%¹⁵

Georgia:

University System of Georgia

Between 2001 and 2004 at the University of Georgia

- full-professors declined 4.6%
- associate professors declined 15.8%
- instructors increased 38.2%
- lecturers increased 82.4%

The ratio of undergraduates to tenure-track faculty has increased dramatically due to expanding student enrollments there as well.¹⁶

Connecticut: [Increases in adjunct employment compared to 2008-2009](#)

Connecticut State University System

--an additional 243 part-time faculty (14%) in the fall semester of 2009, and an additional 34 (7%) at Central Connecticut State University in spring 2010

Connecticut Community College System

-- hired 8% more adjuncts in fall 2009 due to surging enrollments and 5% more in Spring 2010

¹ Alan Finder, "Decline of the Tenure Track Raises Concerns" *New York Times*, November 20, 2007, A1.

² "One Faculty Serving All Students: An Issue Brief by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce," February 2010, http://www.academicworkforce.org/CAW_issue_brief_Feb_2010.pdf

³ Frederic Jacobs, "Using Part-Time Faculty More Effectively," in *The Growing Use of Part-Time Faculty: Understanding Causes and Effects*, David W. Leslie, Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 11.

⁴ M. Edith Rasell, Eileen Appelbaum, "The Changing Pattern of Employment Relations," in *The Growing Use of Part-Time Faculty: Understanding Causes and Effects*, David W. Leslie, Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 29.

⁵ "One Faculty Serving All Students: An Issue Brief by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce," February 2010. Appendix contains data from the Digest of Educational Statistics: Figure 1. Percentage of Part-Time and Full-Time Faculty Members, 1970-2007, p. 9.

http://www.academicworkforce.org/CAW_issue_brief_Feb_2010.pdf.

On the Humanities Indicators Project, see "State of Humanities Departments," *Inside Higher Education* (March 1, 2010), <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/03/01/humanities>, and Robert B. Townsend, "Putting Academic History in Context: A Survey of Humanities Departments," *AHA Perspectives* (March 2010): 7-10.

⁶ One study that documents the extent of multi-campus employment of part-time adjuncts is "CSU-AAUP Report: Working Conditions of the CSU Part-Time Faculty, 2005," p. 8, which can be found at <http://web.ccsu.edu/aaup/publications.htm#CSU-AAUP>. One claim that increased use of part-timers results in decreased graduation rates for students may be found in Ronald G. Ehrenberg and Liang Zhang, "Do Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty Matter?" in *What's Happening to Public Higher Education?* Ronald G. Ehrenberg, Editor, (Westport, CT: Praeger/American Council on Higher Education, 2006); For more information of the qualifications and evaluations of part-timers see John D. Haeger, "Part-Time Faculty, Quality Programs, and Economic Realities" in *The Growing Use of Part-Time Faculty: Understanding Causes and Effects*, David W. Leslie, Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

⁷ Eddy A. Ruiz, "The Stone That Struck Goliath: The Part-Time Faculty Association, Washington State Community and Technical Colleges, and Class-Action Lawsuits," in *The current Landscape and Changing Perspectives of Part-Time Faculty*, Richard L.

Wagoner, Ed. (No. 140, Winter 2007) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 50.

⁸ Robert B. Yoshioka, "Part-Time Faculty in California: Successes, Challenges, and Future Issues," in *The Current Landscape and Changing Perspectives of Part-Time Faculty*, Richard L. Wagoner, Ed. (No. 140, Winter 2007) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 41.

⁹ Cal State estimated an increase over last year's applications by 53%. "CSU Officials Outline Enrollments and Preview 2010-2011 Budget," Nov 10, 2009, California State University, Public Affairs Website, <http://www.calstate.edu/pa/News/2009/enrollment-budget.shtml> (November 2009).

¹⁰ Ronald G. Ehrenberg, Editor, *What's Happening in Public Higher Education?* (Westport, CT: Praeger/American Council on Education, 2006), 174, 200.

¹¹ Audrey Williams June, "Surge in Adjunct Activism is Spurred by Bad Economy and Hungry Unions," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 14, 2009), <http://chronicle.com/article/Surge-in-Adjunct-Activism-Is>

¹² David Hecker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, quoted in Finder, "Decline of the Tenure Track Raises Concerns," *New York Times*, November 20, 2007, A1.

¹³This study looked at thirty institutions, which were not identified. Peter Schmidt, "When Adjuncts Push for Better Status, Better Pay Follows," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 1, 2009), <http://chronicle.com/article/When-Adjuncts-Push-for-Better>

¹⁴"One Faculty Serving All Students: An Issue Brief by the *Coalition on the Academic Workforce*," February 2010, p. 5.

¹⁵Aimee Schreck, California Faculty Association, January 2009.

¹⁶ Christopher Cornwell and David B. Mustard, "Assessing Public Higher Education in Georgia at the Start of the Twenty-first Century," in *What's Happening in Public Higher Education?* Ronald Ehrenberg, Ed., (Westport, CT: Praeger/American Council on Education, 2006), 131-132.