

“Come Together”: Part-Time/Contingent Faculty in History

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The Challenges of Part-Time Faculty Employment

Among the most important challenges facing non-tenure track faculty are questions about the actual composition of the workforce, access to governance and respectful treatment. This paper argues that addressing these critical areas will allow us to develop meaningful guidelines and to achieve long-lasting change.

Let me support the findings of the previous panelists. As part-time faculty, we face a situation filled with complexities. We are the product of a longstanding, “decided shift” toward increased reliance on off-the-tenure track professionals in higher education. Currently, we are enmeshed in a short term financial crisis that both accelerates the pre-existing pattern and renders continued employment even more fraught with uncertainty as my colleagues illustrated. In some parts of the country and in certain institutions, we are working longer and harder than ever before, teaching additional sections of over-enrolled classes. In other areas and places, we are the target of budget cuts; often, we are not fired or laid off but simply “not asked” to return. Without doubt, the changes in faculty composition have attracted attention. Since the 1990s, professional organizations like the OAH began to debate ideas, draft statements and issue guidelines. The newest initiative by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW) entitled “One Faculty Serving All Students” takes into account the realignment of the last four decades

and the economic downturn with which we struggle now.¹ CAW has reframed the issues in terms of better results for students and the overall welfare of the system of higher education but it is unclear that such an approach will inaugurate change.² That we are still generating “briefs” and building coalitions underscores the inefficacy of previous efforts.

Obviously, the challenges we confront are persistent given the frequency with which they are highlighted by coalitions similar to the CAW, professional associations like ours and advocacy groups such as the New Faculty Majority.³ According to James Monks, the problems facing part-time faculty are fairly uniform: “low pay, almost non-existent benefits, inadequate working conditions, and little or no opportunity for career advancement.”⁴ This litany is so widely understood that our committee readily came up with a similar list of issues for participants to rank on our survey (see Appendix I). Given the consensus on the importance of pay, benefits, conditions and opportunities, I’d prefer to focus on three other challenges: establishing our identity, gaining access to governance and attaining a level of respect. These areas repeatedly come up in discussions among activists and in the literature on contingent faculty because they are crucial in achieving long term transformation (see Appendix II). In each

¹ The Brief has been endorsed by at least fifteen major organizations including the AHA; the OAH has recently endorsed it. *One Faculty Serving All Students: An Issue Brief by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce* (February 2010), 5. http://www.academicworkforce.org/CAW_Issue_Brief_Feb_2010.pdf, (accessed March 9, 2010).

² Ibid. According to the concluding sidebar of the *Issue Brief*: “When all teachers are appropriately compensated and are active participants in curriculum planning, student advising, and campus life, then learning flourishes and student retention and completion rates increase.”

³ Recently formed, the New Faculty Majority is seeking non-profit status. Consult: <http://www.newfaculty.majority.info/national/>.

⁴ James Monks, “Who Are the Part-Time Faculty?” *Academe Online* (July-August 2009), <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2009/JA/Feat?monk.htm> (accessed January 17, 2010).

case, they supply the connections necessary to becoming “one faculty”, as the CAW envisioned. The bifurcated one with which we currently contend consists of tenured and tenure-track full-timers alongside an invisible army of contingent teachers and scholars with tremendous responsibilities and little authority. At the very least, if we pursue the questions of identity, governance and professional respect, we will understand better who we are and where we may want to go.⁵

As fellow committee members noted, the first challenge we must address is the collection of comprehensive data on the composition of part-time faculty; by part-time or contingent faculty, I mean any faculty member off the tenure track employed in colleges and universities. The need for a concerted effort on the part of all disciplines to conduct a census of their workforce is long-overdue. Still, the field of history might provide a model in gathering the information necessary if we made a commitment across the board to do so. Ultimately, we may conclude that, as Monks argued, “There is no Such Thing as a Typical Part-Timer.”⁶ However, his finding is based on *The National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*, published in 2004 and derived from 26,108 responses; current estimates of 700,000 (to possibly 800,000) contingent faculty call into question the representative nature of such a small sampling.⁷ Furthermore, a substantial number of academics may be “contingent” in name only as the CAW *Brief* indicated: [Many] . . . effectively function as permanent members of the staff . . . yet institutions often perpetuate outdated personnel and compensation policies that assume non-tenure track

⁵ I am echoing the sentiment of pioneer sociologist Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman. See Alice Rossi, ed. “The Militant Madonna’: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1860-1935” in *The Feminist Papers* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988):566-598.

⁶ Monks.

⁷ Ibid.

faculty . . . are short term employees who. . . [make up] only a small proportion of the faculty.”⁸

Both the dearth of information and the prevailing fiction of a temporary staffing measure represent substantial impediments to proposing meaningful changes and realistic guidelines for treatment of the contingent workforce.

The collection of comprehensive data will enable us to address other areas as well. The current “system” of employment reflects the piece-meal nature of its evolution. Emblematic of the confusion is the absence of consensus on what we are called: part-time, contingent, affiliate, off-or non-tenure track, adjunct. Post-doctoral fellows and graduate student employees combine to diversify the picture. If we are hardly a uniform category except for being off the tenure track, our individual titles such as professor, lecturer or instructor are equally muddled. Linda Kerber observed: “Someone called a ‘lecturer’ at one institution is called an ‘adjunct professor’ at another.”⁹ The specific categories indicating rank according to the framework outlined by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) were created for a different era. An adjunct professor, for example, used to designate a professional who taught a course at a college or university but was gainfully employed full-time elsewhere. With the rise in part-time faculty during the 1980s and 1990s, the term adjunct proliferated in part, perhaps, because no other language was available. Clearly in the early 21st century, it is time to revisit the issue. The temptation to formulate a “parallel’ universe to the tenure-track may be appealing but

⁸ *Issue Brief*, 2.

⁹ Linda K. Kerber, “Depending on the Contingent: The Hidden Costs for History,” *AHA Perspectives* (April 2006) <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2006/0604/0604pre1.cfm?pv=y> (accessed 1.13.08).

inappropriate.¹⁰ Instead, we need to employ the same precision we use in our scholarship and in our classrooms. We should encourage the establishment of a consortium of individuals across our profession or across professions to examine the actual contours of employed faculty.¹¹ If we unite the impulse to name with the availability of meaningful data, we may ascertain the dimensions of a workforce as it exists, develop appropriate categories and encourage the use of new terms that indicate our place within it. Such an exercise should not preclude the possibility of recommending an overhaul of the system. Moreover, hard data will allow us to make the case for doing our work better with a fairer allocation of resources, including funds for professional development, sabbaticals, research and course development.

The second challenge under consideration is that of governance, an area deemed important by many of the professional associations organized by discipline although not mentioned in the original AHA-OAH guidelines – more fuel for Howard Smead’s contention that they are outdated and in need of revision. In an AAUP report from 2006, John W. Curtis and Monica F. Jacobe identified and clearly articulated the general problem: “part-time faculty are not involved in broader curriculum planning [and are] . . . generally excluded from

¹⁰ Joe Berry, chair of the Chicago Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor, made the observation that the AAUP attempted to use term limits and rigid schedules to shadow the system governing full-time faculty. Berry is quoted in Scott Jaschik, “More Rights for Adjuncts,” *Inside Higher Education* (September 13, 2006), <http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2006/09/13aaup> (accessed 4.16.08), 2

¹¹ This idea of a commission or consortium occurred to me in reading an article entitled “Boise State Looks to Improve Conditions for Part-timers,” Associated Press (December 6, 2007) <http://www.montananeewssation.com/global/story.asp?s=746081%Clinet=Printable> (accessed December 7, 2007). Routinely, I resist the practice of using “adjunct” as a noun rather than as an adjective and encourage others to do so.

participation in . . . departmental or institutional governance.”¹² In the last decade for example, the Executive Council of the MLA acknowledged as much and recommended: “NTT Faculty members should be incorporated into the life of the department to the fullest extent possible”¹³ An increasing cause of concern, according to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Standards, is the development of a contingent faculty position heavily weighted towards teaching, the temporary full-time professor: “The narrowed categories that fulltime non-tenure track faculty fill . . . often (also) takes them out of (the) decision making at their own institution; that is, they lose their voice in the traditional shared governance process.”¹⁴ A local newsletter for an AAUP chapter unintentionally supported the inclusion of part-time colleagues as they called for the greater involvement of tenure track faculty in university business: “. . . it is sensible and appropriate to allow as many relevant opinions and voices into the decision-making process as possible. . . . this process of deliberately and thoroughly addressing divergent perspectives is essential.”¹⁵ Most telling is the case of former University of Akron Adjunct Professor Matt Williams. He staged a walk-out to protest a newly instituted DNA-testing policy for faculty and was later barred from teaching at Akron. But, his “firing” may have occurred because he

¹² John W. Curtis and Monica F. Jacobe, “Consequences: An Increasingly Contingent Faculty,” *AAUP Contingent Faculty Index 2006*, American Association of University Professors, (2006), 9. They exempt unionized campuses from their generalization.

¹³ “Statement on Non-Tenure Track Faculty Members, Modern Language Association,” December 2003, http://www.mla.org/statement_on_nonten(accessed April 16, 2008), 2.

¹⁴ American Federation of Teachers, “Standards of Good Practice in the Employment of Part-time, Adjunct Faculty: Fairness and Equity: Blueprint for Quality,” (2002), 11.

¹⁵ “Effective Shared Governance,” *Faculty Welfare/AAUP Newsletter*, Fairfield University (February 2008), 3.

attempted to “discuss the way adjuncts (sic) are treated” with administrators and trustees.¹⁶

Williams, like the majority of his part-time associates, lacked an outlet for an exchange of views on working conditions, a means of negotiating with their employers and a venue for forging an alliance with colleagues. The absence of part-time faculty in structures of governance leads to isolation and disconnection, frustration and alienation. Life on the margins hampers the ability to perform well and deprives institutions of part-time faculty expertise. Part-time faculty must become an integral part of the governance system. Little will change until we are.

The last area of discussion and possibly the most foundational is that of respect. The issue surfaced at a Forum held in March 2010 in San Jose, part of AFT-NEA Joint Meeting. Observers reported that: “at least some of the grievances [among part-time faculty] were directed not just at administrator[s] but at the senior, tenured faculty ranks.”¹⁷ Lack of respect, as Smead’s paper suggested, was reflected in Standards and Guidelines that characterized contingent faculty as a problem or “contagion to be stopped and possibly reversed.”¹⁸ A letter sent in response to a piece in the OAH Newsletter in 2003 echoed a similar theme:

[Most] . . . objectionable . . . [is] the frequent disrespect part-time professionals encounter. One of the greatest misconceptions we face is the insistence that . . .

¹⁶ Scott Jaschik, “No Job for an Adjunct Who Took a Stand, *Inside Higher Education* (March 23, 2010), <http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2010/03/12/akron> (accessed March 23, 2010).

¹⁷ Scot Jaschik, “How Fast is Fast Enough?” *Inside Higher Education* (March 29, 2010), <http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2010/03/29/adjuncts> (accessed March 29, 2010).

¹⁸ Howard Smead, “Treating Chronic Illness: The AHA-OAH Standards: Are They Appropriate?” Paper, OAH Convention (April, 2010), 2.

[we] devalue higher education. When you write that, among, other factors the substitution of “tenure-track with part-time and adjunct positions undermine [s] the quality of higher education,” you contribute to an atmosphere which conflates the issues. We are not the “problem”; the exploitation of “adjunct(s)” faculty and the failure to replace or expand tenure-track positions [deserve separate consideration].¹⁹

Anne Cassebaum, a full-time English professor, described the issue as one of divided faculties; we operate, she argued, in a class system of insiders and outsiders.²⁰ She thought the gap might be narrowed if more full-timers followed her example and spent a month as an adjunct professor - to experience what she referred to as “nonentity status.”²¹ Gary Rhoades, professor of higher education, placed the issue in historical perspective:

Indeed, the working conditions of contingent faculty highlight the steady erosion of key rights obtained for employees a century ago by a national labor movement and employment legislation. The situation of contingent faculty thus provides an opportunity for all faculty groups to better connect with other employees in and outside the academy.²²

He concluded that common ground might be established by coalescing around workers’ rights.

Still another approach was reported by Peter Schmidt in detailing the findings of a study

¹⁹ Letter from Elizabeth Hohl to Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, May 3, 2003. Dr. Hall responded thoughtfully and concurred with the necessity of distinguishing among the issues.

²⁰ Anne Cassebaum, “Crossing Class Lines: A Diary,” *Academe* (July-August, 2001), 37.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Gary Rhoades, “The Centrality of Contingent Faculty to Academe’s Future,” *Academe Online*, <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2008/ND/Feat/rhoa.htm?PF=1> (accessed April 3, 2010).

conducted by Adrianna J. Kezar and Cecile Sam.²³ Based on an analysis of 30 institutions, including community, technical and 4 year colleges, they argued that “adjuncts made the most progress at [places] . . . where they tried to transform the campus climate to be more inclusive of them, rather than simply fighting to change one employer at a time.”²⁴ They described a three step process of mobilization, implementation and institutionalization. In the last phase, achieved by only one sixth of the colleges they examined, “steps [were taken] . . . such as offering mentors and professional development, to ensure that adjuncts feel included in the over all faculty”; “proportional representation” in the system of governance also improved working conditions.²⁵ Some schools have implemented means of recognition through teaching awards. The issue of respect repeatedly comes up in anecdotal evidence such as focus groups and forums for discussion. Of the three challenges, it may be the hardest to resolve. We may have to employ multiple methods to address it but I suspect the resolution of the first two issues depends largely upon the finding a way to deal with the third.

We are anything but temporary, part-time workers. Given the current climate, we may be more vulnerable and easily exploited than ever before. Despite many years of proposing guidelines and forming coalitions, the problems of pay, benefits, conditions and slim chances for advancement persist. For change to take place, we need to become visible in all of our variety, to exercise our voices as fully enfranchised individuals of the institutions that employ us and to gain respect as members of the professoriat.

²³ Peter Schmidt, “When Adjuncts Push for Better Status, Better Pay Follows, Study Suggests,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 1, 2009) <http://chronicle.com/article/When-Adjuncts-Push-for-Better/48998/> (accessed 11/4/09).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Appendix I
Part-time and Adjunct Employment Survey
For Distribution at OAH Conference: 4.10.10

1. Name
 (optional) _____
2. Current title _____
3. Place of Employment (optional) _____
4. Years of Employment as Part-time or Contingent Faculty (circle one)
- 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26 +
- 4a. Where have you been primarily employed? (circle one)
- private colleges/universities public colleges/universities both
- 4b. During an average semester, at how many places are you employed?
- (circle one) 1 2 3 4 5 or more.
5. Are you familiar with the Joint AHA/OAH Standards on Part-time and Adjunct Faculty Employment (abridged version printed on the reverse side of survey)?
- (circle one) yes no unsure
6. What revisions, if any, would you recommend for altering the Standards? (mark copy on reverse)
7. What would enable you to function more effectively? Rank the following issues in order of importance on a scale beginning with #1 as the highest priority. Use n/a (not applicable) for categories that do not constitute areas of concern.
- Salary Increase _____
- Job Security _____
- Opportunity for Promotion _____
- Availability of Travel/Conference Funds _____
- Option for Health Care Benefits _____
- Retirement Benefits _____
- Access to Professional Development _____
- Resources for Research _____
- Greater Respect as a Professional _____
- Collegial Interaction/Part-time Faculty _____
- Collegial Interaction/Full-time Faculty _____
- Access to computer, telephone, other equipment _____
- Other Issues (use the reverse side for other comments):
-
-

Appendix II
Handout: Resources for Part-time Faculty: 4.10.10
OAH Committee on Part-time and Adjunct Employment

In the spirit of our purpose which “is to recommend programs and services for adjunct and part-time members of the profession,” we assembled information on advocacy groups, guidelines and current literature.

Groups Guidelines

AdjunctNation: <https://www.adjunctnation.com/page/aboutus/>.

American Association of University Professors: <http://www.aaup.org/aaup>.

Explore this site for many resources.

AFT Higher Education. “American Academic: The State of the Higher Education Workforce 1997-2007,” American Federation of Teachers.

http://www.aftface.org/storage/face/documents/ameracad_report_97-07for_web.pdf.

American Association of University Professors. “Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession.” <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/conting-stmt.htm>.

Campus Equity Week: <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/issues/contingent/cewpage.htm>. (See AAUP description, including links under “Inside this Section”)

Coalition on the Academic Workforce

http://www.academicworkforce.org/contingent_faculty/index.cfm. Note: CAW site provides links to guidelines in many fields.

H-Net Network on Adjunct/Part-time Faculty Issues h-adjunct@h-net.msu.edu <http://www.h-net.org/~adjunct>.

“Joint Committee Issues Standards for Part-time and Adjunct Faculty”

<http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2003aug/ptstandards.html>.

New Faculty Majority: The National Coalition for Adjunct and Contingent Equity

<http://www.newfacultymajority.org>.

Resolution on Fixed-Term Higher Education Teaching Personnel. The Fifth World Congress of Education International, Berlin, Germany (July 22-26, 2007), <http://www.ei-ie.org/library/en/display.php?id=15>.

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