



Part-Time Faculty Confab

Student Learning Center

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Assigned Reading

PART TIME FACULTY ISSUES

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If we deconstruct the university-and set aside the trendy rhetoric of a multiversity-are we not actually approaching a "strativersity," a hierarchy of teaching that imposes a hierarchy of learning?

I intent to present the perspective of adjunct and part-time faculty in the academy, but I think the questions raised by contingent faculty have resonance for every sector of the university today.

Part-time Faculty Issues

Let me begin with some of the hard realities that I recently presented to the New Jersey legislature, linking the ways that typical contingent working conditions may undermine student learning conditions.

Accessibility.

Faculty accessibility is the first and most frequently cited problem associated with contingent faculty when they become the primary teaching force in undergraduate education. Adjunct and part-time lecturers in particular most often face heavy teaching loads, commute between multiple positions, and lack basic support facilities like offices, mailboxes, telephones, Web sites, and e-mail accounts. These conditions, to say nothing of the grading workload, diminish and fragment their time-and directly undermine their ability to meet with students. Tenure-track faculty themselves are also increasingly unavailable, as their ranks are eroded by contingent appointments and as their responsibilities are increasingly centered on graduate students and research.

The previous chapters put numbers to this trend. More anecdotally, a recent Rutgers graduate wrote to the student newspaper that only 18 of her 120 credits for graduation were in courses taught by tenure-track faculty-all the rest were led by part-time lecturers or teaching assistants. So if we consider student access to faculty beyond the immediate classroom to be a condition that enhances student engagement and learning, the growing contingency of university teachers is a negative trend with no remedy in sight.

Even collective bargaining, which can be an effective tool to address inadequate salaries and working conditions, may be impotent when it comes to the circumstances of teacher accessibility. Collective bargaining law differs from state to state, but in New Jersey we have found that mirrors in the bathroom are a more protected topic of bargaining than offices, phones, and mailboxes-the latter are only necessary if educational managers judge them to be, whereas the mirror is an option of desire or convenience that educational workers are free to request. Evidently, the importance of offices, phones, and mailboxes to teachers' accessibility is not even debatable sometimes.

Student Advising.

A clear consequence of inaccessibility is inadequate student advising. Undergraduates, particularly those in their first two years of study, are more likely to be in introductory and core courses taught by contingent faculty, which also tend to be the classes with better students-teacher ratios. These lower-division undergraduate students are the students most in need of advising, and this is the best moment to reach them. But contingent faculty may not be familiar with the range of academic programs, requirements, and possibilities available to students. They are certainly not paid to advise or become mentors beyond their classroom hours of work. That responsibility presumably falls on the tenure-track faculty, yet there are fewer of them teaching undergraduates in small classes.

At the Rutgers Writing Program, we try to bridge the gap first by distributing standardized "registration" handouts in class, then by sending students to the department Web page. But is effective advising a matter of isolated reading and independent Web browsing? Students miss the chance to develop real relationships with faculty, a factor some say is the single most important contributor to an outstanding education. In the direction we are heading, it is fair for students to ask their college: Who will be there to help us select the right major, sponsor an independent study, call in an incomplete, suggest an alternative reading, cut through some bureaucratically scrambled credits, or just write a reference that is taken seriously? We have tried to negotiate compensation for extra duties at Rutgers where some part-timers write recommendations, cover incompletes, and advise regularly without pay, but it remains to be seen when these crucial aspects of the college teachers' role will become fully acknowledged.

Classroom Issues.

Accessibility and advising are at risk outside the classroom, but contingency increases the ways students can be shortchanged inside the classroom as well. Let me recast this more positively-if students are not going to be shortchanged, they need courses taught by faculty who know ahead of time that they are teaching, what they are teaching, and when they are teaching. For the teacher this means advance notice of reappointment; for the student, it means courses will more likely be well planned and well organized. In my work for the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), at Rutgers and nationally, I see dozens of excellent, qualified, and committed instructors leave academia because they are tired of not being able to plan ahead.

Through collective bargaining, we have gradually pushed notice of assignment and appointment so that now departments are encouraged to make decisions one term ahead of time. But as often occurs with bargaining, the key word is "encouraged"; we still have work to do if teachers and students are to get the advance planning they deserve.

Professional Development.

But better notice of reappointment is not enough. Support for professional development should be available to anyone in front of a college classroom. Students need instructors who are in tune with the continual transformation taking place in higher education. Students benefit from teachers who are aware of developing pedagogies, changing disciplines, and new classroom practices and technologies-and teachers in tune with the mission of their institution. Students suffer when instructors stagnate-and although this certainly can happen to full-timers, it is built into the structure of contingent appointments.

Professional development means being able to attend conference in your field, give papers at such meetings, participate in discipline associations and departments. At the Rutgers Writing Program, royalties from the composition textbook are used to fund professional travel for part-time lecturers and full-time non-tenure-track instructors. But in a sense, this funding is then coming out of tenured faculty pockets rather than institutional budgets. The Rutgers Writing Program also encourages us all to build Web pages, but even teaching assistants and non-tenure-track instructors can take Web page design courses for free; in contrast, part-time lecturers must pay their own way. This is another topic we have been struggling with at the bargaining table.

Collegial Involvement.

Professional development and students advising depend on collegial involvement. Instructors who keep up in their fields, are abreast of developments in their institutions, and are in touch with other faculty members make the best student mentors and advisers. There can be no collegial interchange if faculty are operating in rigid tiers with no contact between contingent instructors and the tenure-track faculty.

Students will not necessarily see these invisible dividers, but the results will affect their educations. Students need to talk with faculty who are up-to-date, well-connected, and encouraging; they need to see faculty who are positive examples of where advanced education can take you; and they need to interact with faculty who can steer them most effectively through their institutions.

The need for collegial involvement extends beyond the departmental level. At Rutgers last year, the university senate added three representatives for part-time lecturers and annual appointees for the first time ever. This is an opportunity for contingent faculty to participate in the governance forum in which administrators, tenure-track faculty, and students were already involved. This may be just another occasion to collect unpaid service from those already exploited, but it may also be another step toward revealing

the invisible faculty. It is an important opportunity for the university community to hear contingent faculty voices, to hear a perspective that might not be otherwise heard.

A Stable Workforce.

You can see that I am on a slippery slope ere-but trying to roll the stone up the slope. If universities invest in the professional development and collegial involvement of contingent faculty, then clearly the payoff can only be realized by having a long-term and stable workforce. This brings us back to the issue of tenure, or at very least, longer-term and full-time non-tenure-track appointments. But to secure such stability, even in an adjunct workforce, the pay and benefits would have to match comparable jobs in other sectors. This implies salary and health care coverage. And these are areas where collective bargaining has made its greatest inroads: seniority, security, salary, and health insurance.

Decent Pay and Benefits.

Decent pay and benefits are necessary to the conditions of student learning because students need committed instructors, who have the necessary time and are not distracted by extra employment responsibilities and schedules required to supplement their incomes and live decent lives. Most adjuncts are not Nobel laureates or retired CEOs wanting to give back to the next generation, although a few may be. Believe it or not, a fair number of part-time faculty get menial full-time jobs just so they can continue teaching and using their advanced degrees. I was on a panel once with a fellow who grudgingly gave up his part-time teaching position to do warehouse work that would better support his family. Then he realized he could go back to teaching as a second job. Something seems backwards when the blue-collar position ensures the academic one. All those years of education turn out to be not such a good investment. I wonder if the warehouse position had collective bargaining protections.

Academic Freedom.

And now we come to the heart of the matter. Would the young fellow in this example have dared to tell his story (there was more to it, of course, involving union organizing, I believe) on a panel if he did not feel secure in his basic employment? Academic freedom cannot really be obtained for those appointed by the term or year. Even making the slightest waves could lead to "nonreappointment." In most cases, without collective bargaining, nonreappointment requires no explanation. Surely, contingent faculty can seldom advocate curriculum reform, support unpopular causes, or take risks in the classroom in an atmosphere like this.

At Rutgers, when we have tried to negotiate an academic freedom clause in our contract, we have been told that "everyone" has academic freedom. Yet how can that be if part-timers have to be reappointed each term? And if that were the case why would those of us in the writing program have to note "All Grades Subject to Department Review" on our syllabi? Good teachers must be able to experiment and take risks, they must demand and display critical thinking skills. Students suffer when an instructor's innovative impulse is constrained, and full-time tenure-track faculty feel the chilling

effects of a department or institution populated with teachers (and perhaps students) watching their backs.

Faculty Governance.

When so many teaching faculty are insecure and without academic freedom, it is difficult for faculty governance to flourish among the elite minority. Tenure-track faculty often resist governance participation by part-time faculty, whom they perceive as too dependent on administration to exercise independent judgment. And as governance bodies become moribund and peer decision-making mechanisms disappear, academic freedom diminishes for everyone. When academic freedom is weak, quality education becomes threatened by conformity, mediocrity, and the safest approaches, including "objective" multiple choice or true-false tests rather than essay evaluation, grade inflation, and choosing to protect one's position rather than extend students' horizons.

Due Process Protections.

Generally we speak of protecting academic freedom with tenure, but the extent that probationary tenure-track faculty and non-tenure-track faculty have any assurance of academic freedom is the extent to which their appointments are associated with due process protections. These may be based on collective bargaining or institutional regulations, but the key feature of due process is usually an opportunity for a hearing before a neutral adjudicator. Contingent faculty appointments are defined specifically to preclude such procedures not only by omitting any regular review and hearing procedures but by explicitly disavowing any standards or expectation of reappointment.

When a part-time lecturer of twenty years at Rutgers was not renewed this year for supposedly abandoning her classroom, even with a collective bargaining agreement there was little we could do to save her job. How many of us think that canceling a class will lead to the end of a career? Without an opportunity to defend her behavior before a neutral third party, the department was able to represent this part-time lecturer as negligent. Due process protections are probably the most important items in a collective bargaining agreement, yet grievance procedure language seldom gets the attention it needs to function fairly. As long as instructors can be denied reappointment at will, they will lack academic freedom and students will lack the opportunity to study with faculty who are working under minimal condition necessary to protect the opportunity to exercise professional integrity.

What sort of example does this set for that special class of student learners: the bright students who might consider becoming teachers in higher education themselves—the students we should be attracting as majors in our department, as prospective graduate students, and as future members of our faculties? What are they observing in these trends and scenarios that will encourage them to invest years to income, sacrifice, and intellectual endeavor—a shrinking shot at position of integrity and security in the university of a growing chance of becoming the academic braceros of the twenty-first century?

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