

THE OVERUSE AND ABUSE OF PART-TIME FACULTY

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In my conversations with college and university teachers, one of the most frequent topics is the overuse and abuse of “contingent” faculty. I will use the term “contingent faculty” to represent not only part-time faculty, but also faculty who teach a full load but do not have tenure or continuing contracts. Contingent faculty are sometimes called "adjuncts."

In 1975, 57 percent of America's college and university teachers were tenured or on tenure track, while 43 percent were contingent. In 2003, however, these numbers had more than reversed: tenured faculty had dropped to 35 percent, while the contingents now stand at 65 percent (U. S. Dept. of Education). Currently, two of three first-time hires in our community colleges are contingent faculty.

In a survey of nine disciplines, only 48 percent of the introductory courses were taught by full-time, tenured faculty. The remaining 52 percent were taught by teaching assistants and contingents. In English and Foreign Languages only 25 percent and 28 percent of introductory courses were taught by full-time, tenured faculty.

Gender differences are significantly higher among contingent faculty. In 1998, 36 percent of tenured faculty were women, but among the contingent faculty it was 48 percent. In the humanities the difference is much greater: 38 percent tenured time versus 59 percent female contingents. Currently only 17 percent of contingent faculty have medical coverage and only 20 percent are on a subsidized retirement plan. Finally, 73 percent of these faculty are paid at a rate of less than \$3,000 per course.

Boise State University (BSU) may have the most contingent faculty as a proportion of total faculty than any other major American university. The number of BSU credits generated by contingents is approaching 60 percent university wide, exceeding the national average by 8 percent. BSU's English Department used to have a dozen full-time instructor positions on continuing contracts with benefits. That number has now been reduced to three, so that there are now 46 contingents and 34 tenured faculty in the department. The BSU history department has 15 tenured faculty and 18 contingents.

Nationally, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) represents 45,000 contingent faculty, more than any other faculty organization. In 2007, 800 adjunct faculty at Wayne State University voted 442-57 for AFT as their bargaining agent. These hard-working teachers had no health insurance and many of them had not received a pay raise in 10 years.

The National Education Association (NEA) estimates that it has about 37,000 members who are contingent faculty. An NEA higher education report cited a study that showed that overuse of contingent faculty lowered graduation rates, and that "part-time faculty have less time to prepare for class and to interact with students outside the classroom, and less often use active and collaborative techniques to engage their students."

Taking some items from union contracts for contingent faculty, I would like to propose "The Four Cs for Contingent Faculty."

Continuity. After a period of satisfactory performance, contingent faculty would receive a "Certificate of Continuing Employment" that gives them hiring preferences and access to benefits. In stark contrast, some University of Idaho (UI) part-time instructors were fired

at the end of the 2004 fall semester and rehired in the spring so that benefits would not have to be paid.

Compensation. Contingent faculty should be paid a salary proportionate to the salary paid to the full-time faculty with equivalent qualifications. In dramatic contrast, pay per course at the UI ranges from \$1,500 to one third of a full professor's salary. Some UI contingents have not received a pay raise since they were hired. Faculty union contracts generally have salary step plans that guarantee a minimum raise for satisfactory performance.

Consistency. Not only is there wide discrepancies in pay, there are also wide differences in contingent appointments. The Idaho State University Department of English and Philosophy should be commended. Of its 58 faculty only nine are contingent. Although their salaries are low, the 20 instructors are employed full-time with full benefits on continuing contracts.

Coverage. Combining consistency and continuity, all contingent faculty who are working more than half time should be entitled to medical and retirement benefits. In 2002, one UI college cut medical benefits for all contingent faculty even though one English instructor was in the middle of cancer treatment.

Our contingent faculty are the draft horses of American higher education, and we must treat them with justice and dignity. As Frank Brooks of Roosevelt University says: "Contingency is a threat to quality, not contingent faculty. It's not who we are but how we are treated that undermines the quality of higher education."