ASA PROGRAM REVIEWERS AND CONSULTANTS TRAINING II

CONTINGENT FACULTY

STEPS FOR ACTION AND ADVOCACY

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CONTINGENT FACULTY
WHO THEY ARE

• "Contingent faculty" are all those working off the tenure track.

• Nomenclature varies by institution, as do the challenges and opportunities they face.

• Some are part-time teaching by the course (i.e., "adjuncts") and others are full-time, benefits eligible faculty.
INCREASING CONTINGENCY
AND THE DECLINE OF TENURE TRACK JOBS

• Between 1995 and 2011, full-time tenure-track positions fell from 42% to 28% of all instructional positions (GAO, 2017).

• Contingent faculty comprise 61% of instructional positions at four-year institutions, 84% at two-year institutions, and over 99% at for-profit institutions (IPEDS 2015).
THE CAUSES OF CONTINGENCY
WHY THIS HAS HAPPENED

• Growing corporate-style management of institutions.

• Increase in administrator numbers and compensation (Ginsberg 2011).

• Decreased public funding for education.

• Push back on the need for tenure (Chait 2002).

• Oversupply of academic labor (ASA 2018).
THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINGENCY EFFECTS ON EDUCATION

• Considerable variation in the literature (Jaeger & Eagen 2011).

• Contingent faculty may be less available to students.

• More contingent faculty may reduce retention and graduation.

• Other research suggests that students learn more from contingent faculty than from those on the tenure track.

• Negative consequences for academic freedom (Smith 2015).
THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINGENCY EFFECTS ON FACULTY

• Low pay and wage premium on educational investment.

• Job insecurity and stressors associated with living with precarity (AAUP 2014).

• Lack of benefits, little professional support.

• Wasted human capital, poor working conditions, little respect, lack of integration (Allison et al 2014).
ACTION AND ADVOCACY
THE ROLE OF THE PROGRAM REVIEWER

• Maximum feasible equity across ranks: pay parity, employment security, academic freedom, inclusion in departments and mechanisms of governance.

• ASA recommendations based on Task Force on Contingency Faculty report (2019).
Whattsamatta University, a small private liberals arts school, has hired Chris as an adjunct (part-time contingent) faculty member for the last eight semesters. Chris has always taught at least one section of the department’s required statistics course, and in alternating semesters also teaches research methods. Chris is generally mailed the teaching appointment letter a week or so before the start of each semester begins (both spring and fall) despite having been on the schedule since it was drafted. Chris receives $2300 per class, a figure that has held steady over time.
In early May, Vaughn was sent an email from the Sociology department chair of New England Private, a small liberal arts school. The informal offer outlined the course load and compensation details for a one-year renewable full-time contingent position. Vaughn spends the summer prepping three courses for the fall semester and uploading materials into the learning management system. In late August, Vaughn is notified that a tenure-line member of the department will be teaching one of the classes Vaughn has prepped. The email also notes that the full-time contingent position has now been converted to an adjunct (part-time contingent) position for two courses each semester.
Northern East University is a 15,000 student regional campus of a state university. The Department of Sociology has eight tenure-line faculty members and an unspecified number of adjunct (part-time contingent) faculty. During your departmental review campus visit your schedule does not include conversations with adjunct faculty members. However, during a meeting with students you are told about Dr. Mills - a popular, long-serving adjunct who was not rehired this year because, according to the students, Dr. Mills offended a group of conservative students by suggesting that the tax cuts enacted since the 1980’s have largely benefited the wealthy, driving up the national debt, and failed to create jobs that paid a living wage for working class people. When students objected to this characterization, Dr. Mills was dismissive of their arguments, telling students they had been “brainwashed by Fox News.” The conservative group of students went to the dean and the student newspaper to complain about a “hostile” environment for conservatives. The students claim the dean pressured the department to avoid rehiring Dr. Mills after the student newspaper article sparked a controversy.
Western Southern University is a state university facing declining enrollments. The provost has placed great emphasis on retaining students as it has become more and more difficult to recruit students to the campus located in an increasingly sparsely populated part of the state. The department has lost two of their 10 full-time tenure-track faculty lines over the past five years as retirees’ lines were not replaced. The department has had to increasingly rely on adjunct (part-time contingent) faculty. Several of the full-time faculty members complain to you that the adjuncts, perhaps in response to the provost’s concerns, are perceived to be “easy A’s”. They grumble that enrollments in their (the full-time tenure-line faculty’s) courses are declining presumably because students prefer to take “easy” courses from adjuncts.
Winterfell University is a mid-sized, publicly funded university in the Midwest, with an undergraduate enrollment of 22,000 students. Their Sociology Department has 15 tenure line faculty, 3 full-time contingent faculty, and 4 part-time contingent faculty. Despite there being two offices held for future tenure-line hires, the contingent faculty share a room that serves as their office space. They have 3 desks and 3 computers that they share on the floor below the Sociology Department main office, supply area, and tenure-line faculty offices. The contingent faculty have difficulty accommodating office hours and privacy for student meetings. The chair has suggested that they meet with students at the library or a local coffee shop. They are discouraged to display personal items in the office space because it is shared with others.
Pat is a full-time, contingent (non-tenure line) faculty in the Sociology Department at Brew University, a mid-sized, publicly funded university. The department has 20 tenure-line faculty and 3 contingent faculty. Pat has worked at Brew U for 18 years, accepting both part- and full-time contracts, as the department needed. Pat has also carried overload semesters several times, teaching an additional course on top of the four course load. While they have a PhD, Pat is listed as “instructor” on the university webpage. Contingent faculty are not typically included in faculty meetings, but Pat always comes when asked. The times Pat attended, it was to provide specific feedback on a contingent faculty issue then was excused. Contingent faculty have no voting privileges in the department. On several occasions, Pat has requested travel funds to attend conferences, and was told funds were not available to contract faculty, but to “check back” if they had interest in travel funds in the future.