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The exploitative working conditions

experienced by a large and growing number of faculty have been given considerable attention—both in the popular press as well as within the higher education community itself. And yet, surprisingly, there has been very little study of the impact on student learning. This is even more surprising—and alarming—given the likely correlation between what we know about how best to facilitate optimal student learning experiences and what we know about the material conditions of contingent instruction.

According to one possible interpretation, the revolving door on the cover of this issue of Peer Review suggests excessive turnover, as a succession of faceless adjuncts cycle in and out of the classroom. Hired on a semester-to-semester basis, many faculty are never sufficiently acculturated to the institution(s) where they teach. They often know nothing about the general education program of which their course is a part, and their knowledge about and ties to the department or division that hired them are often very loose, at best. Further, these faculty may be unaware of the institutional resources available to the students they advise. Those who do know or come to know these things may not be hired back—a significant but unrecognized loss to an institution.

An alternative interpretation suggests itinerancy: a single faculty member in motion, moving in and out of the classroom so quickly that she arrives just in time to teach the class and is gone as soon as it ends, perhaps to repeat the same scene on another campus. Or she could be off to other full- or part-time work elsewhere. While most institutions restrict the number of courses a single instructor can teach, they seldom inquire about the accumulated course load of the part-time or adjunct faculty who teach at several different institutions or about overall workload.

We have come to know a good deal more that is equally troubling about the working conditions of contingent faculty—the lack of protection for academic freedom, for example, or the inordinate dependence on student evaluations for re-appointment. We also know that part-time faculty are less likely than full-time faculty to use essay exams or to hold office hours.

Meanwhile, a related but less visible trend is emerging: The number and percentage of full-time, non-tenure-track appointments are increasing sharply. Clearly, we are witnessing a rapid unbundling of faculty roles and the emergence of a two-tiered system.

While attenuated budgets across all sectors of American higher education may, in part, justify the increasing reliance on contingent faculty, the articles in this issue of Peer Review suggest that small, budget-driven decisions too often are being made without reference to the big picture. As Ernst Benjamin points out in the lead article, “Cost-saving is a reasonable objective but it is not the same as cost-effectiveness.”

Contingent faculty members themselves, as well as all of us concerned about the future of the profession, have a great deal at stake in any discussion of these staffing trends. Yet, even as many of the obvious equity issues are redressed through isolated reforms in some cases and unionization in others, the increasing reliance on contingent faculty is more than just a labor issue; teaching conditions are also learning conditions. Given that contingent faculty now teach the majority of lower-division undergraduate classes—classes populated by students making the transition from school to college, by students most likely to benefit from increased faculty-student interaction—the potential for negative impact on student learning, retention, and attrition is great.

This issue of Peer Review opens a sustained conversation about the relationship between instructional staffing and student learning—a conversation that will be taken up online, through the new Peer Review online forum, and, in collaboration with the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, through a significant content track at AAC&U’s upcoming annual meeting. Information about both venues is available in this issue. Please join us for this important discussion.
How Over-Reliance on Contingent Appointments Diminishes Faculty Involvement in Student Learning

By Ernst Benjamin, senior consultant and special projects director, American Association of University Professors

Over-reliance on part-time and other “contingent” instructional staff diminishes faculty involvement in undergraduate learning. It is urgent that we recognize this for two reasons. First, such over-reliance particularly disadvantages the less-well-prepared entering and lower-division students in the non-elite institutions who most need more substantial faculty attention. Second, the diminished learning opportunities are not confined to extension programs, distance education, or other such marginal outsourcing of instructional responsibilities. Rather, the affected programs are the core undergraduate programs—regardless of whether these are defined as general education courses that provide basic college-level skills such as literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and communication or the liberal education that contributes the information and knowledge fundamental to effective participation in contemporary society.

The change in staffing of these core programs is so obvious and pervasive that the documentation that follows almost seems unnecessary. Yet there has been remarkably little study of the impact of this change on student learning, and a description of the nature and extent of the change in staffing is a precondition to exploring their effects. To be sure, there have been efforts to suggest ways to improve part-time and graduate assistant instruction, as well as the careers of full-time, non-tenure-track faculty (Gappa and Leslie 1993; Roueche, et al. 1996; Baldwin and Chronister 2001). Although the essential, but rarely implemented, reforms recommended by these studies reflect concern for undergraduate staffing policies, none of these studies has directly examined the effects of the increasing reliance on contingent staff on student learning, and each has accepted the inevitability of increased dependence on contingent faculty.

Indeed, in an effort to respect the efforts and contributions of contingent staff, these studies often offer merely anecdotal claims that contingent faculty are generally able and committed, frequently more devoted to teaching than full-time, tenure-track faculty, easily dismissed if found wanting, and recipients of student evaluations comparable to their full-time, tenure-track counterparts. These comforting presuppositions have enabled institutions and accrediting bodies to rationalize and expand their reliance upon contingent instructional staff and to replace precise “input” standards based on faculty qualifications, appointment policies, and performance standards with vaguely defined requirements for institutionally developed student “outcomes” measures. Consequently, reconsideration of these presuppositions is long overdue.

Changing Patterns of Instructional Staffing

It is widely known that the proportion of all faculty who teach part-time virtually doubled from 22 percent in 1970 to 43 percent in 1997 (National Center for Education Statistics 2001). Yet, even this understates the problem. Indeed, as Table 1 shows, between 1975 and 1995 part-time faculty appointments increased by 103 percent and graduate assistant appointments by 35 percent. Along with a 92 percent increase in non-tenure-track appointments and a 12 percent decline in probationary tenure-track positions, these changes reduced the proportion of full-time, tenure-track fac-
ulty to little better than a third of those engaged in faculty work (Table 1). Most part-time faculty and virtually all of the nearly half of graduate assistants who are teaching assistants teach lower-division undergraduates. Consequently, staff with part-time, contingent appointments compose a substantial majority of those staff who provide lower-division instruction.

This is self-evident in the two-year colleges, where almost 50 percent of first-time students begin their higher education and where about 63 percent of instructors are part-time appointees. Yet, even in four-year institutions, nearly half of all instructional staff are either part-time faculty or graduate assistants. The need to consider graduate assistants is clear from Table 2, which contrasts the private university reliance on part-time faculty with the public university reliance on graduate assistants. The substantial role of graduate assistants has been relatively neglected, in part due to the assumption that they worked only as assistants to full-time faculty. But newly developed data showing that nearly half of all teaching assistants have full responsibility for one or more courses demonstrate that they are major contributors to undergraduate instruction. This is especially true in the humanities and social sciences, where almost three-fourths of graduate assistantships are teaching assistantships, in contrast to science and engineering, where only about half are teaching assistantships (National Center for Education Statistics 2001).

Headcount comparisons do not, of course, equate directly with the proportion of classes taught, since most part-time faculty teach fewer class sections per institution than full-time faculty (except in some doctoral universities). But even a measure of the proportion of courses taught by different types of staff finds that full-time, tenure-track faculty frequently teach a minority of lower-division classes. These observations are confirmed in fall 1999 surveys of department chairs conducted for several core liberal arts disciplines including English, foreign languages, history, philosophy, and anthropology (Townsend 2000). The surveys revealed that the majority of staff held contingent positions in most of the disciplines, and only three had bare majorities (52-3 percent) on tenure-track. Despite the larger teaching loads of full-time faculty, full-time, tenure-track faculty in the ten disciplines taught only from 16 percent to 64 percent of undergraduate classes (with a median of 59 percent) and from 7 percent (composition) to 55 percent of introductory classes (with a median of 48 percent). The introductory courses included almost half (a median of 47 percent) of all courses taught in these disciplines.

More detailed data from the survey by the Modern Language Association provide a breakdown by type of institution (Laurence 2001). Only baccalaureate college departments had a majority of full-time instructional staff. Full-time faculty did teach 55 percent of all undergraduate sections but, again excepting the four-year baccalaureate institutions, they taught less than half of all first-year English and foreign language sections. Notably, despite the prevalence of part-time faculty in com-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Changes in Faculty Distribution by Type of Appointment: 1975 and 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full-Time Faculty</strong> (of faculty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of full-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenured</strong> (of full-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of faculty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Probationary</strong> (of full-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of faculty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Tenure-Track</strong> (of full-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of faculty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part-Time Faculty</strong> (of faculty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of full-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Faculty</strong> (of faculty)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data are primarily derived from “Fall Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, 1993” and “1995,” the 1995 data are based on Appendix Tables B1a and B7a; the 1975 tenure data is constructed from Tables 9 and 10 of “1993.”
Community colleges, students in community colleges, like those in baccalaureate colleges, were far more likely than students in doctoral or MA-granting departments to study with a full-time, tenure-track faculty member in their first-year writing or language course.

A more recent survey of mathematics departments shows a similar, if less extreme, pattern. Between 1995 and 2000, tenured faculty declined by 3 percent and tenure-track by 6 percent; conversely, part-time faculty grew by 35 percent and full-time, non-tenure-track grew by 65 percent. The proportion of core introductory calculus classes taught by tenured or tenure-eligible faculty declined from 61 percent to 52 percent in doctoral institutions, from 79 percent to 66 percent in MA institutions, and from 85 percent to 75 percent in baccalaureate institutions. The proportion of graduate assistant sections declined, but sections taught by part-time and, especially, full-time, non-tenure-track faculty increased substantially (Lutzer, et al. 2002).

The Cost of Cost-Saving to Faculty Qualifications and Professional Development

The increasing reliance on contingent appointees for undergraduate instruction in fields like English, composition, languages, history, and mathematics obviously shapes the core undergraduate experience. Moreover, unlike the use of part-time appointees in fields like business, journalism, the health professions, and the performing arts, contingent faculty in the basic liberal arts positions are less likely to compensate for their lack of time and academic credentials by providing pertinent “real-world” vocational and practical experience. Yet, even as the proportion of part-time faculty in the humanities, the social sciences, and mathematics has increased, the proportion of part-time faculty in business and vocational training—areas in which part-time faculty do offer some special advantages—has decreased (Table 3). Moreover, the growing proportion of contingent faculty in the core, liberal arts disciplines far exceeds the need for flexibility to meet any plausible expectation of enrollment variations or program changes.

The principal remaining rationale for the increased reliance on contingent faculty in core undergraduate programs is cost-saving. Cost-saving is a reasonable objective but it is not the same as cost-effectiveness—especially if, as is the case, it substantially detracts from educational quality. This is not because contingent faculty lack native ability or classroom skills. The quality cost of contingent faculty derives rather from their relative lack of support, professional development oppor-

---

**TABLE 2**

Distribution of Faculty and Graduate Assistant Appointments By Type of Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Faculty and Graduate Assistants</th>
<th>Full-Time Faculty</th>
<th>Part-Time Faculty</th>
<th>Graduate Assistants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>% of Faculty</td>
<td>% of All</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL INSTITUTIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1,164,795</td>
<td>561,206</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>386,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOUR-YEAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>858,115</td>
<td>447,029</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>199,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>562,824</td>
<td>291,089</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>93,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>295,291</td>
<td>155,940</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>106,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO-YEAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>295,773</td>
<td>105,984</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>185,373</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The inadequate salary and benefits of part-time faculty are cause for serious concern even if we focus our attention solely on the consequences for student learning and ignore the implications for the quality of life of part-time faculty and the future of the profession. Part-time faculty teaching in fields such as English, languages, history, and mathematics are far less likely to hold full-time employment elsewhere than are those part-time faculty who teach in the professional and vocational areas (Benjamin 1998b). So the typical lack of institutionally provided health, life, and retirement benefits often means these benefits are lacking entirely. Their median earnings per course, which range from $1500 to $2500 (Townsend 2000), lead many to seek work at multiple institutions and spend time commuting that might better be spent with their students and potential colleagues. Low earnings and a lack of health benefits are handicaps likely to interfere with their work. Dedicated and motivated though many of these faculty may be, and most do report high levels of commitment and overall satisfaction, many are understandably dissatisfied with their compensation and opportunities to keep up with their fields (Benjamin 1998b). And, as I argue below, all this has a demonstrable effect on their involvement in student learning.

In fields such as English, foreign languages, history, and math, part-time faculty in four-year institutions are about one-third (English, languages, and math) to one-half (history) as likely to have Ph.D.s as full-time faculty; in two year schools, they are about two-fifths to two-thirds as likely to have Ph.D.s (Benjamin 1998b). Of course, the graduate assistants who contribute more to lower division instruction than part-time faculty in public doctoral institutions also lack terminal degrees. It is also noteworthy that, in many specialized disciplines, two-year part-time faculty are more likely than their full-time counterparts to have Ph.D.s or other terminal degrees as well as valuable vocational experience. This suggests that the absence of terminal degrees in basic liberal arts fields—the very fields in which there has been much concern about a “Ph.D. glut”—may have more to do with cost-saving than either the availability of qualified candidates or the allegation (contrary to repeated survey findings) that Ph.D.s are not interested in teaching undergraduates.

Contingent instructional staff, especially part-time appointees, also lack the professional evaluation, compensation, support and, often, collegial involvement of the full-time, tenure-track faculty. The latter are appointed based on a highly competitive national search and teaching demonstrations as well as scholarly records, recommendations, and peer evaluation. The former are often selected by an overburdened chair from a local list at the last moment and subject to a perfunctory review of their vita and, perhaps, student evaluations. Full-time, tenure track faculty receive recurrent evaluation and substantial support: logistical, professional, and collegial. Contingent faculty are fortunate to share an office space or computer access and are unlikely to be eligible for professional development grants, research support, or even participation in collegial meetings either to benefit from peer evaluation or to share information about student learning and adapt curricula to student needs.

The case of graduate assistants is less certain. Many graduate departments have begun to offer increased training and supervision of their teaching assistants. And teaching assistants often compensate for
their lack of experience with youthful enthusiasm and the latest training. The average of 15 hours a week in direct contact with students in class or office hours or grading papers for faculty-taught courses reported by doctoral-student teaching assistants does not seem excessive. But this does not count overall work-time such as preparation and grading in those courses for which they had primary responsibility. Notably, the 70 percent of all doctoral students who worked, reported an average of 29 hours per week; the 64 percent who were enrolled full-time worked an average of 26 hours per week (National Center for Educational Statistics 2001). This substantial demand on the time of these student employees clearly pressures them to choose between sacrificing the quality of their own education and that of their students.

Moreover, the common defense of the reliance on graduate assistants, which many graduate students themselves endorse—that teaching experience is essential to their own education as prospective faculty—clearly contradicts the argument that they are already effective faculty. Hence, although the discussion of contingent faculty involvement in learning that follows cannot offer as much evidence concerning graduate teaching assistants as part-time faculty, similar concerns may apply.

**Involvement in Student Learning**

We know from the work of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) that “net of precollege characteristics, attending a private or a small college tends to have positive effects on educational attainment. . . . attendance at a small college rather than a large one tends to facilitate social involvement with faculty and peers that in turn positively influences persistence, college graduation, and graduate school enrollment” (417). Similarly, Alexander Astin (1993) has reported that “the private universities are not as large as the public ones and have lower student-faculty ratios and more-student-faculty interaction. These differences may well explain why private universities, unlike the public universities, influence positively student retention and interest in graduate school” (319).

Even controlling for student ability, SES and the like, there may be many reasons for these findings. There can be no doubt, for example, that student time for on-campus involvement with faculty and, as Astin emphasizes, for peers is at least as essential as faculty time devoted to student learning. That is why the classic report on “Involvement in Learning” recommended that students spend more time learning, including at least one year of full-time study, as well as recommending that “academic administrators should convert as many part-time teaching lines into full-time lines as possible” (Study Group 1984, 36). Unfortunately, although we have continued to acknowledge the importance of “involvement in learning,” the only substantive recommendation of this important report that has been widely, if ineffectually, pursued is assessment of student outcomes.

---

**TABLE 4** Comparative Productivity of Full- and Part-Time Faculty by Type of Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF INSTITUTION</th>
<th>Classroom Instructional Hours</th>
<th>Non-Classroom Instructional Hours</th>
<th>Ratio of Non-Classroom to Classroom Instructional Time</th>
<th>Number of Refereed Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F-T Faculty</td>
<td>P-T Faculty</td>
<td>F-T Faculty</td>
<td>P-T Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Average</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Non-classroom instructional time is calculated by subtracting the reported classroom instructional hours from the reported overall instructional time which consists of reported work hours multiplied by the percentage of time spent teaching, grading papers, preparing courses, developing new curricula, advising or supervising students, and working with student organizations or intramural athletics.*

Based on data from the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty conducted for NCES in fall, 1992.
Regardless of other factors, however, these basic studies of undergraduate learning agree that faculty involvement with students is a critical factor in student completion and success. Full-time faculty devote substantially and proportionally more out-of-class time to student learning than part-time faculty. As Table 4 shows, full-time faculty generally report two to four times as many out-of-class student-related hours per class hour as part-time faculty. In public two-year colleges, where full-time faculty spend eight-tenths of an hour outside class for every hour in class, part-time faculty spend only two-tenths outside to each hour inside. In sum, part-time faculty spend at best half the out-of-class student-related time per class hour of full-time faculty, and the vast majority of part-time faculty devote 25 percent or less as time per class hour to out of class student-related activity (Table 4).

These self-reported estimates are consistent with more specific survey findings regarding full- and part-time faculty involvement in student learning. Moreover, they hold true especially in the core, liberal arts disciplines. For example, when I compared the use of essay exams in a cluster of liberal arts disciplines (history, English and literature, foreign languages, fine arts, philosophy and religion, sociology, biology, and political science) at two-year colleges, some 37 percent of part-time faculty—compared to 25 percent of full-time faculty—reported that they did not use essay exams. In four-year institutions, the percentages were 38 percent for part-time and 23 percent for full-time. In the same fields, 50 percent of part-time faculty at two-year institutions and 31 percent of part-time faculty at four-year institutions reported holding no office hours, while only 2 percent of full-time faculty at two-year institutions and 7 percent of full-time faculty at four-year institutions held no office hours (Benjamin 1998b).

The lack of part-time faculty time devoted to out-of-class instructional activities, of course, consistent with the widespread practice of paying by the class hour rather than, as less commonly occurs, the fraction of overall faculty responsibilities. The recently accelerating increase in the employment of full-time, non-tenure-track faculty represents an effort to ameliorate this problem, while still minimizing costs and long-term obligations. Comparing those full-time faculty who report that teaching is their primary obligation, non-tenure-track faculty do tend to report devoting similar percentages of time to teaching as do full-time, tenure-track faculty. However, they report 5 to 10 percent less time working for the institution overall and so their similar percentage of instructional time actually involves somewhat less absolute time devoted to student learning—contrary to the assumption that non-tenure-track faculty are more student-oriented (Benjamin 1998a).

This marginal time deficiency is probably less significant, however, than other costs more difficult to measure. As with part-time faculty, non-tenure-track faculty are generally subject to less thorough selection and evaluation, are less likely to have advanced degrees, and are less involved in current scholarship (Benjamin 1998a). They represent a lost opportunity to appoint a more able faculty member even at institutions that routinely deny tenure to better-qualified probationary faculty. Perhaps even more important, faculty collegiality is fractured in institutions where non-tenure-track faculty constitute a “second tier” and “first-tier” faculty occupy better compensated tenure-track positions with greater professional opportunities. A faculty in which some have opportunities to participate in academic governance and reliable protection of academic freedom—or at least the prospect of achieving these after a reasonable period of probation—and others do not is unlikely to cooperate effectively in curricular development or even in sharing instructional experience. Faculty involvement in learning includes involvement with colleagues as well as students, and this involvement is damaged by the spread of a two-tier system.

**Staffing to Enhance Faculty Involvement in Undergraduate Learning**

The data and analysis presented here are not sufficient to prove definitively that the increased reliance on contingent appointments is substantially damaging undergraduate learning. But, I think they are sufficient to shift the burden of proof to those who have accepted the expanding reliance on contingent faculty based on anecdotal observations about the teaching commitment of contingent faculty or derisive and unsupported comments about the teaching commitment of tenure-track faculty.
Full-time, tenure-track faculty are, in fact, not only demonstrably better qualified but also devote proportionally more time to their students than do contingent faculty. Of course, this is not really news. For, as Astin (1993) has observed, it is the institutional devaluation of teaching, not the faculty orientation to research, that impairs student learning. We would not devote the time and resources we do to selecting tenure-track faculty, even in predominantly teaching institutions, if we did not believe it made a difference. Nor could we continue to argue that graduate assistants should serve as teaching assistants as part of their own education, if we truly believed they were already fully prepared. Hence, I offer three concluding suggestions.

First, we do, of course, need more systematic and thorough research on the effects of faculty staffing patterns on student learning than I have offered here. I hope only to have shown that there is already significant evidence available and that it does point to a serious problem.

Second, accrediting bodies need to acknowledge that faculty qualifications and the procedures for faculty selection, appointment, and support do affect “involvement in learning” and, thereby, student outcomes. Since we lack adequate outcomes measures applicable to specific courses or even to systematically compare institutions, this general effect of faculty “inputs” and procedures on student outcomes should at least create a presumptive standard. That is, those institutions that rely substantially on contingent staff should be expected to show that their procedures for faculty selection, appointment, evaluation, and re-appointment are consistent with assuring the extent of faculty involvement in learning with students and colleagues out of class. Further, they should be expected to provide opportunities for faculty to participate in academic governance and reliable protection of academic freedom.

Finally, even in these economically difficult times, we need to acknowledge that excessive dependence on contingent appointments is detrimental to undergraduate learning—especially for the majority of students unable to attend the few selective institutions that still staff their core programs with full-time, fully-supported faculty. Those among us—whether policymakers, faculty, administrators, or educational researchers—who have urged that tenure-track faculty devote more attention to undergraduate learning need to recognize that this requires that there are, in fact, tenure-track faculty assigned and committed to core undergraduate instruction. We need to begin promptly to make the resource commitments or reallocations necessary to assure that all undergraduate students benefit from involvement with full-time, fully qualified, fully supported, and fully committed faculty.

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Who Should Teach General Education Courses?

By Jack Meacham, SUNY distinguished teaching professor, University at Buffalo—The State University of New York

Staffing general education courses cannot be done merely by asking who is available with the content expertise for teaching particular courses. Student learning outcomes reflect a complex dynamic that includes students’ characteristics and prior preparation, the subject matter and the student learning goals and objectives for the course, the teaching techniques, the readings and assignments for students, and the means for evaluating student learning outcomes. The faculty entrusted to teach general education courses can enrich or diminish this student learning dynamic by the beliefs, attitudes, and skills that they bring as teachers.

It cannot be assumed that it is only full-time faculty who give extensive time to advising students outside of class, who are reflective about their teaching and engaged in thoughtful conversations about student learning and development, and who are experimenting with new teaching techniques and assessing student learning to improve their teaching. Many part-time faculty, including graduate students, are similarly engaged and committed to high standards in their teaching and their interactions with students. Whether a faculty member is full-time or part-time is not a sure guide to who will be the best teacher for general education courses. Instead, staffing of general education courses should reflect the campus’s general education student learning goals and objectives and which faculty have the expertise to enable the students to achieve these learning objectives. It should also take into account the characteristics of students and the kind of support they will need from faculty.

Foundation Skills

One common purpose of general education programs is to ensure that students have a secure foundation in prerequisite skills that will be essential for upper-level and disciplinary major courses. On most campuses, these foundation skills include mathematical understanding, written communication, and computing and information technology. What are the characteristics of faculty who can best help students acquire these foundation skills? The faculty must be highly proficient in their own understanding and application of skills in mathematics, writing, and computing. Given the importance of these skills for later success, the faculty should be committed to criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced grading. Equally important is to be sensitive to the anxieties of students living away from home for the first time and perhaps lacking confidence in their ability to succeed in college.

Can part-time faculty teach such foundation skills courses successfully? Of course, and on many campuses introductory courses in mathematics,
English, history, and languages are taught by part-time faculty, including graduate students. Many first-year college students may be more comfortable interacting with graduate students with whom they share lifestyles than with tenured faculty who represent their parents’ generation. And many first-year college students may be inspired more by graduate student instructors who can say, “Only a few years ago I was a new college student like you and I recall how hard it was for me to understand mathematics and learn to write but I persevered and now I’m in a doctoral program,” than by distinguished, full-time faculty whose academic skills can appear so exceptional to first-year students as to be beyond emulation.

On many campuses, the foundation skills for students new to college involve much more than mathematics and writing. Freshmen need to be introduced to campus and academic life, learn to be comfortable with peers with different backgrounds and experiences, increase appreciation for critical thinking and intellectual adventures, gain confidence in their public speaking ability, participate effectively in collaborative learning with peers, and become actively engaged in and responsible for their own education.

Some campuses have implemented innovative general education strategies, such as freshman seminars and learning communities, to facilitate acquisition of these important skills and attitudes during students’ transition from high school to college. When we ask who can best help students during this transition, faculty understanding of students’ developmental needs and faculty expertise and skill at facilitating student development are likely more important than part-time or full-time status per se. However, when part-time faculty are responsible for general education courses, students, parents, tenured faculty, and administrators should ask whether the campus is providing the preparation and continuing support that will enable those faculty to do their very best as teachers and thus ensure that students can achieve the campus’s general education learning objectives (see additional questions in the box to the left).

**QUESTIONS**

Students, parents, tenured faculty, and administrators should ask questions about the preparation and continuing support provided to part-time faculty.

- Does the campus provide a regular, intensive program to prepare part-time faculty to become effective teachers?
- Does this program prepare part-time faculty to teach students who arrive in college with different levels of intellectual development, differential high school preparation, and different learning styles?
- Does the campus ensure that part-time faculty understand the philosophy and structure of the general education program, how it relates to campus mission and identity, how the program is intended to promote students’ development, and how teaching a general education course is different from teaching a department majors course?
- Does the campus have a regular means of assessing the teaching effectiveness of its part-time faculty, that is, of assessing whether their students are achieving the campus’s general education learning objectives?
- Does the campus provide regular supervision of teaching and constructive, formative feedback and workshops to improve the teaching of its part-time faculty?
- Does the campus provide appropriate office space and supplies, computer access, and administrative support for part-time faculty to do their very best as teachers?

**Breadth**

A second, common purpose of general education is to open students’ minds to new possibilities for academic study, to careers and professions beyond those they had considered while in high school, and to diverse ways of knowing and approaches to understanding significant topics and issues. Referred to on many campuses as the breadth or distribution requirement, the purpose is to have students become educated persons in the sense of knowing about many things, including the arts, history, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences.

The faculty who teach breadth general education courses should have expertise in and a passion for their discipline. However, these breadth courses should not be niche- or boutique-courses taught from the nar-
row perspective of doctoral training or dissertation research. Many of the students will be completing their first and likely their only course within this discipline. Thus the faculty must be able to describe the big picture in their discipline and, furthermore, draw connections with other disciplines and with diverse, real-world applications of the course material. Faculty teaching breadth courses should be flexible generalists who can promote the spirit and breadth of the liberal arts.

Faculty who can be excellent teachers of breadth courses are those who themselves experienced outstanding general education programs as undergraduates, changed majors several times during their undergraduate careers, have changed the focus of their research programs since their doctoral research, pursue research questions that call for interdisciplinary answers, and read widely and are comfortable discussing issues outside of their own disciplinary expertise. An important quality for faculty teaching breadth courses is to be comfortable acknowledging when they lack expertise or understanding, because these faculty can then model for the students in their classes the methods of inquiry that are typical within their discipline, and contribute to student advisement and faculty governance. Certainly there are many part-time and junior faculty with exceptional expertise and understanding, with passion for their discipline, and remarkable teaching skills. However, senior, full-time faculty are more likely to have the expertise and skills that can most effectively enable students to achieve the learning objectives of breadth courses.

Life after College
On many campuses general education programs have become the location for an expanded commitment to preparing students for life after college. The programs and courses are intended to provide students with the societal, civic, and global knowledge they will need to become reflective, critical, and engaged citizens. The emphasis is no longer merely on preparing students for work following graduation, but more broadly on preparing students to live and work with people who have diverse backgrounds and experiences, providing students with an understanding of cross-cultural, environmental, social justice, and global issues, and facilitating the development of the skills and attitudes students will need to become engaged and responsible as citizens in a pluralist democracy and of the world. Opportunities for study abroad, extra-curricular activities, and service learning enable students to make progress toward these student learning goals. On other campuses, students are challenged to pursue these goals in upper-level courses.

Whether a faculty member is full-time or part-time is not a sure guide to who will be the best teacher for general education courses. Is being a full-time, tenure-track or tenured faculty member sufficient qualification for guiding students toward engaged and responsible citizenship? Perhaps. However, more effective teaching will flow from faculty who are not cloistered but are themselves actively engaged in the world, with one foot in academia and the other in social justice movements, environmental action, or political organizing. Informed citizenship means that students should learn about societal diversity in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and religion. Teaching about diversity calls for faculty who understand the impli-
cations of their own position on these dimensions, who are not afraid to engage students on issues of race, religious pluralism, and sexual orientation, who have a capacity and a desire for learning about and understanding perspectives other than their own, and who have sought and learned from experiences in which they were confronted with radically different lifestyles, cultures, and opinions. Tenure-track and tenured faculty who move directly from undergraduate to graduate school to full-time teaching are less likely to have had such transformative and enriching experiences than part-time, community-based faculty who are actively engaged with and contributing to the world off-campus.

Integration and Development
No matter how coherent a campus’s general education program, it remains the task of each student to reflect upon and construct an integration of the most valuable understandings and skills from among all that has been encountered throughout the college years. Each student has to discover how best to make connections among diverse disciplinary perspectives and, furthermore, how best to make college learning relevant to prior and current life experiences as well as to goals and visions for his or her future. Despite a common learning experience in a campus’s general education program, students should graduate as mature and unique individuals, as persons in their own right. General education programs facilitate this important developmental work through a variety of means, including senior seminars, projects, and theses and integrative, interdisciplinary capstone courses. Many of these have common student learning goals and objectives, including increasing critical thinking skills, engaging ethical, moral, and political issues, developing personal perspectives and values, and instilling motivation for continuing, lifelong learning.

To teach and guide students in this important developmental work requires disciplinary expertise, but the expertise fades into the background. More important is for faculty to motivate and empower students to take control of and accept responsibility for their own intellectual and identity development and lifelong learning. As students mature and gain confidence intellectually and prepare to graduate, faculty must relinquish control, freeing the students to construct a personal course through life and through history. Not all faculty have sufficient insight into their own identity, values, motivations, and place in history to be able to hold on to what has become important for themselves and simultaneously to nurture, guide, and respect what is becoming important for their students. The critical question in selecting faculty to teach capstone general education courses and to supervise senior projects and theses is not faculty part-time versus full-time status. Instead, do the faculty have good insight into their own identities, values, and motivations and can they be wise in sharing these insights while at the same time granting their students the freedom to construct their own identities?

Finding the Best Teachers
Part-time faculty can be excellent teachers for foundation skills courses as well as general education courses that aim to prepare students for life after college and that aim to facilitate their development as persons, whereas full-time faculty can be excellent in teaching the breadth courses that are a common component of general education programs. Especially when student learning goals and objectives shift from mastery of disciplinary content toward students’ own social, value, and intellectual development, part-time, community-based faculty with off-campus experiences and knowledge and without the pressures of research, publishing, and faculty committees can be as effective as tenured faculty who have lost their love of their discipline and their commitment to students and to teaching. These part-time faculty also can be as effective as tenure-track faculty who have lived in a student role until their late twenties, whose job security in their early thirties remains uncertain, and who remain caught in their own unresolved developmental issues. The staffing of general education courses cannot be done in broad strokes; it must reflect a careful matching of the general education goals and objectives for student learning with the content expertise and teaching skills of each potential teacher.
In considering the relationship between the increasing use of part-time faculty and the quality of the undergraduate learning experience, determining just how much reliance is too much appears to be the most pressing policy issue. At what point does the use of part-time faculty jeopardize the academic integrity of the teaching-learning process and the vitality of student learning? What is the appropriate reliance on part-time faculty at a particular institution? Is it different for similar types of institutions? Does it vary over time, in light of changing environmental factors, or according to changing circumstances at an institution?

Regardless of how policymakers and academics choose to approach it, the complex policy challenge posed by the increasing use of part-time faculty should not center on numbers or percentages. That is, the goal should not be to identify the “right” quota of part-time faculty in a particular department, school, or institution. Instead, the central issue must be the collective responsibility of all the faculty and the leadership of an institution for ensuring quality instruction and appropriate student learning.

The Role of Regional Accreditation

Regional accreditation presumes a direct correlation between faculty commitment to the quality of instruction, on one hand, and the quality and value of student learning, on the other. It also presumes a direct correlation between the commitment of the institution to its faculty and the quality of both instruction and student learning. Moreover, regional accreditation standards imply a direct relationship between the quality of instruction in undergraduate liberal arts curricula and the knowledge and competencies of educated persons—the institution’s graduates. The appropriate role of regional accreditation, then, is to hold the institution as a whole accountable for demonstrating that the use of part-time faculty is contributing to the overall quality and rigor of undergraduate education and student learning outcomes.

It is axiomatic that greater institutional commitment to the faculty member will result in greater faculty commitment to the institution. The faculty’s unavailability for student advisement, for example, is frequently cited as a negative effect of over-reliance on part-time faculty. Regional accreditation posits that this is not merely the responsibility of the faculty and the students. If part-time faculty are expected to serve as advisors, then the institution is responsible for providing adequate physical space where these faculty can meet with students. The assumption that a table in the student cafeteria will...
Regional accreditation can and should explore issues of collective responsibility by encouraging institutions to develop and implement guidelines on the use of part-time faculty.

Institutional Culture

As they become increasingly reliant on part-time faculty without, in most cases, considering the potential consequences for student learning, colleges and universities should establish guidelines for ensuring institutional effectiveness and integrity. Three principles should inform such guidelines. First, the use of part-time faculty should not be considered as an isolated issue. Instead, it should be deliberated in light of the overall mission, purposes, and educational objectives of the institution. Second, the institution should clarify and make explicit its expectations for part-time faculty. In conjunction with department chairs or division heads and, as appropriate, deans, full-time and core faculty should be actively involved in, and take responsibility for, explicating the roles and responsibilities of both full- and part-time faculty.

Finally, part-time faculty should have a voice in academic governance and in the decision-making processes that affect departmental policies and procedures. This critical intervening variable in the relationship between the quality of instruction and student learning is often given short shrift or, worse, overlooked entirely. The quality of instruction provided by part-time faculty is affected by their level of satisfaction and morale vis-à-vis their perceived and actual impact on curricular design and development as well as their perceived and actual role in their respective department.

In short, colleges and universities must either work to create an institutional culture that embraces part-time faculty as credible, legitimate members of the academic profession or else not hire them at all. Failure to create an institutional culture that enables part-time faculty to be effective not only compromises the educational experience of students, it is not equitable. Absent such a culture, any use of part-time faculty risks undermining the integrity of the institution.

Guidelines on the Use of Part-Time Faculty

As administrators and faculty confront increasing demands from a variety of constituents, there is often less time for engaging in important dialogue regarding core issues that directly affect the quality of the student learning experience. Though anecdotal evidence indicates that faculty perceive that they are attending more committee meetings than they did a decade ago, rarely do these meeting agendas encourage reflection about the implications and impact of the increasing reliance on part-time faculty. Generally, such discussions appear on departmental meeting agendas only after they have emerged as problems or potential crises.

Conversations with numerous faculty and administrators undergoing regional accreditation self-study processes reveal that the more proactive an institution is in ensuring that discussions about part-time faculty occur on a regular and systematic basis as part of departmental, school, and academic affairs planning meetings, the less hostile the climate is toward part-time faculty. And this, in turn, results in a greater level of satisfaction on the part of part-time faculty and their students. It is imperative that full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and relevant administrators—department chairs, associate deans, deans,
associate provosts, and vice presidents for academic affairs—meet regularly to discuss the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of part-time faculty at the institution.

Following are several critical questions that should be addressed by all institutions that hire part-time faculty:

- To what extent do departments engage in planning discussions about the current and projected course offerings, faculty assignments for these offerings, projected use of part-time faculty, resource allocations, budget projections, and actual and anticipated sources of revenue?

- To what extent do departments—their respective chairs and faculty—formulate strategies and plans for ensuring that instructional programs are being offered and will be offered in the foreseeable future that reflect the mission and educational objectives of the institution, meet society’s needs for applied knowledge and competent individuals, and ensure that the institution graduates educated persons?

- To what extent do department chairs or division heads collect information regarding the course load of part-time faculty who also teach at other institutions? Likewise, to what extent do they collect information regarding part-time faculty’s professional workload obligations beyond part-time teaching?

- Does the institution collect, analyze, and review data in the aggregate that compares the quality of instruction and student learning outcomes in courses/programs delivered by full-time versus part-time faculty?

- Do all faculty members understand their role in contributing to the overall undergraduate curriculum? Does the individual faculty member understand the relationship between his or her course(s) and the institution’s general education program?

- Are part-time faculty members given a written description of the overall schematic of the liberal arts curriculum at the college and the philosophical underpinnings of the liberal arts curriculum and general education at the college?

- Are part-time faculty members apprised—both through conversation and in writing—of their department’s expectations of the content of their courses and their respective responsibilities to the department and, as appropriate, to the institution?

These questions also should inform the accreditation process.

**Conclusion**

In the coming decades, higher education is more than likely to further increase its reliance on part-time faculty. Accordingly, part-time faculty will have an even greater impact on student learning. It is incumbent, therefore, upon all faculty and administrators to be proactive and deliberative, either through the accreditation process or by other means, to ensure the effectiveness of part-time faculty in contributing to the teaching-learning process. To do otherwise jeopardizes both the academic vitality and the integrity of our colleges and universities.

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Information about upcoming meetings is available online at [www.aacu.org/meetings](http://www.aacu.org/meetings).
Indiana University is a multi-campus institution. Our residential research campus is in Bloomington, where the university was founded 183 years ago. Our medical school and a large array of health science schools are located on our urban campus (IUPUI) in the state’s capital city, Indianapolis. Six regional campuses, a network of medical education centers, and several small learning centers extend the university throughout the state.

Like other public universities over the past few decades, IU has seen enrollment and operating costs escalate without receiving proportional increases in state funds. While this poses problems for the long-established residential campus, it is a source of even greater difficulties for our urban and regional campuses. Most of these campuses are less than forty years old and have not yet developed adequate baseline funding levels. They must deal with the added pressures of creating infrastructure, such as student services, library materials, technology, and bricks-and-mortar facilities to accommodate growing enrollments.

Relying on Part-Time Instructors as a Cost-Containment Strategy

Colleges and universities have typically coped with diminishing funds by enhancing external funding and undertaking cost-cutting strategies. Increasing class size is one approach. But an increased faculty/student ratio almost always adversely impacts the quality of instruction. On research campuses that have graduate programs, such as IU Bloomington, teaching assistants cover many of the courses that might otherwise be taught by part-time instructors. Hiring non-tenure-track, part-time instructors is another common solution. This approach is not without advantages. Part-time instructors are paid on a course-by-course basis, providing instruction at considerably lower costs than a tenure-track faculty member. They are a highly flexible workforce: They can be hired on short notice according to student demand. The use of part-time instructors both contains the cost of instruction and permits tenure-track faculty to concentrate on upper-division courses, thus putting their disciplinary expertise to best use. It also permits faculty members to devote time to research and directs their teaching to upper-division and graduate students.

Indiana University, like other public and private institutions, has used this approach to meeting its instructional needs. But there is growing dissatisfaction with it. The Bloomington campus saw only modest increases in part-time instructors, in part because of its healthy graduate programs but mostly because its enrollment has stabilized. IU’s other campuses, however, had become overly reliant on part-time instructors. For some of the regional campuses, more than half of the instruction was carried out in this way. This large part-time teaching force allows for much greater flexibility than changing student demand actually requires.

Though it is controversial, this approach both benefits the university and provides employment for those unable to locate a regular, tenure-track position. Part-time instructors tend to have terminal degrees and extensive knowledge of their fields. Most are committed, conscientious teachers who care deeply about their
students. But the realities of their employment severely limit the time they can devote to office hours and advising. Most of them do not even have offices in which to meet students. The problem lies not with the instructors, but with the way the system has evolved.

Actually, the problem is multi-faceted. First, both the university and its students are benefited by full-time teachers who are focused on their students and who have sufficient time and infrastructure support to provide quality instruction. Second, the present approach of using part-time instructors is inherently unfair. These teachers are underpaid for their work. The payment they receive per course undervalues the expertise they bring to the classroom—even though the market permits this rate of pay. The market takes advantage of trailing spouses and others tied to a geographic location. Moreover, part-time instructors are almost always employed without health and other benefits. Third, under this approach, these instructors do not have the protection of academic freedom. Anyone who teaches, undertakes research, or otherwise does the academic work of the university must have the freedom to conduct this work using their best professional judgment, without threat from arbitrary external forces or campus officials.

The challenge, then, is to find a way to deliver high quality instruction within realistic economic constraints and to retain adequate flexibility to meet changing student demand while also treating instructors with fairness and protecting their academic freedom.

## The Full-Time, Non-Tenure-Track Model

Several years ago, I began discussing these issues with Indiana University’s Board of Trustees and with our faculty governance groups. I argued that we could meet this challenge if we combined part-time instructional positions into full-time ones. If we could institute a system of non-tenure-track positions focused on teaching without accompanying research responsibilities, we might be able to effectively address the problem. We could offer a reasonable salary scale with a full benefit package, though the salary would be lower than that for tenure-track faculty. This system would include probationary employment leading to long-term contracts and thus would establish a career path for non-tenure-track instructors. Protection of academic freedom would be incorporated into the contract.

A number of issues had to be resolved before such a program could begin. This model of full-time, non-tenure-track instructors entails more cost than the part-time instructor approach. While the teaching load for such instructors would be greater than that of tenure-track faculty, the budget per course would easily be double or triple the cost of hiring part-time instructors. The only available source of additional revenue, realistically speaking, is increased tuition. After a great deal of thoughtful discussion, the IU Trustees agreed to raise tuition several percentage points for each of three years on our regional campuses and on our urban campus (IUPUI) to develop the base support needed for this transition to a system of full-time, non-tenure-track instructors. Though students and their families never like to pay higher tuition, they understand, for the most part, that these monies will be dedicated to improving the quality of instruction.

The initial reaction of faculty governance was to argue that these new full-time positions should be tenure-track. I have great sympathy with this position. However, the added tuition costs necessary to make that possible would put too great a financial burden on our students and their families, and, in any case, the university’s trustees would not approve an increase that dramatic. Not surprisingly,
given the current economic downturn, the state was unwilling to provide the additional resources. Moreover, our regional campuses required flexibility in staffing and instruction

Lecturers are full-time teachers. They are expected to keep abreast of their fields, but their responsibilities do not include independent research. They teach a heavier course load than tenure-track faculty, and their teaching assignments focus primarily at the introductory level. As we developed this new system, we seized the opportunity to better define the category of clinical faculty. These persons are also full-time, non-tenure-track instructors who engage in teaching and service activities, though again without research responsibilities.

The health sciences and some other professional programs, such as law, have long employed clinical faculty. Clinical faculty serve in a number of roles, including as advisors and supervisors of internship or student teacher programs in schools of education. Under our new program, all academic units, including the arts and sciences, can now employ some clinical faculty.

The system we put in place charts a career path. Lecturers and clinical faculty receive initial contracts for several years (usually three). They also receive an annual review, similar to the evaluation procedure in place for tenure-track faculty. An inadequate performance will, of course, mean that the lecturer’s contract is not renewed. After a probationary period of no greater than seven years, a lecturer will be fully reviewed and, if successful, promoted to senior lecturer or senior clinical faculty with a long-term contract. The long-term contact is usually five years, though a three-year rolling contract can also be used.

Academic freedom is protected by contractual specifications concerning dismissal and non-renewal. Dismissal during a contract period can occur only for reasons of professional incompetence, serious misconduct, or financial exigency. Non-renewal of a contract can occur for any of these reasons or as the result of changing staffing needs of the academic unit’s program. Once lecturers and clinical faculty receive long-term contracts, any decisions concerning non-renewal will be made in consultation with the appropriate faculty governance body. Lecturers and clinical faculty have access to campus and university faculty grievance procedures.

The lecturer system at IU will offer much of the financial flexibility that the use of part-time instructors had previously provided, but with more fairness to the instructor. The university has no obligation to reassign a lecturer or clinical faculty member if the position is eliminated because of program closure, permanent downsizing, or changing staffing needs. If a lecturer or clinical position is converted to a tenure-track position, the lecturer or clinical faculty member occupying this position may apply for the tenure-track position, but there is no guarantee that he or she will receive the appointment.
Lecturers and clinical faculty members are permitted to engage in faculty governance at the discretion of their home academic units. As we developed policies for our full-time, non-tenure-track instructors, faculty members agreed, rightly I believe, that faculty governance is the province of tenure-track faculty; hence a super-majority (at least 60 percent) of votes in an academic unit should be reserved for tenure-track faculty. Nor are lecturers and clinical faculty eligible for sabbaticals or academic administrative posts.

**Implementation**

We began to implement this system with a pilot project on two campuses. We instituted the program on all campuses two years ago, phasing it in as resources become available and hiring takes place. IUPUI, our urban research campus, has the largest number of lecturers and clinical faculty. By the end of the phase-in period next year, there will be 104 new full-time lecturers and clinical faculty at IUPUI teaching an equivalent of 832 sections that are currently being taught by part-time instructors. On our regional campuses, a total of eighty-eight new full-time lecturers and clinical faculty will be teaching an equivalent of 675 sections now taught by part-time instructors. As the numbers illustrate, it may well be that the best results will be achieved on the regional campuses, since these have the largest percentage of courses taught by part-time instructors. Not surprisingly, a number of part-time instructors who have distinguished themselves for excellent teaching now occupy the full-time lecturer positions.

Under the current projected funding, we will not have the resources to combine all part-time instructor positions into full-time lecturer ones. Nor do we want to do so. Some part-time instructors are necessary to teach specific courses or to bring specific professional experience to the classroom. Especially on the smaller, regional campuses, we must retain the flexibility necessary to meet unexpected, last-minute student demand.

Early reports are good. High-performing instructors have been hired, and that improves the quality of education. By and large, regular, tenure-track faculty have welcomed their new colleagues. But some problems have also arisen. For instance, office space is difficult to provide and support costs tended to be underestimated.

This is a new category of faculty. For the individuals involved and for the institution, it marks a meaningful improvement over the part-time instructor approach. But the lecturers and clinical faculty do not enjoy all the benefits of regular tenure-track faculty members. Though their academic freedom is protected and a genuine career path established, even a long-term contract holds no guarantee of life-time employment. Lecturers are afforded limited participation in faculty governance, a lower salary than their tenure-track colleagues, and no provision for independent research.

Yet it would be a mistake to characterize lecturers and clinical faculty as “second-class citizens.” Such a derogatory characterization would be both inaccurate and unfair. Lecturers and clinical faculty have a different role to play in the university than regular tenure-track faculty. It is not a lesser role, just a different one. As tenure-track faculty members devote more time to research and more of their pedagogical attention to their highest-level students, the university must have productive, highly competent persons to provide academic support where it is needed. Because we need accomplished, committed instructors to teach introductory classes, these persons play an inestimable role in the overall success of the university.

**Conclusion**

More experience is needed to ascertain whether this model creates a good balance between the needs of the institution and the fair treatment of instructors, including protecting their academic freedom. It locates some middle ground between an untoward system of part-time instructors and an unaffordable ideal in which every teacher that a student encounters is on the tenure track. The policies establishing these new lecturer and clinical roles were developed with good will and thoughtfulness. IU has embarked on an experiment that is worth undertaking, and early results are good. While we have made this transition successfully so far, I am not yet ready to declare victory. I am confident, however, that IU’s new system strikes a good balance between accommodating fiscal realities and fairly compensating non-tenure-track instructors.
Treating Part-Time Faculty Equitably: One College’s Solutions

By Elizabeth H. Tobin, associate dean of faculty, Bates College

In the late 1990s, Bates College decided to review its treatment of part-time faculty. Most lecturers, as we call part-time faculty, served the college very well indeed and appeared satisfied with our policies. Our system of contracts and reappointment for lecturers, however, was inconsistent, and lecturers occasionally complained about unclear policies. The national discussion of the difficulties facing both part-time faculty and those colleges and universities using them extensively also gave us pause. We hoped to create policies that would allow us to treat part-time faculty equitably.

Bates is a private, residential, liberal arts college in Lewiston, Maine, with approximately 1,700 students, approximately 155 teaching FTEs, and about 190 faculty teaching in a given year; approximately 18 percent are part-time. Until the fall of 2002, full-time faculty members taught six courses per year, and the thirty-five to forty part-time faculty taught between one and five courses per year.1 Over 60 percent of the part-time faculty taught in ongoing positions that were untenured but generally expected to continue. Such lecturers could be reappointed, according to established personnel procedures. Salaries for lecturers varied considerably, depending on seniority and qualifications. Some lecturers’ salaries, on a per-course basis, compared well to those of full-time faculty; some lagged behind.

Process

A committee of divisional chairs and deans of faculty took two years to interview all lecturers and chairs of departments and programs, to hold open meetings, and to fashion a set of recommendations.2 Along the way, we developed a set of principles with which we hoped to address both educational and labor issues by considering the needs of part-time faculty, the learning environment of our students, and the exigencies of our budget. Bates’ Maine tradition of “doing more with less” helped us become competitive with many elite schools, but requires prudence in all aspects of our budget. While the process induced anxiety in a number of lecturers who feared the elimination of their positions, it also encouraged them to point out problems. Individual interviews by a division chair with each lecturer gave us information and opinions we would not have heard in open meetings. The division chairs recommended new procedures, which had to be voted on by the entire faculty and approved by our trustees,3 as well as salary policies, which had to be adopted by the president. These complications ensured a long process, beginning in 1997 and ending with the trustees’ approval in 2000, but also allowed us the opportunity to think through our proposals with all those affected.

1. In the fall of 2002, Bates began the transition to a five-course teaching load for full-time faculty; in 2003-04, part-time faculty will teach no more than four courses per year.

2. The author was division chair of the social sciences during the genesis of the recommendations, and has been associate dean of faculty during the implementation.

3. The faculty rules regarding reappointment of lecturers can be found on pages 1.13-1.14 of the faculty handbook, which is available online (http://www.bates.edu/faculty_handbook.xml).
Principles and Policies

1) **Students benefit from being taught by the most competent, engaged, and committed faculty.** Part-time faculty at a residential liberal arts campus cannot simply teach their classes and disappear. For the benefit of our students, part-time faculty should be integrated into the life of the college, knowledgeable enough about their students and the campus culture to give attention and advice to individual students, contributing to departmental and faculty-wide decisions about curricula, and, in most cases, engaged in professional achievement. At a student-centered institution such as ours, this principle undergirds our entire policy. Part-time faculty must help create the best possible learning environment for our students.

2) **Part-time teaching can be a purposeful life choice, and we should develop policies which respect and support those choices.** Bates has employed pairs of faculty in shared positions, allowing individuals time with children and couples the opportunity to work at the same institution. Bates also employs artists who want less-than-full-time teaching in order to make time for their creative work, as well as artists who deliberately decided not to tie their creative work to a tenure decision. Our decision to respect this life choice helped us recognize that part-time faculty are highly trained and desirable employees. It also helped us assuage the worry of some faculty members that part-time employment is necessarily exploitative.

3) **Part-time faculty should receive salary and benefits proportional to that of comparable full-time faculty members in terms of training, years of experience, and professional achievement.** If our part-time faculty are engaged teachers pursuing professional achievement, we should pay them appropriately. This principle enables the hiring of excellent part-time faculty and disables attempts to balance a budget by hiring part-time faculty on a low pay scale.

4) **Faculty who are paid a salary proportional to comparable full-time faculty should participate proportionally in what we came to call “supplemental teaching and service.”** Although not everyone contributes equally or in all categories, faculty participate in college governance, develop departmental and program curricula, supervise senior theses, advise students about their academics, and work with students in a variety of other formal and informal ways. We now ask part-time faculty and their chairs to determine the ways in which those part-time faculty will engage in supplemental teaching and service. The dean of faculty oversees these decisions, ensuring that the responsibilities are reasonably proportional and that they are appropriate to the teaching schedule of the faculty member.

5) **Hiring and evaluation procedures for part-time faculty should be transparent and predictable.** While Bates will never avoid the need to hire some part-time faculty on a last-minute or temporary basis, we seek to minimize those situations in favor of ongoing part-time “lectureships.” We established three-year cycles for the reauthorization of positions and for the reappointment of persons in those positions; after nine years of existence, those cycles become five years. This system offers our lecturers a clear understanding...
of the duration of the position and a fixed time for reappointment processes. Our new rules also establish clear standards for the evaluation of lecturers.

6) **Part-time faculty should have the opportunity to be recognized for excellence.**

Our new policies created the title, “Artist in Residence,” acknowledging the particular contributions of part-time faculty doing creative work in painting, ceramics, sculpture, music, theater, or writing. We also created the rank of “Senior Lecturer” for part-time faculty with a terminal degree, thirteen years of teaching at Bates, and significant professional achievement. The rank does not include tenure, usually carries a salary increase, and ends the need for personnel evaluation. The position itself must still be reauthorized on a five-year cycle.

**Results**

Have our policies lived up to our principles? Have they had the desired effects of attracting and retaining excellent part-time faculty and integrating them into the academic life of Bates College? At the end of our second year of implementation, we are pleased to see that the policies are largely successful. Everyone is satisfied with clearer procedures for hiring and evaluation. Everyone is happy about the possibility of greater recognition and promotion for part-time faculty. The process and the new policies have improved the feeling of belonging for some lecturers. But some challenges remain.

Most lecturers at Bates qualifying for the rank of Senior Lecturer are choosing to stand for this promotion. It also seems that the prospect of advancement is encouraging professional achievement in lecturers who may stand for the promotion in the future. We hope that those with the rank of Senior Lecturer will be less tempted by rewards at other institutions. Our policies also offered the possibility for part-time tenure-track positions, which were meant especially for creative artists. Yet none of our lecturers who might have qualified chose that option and, instead, continued to separate their creative work from the tenure system.

The qualifications for Senior Lecturer have also led to some controversy—especially among faculty teaching languages, several of whom are native speakers without terminal degrees. How can we reward and encourage those faculty who do research, independent studies, and senior theses, but who do not have a Ph.D.? We appreciate the question, but don’t yet have an answer.

The requirement that part-time faculty make clear their responsibilities for supplemental teaching and service has generated better information about who is doing what and about what responsibilities can be expected. Transparency, however, has sometimes brought discomfort. Some chairs have been startled to see in written form how many contributions they have asked of lecturers; some lecturers have feared increasing demands. Determining the meaning of these new norms for all part-time faculty will apparently take some time.

One challenge for the administration has been financial. We have introduced pay proportional to that of comparable full-time faculty for all new lecturers, rectified clear inequities, and planned to phase in proportional pay for existing lecturers over two years. Yet as we begin the transition to a five-course teaching load for all faculty, the goal of proportional pay for all part-time faculty becomes more expensive and must now be phased in over three or four years. And, in order to fit with wider campus employment policy, we are also unable to offer proportional benefits to part-time faculty working less than half-time.

**Conclusion**

It is possible to treat part-time faculty equitably. At Bates, we moved in that direction by making two sets of connections: between our local issues and the national discussion about the exploitation of part-time faculty, and between our treatment of part-time faculty and our core mission. The national discussion about part-time faculty encouraged us to go beyond a quick administrative fix of inconsistent policies. Instead, we tried to establish a set of principles by asking ourselves for what purposes we hire part-time faculty and what low pay and disengaged part-time faculty might mean for our college. We could see where we did not want to go. Faculty, administrators, and trustees then signed on to these new policies, despite the budgetary implications, because of the connection between better pay and treatment for part-time faculty and our core mission. The national discussion about part-time faculty encouraged us to go beyond a quick administrative fix of inconsistent policies. Instead, we tried to establish a set of principles by asking ourselves for what purposes we hire part-time faculty and what low pay and disengaged part-time faculty might mean for our college. We could see where we did not want to go. Faculty, administrators, and trustees then signed on to these new policies, despite the budgetary implications, because of the connection between better pay and treatment for part-time faculty and our core mission. We think that, by making a gradual transition to policies that are both fair to all faculty and beneficial to students, we are moving in the right direction.
Why Hire Non-Tenure-Track Faculty?

By John G. Cross, professor emeritus of economics, University of Michigan, and executive vice president, Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, and Edie N. Goldenberg, professor of political science and public policy, University of Michigan

Much that is written about non-tenure-track faculty in higher education today is distinctly critical in tone, reflecting a premise that the increasing use of lecturers is driven almost entirely by economics—by the fact that non-tenure-track faculty are significantly less expensive than tenure-track faculty. However, the empirical foundations of these writings rarely address motive. Instead, they simply report the growth in raw numbers of non-tenure-track faculty over time, often derived from voluntary responses in national surveys.

We too have gone in search of data about the composition of arts and sciences teaching faculty over time, but our approach has been to focus on the administrative processes that lead to the use of different categories of faculty. We seek to determine how the system of faculty appointments works, how various instructional needs are addressed, and what special problems are solved by employing non-tenure-track faculty. Ultimately, we need to ascertain whether the growth in numbers of non-tenure-track faculty creates a problem for the universities themselves.

In order to address these questions in a preliminary study, we selected a small sample of four “Research I” universities. Even with such a small sample, our selection was carefully chosen to provide considerable variation in local conditions. Our sample universities were set in very different local labor markets; they were subject to significant differences in the severity of budget pressures; they used different internal resource allocation models; and they represented both private and public institutions (with greater and lesser autonomy with respect to state legislatures). We visited each over a period of two to three days, collecting data and interviewing data analysts and decision makers at multiple levels. Our goal was to collect data in context; that is, we sought to understand what the data mean in the midst of complicated environments. Even so, with such a small sample, our conclusions to date can be regarded as suggestive and tentative only.

Data Challenges

Everyone with whom we spoke—from provosts to budget administrators—welcomed the opportunity to cooperate with our study. They were forthright in offering access to their data, although it was clear from the start that many institutions do not have data systems adequate to understand the non-tenure-track issue. Careful data management systems are relatively new on many campuses. In some cases, they are the product of one budget officer’s efforts rather than any broader institutional initiative. This means not only that different institutions have different lengths to their historical records, but also that different categories of instructor are often not effectively differentiated. For example, not all institutions have data systems that distinguish

The authors gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for this work. We also thank Clint Peinhardt, who provided very capable research assistance.
This data deficiency is often compounded by the fact that academic administrators tend to focus their attention on high-profile faculty. Although administrators knew how many tenure-track faculty they employed (and how many FTE they represent), they were much less aware of the numbers of non-tenure-track instructors. The answer to the question, "How many tenure-track faculty do you have?" is typically precise (e.g., "324"), but the answer to the question, "How many non-tenure-track faculty do you have?" is often vague (e.g., "I think it is about 20 percent"). Worse, different officers of the same institution sometimes come up with different percentage estimates.

Nonetheless, the data we did collect demonstrate convincingly that the numbers of non-tenure-track faculty are growing in arts and sciences at some of our nation's most prestigious institutions. Answers to our questions about motive—which courses non-tenure-track faculty teach; how their appointments are defined; what drives their appointments and re-appointments; and how their presence on the teaching faculty affect university functioning—could only come from our interviews with university administrators and not from any institutional data archive.

**Numbers and Roles of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty**

In spite of the differences among our institutions, we heard very similar stories about the appointment of non-tenure-track faculty. First, they teach the same courses everywhere—English composition, beginning languages, laboratory sections in the sciences, and calculus. Most non-tenure-track teaching is provided to first- and second-year students. The trends in non-tenure-track faculty teaching are clearly upward. We were interested to find that the amount of instruction by graduate student teaching assistants has remained flat or actually decreased. This probably reflects the fact that many universities have reduced their graduate student populations (especially in the Humanities) in recognition of reduced job opportunities for new Ph.D.s.

More detailed data show the large amount of growth of non-tenure-track instruction in the Humanities. On one of our campuses, by 1995 the number of first-year-sophomore credit hours generated by non-tenure-track faculty in the Humanities surpassed the number generated by their tenure-track colleagues. Growth is less dramatic but still evident in the social sciences and the natural sciences.

Non-tenure-track instruction is expanding even into junior-senior courses, but at a much smaller rate. We were surprised to discover that non-tenure track faculty are also moving into non-instructional faculty roles, such as student advising and even college administration.

Labor market differences clearly influence the parameters that govern non-tenure-track appointments. Rural markets in which there are few alternatives to university teaching appointments are characterized by low turnover and correspondingly high appointment durations. In urban areas where alternative employment opportunities are plentiful, the turnover rates are higher, and the universities have established formal policies that limit the possible duration of one individual's appointment.

Everyone agrees that cost-cutting is an important factor in the increasing use of non-tenure-track faculty in the arts and sciences. However, it is just one in a long list of motives that lead to the employment of non-tenure-track faculty. Other moves might include:

- The need to replace faculty temporarily on leave;
The use of “adjuncts” who bring special knowledge and experience into the academy;

The offering of teaching opportunities to retirees as a retirement inducement;

The expanding need for “remedial” education;

The wish to support long-term research faculty whose research funding has temporarily lapsed;

Resistance on the part of tenured faculty to teach some courses—especially beginning language courses—and to fill certain roles such as advisor;

The use of lecturers in administrative roles;

The employment of a partner in a dual career recruitment;

Budgetary savings.

Additional motives that affect who teaches undergraduate courses derive from a concern about strengthening graduate education and preparation for the job market, for example:

The provision of support to graduate students as teaching assistants;

The integration of teaching experience into graduate training programs;

The growing use of “teaching post-docs” as a way of preparing new Ph.D.s for teaching careers.

We encountered examples of each of these motives in our interviews, and there may be others still. The length of this list is impressive, and many of the motives listed here are notably related to efforts to improve programs and have little or nothing to do with cost-cutting. We believe that it is important for the current debates about the growing use of non-tenure-track faculty to include this full range of motives and to recognize the complexity of the forces driving the employment of non-tenure-track faculty. As this list demonstrates, not every lecturer is hired for reasons of cost; in practice, many are initially hired for the sake of their special contributions to their university communities.

Conclusions

This is not to say that there is no problem. Even in this preliminary study, our data are consistent with the already available survey data that reveal a continuing and significant increase in the use of non-tenure-track faculty in higher education. Our interviews also confirm an observation that has been made in a few other studies: Most university administrators are only vaguely aware of the extent of this expansion. Whereas the appointment of tenure-track faculty is always closely monitored by university administrations, non-tenure-track appointments are usually governed by decentralized decision making that is almost invisible at the university level. This is particularly the case when universities turn to decentralized funding models—such as “Responsibility-Centered Management.” These funding models heighten the importance of the cost motive in a decontrolled environment, leading to collective decisions that may be wholly inconsistent with overall university priorities. These two factors—growing numbers and lack of awareness—create a context within which the nature of the professoriate can change in ways directly contradictory to the educational preferences of university leaders.

Whatever the motive for appointing non-tenure-track faculty, there remains an important economic reality. Non-tenure-track faculty are significantly less expensive providers of teaching effort. On the campuses we studied, they cost on average about half as much per credit hour as their tenure-track colleagues. Once the larger cohort of non-tenure-track faculty is in place, and once the university budget has absorbed their lower cost (and used the savings for salary increases, new hiring, maintenance, new facilities, or whatever),

Most university administrators are only vaguely aware of the extent of this expansion. Non-tenure-track appointments are usually governed by decentralized decision making that is almost invisible at the university level.
it becomes almost impossible to retreat. Particularly at public institutions that face annual reductions (or very small increases) in state funding, financial resources are not available to undo decisions made in the past, and the non-tenure-track faculty lines become permanent.

In future reports we plan to explore the implications of the growth and size of the non-tenure-track faculty for university governance and administration, departmental management, and even collective bargaining. We also plan to explore the forces that lead to increasingly intense competition among universities for both faculty and students as well as the extent to which that competition restricts the ability of university administrators to manage faculty composition. We often hear that the traditional model of the “balanced” faculty member—whose research informs his or her teaching and whose teaching drives research—is being replaced by a “star” system in which high-paid research faculty do little teaching while the less-well-paid non-tenure-track lecturers are assigned only teaching roles. The ultimate question is whether this increasing segmentation of faculty roles is something university administrators are able to control or whether it arises from the environment in which universities are embedded.

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*Sources: U.S. Department of Education, American Association for Higher Education*
Highlights from AAC&U Work on Faculty

Assessing Faculty Involvement in General Education Reform

As part of AAC&U’s “Greater Expectations for Student Transfer” project, researchers are using statewide faculty surveys to gather data in three states (Maryland, Georgia, and Utah). These surveys are examining faculty experiences teaching general education at state colleges and universities. They include questions about awareness of statewide general education initiatives, relative importance of general education, learning goals in general education courses, and assessment mechanisms.

Preliminary findings reveal significant differences between full-time and part-time faculty respondents:
- Full-time faculty teaching general education courses are more aware of state-level initiatives aimed at easing student transfer.
- Full-time faculty report higher levels of awareness of initiatives aimed at developing more intellectual coherence in general education courses and programs.
- Part-time faculty are more likely to rate the development of intellectual coherence and common goals across general education courses as important relative to other academic issues.

Additional information about AAC&U’s “Greater Expectations for Student Transfer” project can be found online at www.aacu.org/gex/Transfer/transfer.cfm.

Changing Course: Preparing Faculty for the Future

The summer issue of Liberal Education, AAC&U’s quarterly journal, focused on faculty issues. Articles include:
- The Disconnect between Graduate Education and the Realities of Faculty Work: A Review of Recent Research
  By Jerry Gaff
  A review of recent studies regarding new faculty and of graduate students aspiring to a faculty career documents the deficiencies in graduate education and the need for better bridges between doctoral preparation and the actual work of faculty.

- Our Doctoral Programs Are Failing Our Undergraduate Students
  By Jack Meacham
  Does graduate education adequately prepare doctoral students for the varied responsibilities of the professoriate they plan to enter? What role could other kinds of institutions play in the education of graduate students for the professoriate?

- Disciplinary Leadership in Preparing Future Faculty: The Humanities and Social Sciences
  By Paul D. Nelson and Shevavan P. Morevale
  National disciplinary associations through their varied array of resources demonstrate how they can support the preparation of future faculty as a natural part of graduate department responsibilities.

- Compacts and Collaboration Across the Faculty/Administrator Divide
  By Linda McMillen
  What are the factors that reinforce the division between faculty and administrators? Are there processes that minimize the divide? Lessons learned about collaboration convey its complexity and potential for producing results that benefit participants and institutions.

See www.aacu.org/liberaleducation for more information.

The Preparing Future Faculty Program

The Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program was launched in 1993 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools to develop new models of doctoral preparation for a faculty career by including preparation for teaching and academic citizenship as well as for research. Through a series of four national competitions, grants have been awarded to forty-three doctoral-producing universities and their departments to develop and implement such model programs that bring expectations for undergraduate professors into the graduate preparation of future academics. One stipulation of grants has been that the universities cannot do this work by themselves. They were required to form a cluster of diverse institutions—now numbering 252—so that the graduate students could have direct, personal experience with faculty life as it is lived in institutions with different missions, student bodies, and expectations for faculty. Often the graduate students work with an assigned teaching mentor at another institution.

In 1998, PFF developed partnerships with eleven professional societies in the academic disciplines of biology, chemistry, communication, computer science, English, history, mathematics, physics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Leaders of the learned societies in these fields were eager to encourage broader preparation for their faculty members, and each conducted national competitions to award grants to departments to develop model PFF programs. Each of the societies has been highlighting PFF ideas and the work of the new PFF programs in their national and regional meetings, in their print and electronic communications, and their special action initiatives.

The Preparing Future Faculty Program is made possible with funding from the participating institutions and by grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Science Foundation, and The Atlantic Philanthropies.

See www.preparing-faculty.org for more information.
Coalition on the Academic Workforce at AAC&U’s Annual Meeting:

How Do Differential Staffing Patterns Affect the Quality of Student Learning?

The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW) will be participating in AAC&U’s 2003 Annual Meeting, to be held in Seattle, Washington, January 22-25, 2003. CAW will present a featured session on Friday morning and has scheduled a half-day forum on Saturday, January 25 (descriptions of both below). Additional information about the Annual Meeting is available online at www.aacu.org/meetings/annual.cfm.

FEATURED SESSION
FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 8:45-10:15 AM
What Do We Know about Faculty Staffing and Student Learning?
The Coalition on the Academic Workforce encourages educational researchers to consider staffing as a variable in studies of student learning and students’ attitudes toward learning. Discussion will focus on the use of part-time teachers in AAU institutions, the range of staffing choices available to administrators, and what we know about the relationship between the staffing of undergraduate liberal arts courses and programs and the quality of students’ educational experiences.

Presider: ARNITA S. JONES, executive director, American Historical Association; EDIE GOLDENBERG, professor of political science and public policy, University of Michigan; GARY REICHARD, provost, California State University, Long Beach; JACK H. SCHUSTER, professor of education and public policy, Claremont Graduate University

FORUM ON FACULTY STAFFING AND STUDENT LEARNING
SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 2:00-5:00 PM
Five Perspectives
This session brings together people who have very different perspectives on the staffing of undergraduate courses and how it affects the quality of student learning.

ERNST BENJAMIN, the American Association of University Professors, will review what the research has to say about staffing arrangements and the quality of undergraduate education; SANDRA ELMAN, executive director of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, will talk about changes in the focus of regional accrediting associations with regard to staffing issues; MAUREEN MURPHY NUTTING, professor of history at North Seattle Community College and member of the AHA Council, will talk about field-wide and departmental issues; and KAREN THOMPSON, part-time lecturer, Department of English, Rutgers University, will recount testimony she provided the New Jersey state legislature on the problems part-time teachers face.

An Open Discussion: What Are the Disciplinary Associations Doing?
Presider: ROSEMARY G. FEAL, executive director, Modern Language Association

Representatives of the CAW organizations and AAC&U participants will share information about disciplinary and institutional practices and concerns.

The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW) was established in 1997 by a group of learned societies in the humanities and social sciences. Among the organizations participating in the Coalition are the American Anthropological Association, American Association of University Professors, American Historical Association, American Philological Association, American Philosophical Association, American Political Science Association, College Art Association, Linguistic Society of America, Modern Language Association, and Organization of American Historians. CAW’s purpose is to discourage the growing use of part-time faculty members in higher education.
Manus, don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys. Don’t let ’em pick guitars or drive them old trucks. Let ’em be doctors and lawyers and such. (Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings)

Parent: (Beaming) Gee, Honey, you’ve made us so proud. You have really thrown yourself into your academic work, made the Dean’s List, taken advantage of all a strong liberal education had to offer. Do you have any idea what you might like to do after graduation?

Child: Well, Mom, I think it must be pretty clear by now that there is something I’m really interested in, in fact, something I’m totally head over heels in love with. I’ve decided I want to go to graduate school and study art history—I’m pretty sure I want to teach—you know, be a professor, like the great teachers I have in college.

Parent: (Sinking into chair) Holy Mother of Mercy, you can’t be serious! I knew you were really preoccupied with art history, but I figured it was just a youthful phase, like being a socialist, or liking the Backstreet Boys. Please tell me you’re joking…where did I go wrong?

Child: Honestly, Mom, I really thought you’d be happy about this, after all you studied art history, in fact you’re the one who got me interested in art history in the first place! You and Dad have always told me to “follow my dream,” and I can’t think of anything better than studying the thing I love and offering my knowledge to others, in the hopes that they will love it as much as I do.

Parent: Of course I wanted you to be “interested” in art history, and English, and history and lots of other good things that develop your cultural sensitivities and improve your writing and critical thinking skills—so you would be better prepared to “follow your dream,” preferably a dream of being a lawyer, or a pediatrician, or an actuary. I never meant for you to get carried away and throw your life away on some pipe dream! Do you know what kind of life you are setting yourself up for? You’ll spend ten years in graduate school, go heavily into debt, and have less than a 50 percent chance of getting a job—and even if you get a job—haven’t you read this issue of Peer Review, for gosh sakes?! 

Child: (in a steely voice) Mom, its what I want to do, its what I’m interested in—and its not like I was telling you I wanted to be a street mime, for heaven’s sake.

Parent: (Shrilly) Hey, at least a street mime has a marketable skill! And compared to college teachers, street mimes get respect! Believe me, young lady, there’s a big difference between knowing what you’re interested in and knowing what’s in your best interest. (Voice softening, with note of pleading) What happened to your wanting to be an actress? You love the theatre, and it’s a union job. When you were nine you wanted to be an astronaut—it’s not too late! You could start brushing up on your physics now!

Child: (Eyes narrowing) I really don’t understand this. Both you and Dad got Ph.D.s in the humanities, why are you really so freaked out?

Parent: I just don’t want you to go through what we have gone through! Years of un- or under-employment, the financial insecurity, the lonely and nomadic existence following the academic job market, the pain of training for years for a profession you’ll never practice—no one wants their child to go through that!

Child: Sure, sure. I know you guys never seem to have as much money as my friends’ parents, and that some of our relatives do think you are just a couple of irresponsible deadbeats. In fact, when I was growing up I was never actually sure what it was you and Dad actually did for a living. But I always knew that years of studying something you loved changed your life, and continues to be central to your work.

Parent: What are you talking about! The closest I ever got to getting work in my field was a depressing chain of adjunct positions—and what I do now seems pretty far away from art history.

Child: Mom, you’re talking about jobs and not work! As Hannah Arendt says in The Human Condition, the tragedy of modern life is that “too few people consider what they are doing in terms of work, rather than in terms of making a living.” The “work” of your life—your life as a citizen, thinker, parent, solver of problems, and producer of knowledge—is what makes you who you really are, not the weird jobs you’ve had.

Parent: Damn that liberal education—Wait till you father hears about this, it will break his heart!
Learning Communities: A Sustainable Innovation?
(Summer/Fall 2001)
- The Challenge of Learning Communities as a Growing National Movement
- Assessing Learning Communities: Lessons Learned
- Learning Communities and the Sciences
- How Learning Communities Affect Students

Value Added Assessment of Liberal Education
(Winter/Spring 2002)
- Can Value Added Assessment Raise the Level of Student Achievement?
- Assessing Selected Liberal Education Outcomes: A New Approach
- Measuring the Difference College Makes
- Eyes Wide Open: A Look at the Risks

The Values Question in Higher Education
(Summer 2002)
- Toni Morrison asks, How can values be taught in the university?
- A look at athletes and religion on campus
- An interview with Alan Wolfe
- Case studies on sustaining an interdisciplinary first-year program and on the use of personal development portfolios
- New research on moral and civic development during college

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