

Panel on the Changing Role of Faculty
Committee on Institutional Cooperation
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I am delighted to be here. Thank you for inviting me to participate in this exciting conference.

I started teaching in the golden age when faculty were professors, not information providers. Those whom we taught were, or at least pretended to be, students, not consumers or customers. Students filled out course evaluations that were intended merely to give us valuable feedback. The notion that the opinions of adolescent undergraduates could substantially affect promotion, retention, and tenure decisions was not even broached, let alone taken seriously.

Deans were former faculty members, not bean counters or retired colonels. They served as the conduit between the faculty and administration, not as managers and overseers. The top administrator was called a president, not a CEO. The person in charge of collecting tuition and paying the bills was a bursar or treasurer, not a CFO. Our collective identity was that of a college, a self-governing assembly of scholars. We were neither a family nor a profit-seeking corporation. When university presidents now refer to the academy as a family, they appear to be using the Roman model in which the *paterfamilias* held the power of life and death over other members of his family.

Above all, the university's mission and identity were firmly grounded in the notion, subscribed to by faculty and administration alike, that, in the words of the AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, "Institutions are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole."

Adjunct faculty occupied a small, but valuable niche, providing expertise in arcane or highly specialized areas not provided by the regular, full-time faculty. They were the local lawyer who taught one course per semester in real estate law to business majors, the psychiatrist who taught a graduate seminar in Jungian analysis, and the retired French professor who wanted to keep her hand in by offering a literature course popular with senior language majors that no one else in the department was qualified to teach. They did not have fringe benefits or office space, because they did not need them.

Part-timers were those who, by choice, were unable or unwilling to take on full-time academic responsibilities. They were tenured or tenure-eligible faculty with reduced course loads, office hours, and committee assignments. They received benefits, were provided office space and secretarial support, and were indistinguishable in almost all respects from their full-time peers. Anyone with appropriate academic credentials, including ABDs, had a choice of full-time, tenure-track jobs. One was limited only by personal inclination with respect to geography and the characteristics of the institution. Faculty members who performed their duties faithfully and competently could expect to obtain tenure after a reasonable probationary period. It was a seller's market.

I exaggerate a little, of course. Then, as now, there were tyrannical presidents, limited access for women and minorities, and students who spent most of their time for four or more years honing their party skills. But the picture I've painted represents, if not objective reality, the stated ideal shared by all components of the academy. Our purpose was clear—to provide our students with an education that would teach them to think, to participate fruitfully in the larger society, and provide a measure of personal satisfaction. Even those students whose primary purpose in attending college was to obtain marketable professional skills expected, and were required to, take courses in a core curriculum that included at least some minimal exposure to the arts, the humanities, and the social and natural sciences.

The college and university represented the best in society, not only intellectually, but morally, and the professorate was held in high esteem. Young scholars entered the profession for a variety of reasons that included a fiercely held devotion to learning, to the betterment of society, and to the socialization of the younger generation. They could expect an adequate, if not lavish, standard of living, usually at a much lower level than they would have received in the corporate world. In return, they would enjoy almost complete freedom in determining the shape of their professional lives. Within the bounds of scheduled class times and office hours, they were free to work when and how they pleased. Part of the unwritten understanding was that, in addition to guaranteeing academic freedom, tenure was a property right that substituted, in part, for low salaries.

Even in corporate America, workers could expect the equivalent of tenure after a short probationary period. There was an expectation that, barring gross incompetence or malfeasance, jobs were secure. Employers owed their workers loyalty, and workers reciprocated in a mutually advantageous exchange.

Starting in the mid-seventies, the terms of the compact shifted. Corporations aggressively seeking greater and greater profits began to eliminate major portions of their workforce. Functions that had been performed by employees were turned over to independent contractors and temporary agencies. Corporate executives eventually found their way to university governing boards. They convinced academic administrators that this new, unproven, and inhumane organizational model was the wave of the future, not only for profit-seeking companies, but for the academy as well. Cafeteria workers and bookstore clerks employed by the university were fired and their functions farmed out to national chains that promised greater efficiency at lower cost and, of course, immense profit to themselves.

The problem with faculty, of course, was that too many of them had tenure and could not easily be fired. Restructuring the curriculum by eliminating or combining programs and departments facilitated the removal of some academic personnel, but the pesky problem of tenure persisted. In the eighties, attacks on tenure escalated in number and volume. Unfortunately for the bean counters and fortunately for the viability of the profession, we were able to withstand the worst of the direct assault.

The corporate tacticians, thwarted in their attempt to destroy the collegial model that has made the American system of higher education the envy of the world, shifted gears. If they could not demolish tenure by a frontal attack, they would vitiate it by imposing standards for promotion and tenure so exigent that few could meet them and by replacing tenure-eligible positions with contingent faculty, both full-time and part-time.

In 1970, part-time faculty comprised only 22% of the professorate. In 1995 the figure had risen to 41%. In 1998 the figure had risen still more to 49%. Even more telling is the percentage of faculty who are tenured or on the tenure track. According to the U.S. Department of Education, it was only 38% in 1998, the most recent year for which we have data. In other words, the overwhelming majority, 62%, of the professorate was, in 1998, contingent and exploited. In the last decade 54% of all new full-time faculty hires in the United States were off the tenure track. I repeat, 54% of all new full-time faculty hires were off the tenure track..

It is not uncommon for contingent part-time faculty to teach as many as six courses per semester at several institutions in order to survive financially. They typically do not keep office hours, because they are not paid to do so, and seldom have offices assigned to them. Students who have reasonable access to contingent faculty outside the classroom are exceptionally fortunate. I emphasize that this is not a reflection on the dedication of the faculty but on the character of the institutions that exploit them.

A corollary problem of their inaccessibility and their employment at multiple institutions is the inability of contingent part-time faculty to provide competent academic advisement. It is a difficult, if not impossible, task for contingent part-time faculty members to be well-informed of the curricular requirements of several institutions. They are seldom invited to departmental meetings and are often unfamiliar with broad departmental objectives or the content of courses taught by others. In large universities that rely heavily on contingent part-time faculty to teach large survey courses, there is often little, if any, discussion between regular faculty and their contingent part-time colleagues concerning the articulation of various components of departmental offerings. Typically excluded from governance structures at every level, and economically exploited, contingent part-time faculty have neither the opportunity nor the incentive to contribute their expertise to curriculum development.

It is common practice to hire contingent part-time faculty at the last possible moment based on the latest enrollment figures or a personnel emergency, a practice that can lead to the assignment of faculty, who are otherwise well qualified, to courses for which they are only marginally prepared. A few years ago, a colleague was severely injured in an automobile accident during the first week of the semester. The faculty member assigned to one of his courses had never taught the course before and had never taken the course at even the undergraduate level. It is not an exaggeration to say that her students were cheated. In this case, the department had little choice, but when such assignments become standard practice, one must question the institution's integrity.

Contingent part-time faculty tend not only to teach multiple courses, but to teach large sections of lower level courses in disciplines that would ordinarily require frequent writing assignments and essay examinations. The mountains of paper that would be generated make it virtually certain that many overburdened contingent part-time faculty eliminate or reduce the number of such assignments. It is impossible for students to learn to write clearly and coherently without practice and without guidance. Although well-designed multiple-choice tests are superior to subjectively scored essay tests for many purposes, they cannot measure a student's ability to write cogently and to synthesize a body of data into a coherent whole. But the time required to score essay tests with any degree of objectivity militates against their use in large classes.

Vulnerable to arbitrary hiring and firing decisions, the temptation to pander to their customers is, regrettably, understandable and a probable cause of grade inflation and lowered standards. Contingent part-time faculty are often evaluated only by their students, because their numbers preclude more thorough peer review. That we allow the opinions of adolescent undergraduates, many of whom perceive themselves as aggrieved customers, to substantially affect or even determine a faculty member's chances for promotion, retention, and tenure is outrageous. I do not suggest that we eliminate student evaluation of teaching, but that we use student opinion cautiously, and primarily for the purpose of providing the faculty with feedback. If my livelihood depends on arbitrary hiring decisions, and my competence is judged by anonymous student evaluations, I know how to guarantee my future—give easy assignments and high grades.

I suggest that colleges and universities adopt the following principles adapted from the AAUP's 1993 report, entitled *The Status of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty*.

1. All faculty, including contingent faculty, should have a description of the specific professional duties required of them.

2. All faculty should be evaluated on a regular basis using criteria appropriate to their positions. In other words, the criteria for full-time, tenure-track faculty should not be applied to contingent, part-time faculty.

3. Personnel decisions should be based on those criteria, not on criteria appropriate to another position.

4. Compensation for contingent faculty should be a reasonable fraction of a comparable full-time position and should include fringe benefits.

5. Timely notice of nonreappointment should be extended to all faculty. The AAUP's 1980 report on part-time faculty recommends that part-time faculty "who have been employed for six or more terms, or consecutively for three or more terms," should receive at least a full term's notice of nonreappointment. In no case should a faculty member receive notice of nonreappointment later than four weeks prior to the commencement of the next term.

6. All faculty members should have reasonable advance notice of course assignments to allow adequate preparation.

7. All faculty should receive appropriate support in the form of office space, supplies, equipment, and support staff.

9. Contingent faculty should be given consideration for full-time, tenure-track positions as they become available.

10. Caps should be placed on the percentage of courses taught by contingent faculty and contingent positions converted to full-time tenure-track positions wherever reasonable

In the words of AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligation to its students and to society. When more than half the members of the professorate are denied the opportunity to seek tenure, academic freedom is in mortal danger. When faculty are forced to self-censor in order not to offend their customers, and to lower academic standards in order to survive, the real victims are students, their parents, higher education, and society. Students should receive an education that, at a minimum, will teach them to evaluate competing claims, to participate in the larger society as informed citizens, and provide the means to obtain a satisfying intellectual life. Even those whose primary purpose in attending college is to obtain marketable professional skills will benefit from the rigorous application of reasonable standards. Employers value literacy, numeracy, disciplined thought, and hard work, qualities that are learned in an atmosphere where faculty are not penalized for demanding the best from their students.

If colleges and universities insist on using the market metaphor, let's think about pushing it to its limit. If students are customers, let them demand a high-quality product, truth in advertising, a list of ingredients, and warning labels. Colleges and universities, in order to achieve or maintain accreditation, should be required to disclose the percentage of courses taught by faculty ineligible for tenure, the disparities between the CEO's compensation and that of junior faculty members, the proportion of the operating budget devoted to instruction, and the compensation of support staff. But let us abandon the language of the marketplace, because our choice of metaphor ultimately determines reality. We should refuse to refer to our students as customers, presidents as CEOs, bursars as CFOs, and professors as content providers. Let us liberate the academy from the corporate hucksters. We are not always right when we speak out, but we are always wrong when we do not.