

EDITOR'S NOTES

The majority of undergraduate instructors hold contingent appointments. This volume documents the centrality of these contingent appointees to undergraduate, and especially lower-division, instruction. Then it explores how we might better assess the academic significance of this increasing reliance on contingent appointees to carry out the core responsibility of undergraduate teaching.

“Contingent Appointments”

The terms *contingent appointments* or *contingent appointees* have been selected as the generic terms for a highly diverse group of instructional staff. In view of their substantial responsibility for undergraduate instruction, it is misleading to refer to contingent appointees as *adjuncts*. Nor is the term *part-time faculty* appropriate as a generic term. Contingent appointees include not only non-tenure-track part-time faculty but also many instructional staff who lack faculty status, an increasing proportion of full-time non-tenure-track faculty, and a substantial number of graduate student teaching assistants.

Nor does *contingent* simply equate with *temporary*, although this is often an important characteristic of these positions. Part-time faculty object to the designation “temporary” because many have been recurrently appointed to the same position for years. Part-time faculty respondents to the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF), for example, have held their specific institutional appointments for an average of seven years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002a). This average conceals, however, the bimodal distribution of these appointments (Baldwin and Chronister, 2001). As I will document later in these Editor's Notes, most contingent appointees have held their current appointments for no more than four years. Graduate assistantships are, of course, inherently transitional, but even these appointments are now often prolonged and sometimes evolve into part-time and multiple postdoctoral appointments. This slower progress to degree is the result of combining work with study. Also, many graduate students postpone full-time employment because of the lack of full-time faculty employment opportunities in many fields.

Although they are in no way to blame for my errors or opinions, I wish to express my appreciation to the many colleagues with whom I have worked and from whom I have learned to better understand our profession at Wayne State, in the AAUP, and in the Coalition on the Academic Workforce. I wish also to acknowledge the generous support of the TIAA-CREF Institute for my work on this project.

The distinguishing characteristic of *contingent appointments* is the tenuous connection between the institution and the appointee because of the brief term of each appointment; in other words, part-time faculty appointments are usually for a single academic term and non-tenure-track appointments for a single academic year, even in the case of those faculty who have held previous appointments. Further, contingent appointments normally provide, often explicitly, that the position carries no right to any expectation of reappointment. In contrast to the case of nonreappointment of probationary tenure-track faculty, this means that the institution may decide not to offer further appointments without explaining its decision or providing an opportunity for appeal. Contingent appointments are often also *literally* contingent: they depend on enrollment or funding levels. This administrative or budgetary “flexibility” is a primary reason for the use of such appointments. Nonetheless, because there is generally no right to reappointment even should enrollment and funding be secure, it is not the contingency on specific conditions that distinguishes these positions. Rather, their contingency derives from their brief terms, the lack of a right to fair consideration for reappointment, and a fundamental lack of opportunity to achieve a secure long-term connection with the institution.

Studies on the Issue: Coalition on the Academic Workforce

The diverse chapters on contingent appointments included in this volume are the result of two projects sponsored by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW). The coalition emerged in 1997 when leaders from some twenty-five academic associations met at the call of the American Historical Association and issued a joint statement on the growing use of part-time and adjunct faculty (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 1998). Following the conference, at the initiative of the Modern Language Association (MLA) and with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the coalition sponsored departmental surveys of instructional staffing in ten disciplines (anthropology, cinema studies, composition, folklore, history, linguistics, English and foreign languages, philosophy, and philology [classics]). The survey sought both to determine the proportional reliance on part-time, full-time non-tenure-track, and graduate assistant staffing and to document their terms and conditions of employment. Chapter Two in this volume by Robert B. Townsend presents data from and comments on the results of these surveys.

The coalition members thereafter decided to exchange observations and views on current trends in instructional staffing of undergraduate programs with other academics. This led to the decision to sponsor a panel session, a combined forum and discussion session, and a reception at a meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in January 2003. The reception was cosponsored by the American Conference of Academic Deans

and generously funded by TIAA-CREF. The AAC&U journal *Peer Review* devoted its fall 2002 issue to a preview of the topic; the issue title was “Contingent Faculty and Student Learning” (Tritelli, 2002). Six of the chapters in this volume are versions of the presentations at the two panels and three of these are by contributors to the special issue of *Peer Review*. It should be noted that the editor and the authors included here are indebted to the coalition and the other associations that have cooperated in its endeavors, but the findings and views expressed in each chapter are those of their authors and may not represent those of the coalition or others involved in its activities.

The Nexus Between Contingent Appointments and Undergraduate Learning

Recent studies of contingent staff emphasize a number of characteristics associated with contingent appointments, including lower pay, fewer benefits, less professional support, and consequently, inferior status. As Caplow and McGee observed as early as 1958, when the proportion of contingent appointments was a minute fraction of current levels: “An increasing proportion of the faculty regard their teaching duties as obstacles to the performance of essential tasks, and instruction falls more and more into the hands of academics of inferior standing” (Caplow and McGee, 1965, p. 199). This statement not only conveys the disregard for the emerging “second-tier” faculty but identifies this lower status with the associated teaching responsibilities that it implicitly excludes from the category of “essential tasks.” And as in more recent studies, Caplow and McGee proposed not to reverse this trend but rather to create new forms of nonprofessorial appointments to attend to undergraduate instruction.

The subsequent literature on contingent appointments may be said to have substantially followed two divergent paths. The leading studies of undergraduate learning, while sometimes critical of the undergraduate learning experience in research universities, have neither, on the one hand, attributed the problems specifically to research-oriented faculty nor, on the other hand, considered whether the problems might be associated with the increasing reliance on contingent faculty. Indeed, terms like *part-time* and *adjunct faculty* are not to be found in the index of either of the two most important studies on undergraduate student learning (Astin, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1961). Other, less careful critics have, as in the observation of Caplow and McGee cited earlier, ascribed the problems of undergraduate instruction to the lack of regard for undergraduate instruction by the full-time, tenure-track faculty even as that faculty has taught a dwindling proportion of undergraduate courses (Benjamin, 1998a).

Of course, such a critique could be taken as a backhanded slap at the contingent faculty. That is, the critique implies that if the implicitly more able tenure-track faculty were to resume greater responsibility for undergraduate

instruction then that instruction would proceed more effectively than if it were left to contingent appointees. Yet none of the numerous recent studies of contingent appointees has adopted this view. Each has argued, based largely on anecdote and allusions to student evaluations, that contingent faculty are generally good teachers whose commitment to teaching may indeed make them, as Caplow and McGee (1965) suggested, more effective teachers. Each has, therefore, advocated only such changes in appointment practices as would be required to ensure that contingent faculty are treated fairly and receive the support necessary to carry out their duties (Gappa and Leslie, 1993; Baldwin and Chronister, 2001; Chait, 2002).

These admirable calls for equity, support, and respect have not, therefore, included calls to substantially restore the proportion of full-time faculty positions or to provide an opportunity to achieve tenure based on teaching performance. In this they lag behind the earlier recommendation of Caplow and McGee. The latter both assumed full-time positions and recommended rank and tenure eligibility for instructional faculty. Even so, they recognized that their plan to designate these positions as various grades of lecturers presupposed “that the precedence of research over teaching as a source of disciplinary prestige would continue to be recognized” (Caplow and McGee, 1965, p. 204). *Can it really be that assigning core responsibility for undergraduate instruction to staff accorded systemically less professional support and protection can attract and retain instructional staff who are as effective in promoting student learning as those attracted to full-time tenure-track positions?*

This volume seeks to foster a dialogue, long overdue, among those who believe that the academy has failed to give adequate respect and support to *undergraduate instruction* and those who believe that the academy has failed to give adequate support and respect to the selection and terms and conditions of employment of *undergraduate instructors*. To accomplish this, it is necessary to look more carefully at the role of contingent faculty in undergraduate learning. This is necessary, first, because those who have examined undergraduate learning have not considered the effects of the increasing dependence on contingent appointments. It is necessary, second, because although those who have examined staffing have shown some concern for instructional effectiveness in the classroom and are commendably concerned with the inadequate professional compensation and support given contingent instructors, they have not looked as carefully at the issues of faculty preparation and faculty involvement in student learning. Simply stated, one group has studied students, the other faculty, and it is time to try to see how the two discussions can become one.

The Central Role of Contingent Staff in Undergraduate Education

The initial chapters of this volume examine the centrality of contingent staff to undergraduate instruction. It is common today to defend the increasing reliance on contingent instruction staff by making comparisons to changes

Table A. Changes in the Distribution of Faculty and Graduate Assistant Appointments, 1975–1995

	1975	1995	Percentage Change, 1975–1995
Full-time faculty (N)	435,000	550,822	27
Percent of faculty	70	59	
Percent of all	56	48	
Tenured (N)	228,000	284,870	25
Percent of faculty	52	52	
Percent of full time	37	31	
Percent of all	29	25	
Probationary (N)	126,000	110,311	– 12
Percent of faculty	29	20	
Percent of full time	20	12	
Percent of all	16	10	
Non-tenure-track (N)	81,000	156,641	93
Percent of faculty	19	28	
Percent of full time	13	17	
Percent of all	10	14	
Part-time faculty (N)	188,000	380,884	103
Percent of faculty	30	41	
Percent of all	24	33	
Graduate assistants (N)	160,000	215,909	35
Percent of all	20	19	
All faculty (N)	623,000	931,706	50
All	783,000	1,147,615	47

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (1995, 1998). The 1998 data are based on appendix Tables B1a and B7a of that issue; the 1975 tenure data are constructed from Tables 9 and 10 of the 1995 issue. Historical data for graduate assistants based on U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics (2002, Table 214, for 1976).

in other employment sectors (Chait, 2002). In fact, as a previous volume in this series has observed, instructional staff in higher education are more likely to occupy “nonstandard” positions than other professional or non-professional employees (Rasell and Appelbaum, 1998).

The increasing reliance on contingent appointments has been dramatic. The proportion of part-time faculty appointments alone has almost doubled—from 22 percent in 1970 to 43 percent in 1997 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, Table 228). The variations in the growth of different types of contingent and standard appointments over the twenty years between 1975 and 1995 are substantial, as shown in Table A. Part-time faculty appointments increased by 103 percent, non-tenure-track appointments by 93 percent, and graduate assistant appointments by 35 percent. These changes reduced the proportion of full-time, tenure-track faculty to little better than a third of those engaged in faculty work.

Before exploring the significance of these increases in the proportion of contingent appointments, however, it is necessary to discuss the reasons why graduate assistants have been included among them.

Why Consider Graduate Assistants?

The inclusion of graduate assistants may seem inappropriate. Many academics regard these appointments primarily as a form of financial aid and training opportunity for the graduate students who hold them and not as a significant factor in undergraduate instruction. The rationale for exploring the instructional role of graduate assistants despite these preconceptions may be discerned by noting first the inverse relationship between part-time faculty and graduate assistants in public and private four-year institutions displayed in Table B. Specifically, in private four-year institutions part-time faculty make up more than one-third of the complement and graduate assistants little more than one-tenth, whereas in public four-year institutions the part-time faculty account for less than one-fifth of the total while the graduate assistants account for almost one-third. In both public and private four-year institutions full-time faculty account for about half of the faculty and graduate assistant mix. This suggests, as the disciplinary survey data presented by Robert Townsend in Chapter Two will confirm, that the large public doctoral and comprehensive universities rely heavily on graduate assistant instruction.

The substantial role of graduate assistants has also been underestimated because of the assumption that they have worked primarily as assistants to full-time faculty. Newly developed data that show that about half of all teaching assistants have full responsibility for one or more courses confirm that graduate assistants contribute substantially to undergraduate instruction. This is especially true in the humanities and social sciences, where almost three-fourths of graduate assistantships are for teaching, in contrast to science and engineering where about half of the assistantships are teaching assistantships (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b; see Table 11, and Table 4).

Table B. Distribution of Faculty and Graduate Student Appointments, by Type of Institution, 1999

<i>Type of Institution</i>	<i>Full-Time Faculty</i>		<i>Part-Time Faculty</i>		<i>Graduate Assistants</i>		<i>All Number</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
All	590,937	46.6	436,893	34.5	239,738	18.9	1,267,568
Public four year	302,598	49.3	114,488	18.7	196,393	32.0	613,479
Private four year	174,352	52.0	122,385	36.5	38,597	11.5	335,334
All two year	113,987	35.8	200,020	62.8	4,748	1.5	318,755

Source: Data are derived from U.S. Department of Education (2002, Table 226).

The Centrality of Contingent Appointments

The fundamental concern of this volume is not simply the increasing reliance on contingent appointees. It is the centrality of these appointments to undergraduate education. 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 constitute a substantial majority of those 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, as Table B shows, even in four-year institutions nearly half of all instructional staff are either part-time faculty or graduate assistants.

Despite this centrality, most contingent appointees have relatively little experience in their institutions. As Table C shows, more than half of part-time faculty and of non-tenure-track faculty at institutions with tenure have less than five years experience in their current positions. Overall, 40 percent of primarily instructional faculty have less than five years in their positions. Because the table does not include the 28 percent of faculty whose primary responsibilities are noninstructional, it somewhat overstates the proportion of short-term appointees. However, the researchers, administrators, and clinicians who largely compose this group of omitted faculty

Table C. Estimated Number and Distribution of Primarily Instructional Faculty, by Type of Appointment and Years in Current Position, 1998

	Distribution by Type of Appointment		Years in Current Position (%)					
	Number of Faculty	Proportion of Faculty (%)	1	2-4	5-7	8-10	More Than 10	Less Than 5
Part-time faculty	381,780	49.4	22.6	30.8	15.3	10.8	20.6	53.4
Non-tenure-track faculty	54,270	7.0	22.7	32.0	15.4	10.5	19.4	54.7
No tenure at institution	44,040	5.7	7.9	22.8	15.9	14.3	39.1	30.6
Probationary tenure- track faculty	78,950	10.2	23.2	48.8	21.2	3.2	3.7	72.0
Tenured faculty	214,520	27.7	0.7	2.9	8.1	14.9	73.4	3.5
All	773,560	100.0	40.2					

Note: "Primarily instructional faculty" are the 72 percent of respondents who cited credit instruction as their primary responsibility; those faculty omitted cited research (7.2 percent), administration (8.2 percent), and other, including noncredit instruction (12.6 percent).

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2001).

do a small proportion of instruction in general and lower-division instruction in particular. Moreover, if the hundred thousand graduate teaching assistants were included in the survey, then the overall proportion of primarily instructional staff with less than five years experience in their institutions would increase to over 50 percent. Because contingent appointees are largely assigned to lower-division instruction, the proportion of short-term instructors teaching first- and second-year students is substantially greater than 50 percent.

Head count comparisons do not, of course, equate directly with the proportion of classes taught, because most part-time faculty teach fewer class sections per institution than full-time faculty (except in some doctoral universities). But as Robert Townsend will document in Chapter Two, 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. Here it is necessary to make two additional observations on English and foreign language departments, based on the MLA-CAW surveys mentioned earlier. Tenured and tenure-track faculty taught less than half of the first-year writing and language courses that composed almost half of all of the undergraduate courses in these departments. Moreover, despite the prevalence of part-time faculty in community colleges, students in community colleges, like those in baccalaureate colleges, were far more likely than students in doctoral or master's degree-granting departments to study with a full-time tenure-track faculty member in their first-year writing or foreign language course (Laurence, 2001).

A more recent survey of mathematics departments shows a similar, if less extreme, pattern. Between 1995 and 2000 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 M.A. 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, Maxwell, and Rodi, 2002).

This dependence on contingent staff to teach foundation courses in the liberal arts—those that matter most to student literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking—should surely matter to those of us concerned with improving general education. Proposals aimed at improving and evaluating the teaching skills of the full-time tenure track faculty will not enhance the quality of general education if these are not the faculty who teach general education. Similarly, the intense debates over the content of general education are misplaced if the courses are taught by faculty whose teaching, however enthusiastic, is found not to be based on sound, scholarly qualifications.

Those contingent appointees who teach these core undergraduate courses are, of course, different from those who teach in specialized and vocational programs. Those liberal arts instructors who hold part-time

appointments are less likely than the vocationally oriented part-time instructors to have other full-time jobs, to draw on pertinent nonacademic experience, or to have the security and benefits that derive from their nonacademic positions. The liberal arts instructors are, therefore, certainly less satisfied. They are also, *debatably*, less well qualified and certainly less well professionally supported. In consequence, they may contribute less to student learning than either their vocationally oriented part-time or liberal-arts-oriented full-time counterparts (Benjamin, 1998b). It is this debate over part-time faculty, and in some respects full-time non-tenure-track faculty and graduate assistants, that runs through much of the book and should be the subject of careful future research. The question is this: *Does the increased reliance on contingent faculty for core undergraduate instruction have negative consequences for undergraduate student learning that require consideration of ways either to reduce that reliance or to improve the terms and conditions of contingent appointments?*

Exploring the Role of Contingent Faculty in Undergraduate Learning

As the opening chapter by Jack Schuster explains, there is not as yet an adequate research base to determine with reasonable certainty whether the increased reliance on contingent instruction substantially affects undergraduate learning. The chapters in this volume do, however, consider many of the factors and arguments that should be considered in seeking to improve our understanding of this issue. They also offer sufficient evidence of problems as to suggest serious reason for concern.

Growth, Centrality, and Characteristics of Contingent Appointments. The first two chapters describe the growth, instructional role, and characteristics of contingent instructional staff. In Chapter One, Jack Schuster, who has written extensively on faculty issues, explains how the shift from documenting educational inputs to assessing student learning has coincided with a massive “makeover” in the composition of the faculty, and especially, growth in non-tenure-track appointments. He calls attention to the consequent lack of research on the implications of these staff changes for undergraduate learning and emphasizes the need to undertake this research.

As noted previously, Chapter Two, by Robert Townsend, provides uniquely detailed department-level, disciplinary data on the proportion of classes taught by various types of faculty and staff. The departmental data enable him to distinguish the roles and working conditions of the different types of contingent faculty, and the substantial advantages of full-time non-tenure-track faculty compared with part-time faculty. Townsend also expresses the dismay he shares with many new entrants to the profession over the diminished and degrading professional opportunities available to them.

Contingent Appointees and Student Learning. The next five chapters explore the relationship between the terms and conditions of employment of contingent appointees and their contribution to student learning. Two of these chapters focus on part-time faculty appointments, two focus on full-time non-tenure-track appointments, and the last describes how regional accreditation views the relationship between contingent appointments and undergraduate learning. The first two emphasize the severe disabilities under which part-time faculty teach. The latter three discuss administrative policies that may rectify many of these disabilities, especially with the use of appointments, full- or part-time, based on full-time non-tenure-track faculty policies. The first two are written by part-time faculty leaders, the next two by tenure-track faculty with current or previous experience as academic administrators, and the last by a director of a regional accreditation association.

In Chapter Three, Maureen Murphy Nutting contrasts the substantial ability and accomplishments of many part-time faculty members with the disabilities under which they teach. She reports, for example, that some part-time faculty teaching in community college general education programs have stronger disciplinary backgrounds than their full-time colleagues. She then explores how their conditions of employment negatively affect the contribution even of such able faculty to their students and their full-time colleagues. In Chapter Four, Karen Thompson provides the perspective of a collective bargaining representative of part-time faculty at a large research university. She describes the interconnections of faculty working conditions that make it difficult to overcome the limitations on the part-time faculty contribution to students without a comprehensive transformation of their terms of employment to include adequate compensation, job security, participation in governance, and protection for academic freedom.

Many, but not all, of these terms of employment are more nearly approximated for the faculty described in the next two chapters. These faculty hold either full-time non-tenure-track appointments or what are sometimes termed *fractional-time* appointments. These are part-time appointments that offer compensation, including salary and partial benefits, based on a fraction of a full-time equivalent appointment; they may also offer opportunities for professional support and limited job security, as are available to some non-tenure-track full-time faculty.

In Chapter Five, John Cross and Edie Goldenberg focus on the growing number of non-tenure-track “teaching specialists” who staff lower-division programs at research universities. They present preliminary findings from case studies at four research universities to support their view that the increased reliance on non-tenure-track faculty has diverse motivations and that these faculty often have appropriate terms of employment and contribute effectively to undergraduate instruction. In Chapter Six, Gary Reichard describes how a large, comprehensive university relies on part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty for the majority of its instructional

staff and explores how the terms of employment of these faculty have been developed both through and outside of the collective bargaining agreement to enhance their contribution to undergraduate general education. The authors of these two chapters contend that full-time and fractional-time non-tenure-track faculty are substantially better supported and enabled to offer more effective instruction than are the part-time non-tenure-track faculty who are employed on a per-credit-hour basis.

Sandra Elman, in Chapter Seven, concludes this section by reviewing the policies and procedures that regional accreditation associations employ to ensure that contingent faculty provide effective instruction. She suggests that the important concern is not the proportion of contingent appointments but the effectiveness of the faculty as a whole. To ensure that effectiveness, the institution needs to be careful in planning how it uses part-time faculty and ensuring that part-time faculty are fully integrated into the institution. The institution needs also to develop procedures to ensure that those functions necessary to student learning that cannot be performed by part-time faculty are performed by others.

Implications for Policy and Research

In the concluding chapter I draw on the survey data on contingent instructors and studies of student learning, as well as the preceding chapters, to point to policy concerns and research needs. I explore several underemphasized differences between contingent faculty and tenure-track faculty. These include differences in experience and qualifications, as well as the differences in professional opportunities and support discussed in the preceding chapters. Further, I suggest that studies of contingent faculty conditions of employment have not adequately thought through the issues involved in concluding that these faculty are effective teachers. Finally, I present survey data to support the finding that the critical issue for both policy and future research is the relative lack of time that contingent staff devote to their instructional activities and especially to out-of-class involvement in student learning.

My contributions to this volume derive as much from my nineteen years experience teaching at Wayne State University as from my subsequent nineteen years on the staff of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). At Wayne State, after four years in a political science department that included graduate instruction, I taught primarily in undergraduate general education programs, including Monteith College, and after its discontinuation, in the Department of Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts. I then served as coordinator of labor studies in the College of Liberal Arts, as director of the Weekend College, and as interim dean of the College of Lifelong Learning. The demise of Monteith can be attributed to the high cost of its lower-division instruction that resulted from its relative reliance on full-time faculty and its unfortunate lack of regard for general

education. The College of Lifelong Learning, in contrast, prospered through its reliance on part-time and overload faculty. As general secretary of AAUP my continuing concern and that of the association for the use and abuse of contingent faculty and their effects on student learning led me to staff our Committee on Part-Time and Non-Tenure-Track Appointments. Subsequently, I pursued the issue as AAUP director of research.

These experiences have combined to convince me that the increasing dependence on contingent appointments imperils undergraduate learning no less than it imperils the future of the academic profession. I understand that many see the increasing dependence on contingent appointments as cost-driven and irreversible: “a permanent fix” (Gappa and Leslie, 1993, p. 3). I believe that, as with any addiction, the first step to a cure is to recognize that one is ill. I hope this colloquy contributes to such self-recognition.

Ernst Benjamin
Editor

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