

THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

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June 30, 2009

The Faculty of the Future: Leaner, Meaner, More Innovative, Less Secure

The faculty workplace has changed significantly in the last 20 years: More women, minority professors, and adjuncts have joined the professoriate. Information technology has led to new opportunities and expectations. The economic crisis has complicated long-term planning for scholars and institutions alike. We asked seven scholars from several fields and generations how they think the academic workplace —and, in particular, the job satisfaction and expectations of a faculty career —will change over the next 20 years.

Marc Bousquet

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Look at the tenured colleagues to your left and right. Imagine them gone.

At the present rate of decline, the next two decades will see the percentage of tenured and tenure-track professors plunge into the single digits. As of the fall of 2007, the tenurable comprised just one-quarter of the faculty population, according to the American

Federation of Teachers, down from one-third a decade earlier.

Sadly, the AFT analysis is probably conservative.

Nor do these sobering statistics capture the full sense of the transformation. Tasks formerly performed by the professoriate haven't just been turned over to lecturers —much of that work is now done by an army of nonfaculty staff members, administrators, and even undergraduate students.

In short, we already know what the future academic workplace will look like. It will closely resemble many of today's for-profits and the community colleges with which they compete —operating without tenure or with tenure reserved for a small group of faculty administrators in charge of hiring, supervising, and setting curriculum for a part-time staff, whose members typically lack doctorates and earn only a few thousand dollars.

At institutions where some faculty members now engage in research, tenure is likely to survive among those who bring in external grants. But departments that traditionally rely on internal financing are likely to do steadily less research and more instruction. This development is at least partly the result of the faculty members' having acquiesced to the improper idea that tenure is a kind of "merit badge" for those with research-intensive workloads, imagining instruction as an inferior pursuit, suitable only for nontenurable appointment. Many of these departments may consolidate on the model of the community college —more and more "modern -language departments" and "humanities departments."

In many cases, the income-producing research activity will follow the trend of moving into non-departmental locations —institutes, centers, and programs —that can be closed with less fuss if the income dries up.

This suggests an alternate to consolidating departments at

institutions where faculty members do research: By redefining the department chiefly as an instructional center and not the home of exciting interdisciplinary research, the researchers will visit departments only to irritably develop syllabi to be implemented by subordinated cadres of cheap teachers, and to reproduce themselves in steadily more pro forma votes, as the real decisions about hiring and retention are made in the revenue centers.

These patterns of change are affecting all of us, just not in exactly the same way or at the same pace. Nonetheless it has to be said: For the majority of us, this ugly future has already happened. The only reason "we" don't realize it is because those of us with the loudest professional voices haven't allowed ourselves to understand.

What the one-quarter of us bemoaning the "future" demise of tenure are most unwilling to understand is this: Those of us with tenure are not just a minority—we're experiencing a radical shift in our function with respect to everyone else. With the nontenurable majority engaged primarily in teaching, and many of the tenured released to revenue production, the remaining fraction of a fraction performs most of the service for everyone else.

More and more committee work. Longer terms in administration. More advising of more complex requirements, and more assessment of more kinds of learning. More mentoring of graduate students. More oversight of student workers, including undergraduates. And a steady stream of more and more nakedly managerial responsibilities with respect to the nontenurable majority—hiring, evaluation, curricular development, professional development, and so on.

If you are tenured and feel this intensified service burden already, imagine what it will be like 20 years from now when the proportion of tenured and tenure track is 8 percent, not 25 percent.

Fortunately, there are countertrends. Most notably, the movement toward unionization of the nontenurable faculty is producing substantial new forms of job security and raising wages. And there is a growing willingness to reconsider the bad idea that tenure is a merit badge for research scholars. There is a growing acknowledgment that faculty members with teaching-intensive responsibilities are needed everywhere (even at research institutions), and that the best form of stabilizing their employment is the intensive peer scrutiny of the tenure system, not the lax and superficial metrics of administrator supervision.

Timothy Carmody

Currently Postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches first-year writing and writes about literary modernism and the history and theory of media; turns 50 in 2029

How is academeia different in 2029? Let's begin with the basics: reading, writing, and teaching. If anything, Google is even more important. The 2009 author/publisher settlements that allowed Google to sell full access to its book collections didn't revolutionize books in retail, but subscription sales to institutions did fundamentally alter the way libraries think about their digital and analog collections. Access to comprehensive digital libraries allows teachers at any institution to compile virtual syllabi on the fly, seamlessly integrating readings, assignments, communication, and composition.

Automated subscriptions powered by Google's search services deliver articles on any topic or keyword of interest instantaneously; hyperlinked citations and references appear with the original document, as threads in a continuingan ongoing conversation, creating the first genuinely hypertext documents.

Apple's popular iRead application (launched in 2011) enables reading, writing, and recording on virtually any device. Some teachers and students still use laptops or tablets, but others prefer handhelds, like phones or game consoles. But users' inherited assumptions about the casual use of these devices make both teaching and research more closely resemble the activity of online social networks than traditional lectures, seminars, or conferences. Courses typically emphasize collaborative research leading to immediate publication of short bursts of text. Reader feedback then powers incremental improvements and additions.

The curriculum, especially in the humanities, valorizes thoughtful curation and recirculation of material rather than comprehension or originality. The traditional unidirectional model of knowledge transmission (best represented by the now-deprecated "lecture") has been effectively discredited, although it persists through habit, inertia, and whispered doubts about the efficacy and rigidity of the new model. Many professors periodically pause to lecture, but only apologetically, or when distanced by ironic quotation marks.

The 'teens are as widely remembered for technical innovation and radical dissemination of knowledge as the '20s are for job loss, technological retrenchment, and economic concentration. In 2019, when Google used its capital to snap up the course-management giant Blackboard and the EbscoBSCO, LexisNexis, and Ovid databases, it effectively became the universal front -end for research and teaching in the academy.

Many university presses were shuttered in the transition from print to digital, especially those affiliated with public universities looking to shed costs following the catastrophic collapse of the University of California system following state budget cuts in 2020. The remaining presses make up for lost textbook sales by hosting weblogs where established scholars and high-octane amateurs brush shoulders (and compete for shared advertisement revenue).

These in turn drive production of traditional monographs, whether published electronically, in print, or both. Scholars also directly market their services as virtual lecturers to students and other institutions. All authors now have a broader view of their audience, across institutions, disciplines, and peer levels.

Everyone is excited, but everything is uncertain. No one knows what will happen next. Just like 20 years ago...

Anthony T. Grafton

Professor of European history at Princeton University

Twenty years on, the humanities workplace will look and be worse. In recent decades, competition for stars in the top tier of research universities —a competition that became especially fierce early in the current decade —has resulted in high salaries and low work loads for a fortunate few. Meanwhile, conditions for most humanists have deteriorated. Even in prosperous times, many administrations have treated the faculty chiefly as a cost center. They have minimized the expense of instruction by replacing long-term and permanent appointments with graduate assistantships and short-term jobs. A majority of faculty members now works outside the tenure system.

Unless the world economy recovers with startling speed, for the next several years university administrators, even at top universities, will be even more sensitive than they have been to financial pressures —far more than to demands for prestige or departmental pleas that they heap riches on a Deep Thinker because some other university proposes to do so.

Even high fliers will see salaries frozen and perks withdrawn. More important, few new tenured and tenure-track appointments will be on offer. When funds become available again, post-doctoral

fellowships and other terminal positions will multiply more rapidly than traditional jobs, since awarding them does not require administrations to commit funds for the long term. Even at the top of the system, the workplace will be less stable, less prosperous, and less humane. For most humanists, insecurity will become the new norm.

Innovation will continue to take place, and scholars with new skill sets will still enter the humanistic academy. The natural locus for these changes may be interdisciplinary centers, most of them responsible for raising their own support from outside grants. This model has begun to spread from the natural and social sciences into the humanities—for example, in the shape of digital-humanities centers. Flexible incubators of this kind will help bring new forms of scholarship and teaching into being. At their best, these enterprises will bring humanists and scientists together, replacing some of the loneliness and freedom of traditional humanistic scholarship with collaborative modes of work. Unlike traditional monographs and articles, their results will reach wide publics around the nation and the world.

These changes, however, will exact costs of their own, diverting investment from traditional scholarly institutions, such as established disciplines, research libraries, and university presses. The new centers are likely to provide more contingent than permanent positions. Most of their inhabitants will have to be "entrepreneurial" (and scramble for money) if they hope for continued employment. And the stable support for learning that is needed to train students in the traditional practices of the humanities—whether the classics they love are Greek or Chinese, Arabic or Sanskrit, by men or by women—will be even harder to find than it is now. Still, such centers are likely to be the main bright spots in a darkening sky.

Joseph C. Hermanowicz

*Associate professor of sociology at the University of Georgia; studies careers and is the author of *Lives in Science: How Institutions Affect Academic Careers* (University of Chicago Press, 2009)*

In a recent study, I found academics to have far from definitive and emphatic enthusiasm for academic careers, despite the relative prestige of the academic profession —although this, too, has eroded over time. The American academic profession has reached the point where more faculty members hold non-tenure- line appointments than those who do. It will become increasingly difficult to say how such a community constitutes a bona fide profession when it consists of an ever more disparate array of career lines and commitments.

By one view, this may be a more cost-effective means to conduct business, particularly instruction, but it forms a particularly weak foundation for meaningful work over time, and it suspends the idea of academic communities constituted by scholarship. We have already begun to see, in both public and private institutions, a stratification system of careers, wherein a smaller proportion of faculty members follow the once-standard model with traditional appointments and more are appointed on a fixed-term basis. The stratification of academic careers will very likely intensify over the next quarter-century, as financingunding for higher education continues to fall, and as universities sort out how to operate under these conditions.

What will academic careers be like for the few who are able to secure regular appointments? There is evidence to suggest that they will be nasty and brutish, but not short. Those who have recently entered academeia will, in most cases, lead entirely different careers than those who have recently retired. Achievement expectations in all of the roles academics perform have intensified,

and they will continue to do so and become more formalized —a hallmark of a highly rationalized, bureaucratic system. Institutions of all types now compete vigorously for capital, including capital in the form of prestige.

This evolution, while entailing some benefits, will also bring significant costs. Faculty work, not only in the pre-tenure years, is now and will remain utterly competitive to the point where it will lead many to wonder, as it has already, whether rewards derived from academic work justify its tolls. When expectations are high, the prospect of disappointment increases, and seeds of dissatisfaction are spread. The likelihood of dissatisfaction will be highest in fields characterized by relatively high consensus —that is, in fields where practitioners generally agree about standards of performance, such as physics and chemistry. Ironically, the chance of dissatisfaction will be lower in fields that are conversely in a state of disarray, such as sociology and education, since it is easier to satisfy one of many prevailing definitions of success.

Changed economic conditions combined with changes in retirement plans will more than likely mean that academics now at mid career, and all those younger, will not be able to retire until their 70s. The mixed -blessing: Academeia will, for some, entail life-long employment. More than ever before, individuals will be pressed to find the value in pursuing an academic career, but, as in all times, several may develop ingenious ways of finding it.

Evelyn Hu-DeHart

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The clues are already planted, if one cares to look. I shall highlight three interrelated trends that will intensify with time: growing stratification among institutions by mission and within institutions by fields; diminishing prospects for faculty diversity; and eroding faculty governance in the face of growing concentration of decision-making authority in the administration. If we cast our gaze over higher education in 20 years, this may be what we see:

Broadly speaking, higher-education institutions are stratified in two tiers: At the narrow top of the pyramid lies a handful of well-endowed elite and privileged public and private research institutions with highly selective undergraduate admissions and graduate programs organized primarily around producing Ph.D.'s, M.D.'s., J.D.'s., and M. B. A.'s. The faculty by and large have degrees from the same group of institutions, are hired on the tenure-track system, and aspire to achieving tenure, and thus lifetime employment security. Indeed, departmental faculty members at this type of institution are typically highly tenured, largely white, and male. The core humanities faculty continues to deliver a strong liberal-arts education to undergraduates, most of whom receive their degrees in four years. But their fields have lost a lot of ground and status to the quantitative-driven social sciences and, especially, to the biomedical sciences, where academic work is oriented toward raising prodigious amounts of external research dollars that underwrite their mega-laboratories and finance fund their doctoral and postdoctoral teams. Their presence on campus further is further marked by impressive new buildings, centers, and institutes. Meanwhile, the largesse of wealthy private donors helps maintain high-status professional fields in medicine, law, and business.

With promotion and raises evaluated primarily by research productivity and successful grant -making, with teaching a far second, this privileged research faculty has practically no time or

inclination to serve on committees that had historically driven faculty governance. This is just as well for deans and provosts, who have assumed the role of permanent managers and decision-makers.

These are also precisely the fields that have historically failed to attract, train, and mentor historical American U.S. minority-group members into the research professoriate, although they have done well by white women, whose ranks have risen impressively in these quantitative and revenue-generating fields. Diversity is largely gender-driven, while racial and ethnic diversity, by necessity, is stretched to include international, transnational, and immigrant scholars —the African and West Indian, the Latin American and Asian. At the deep base of the pyramid are the majority of post-secondary institutions, most of them public and minimally selective. They are the myriad of community colleges and many state colleges; together they enroll the vast majority of students pursuing post-secondary education. Their mission is to teach and credential students —many of them people of color, low-income, first-generation, non-traditional —for a fast-changing global economy. Only a small proportion of the faculty is full time and tenured. Most are contract employees —casual academic workers who constitute a flexible labor pool whose members can be easily laid off, recalled, or replaced as state budgets dictate. They deliver courses as much online as in a traditional classroom.

These lower-tier institutions attract few private donors and practically no research grants. Faculty governance is not even remotely part of the academic culture. But diversity is visible and meaningful here, for these institutions do provide opportunities for American U.S. minority-group members to pursue an academic career in teaching or administration.

Peter N. Stearns

Provost of George Mason University

I'm always impressed with the fragility of predictions, ever since, in grade school, I assumed everyone would be riding in helicopters by the 1960s. But I was asked, so here goes:

- We will see more cases in which gender balances are so routine as to require little notice; progress on other types of diversity will also have occurred, but with more gaps remaining.
- Family commitments for younger faculty, including fathers, will continue to run high, leading to new challenges to carrying out committee assignments and building community. This pattern, along with increased comfort with electronic communication, will lead to far more virtual meetings and distance courses taught in part from home. The holy grail of a separate office for each full-time faculty member will be abandoned in this process, in favor of alternate-day sharing.
- More faculty members (particularly those past the child-raising stage) will routinely spend two-week or semester segments teaching abroad, as part of joint or dual-degree programs with foreign universities; and visiting colleagues, correspondingly, will be spending time on American campuses through a new surge of globalization in higher education. It will be interesting to see if current standards differentials between American professors and even their European colleagues even out a bit.
- Basic reward patterns will not change greatly, with a premium on research, although more diverse forms of refereed publication will be accepted. Solidification of assessment will, however, place a greater premium on demonstrated learning results in the evaluation of faculty teaching, with continuing disputes about out-of-classroom evidence. More comfort with interdisciplinary and inter-unit appointments will develop.
- Pressure to increase faculty productivity will intensify

substantially. This will lead to some overreliance (at least in terms of real economies in pedagogy) on distance delivery and continued use of adjunct instructors. To defend full-time positions, particularly in fields devoid of major research financing, institutions may press for slightly greater teaching loads. Tenure will be challenged, and might in some cases actually be modified to cover, say, 20 years of a career (as a gesture to core protection of academic freedom) followed by renewable appointments based on productivity. More successful faculty members will work on through their 70s.

Any set of predictions depends on some mix of extrapolating from current trends and hypothesizing newer directions. Forecasts about family-centeredness, more technology, and more diversity build on things already in gestation. A more global framework for careers and productivity that might produce structural modifications (if the profession is not hopelessly to divide between a successful minority and a growing horde of transients) would represent a major departure from current patterns.

In terms of faculty satisfactions: I'm predicting a bit less on the lifetime-security side, a bit more ease with home-work balance and with technology links, a bit more orientation toward the pleasures of global experience. The sum total is not, probably, a revolution in rewards and anxieties, although there will be a few hot debates to anticipate over the next two decades.

Cathy Ann Trower

Research director at the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education

I envision two possible but very different academic worlds 20 years from now. One is the path of least resistance — maintaining the status quo. If we do not reimagine the academic workplace and change the supporting culture, practices, and policies accordingly, one possibility is that it will look much like it does today, but with still fewer tenured and tenure-track faculty. If current trends continue (from a third of the professoriate tenured in 1997 to one-fourth in 2007), or slow slightly, it is likely that only around 20 percent% of all instructional staff will be tenured or on the tenure-track. Faculty members then will be less satisfied than today because they will have had to assimilate and compromise their generation's values (collaboration, transparency, community, flexibility, diversity, interdisciplinarity, work-life integration) to fit into the mold created and institutionalized many years ago by "traditionalists" (competition, secrecy, autonomy, uniformity, homogeneity, disciplinary silos, 24/7 careers). We are, in 2009, seeing signs of decline as doctoral students vote with their feet — heading to the private sector, the government, or other non-profits. A recent study of over 8,000 doctoral students in the University of California system showed that upon beginning their studies, 45 percent% of men and 39% percent of women wanted to pursue careers as professors with an emphasis on research, but those percentages dropped to 36 percent% and 27% percent respectively as time progressed. In the sciences, the shift was more dramatic. Why? For both men and women, a major factor was the perceived inflexibility of an academic career at a research university; and for women, being unable to reconcile family life with career pressures in this environment.

The other path will require rule re-making that reflects the 21st-century global, social, demographic, economic, and technological realities, as well as the values of new faculty members and doctoral students. We should ask them what they would like if given the opportunity to rethink, and possibly rewrite, the current system.

In this scenario, I believe the academy will continue to attract the best and brightest, and that they will thrive in their academic careers. There will be still more interdisciplinary centers and institutes with faculty and students working together solving problems. Most faculty members will no longer have to be equally outstanding at research and teaching; instead, while some will perform both functions, the majority will specialize in one or the other. Rungs will disappear, replaced with lattices that allow movement in many directions. The up-or-out tenure system will be reformed to be more flexible; in fact, faculty members may be less concerned about lifelong job security than about producing the highest quality research and teaching at the highest levels, utilizing technology in ways that haven't been conceived in 2009.

Whatever is to be, I hope that we don't wait 20 years to make dramatic changes; the time for reform is now.

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The Chronicle of Higher Education 1255 Twenty-Third St, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037