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## No Faculty Left Behind

Submitted by Marc Bousquet on April 8, 2008 - 4:00am

First-year students are more likely to persist to their sophomore year when high-stakes "gate-keeper" courses are taught by permanent faculty, and campus unions generate significantly greater undergraduate experience of tenure-stream faculty, observe two studies just released at the annual convention of the American Education Research Association.

These studies confirm numerous [other reports](#) <sup>[1]</sup> and bolster the widespread faculty conviction that four decades of permatemping is a major factor in the dismal rates of student persistence. Taken together, these reports provide a boost to the major faculty unions, all of whom have launched substantial recent initiatives to reconvert part-time and contingent positions to tenure-track faculty jobs.

On the other hand, the studies and the campaigns have not been universally welcomed by faculty serving contingently. While many contingent faculty welcome the chance to convert to traditional tenure-track employment, others fear that the conversion of some positions would result in long-term faculty serving contingently being forced out by younger job-seekers. Many are concerned that the rhetoric of re-conversion unfairly diminishes the qualifications of faculty members serving in contingent positions. They point out that it is generally the working conditions associated with serving contingently that present risks to student learning, not the characteristics, qualification, or ability of the faculty themselves. When studies link student non-persistence to an inability to maintain relationships with faculty, some faculty serving contingently observe that it's simply not a matter of personal choice for them whether to spend time on campus -- when they're forced to work multiple jobs in order to pay bills, or when they don't have an office. (This is usually the observation of the studies themselves, but the rhetoric surrounding the studies tends to slip from discussion of "problems caused by the working conditions of faculty compelled to serve contingently" to "problems caused by contingent faculty," a distinction that National Education Association has made a cornerstone of its own campaigns to organize non-tenure-track faculty.)

All of the major unions acknowledge these concerns and generally propose conversion in accordance with attrition, filling converted positions with faculty serving contingently at the same institution, and providing both pay parity and job security to faculty who prefer to work part-time. This is the case, for instance, with the American Federation of Teachers' campaign targeting state legislatures with a goal of restoring the 1970 ratio of tenurable to contingent faculty (75-25) in public higher education. All of the ["Faculty and College Excellence" or FACE campaign](#) <sup>[2]</sup> model legislation simultaneously aims to win pay parity and employment security for faculty serving contingently during the conversion process.

Nonetheless a vocal group of faculty advocates fear that on the ground, in the actualities of regulation, oversight, and -- especially -- appropriation of funds, the rights and interests of faculty who continue to work in part-time positions will be disadvantaged. They believe that funds may well be devoted primarily to providing some tenure-track lines while faculty working on a per-course basis will continue to earn as little as 10 percent of what tenure-track faculty earn. Particularly outspoken in this regard has been the always trenchant Keith Hoeller.

Hoeller, for instance, opposed the AFT's FACE legislation in Washington state because the protections for part-time faculty were, in fact, stripped from the bill. Blaming the union for this, he wrote an intemperate and frustrated local op-ed <sup>[3]</sup> that veered into anti-union propaganda, charging Washington AFT with "failing to bargain any job security" and "discriminating" against faculty serving contingently. Sandra Schroeder and Phil Ray Jack, respectively president of the Washington Federation of Teachers and chair of the AFT Washington Contingent Workers Committee, responded, <sup>[4]</sup> accurately and reasonably, that a number of Washington locals had bargained degrees of job security for faculty serving contingently, and that wages had been bargained from 40 percent of full-time to 60 percent of full-time.

This tension over the legislation is a real disappointment and represents a concern for all of us trying to move forward on this issue while engaging lawmakers in the struggle -- all the more so, since politicians are actually listening to this argument for this time since 1988 (when an unfunded mandate, A.B. 1725, limiting contingent appointments was passed in California).

Since 2007, the FACE campaign has succeeded in getting legislation considered in California, Vermont, New Mexico, Washington, Florida, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. Related legislation has been enacted or considered in New York, Massachusetts, Texas, and Michigan. AFT and NEA have just completed a joint higher education conference in a political climate that, it is hoped, will be friendly to these efforts.

I think there is no question that we must seize these chances to legislate permatemping out of existence. It's not necessarily an opportunity that will come again soon.

On the other hand, those of us in the tenured minority need to recognize that if these other campaigns do move forward as they have in Washington -- if it becomes a consistent trend that protections for the contingent majority are stripped from the bills -- it would represent a crisis for solidarity in the academic labor movement.

Understandably, graduate students and the minority of faculty in the tenure stream will be tempted to welcome this kind of legislation with or without protections for the majority of faculty currently serving in contingent positions. But that would be a mistake, undermining prospects for solidarity within individual locals, in disciplinary associations, and between continent-wide activist groups such as the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions and the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor.

Already the disappointment that some members of the contingent majority feel in the Washington bill has led to fears regarding union democracy, especially with reference to those units representing both groups. Many of these concerns are unfounded, but we need to recognize the truth that these mixed units have historically experienced numerous tensions on this score: My own introduction to academic unionism was the aftermath of Vinny Tirelli's failed drive to decertify the CUNY union for adjunct faculty. The drive ultimately resulted in the election of a reform caucus to the union's leadership, comprising a broad coalition of graduate students, faculty serving contingently and allies in the tenure stream, including Barbara Bowen and Stanley Aronowitz.

In recent years faculty serving contingently have frequently chosen to form units of their own, where state law permits. This choice reflects the growth in full-time contingent appointments, as well as the

reality of academic hierarchy and, especially, broader trends in collective bargaining. Young workers everywhere lost faith in unionism during the 1980s and 1990s because, during those decades, many unions made deals that favored current members at the expense of younger workers. Complicity in the negotiation of multiple-tier workforces -- with benefits and wages for a top tier preserved at the expense of everyone else -- are not a feature exclusive to academic faculty unions, but it has been a feature of those unions nonetheless.

In part, the choice to form unions of their own represents a determination by some faculty serving contingently that -- as those living the norm of faculty life -- they can and must lead the profession. This kind of leadership is already evident in the [recent blog discussions](#) <sup>[5]</sup> surrounding tenure, increasing job security for the contingent majority demystifies "tenure" as the privilege of an elite tier, easily abused by administrators and pushes our conception of it, thankfully, toward the more appropriate, humdrum -- and muscular -- notion of tenure enjoyed by other workers.

Of course faculty serving contingently are not just disappointed in their unions. They feel disappointed in the AAUP, their disciplinary associations, and their tenured "colleagues." And in these other academic organizations and institutions they don't have the option of choosing to form a unit of their own. If they are to lead in the disciplines and in advocacy organizations, they must lead in the "mixed units" of the AHA or ASA.

Currently, very few faculty serving contingently choose to pay the fees for active membership in academic organizations of any kind, even when the costs are set extremely low. We have to do much more in all of these groups -- including my own AAUP -- to recruit faculty serving contingently into membership and leadership. That means providing stipends and travel funding for this unpaid service, and devoting organizing time and dollars. But it also means recognizing and reversing the problematic history of all the "mixed units" in the profession -- the cultural and institutional complicity that Cary Nelson has called "academic apartheid."

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[1] <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/10/16/parttime>

[2] <http://face.aft.org/index.cfm?action=cat&categoryID=9df980d5-9556-4dbc-a392-2ad9725410b7>

[3] [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/opinion/350878\\_adjunct12.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/opinion/350878_adjunct12.html)

[4] <http://aftblog.blogs.com/face/2008/02/anyone-who-read.html>

[5] <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/03/31/tenure>

[6] <http://howtheuniversityworks.com>