

The Changing Faculty and Student Success

National Trends for Faculty Composition Over Time

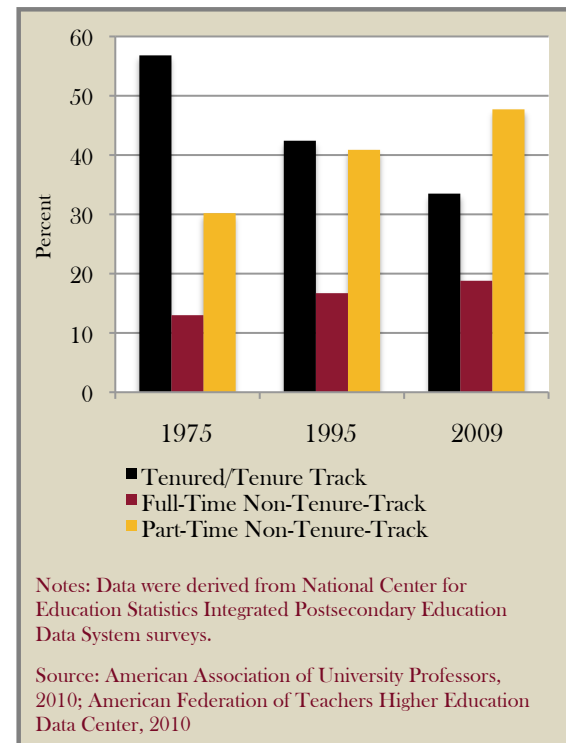
The nature of the American academic workforce has fundamentally shifted over the past several decades. Whereas full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty were once the norm, the professoriate is now comprised of mostly non-tenure-track faculty. In 1969, tenured and tenure-track positions made up approximately 78.3% of the faculty and non-tenure-track positions comprised about 21.7% (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Forty years later, in 2009 these proportions had nearly flipped; tenured and tenure-track faculty had declined to 33.5% and 66.5% of faculty were ineligible for tenure (AFT Higher Education Data Center, 2009). Of the non-tenure-track positions, 18.8% were full-time and 47.7% were part-time.

The recent rate of growth underscores the significant increased reliance on non-tenure-track faculty, particularly part-timers. Analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, 2009) shows that between 1997 and 2007 tenure-track positions increased by 34,109 or 8.6%; full-time non-tenure-track positions grew by 64,733 or 38.2%; and part-time positions grew by 173,529 or 42.6% (AFT, 2009). Available IPEDS data from 2009 demonstrate a continuing decline in tenured and tenure-track positions from 34.5% in 2007 to 33.5% in 2009, offset by a 1% rise in part-time faculty (AFT Higher Education Data Center, n.d.). The AFT analysis did not include data from for-profit institutions, which are comprised almost entirely of non-tenure-track positions. Also, whereas the AFT study considered the number of graduate assistants employed in its reports, the role of graduate assistants in instruction is not always clear. The percentages included here have been adjusted to represent faculty positions only.¹

Part-Time Faculty

Part-time faculty have long been a part of higher education, particularly within the community college sector, where they grew in numbers beginning in the 1970s. They were not commonly represented in large numbers across four-year institutions until the last decade or so. Part-time faculty have

Figure 1. The Composition of the Faculty with Instructional Roles Among Non-Profit Colleges



¹ We recommend reviewing the full AFT study, available at http://www.aftface.org/storage/face/documents/ameracad_report_97-07for_web.pdf, as well as a summary of instructional staff data published online by the AFT Higher Education Data Center at <http://highereddata.aft.org>.

experienced the most significant rate of growth over the last 30 to 40 years. The population increased by 422.1% between 1970 and 2003, compared to an increase of only 70.7% among all full-time faculty, both tenure track and non-tenure-track (Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006). While part-time faculty are often characterized as a homogeneous class of employees, they are actually a very heterogeneous group. Gappa and Leslie (1993) attempted to create a typology to describe this population, identifying four broad categories: career enders; specialists, experts, and professionals; aspiring academics; and freelancers.

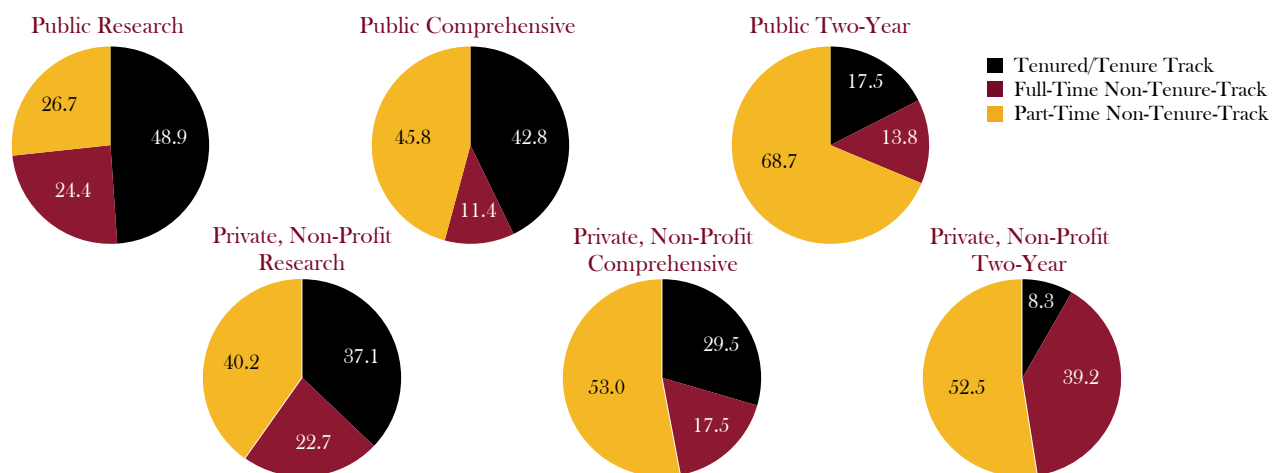
Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

In 1969, full-time non-tenure-track faculty made up only 3.2% of the faculty (Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006). Unlike the part-time faculty population, the number of full-time non-tenure-track faculty did not increase significantly until the early 1990s. Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) note that full-time non-tenure-track faculty comprised a majority of all new full-time hires, outpacing tenure-track positions, in 1993 and reached 58.6% by 2003. While the number has increased over time, it appears that the proportion of these positions has stabilized, remaining fairly constant over the past decade (AFT, 2009). Baldwin and Chronister (2001) established a typology to better understand full-time non-tenure-track faculty based on the terms of their employment responsibilities: teachers, researchers, administrators, and other academic professionals.

The Composition of the Faculty by Sector

Although the number of full- and part-time non-tenure-track faculty has increased across higher education, there are significant differences in composition among various types of institutions. These dissimilarities are largely determined by differences in mission and priorities. Certainly, the faculty composition of individual institutions within a sector will not always reflect these overall proportions. However, understanding differences among sectors broadly explains variations in reliance on non-tenure-track faculty.

Figure 2. Variation in the Composition of Faculty by Sector



Notes: Data reported derived from National Center for Education Statistics 2007 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System survey.
Source: American Federation of Teachers, 2009.

Public and Private Research and Doctorate-Granting

Tenured and tenure track faculty at research and doctorate-granting institutions are increasingly focused on research, publication, and educating graduate students (Cross & Goldenberg, 2009). Institutions' desire to attract external funding provided through grants and other awards has contributed to advancing the priority of research activity and has driven tenured and tenure-track faculty into more entrepreneurial roles. As a result, institutions have turned to non-tenure-track faculty, particularly part-time faculty, to teach an increasing share of undergraduate courses to make faculty available for these tasks. At public institutions, 54.6% of faculty in 1997 were tenured or tenure-eligible, compared with 48.9% in 2007 (AFT, 2009). Part-time faculty increased from 22.9% to 26.7%; full-time non-tenure-track faculty also increased modestly from 22.5% to 24.4%. Among private institutions, tenured or tenure track faculty fell from 42.5% to 37.1%; part-time faculty increased from 36.4% to 40.2%; and full-time non-tenure-track faculty increased from 21.1% to 22.7% (AFT, 2009).

Given this sector's role in educating most future faculty, these institutions often use large numbers of graduate assistants to facilitate different types of instruction, although the nature of their duties is less clear (AFT, 2009). When included in data on instructional staff, graduate assistants comprised as much as 41.9% of instructors at public research institutions and 21.6% at private institutions. Further research is needed to better understand this group's impact on student learning.

Public and Private Comprehensive

Public comprehensive institutions experienced a significant shift from tenured and tenure-track faculty to full- and part-time non-tenure-track faculty during the period between 1997 and 2007 (AFT, 2009). As these positions fell from 54.8% to 42.8%, full-time non-tenure-track faculty increased from 9.5% to 11.4% and part-time faculty increased more than 10% from 35.6% to 45.8%. Private comprehensive institutions have also experienced a shift away from tenured and tenure track positions between 1997 and 2007, falling from 40.4% to 29.5%. The decline was countered by a concurrent increase in non-tenure-track faculty from 59.6% to 70.5% (AFT, 2009). While full-time non-tenure-track faculty positions increased only a slightly, part-time positions rose from 43.5% to 53%.

Comprehensives were the only sector other than research and doctorate-granting institutions in the 2009 AFT study where graduate assistants comprised any measureable percentage of instructional staff. Although the proportion of graduate assistants as instructional staff had declined in the prior two years, in 2007 they accounted for 6.3% and 1.6% at public and private institutions, respectively.

Two-Year Colleges

Community colleges experienced surges in enrollment, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. This influx of students over the years stretched the capacity of the existing faculty. Institutions needed to find ways to accommodate the larger group of students by hiring more faculty; in many ways community colleges were more limited in their options to accommodate these students compared with traditional four-year institutions, as they have had to maintain lower tuition and greater flexibility in hiring and scheduling (Brewster, 2000; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Christensen, 2008; Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006). Hiring part-time faculty instead of full-time faculty was one significant way to cut costs (Anderson, 2002; Gappa, 1984).

Community colleges appear to utilize the greatest proportion of part-time non-tenure-track within any of the sectors; in some schools they have been the majority of the faculty (AFT, 2009; Eagan, 2007; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Overall, part-time faculty increased from 65.6% in 1997 to 68.7% in 2007. Recently, the percentage of part-time faculty at some schools has been calculated to be as high as 80% (National Education Association Research Center, 2007; AFT, 2003).

In contrast to their public counterparts, private two-year institutions make up a very small and still decreasing percentage of the faculty overall – only 2% in 2007 (AFT, 2009). The sector had a nominal 0.8% increase in tenured and tenure-track positions in the ten year period analyzed by the AFT study. Full-time non-tenure-track faculty actually fell 6.8%, whereas part-time faculty increased 6% from 46.5% to 52.5%.

Private, For-Profit Colleges

Unlike the sectors above, nearly all faculty positions among the private, for-profit institutions are non-tenure-track positions. In 2007, four-year for-profit institutions were comprised of 0.2% tenured and tenure-track faculty, 11.7% full-time non-tenure-track faculty, and 88.1% part-time faculty (American Association of University Professors, 2010). Two-year for-profits were comprised of 0.4% tenured and tenure-track, 41.8% full-time non-tenure-track faculty, and 57.8% part-time faculty.

Differences in Full- and Part-Time Composition among Academic Fields

Part-Time

Both community colleges and four-year research, doctoral, and comprehensive institutions saw high percentages of part-time faculty in composition and humanities courses as well as math and science courses. According to a report by the National Education Association (NEA, 2007), the highest increases in part-time faculty occurred in the humanities, social sciences, and agriculture, and the greatest increase from 1987 to 2003 being in education. During this period, part-time faculty in education increased 27.7% to comprise 55.5% of the education faculty. In each respective discipline, the social sciences saw a 15.4% increase to 37.4%, humanities grew 13.2% to 46.2%, and agriculture and home economics increased by 12.2% to 30.2%. Engineering experienced the least amount of growth in part-time faculty between 1987 and 2003, increasing 1.1% to make up 19.6% of the faculty. Overall, faculty in education, fine arts, and business are most likely to work part-time with more than half the faculty assigned to part-time positions.

Full-Time

The greatest increase of full-time non-tenure-track faculty was in the health sciences, beginning with 1.9% of all full-time faculty in the field in 1969 to 22.4% in 1998 (Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006). In 1998 the second largest percentage was in the humanities, with full-time non-tenure-track faculty accounting for 15.9% of full-time faculty positions and the liberal arts and sciences for 11.8% (Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006). Focusing on each discipline as a distinct unit, one can capture the representation of these positions in their own programs. According to the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty Report on Faculty and Instructional Staff, full-time non-tenure-track faculty made up 44.1% of all full-time faculty in the health sciences in 2003 (Forrest Cataldi, Fahimi, and Bradburn, 2005). These positions accounted for 32.6% of full-time faculty in education, 22.2% in the humanities, 16.2% in social sciences, 24.0% in natural sciences, 17.9% in fine arts, 15.4% in engineering, 22.5% in agriculture and home economics, and 17.3% in business (Forrest Cataldi, Fahimi, and Bradburn, 2005). Among all other programs, full-time non-tenure-track faculty comprised 30.7% of all full-time faculty overall.

A summary of key points on Shifts in the Composition of the Faculty is provided on the next page.

Summary of Key Points: Shifts in the Composition of the Faculty

The rise of non-tenure track faculty – the new faculty majority:

- Whereas full-time tenured and tenure track faculty were once the norm, more than two-thirds of the professoriate is now comprised of non-tenure-track faculty.

In 1969: Tenured/on-track = 78.3%; non-tenure-track = 21.7%.

Forty years later, instructional faculty in 2009: Tenured/on-track = 33.5%; non-tenure-track = 18.8% full-time, 47.7% part-time.

- There is no one ‘type’ of non-tenure-track faculty. Part- and full-time non-tenure-track faculty are heterogeneous groups, representing a range of work responsibilities, qualifications, experience, goals, and aspirations. The proportions of both have increased as the percentage of tenured and tenure-track faculty has declined, although part-time faculty have experienced a faster rate of increase, rising 422.1% between 1970 and 2003.

There are often major differences among sectors and disciplines:

- Faculty composition varies by institutional sector, discipline, and is not consistent even within a single institution. Differences exist largely on the basis of differences in mission, priorities, and needs.
- As enrollment growth at the community colleges began to stretch these institutions’ faculties in the 1960s and 1970s, the number of non-tenure-track faculty also increased. The trend eventually spread to the four-year research and comprehensive institutions.

In 2007, non-tenure-track faculty accounted for 51.1% at public research institutions, 26.7% part-time and 24.4% full-time; 53.2% at public comprehensives, 45.8% part-time and 11.4% full-time; and 82.5% at community colleges, 68.7% part-time and 13.8% full-time;. Among private non-profit institutions: 62.9% at private research universities, 40.2% part-time and 22.7% full-time; 70.5% at private comprehesives, 53% part-time and 17.5% full-time; and 91.7% at private two-year colleges, 52.5% part-time and 39.2% full-time.

- Among disciplines, the largest increases in part-time faculty between 1987 and 2003 occurred in education, +27.7% to comprise 55.5%; the humanities, +13.2% to 46.2%; social sciences, +15.4% to 37.4%; and agriculture, +12.2% to 30.2%. Engineering experienced the least amount of growth in part-time faculty between 1987 and 2003, increasing 1.1% to make up 19.6% of the faculty.

The greatest increase of full-time non-tenure-track faculty between 1969 and 1998 was in the health sciences, comprising 44.1% of all full-time faculty in the health sciences in 2003. Full-time non-tenure-track positions accounted for 32.6% of full-time faculty in education, 22.2% in the humanities, 16.2% in social sciences, 24.0% in natural sciences, 17.9% in fine arts, 15.4% in engineering, 22.5% in agriculture and home economics, and 17.3% in business. Among all other programs, full-time non-tenure-track faculty comprised 30.7% of all full-time faculty overall.

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The Changing Faculty and Student Success

For more information please visit <http://pullias.usc.edu>

Project Description

The nature of the American academic workforce has fundamentally shifted over the past several decades. Whereas full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty were once the norm, more than two-thirds of the professoriate in non-profit postsecondary education is now comprised of non-tenure-track faculty. New hires across all institutional types are now largely contingent and this number will continue to grow unless trends change. The purpose of this project is to examine and develop solutions to change the nature of the professoriate, the causes of the rise of non-tenure-track faculty, and the impact of this change on the teaching and learning environment.

Research Team and Partner Organizations

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In partnership with the Association of American College and Universities

About the Pullias Center for Higher Education

The Pullias Center for Higher Education is an interdisciplinary research unit led by Director, William G. Tierney, and Associate Director, Adrianna Kezar. The Center was established to engage the postsecondary-education community actively, and to serve as an important intellectual center within the Rossier School of Education; it draws significant support and commitment from the administration. The Center's mission is to improve urban higher education, strengthen school-university relationships, and to focus on international higher education, emphasizing Latin America and the Pacific Rim. Working on fulfilling that mission are the Center's faculty, research assistants, and staff.

This research project is funded through generous support from The Spencer Foundation, The Teagle Foundation, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The Spencer Foundation was established in 1962 by Lyle M. Spencer. The Foundation is committed to investigating ways in which education, broadly conceived, can be improved around the world. From the first, the Foundation has been dedicated to the belief that research is necessary to the improvement in education. The Foundation is thus committed to supporting high-quality investigation of education through its research programs and to strengthening and renewing the educational research community through its fellowship and training programs and related activities.

The Teagle Foundation intends to be an influential national voice and a catalyst for change in higher education to improve undergraduate student learning in the arts and sciences. The Foundation provides leadership by mobilizing the intellectual and financial resources that are necessary if today's students are to have access to a challenging and transformative liberal education. The benefits of such learning last for a lifetime and are best achieved when colleges set clear goals for liberal learning and systematically evaluate progress toward them. In carrying out its work, the Foundation is committed to disseminating its findings widely, believing that the knowledge generated by our grantees—rather than the funding that enabled their work—is at the heart of our philanthropy.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1905 and chartered in 1906 by an act of Congress, is an independent policy and research center. Improving teaching and learning has always been Carnegie's motivation and heritage. The Carnegie Foundation's current improvement research approach builds on the scholarship of teaching and learning, where we learn from each other, improve on what we know works, continuously create new knowledge, and take what we learn and make it usable by others.

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