

## Campus Women Lead



Carol Hollenshead

### Non-Tenure-Track Pathways: Inclusive Leadership for Instructional Faculty By Carol Hollenshead, principal investigator, “Contingent Faculty in a Tenure-Track World”; and retired director, Center for the Education of Women, University of Michigan

Non-tenure-track (NTT) instructional faculty are the working class of academe. Often hired to teach a single class or term, they typically lack job security, earn relatively low wages, and are frequently denied health insurance and other benefits. Even full-time NTT faculty can have little job security, with year-to-year contracts that allow them to be laid off at any time. Yet these faculty are critical to the teaching enterprise, especially at large regional and research universities. They are essential to undergraduate instruction, particularly in foreign languages, English and writing courses, and mathematics and the sciences.

Nearly half (48 percent) of all faculty at doctoral and research universities are non-tenure track. The share is even higher for degree-granting colleges and universities overall, with 63 percent working in NTT positions (AAUP 2006). These faculty members’ reasons for holding NTT positions vary: a desire to focus on teaching or to have flexibility, a difficult market for tenure-track jobs, a choice to follow a spouse or partner to a particular region or institution. But whatever their reasons for working off the tenure track, NTT instructional faculty share a stake in the institutional climate they experience as contingent employees. Universities, students, and NTT faculty themselves will benefit from the creation of inclusive policies that validate and support NTT instructors’ significant contributions to higher education.

### NTT Faculty Perceptions

During 2008–9, my colleagues and I examined the climate for NTT faculty by conducting twenty-four focus groups at twelve public and private research universities around the United States. We spoke with 220 NTT faculty members, three-quarters of whom held full-time positions. Participants had served as NTT faculty anywhere from one to thirty-five years, with an average of nine years spent in NTT positions. Of the faculty who participated, 60 percent were women. My colleagues Inger Bergman and Jean Waltman [summarized our findings in an earlier issue of \*On Campus with Women\*](#) (2009), and it is worth reviewing some pertinent points here.

Academic institutions and individual faculty and administrators vary in their responses to NTT faculty. Some are supportive and appreciative; others are exploitative and downright hostile. One of the themes that emerged from our focus groups was the idea of respect. In the words of faculty members from one large public research university,

*Even though we do a good job, we could be gone....we are passionate about what we do....we’re college educators and yet we aren’t respected at all....I teach 1,600 [students] a year. It’s 660 every 10 weeks. And it’s doubled in the last four years, but not in pay.... We are not faculty, I realize that. But we should still have some respect.*

*There are two of us [in the department] called, so to speak, “irregular faculty.”*

Others commented about salary and benefit policies:

*I think when they cut our benefits they made the position “visiting” so that...for the same insurance we had to pay a lot more money.*

*I’ve been “visiting” for 14 years....*

*The thing is we don’t qualify for merit pay.*

*I haven’t quite hit the \$40,000 mark yet, after nine years.*

At more than one institution faculty commented on their status as “invisible workers”:

*There are photograph directories on the walls—of every staff person, the maintenance people, every student in the whole school. Every tenured faculty [member] has their photograph on the wall with their name. But not lecturers. Everybody else who works there. Everybody. So we are made into “non-people.”*

*So over the last five years we lecturers have been wiped off the home pages, we’re no longer on the web....Those are some of the indignities we’ve run into...making sure that people realize we don’t exist.*

In contrast, some campuses are working hard to improve policies governing NTT positions and to recognize the work that NTT faculty do. We encountered several outstanding examples of inclusive leadership on the part of faculty and administrators whose efforts were making a positive difference for NTT faculty. At one campus, the women’s commission had been the initial voice for change, subsequently enlisting additional allies from the faculty and administration. Change efforts on other campuses were led by faculty governance committees or ad hoc groups of NTT faculty working in concert with sympathetic administrators. On two campuses, NTT

faculty had recently unionized, bringing about changes in job security, titles, pay, and benefits. (For more information about the study and to view the study's vodcast, *Voices of Contingent Faculty*, visit <http://www.cew.umich.edu/research/voices.htm>.)

### **A Case Study for Inclusive Leadership**

The discussions my colleagues and I had with focus groups indicate a need for leadership that creates inclusive environments for NTT faculty. In the words of Campus Women Lead, a multicultural alliance affiliated with the Association of American Colleges and Universities, inclusive leadership's promise lies in the "transformational power of women"—and, in this context, men—"acting individually, collectively, and strategically to strengthen and sustain inclusive institutions that expect and cultivate the best from everyone" (Campus Women Lead 2010).

Fortunately, in the course of our investigations, our research team encountered a number of individuals whose work on behalf of NTT faculty exemplified the principles of inclusive and transformative leadership. Patricia Hyer, associate provost for academic administration at Virginia Tech, stands out as one example. After leading a successful effort to institute new work/family policies, Hyer moved on to reform policies and practices affecting NTT faculty. Over a period of two years, Hyer worked to include key individuals and groups from across Virginia Tech's campus in creating new titles, longer contracts, and promotional salary increases for NTT instructional faculty. At Virginia Tech, NTT instructors from the English department first brought the issue of developing a career ladder for instructors to the attention of the provost's office in 2006. Exercising critical skills for inclusive leadership—including the ability to listen to and engage individuals from all levels of the institution—Hyer encouraged and supported their initiative. Subsequently, she met with other department chairs to request the names of additional NTT faculty members who could work with her to refine the proposal. She also hosted forums of instructors and administrators to review the evolving draft language.

In the midst of this process, Virginia Tech was rocked by the horrific shootings that killed thirty-two members of the Virginia Tech community and injured many more. The 2007 massacre and its aftermath took an enormous emotional toll on everyone at the university and completely changed the administration's agenda. Under the circumstances, Hyer would certainly have been forgiven if she simply let the issue of NTT faculty drop. But she didn't. She valued instructors' work and believed that many instructors were undervalued and underpaid. Hyer continued her efforts to shape new policies, collaborating closely not only with instructors but also with members of the Commission on Faculty Affairs, department heads, and a range of other faculty and administrators.

Ultimately, Virginia Tech passed a policy that established three levels of employment for instructors: instructor, advanced instructor, and senior instructor. In the new system, instructors were eligible for renewable contracts varying from one to five years (Virginia Tech 2010). More remarkably, the forty-five faculty members who were promoted in the first year after the change received promotional raises of \$2,000 to \$5,000—in a year when other faculty and staff received no raises due to state budget cuts. Hyer described her reaction to the promotion packages in an e-mail: "I was immensely touched in reading about the contributions made by many of these long-term faculty members and their commitment to undergraduate education. They have made this a better place for our students by virtue of their dedication and commitment to teaching."

### **Supporting Quality, Not Rankings**

If higher education at large is to effect widespread change in the climate for NTT faculty, more institutions, and more individuals like Patricia Hyer, will need to exercise inclusive leadership on their campuses. Any institution that employs NTT instructional faculty and is concerned with the quality of undergraduate instruction would be wise to follow Virginia Tech's example.

In higher education, the change process is often excruciatingly slow, especially at state schools where the work must proceed within the parameters of statewide policies. It is all too easy for leaders to become discouraged about the prospects for change. Moreover, some administrators are compelled by competitive rankings to focus on the reputations of their tenured and tenure-track faculty. That obsession can lead some administrators to place issues affecting "working-class" NTT faculty at the bottom of their agendas, especially in times of limited resources. But given that on many campuses, NTT faculty deliver the majority of undergraduate instruction, institutions that ignore the needs of NTT instructional faculty risk excessive faculty turnover and low morale—which may in turn negatively affect the quality of undergraduate instruction.

As we conducted our research, my colleagues and I were struck by the dedication to teaching and to students' well-being that NTT faculty exhibited on campus after campus. In the words of one faculty member, "To me [teaching] is a joy.... I love the students, [and] I love being with them, even though I teach the large classes." We strongly believe that campuses that support and reward such dedicated NTT faculty will foster high-quality undergraduate education. And leaders like Patricia Hyer who work to bring about needed reforms will help fulfill CWL's vision of "inclusive leadership to create the vibrant institutions called for in a diverse but unequal world" (Campus Women Lead 2010).

*Editor's note: Carol Hollenshead is a member of the Campus Women Lead Project on Inclusive Excellence. Campus Women Lead believes that women can advance inclusive leadership in higher education institutions by building multicultural alliances. If you want to raise questions on your campus about how to increase engaged education using diversity as a key vehicle for expanding intellectual and practical choices, consider bringing a Campus Women Lead workshop to your campus. For more information, visit our website at [www.aacu.org/campuswomenlead](http://www.aacu.org/campuswomenlead).*

## References

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