



Non Tenure Track Faculty: The Landscape at U.S. Institutions of Higher Education

Executive Summary

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Center for the Education of Women, University of Michigan
330 E. Liberty St. Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2289

734-998-7080

www.cew.umich.edu

The full report presents findings from a national survey of administrators at U.S. institutions of Higher Education. The survey and related activities are part of *The Dual Ladder in Higher Education—Research, Resources, and the Academic Clearinghouse Project* conducted at the University of Michigan’s Center for the Education of Women and funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Key findings are outlined in the Executive Summary.

Project Team:

Louise August

Carol Hollenshead

Jeanne Miller

Jean Waltman

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Introduction

A great deal of attention in higher education currently focuses on ways to improve career flexibility for tenured and tenure-track faculty, primarily to enable them to integrate their demanding professional lives with fulfilling personal/family lives. However, academia is at an earlier stage in the movement to understand and improve the working conditions of non-tenure track (NTT) faculty.

On one hand, the higher education community is aware both of the problems NTT faculty face and the educational challenges their increased presence represents. On the other hand, many questions remain about the work environment for non-tenured members of the academic workforce. What are the trends across institutions of higher education with regard to their employment policies and benefits? How are NTT faculty defined? What are the terms of employment and working conditions like for NTT faculty?

In an attempt to gather much needed benchmark data, the University of Michigan's Center for the Education of Women—with support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation—set out to learn the answers to a wide range of questions concerning NTT faculty members across the spectrum of colleges and universities in this country. The survey was one of the first of its kind—a comprehensive examination focusing on both full- and part-time instructional faculty in non-tenure track positions. It asked administrators to provide information about their utilization of NTT faculty, terms of employment, working conditions, and institutional policies and practices relating to NTT faculty. It further inquired about their assessment of trends, attitudes, matters of concern, and perceptions about relevant issues from the vantage point of various campus constituencies.

The complete report *Non Tenure Track Faculty: The Landscape at U.S. Institutions of Higher Education* includes all data analyzed to date. Additional analyses of preliminary findings from this survey are available in print and in PDF format at www.cew.umich.edu. Further detailed analysis is ongoing and will be reported in the future.

Background

The number of NTT faculty (both full- and part-time) in American four-year colleges and universities has grown annually and shows strong evidence of continuing to do so. Between 1987 and 2003, the percentage of faculty who were tenured/tenure-track decreased by 15% – a decrease of one out of every seven traditional tenure-eligible positions (NCES, 1988 & 2004). By 2003, full- and part-time non-tenure track appointments accounted for three out of five faculty positions, in all types of institutions (NCES, 2004) and for three out of four new hires. Further, more than a quarter (28%) of all full-time higher education faculty are in non-tenure track positions (AAUP, 2003).

Among the reasons for the increasing number of NTT faculty, researchers cite greater numbers of enrolled students and conferred degrees (Benjamin, 1998a); the considerably lower salary and benefit costs for non-tenure employees (NCES, 2002; Hickman, 1998); fiscal constraints that cause administrators to be reluctant to make tenure commitments (Gappa & Leslie, 1993); and the curricular flexibility and enhancement that non-permanent faculty provide (Haeger, 1998; Chronister & Baldwin, 1999; Jacobs, 1998). At the same time, many point to unionization of faculty as a rising tide across campuses. Unionization of both tenured/tenure track faculty and NTT faculty appears to be increasing: 25% to 33% of post-secondary education faculty are covered by some kind of collective bargaining agreement (Rhoades, 1996), representing 26% of full-time and 20% of part-time faculty (NCES, 2002).

Some beliefs about NTT faculty may assume a simplicity that belies the true situation. Institutions of higher education vary greatly in size and mission, and there is enormous variation among the academic disciplines. Likewise, academics are not a homogenous population. According to reports by the AAUP, non-tenure track employees work under a myriad of titles, contingencies and conditions. They are part time or full time; they work without contracts, with indefinite contracts, or with limited contracts. Their salaries come from different funding sources. They maintain consistent workloads, or their terms of employment vary from term to term, based upon university demand. They may wish to remain in their current employment status, or they may be seeking permanent, tenure track appointments. They work under a wide range of conditions and are given very different degrees of financial and resource support. One of the few constants about this class of university employees is that they do not have the

opportunities, privileges and security that tenure provides (AAUP, 2003; Biles & Tuckman, 1986; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Leslie, 1998).

Findings

This report presents data and key findings that confirm some common assumptions about NTT faculty and dispute others. The report covers:

- Demographics
- Utilization of NTT faculty
- Hiring and Compensation
- Benefits
- Working Conditions
- Mobility between NTT and tenure track (TT)

Key findings are outlined below, with references to the tables, graphs and other figures in the full report. The full report is available at www.cew.umich.edu.

Key Findings

- Using a number of measures (institutional type, geographic region, degree of urbanization, and public/private status) we see that use of NTT faculty in respondent institutions as a percentage of all faculty is fairly evenly spread across geographic region and public/private status, and somewhat less so across institutional type and degree of urbanization. (see Figure 11)

- Because the literature seems to indicate continued increasing use of NTT faculty, we asked respondents to gauge their use of NTT faculty in the next 1-2 years. Their expectations for the future were very different from their past experience. The portion of institutions reporting increases dropped from nearly half (47%) who reported increases in the past five years to less than a quarter (17%) anticipating increases. So, despite implications from the literature, it appears that anticipated usage is going to flatten. (see Figure 15)

- Discussions about non-tenure track faculty can become complicated when the terms “non-tenure track” and “part-time” are used interchangeably to refer to that group of faculty employees who hold positions not leading to tenure or “permanence of position.” Of course, not everyone conflates the two phrases, but the research and anecdotal literature often use them to mean the same thing. The findings from our survey clearly point out the error in doing so. In fact, a fairly high percentage (43%) of non-tenure track instructional faculty are employed full-time at their institutions. (see Figure 10)
- PT-NTT faculty are often hired from a pool of persons already known (55%), from intra-institutional recommendations (58%) or through a search that taps a pool of locally available applicants (51%); however the process is more formal for FT-NTT faculty with a majority conducting a search tapping only a local pool (71%), 55% conducting a formal search equivalent to that for a tenure track position, and fewer than half using either intra-institutional recommendations or hiring from those already known at the institution. (see Figure 18)
- All respondents indicated that they employ their FT-NTT faculty as employees, not as independent contractors. Nearly all (98%) indicated the same for part time NTT faculty. This belies the common belief that NTT faculty are often treated as independent contractors. (see Figure 26)
- About half of the responding institutions offer long term contracts to some NTT faculty, with the proportion varying greatly by institutional type. (see Figure 21)
- When respondents estimated the average number of years NTT faculty tended to remain at the institution, the average was 7 years for FT-NTT faculty and 5 ½ years for PT-NTT faculty. (see Figure 23)
- Across all types of institutions, NTT faculty are hired primarily to teach undergraduate core courses, while very seldom are they hired to teach graduate level courses. (see Figures 35 and 36)

- Entitlement to participation in governance at both the unit level and the institutional (faculty senate) level is quite different for PT-NTT faculty than for FT-NTT faculty. While 78% of FT-NTT faculty are able to participate either fully or partially in faculty governance at the institutional level, only about a third of institutions provide the same opportunity to PT-NTT faculty. (see Figures 38 and 39)
- Despite the commonly held belief that it is impossible to move from non tenure track ranks on to the tenure track, we found that only one in twenty institutions had policies that explicitly prohibit such moves from taking place. Only 6% of institutions said such moves never happen, only 3% said they occur frequently, but 91% indicated that moves from the non tenure track to the tenure track do happen sometimes. (see Figures 43 and 44)
- For the most part, FT-NTT faculty receive benefits in a manner that is close to that of tenure track faculty. However, PT-NTT faculty are much less likely to receive benefits. For example, health insurance which is offered to tenure track faculty by 99% of respondents and to FT-NTT faculty by 95% of responding institutions is offered to PT-NTT faculty by only 51% of institutions. (see Figures 30-32)
- The presence of a faculty union makes a sizeable difference to the frequency with which benefits are offered, not only to NTT faculty, but also in some cases to TT faculty. This is especially true for PT-NTT faculty, for whom the presence of a faculty union substantially increases the percentage of schools offering benefits. (see Figure 34)

Methodology

The study used a stratified random sample of 551 public and private four-year schools, drawn from the Carnegie 2000 list that was representative of institutional types as defined by the Carnegie classification system and geographic region. The survey was fielded in Fall, 2005 via email to an administrator—most often in a provost's office, office of human resources, or

division of institutional research—who had been recommended as the official on each campus most likely to have the information we were seeking.

For the purposes of our project, we defined “non-tenure track instructional faculty” as “employees who, regardless of their title, hold positions that do not lead to consideration for tenure; and who have primarily instructional responsibilities, including teaching one or more classes, or advising or supervising students’ academic activities.” We specifically excluded certain categories from the discussion: post-docs, visiting scholars, librarians, graduate student teaching or research assistants, and clinical and research faculty whose primary responsibilities are not instructional. Throughout this report we use the following abbreviations to enhance readability: NTT faculty – non-tenure track faculty; FT – full time; and PT – part time.

Because this was a long, complex survey, we were pleased with an overall response rate of 36%. In addition, the demographics of our respondent group also very closely reflect the sample on several other measures. We therefore believe that our data is sufficiently representative to allow for generalization to the population of American institutions of higher education.

A number of respondents told us that they either did not have a tenure system or did not have non-tenure track instructional faculty. This disqualified them from further participation in the study and resulted in a group of 144 institutions to be used for further analysis. Due to the small number of Master II-type institutions, for further analysis these are combined with Master I-type institutions.

Overall, approximately a quarter of the institutions surveyed report that their faculties are represented by a union (or other association) for purposes of collective bargaining - 24% have unionized NTT faculty and 22% have unionized TTF (n=35 and 30, respectively). In most cases (91% or 30 out of 33 responding to this item) the union had been in existence more than three years. With only a few exceptions in schools with unionized faculty, not only are both TT and NTT unionized, they are also represented by the same bargaining unit, as shown in the following table.

Conclusion

The survey resulted in a large, rich dataset, analysis of which is ongoing. Of particular interest will be: a more detailed and nuanced examination of the differences that the presence of

a faculty union makes; the level of institutional consideration given to a lengthy list of issues associated with the employment of non-tenure track faculty; respondents' assessment of the relative importance of issues of particular salience to NTT faculty themselves (as opposed to institutional issues); support and opposition to these issues from various campus and external constituents; an analysis of which constituencies which had been most instrumental in advocating for change on behalf of NTT faculty and which had been resistant to change; and respondents' assessment of the most significant contributions that non-tenure track faculty make to their institutions. These findings will be presented in future reports on the CEW website and through other publication outlets.

This research is one of the first of its kind—a comprehensive examination focusing on both full- and part-time instructional faculty in non-tenure track positions. We believe that this data has and will continue to provide valuable insight into the working conditions of NTT faculty across the spectrum of colleges and universities in this country.

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