



**POLICY
MATTERS**

Faculty Trends and Issues

The time is past for a “one size fits all” approach to faculty. If American colleges and universities are to remain strong, they must commit to making academic work financially viable and attractive to the next generation of scholars.

Context

In an issue paper released earlier this month by the U.S. Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Robert C. Dickeson offered harsh criticism of “the unique culture and extraordinary power of the faculty” in higher education. The systems of tenure and shared governance, he argued, run counter to sound business practices and contribute substantially to rising college costs.

The same week, Michael F. Middaugh, director of the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity, presented a different picture at the annual meeting of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. “Faculty instruction has been managed and managed well. It’s the other stuff that’s killing us.”

For their part, four-year college presidents weighed in last fall in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey. While inadequate faculty salaries ranked highest on their list of

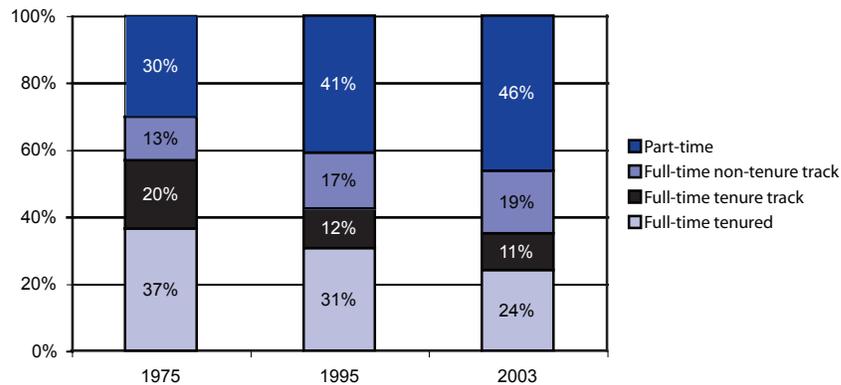
faculty concerns, a majority of presidents surveyed also foresee change in the tenure system.

Because of the unique characteristics of the academy, namely, its labor-intensive nature and its tradition of shared governance, faculty issues are always a matter of great interest and high emotion. As such, it is important for campus and system leaders to understand current faculty trends and their implications.

Observations

Higher education faculty is aging and there will be a major bulge in retirements over the next decade. Tomorrow’s faculty will be more female, more diverse racially and ethnically, and will bring different expectations to their careers. Full-time faculty average 50 years of age, with about a third 55 years of age or older. Research indicates that while most faculty retire at around age 65, about a quarter would like to retire earlier and another quarter at 70 years or older. Most

Trends in Faculty Status



Source: American Association of University Professors, *Trends in Faculty Status, 1975-2003*, May 2005.

faculty would like a phased retirement in which they continue to work part-time, according to TIAA-CREF. Institutions, systems, and states need good faculty data to help manage the timing of retirements. By developing early and phased retirement programs, they can accommodate different faculty interests and better serve institutional staffing needs.

To fill vacated positions, institutions have begun to attract new kinds of faculty members. Women make up 38 percent of full-time faculty, up from 27 percent in 1987. Though this represents some progress, women continue to face major obstacles in combining family and career. Universities need to adopt “family-friendly” policies that include extending tenure clocks, part-time tenure-track options, paid and unpaid parental leave, and child care. The University of California has been proactive in this area for many years.

The racial/ethnic makeup of the American professoriate is not reflective of the American population, but it too is gradually becoming more diverse. Currently, 80 percent of full-time faculty are White, 10 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 5 percent Black, and 3 percent Hispanic. This compares to a faculty that was 89 percent White in 1987. Research indicates that the under-representation of minorities among faculty is largely a pipeline issue. Federal and state programs are needed to increase the number of minority Ph.D.s and support recruitment

efforts, especially in the science and technology fields. Institutions can make a strong commitment to hiring underrepresented minorities, for example, through diverse search committees and job descriptions that expand the candidate pool.

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education has examined conditions that make the academy more appealing for young faculty, especially women and minorities. It found that junior faculty tend to value teaching more than their senior colleagues (who show a stronger affinity for research). They seek more clarity about the tenure process, dislike hypercompetitive departments, and “want to have a life.” To attract and accommodate the next generation of faculty, institutions need to take stock of policies and practices related to retirement, recruitment, and retention as part of efforts to become more flexible and faculty-friendly.

The composition of faculty by workload has been shifting over recent decades, with significant increases in part-time faculty and full-time non-tenure track positions (“contingent” faculty). Contingent faculty make up 65 percent of total higher education faculty, up from 43 percent in 1975. (See graph.) Nearly half of today’s faculty (46 percent) work part-time, a trend that is showing signs of leveling off. About one-fifth (19 percent) hold full-time non-tenure track positions, a

trend that is still going strong. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) notes that 69 percent of the increase in full-time faculty members since 1987 has been in non-tenure-track positions.

The forces driving this trend are strong and persistent, especially pressure to reduce costs and the need for more flexibility in staffing. At the same time, this trend has sparked concerns about the impact on student learning and success; inequities among faculty; and erosion of tenure, shared governance, and academic freedom.

One approach is to work to reverse the trend. Lawmakers in several states have proposed limits on the use of part-time and adjunct faculty, and some state higher education agencies have considered incentives for hiring and retaining tenure-track faculty. The American Association of University Professors recommends that no more than 15 percent of total instruction in an institution and no more than 25 percent of total instruction within any department should be provided by non-tenure track faculty. Institutions such as Western Michigan University and systems such as the California State University have sought to reduce reliance on temporary faculty.

Another approach is to minimize the potential drawbacks of contingent faculty. AFT has developed standards of good practice regarding compensation, professional conditions and responsibilities, and assuring a voice for full-time non-tenure track and part-time/adjunct faculty. More than 95 percent of faculty at Florida Gulf Coast University are on continuing three-year contracts, for example, and the system is working well. Administrators have flexibility and faculty have supportive policies and protections in place.

Finally, to the extent that the tenure system itself can be improved, there may be less need to hire outside the system. The last decade saw the growth of post-tenure review, generally initiated by state higher education agencies or state legislatures. Another advance has been the development of specialized workplans for faculty in which individuals may concentrate on teaching, research,

or service as long as department needs overall are being met. These have the potential to improve academic quality and productivity.

Faculty salary growth has not kept pace with overall wage and salary growth, and salaries at public institutions have lost ground to privates. TIAA-CREF reports that United States wages and salaries grew at an annual average of 5.7 percent between 1981 and 2004, but faculty salaries grew only 4.4 percent annually. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveal differences by sector. Between 1987-88 and 2002-03, faculty salaries increased 17.5 percent (adjusted for inflation) at private four-year doctoral institutions (to an average of \$82,500), compared with a 9.5 percent increase at public four-year doctoral institutions (to \$72,800). Salaries at four-year master's colleges and universities increased at an annual average rate of just 1.6 percent during this period (to \$58,900). The implications for faculty recruitment and retention are obvious.

Other trends include growing salary differentials across fields and instances of unusually high salaries for junior faculty relative to senior faculty. In those areas where there is a strong non-academic market (business, computer science, economics, and engineering), institutions need to offer considerably more money to recruit young faculty. In some cases, junior faculty may be earning more than experienced faculty. Another differential occurs between tenure-track and contingent faculty. NCES data suggest that full-time non-tenure track faculty are paid 26 percent less than comparable tenure-track assistant professors. Part-time non-tenure track faculty are paid approximately 64 percent less per hour.

Institutions must be equipped to offer competitive compensation packages and there is increasing pressure for non-cash contributions such as housing benefits. A growing issue is the increasing cost of health insurance for active and retired faculty, as these costs continue to increase at a faster rate than salaries. In 2002-03, full-time faculty received benefits averaging \$15,500, a 33.6 percent increase (adjusted for inflation) since 1987-88.

Some state higher education agencies and legislatures have directly addressed faculty salary levels and have set goals to raise salaries to more competitive levels. Many campuses have limited authority in these matters and have been attempting to gain more autonomy. The University of North Carolina System has taken steps to help recruit and retain faculty by delegating more personnel actions to campuses (including the ability to set salaries and approve salary increases) and assuring paid leave for serious illness, disability, or dependent care.

Conclusion

Though changes are underway in the make-up and work of the professoriate, one constant is that high quality faculty remain the heart of academe. If American colleges and universities are to remain strong, they must make a commitment to invest in their faculties and to make academic work financially viable and attractive to the next generation. The time is past for a “one size fits all” approach to faculty. Campuses and states need to be flexible, strategic, and market savvy as they look for creative solutions.

Resources

American Association of University Professors (AAUP). AAUP has developed statements of standards and procedures related to advancing academic freedom and shared governance, and defining professional values in higher education. aaup.org

American Federation of Teachers (AFT). AFT’s higher education department offers information and policy statements on such topics as tenure, shared governance, and contingent labor. aft.org/higher_ed

Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE). Housed at Harvard University’s (Mass.) Graduate School of Education, COACHE is a collaboration of public and private institutions committed to improving the quality of faculty work life. The Study of New Scholars gathers data to help academic administrators recruit, retain, and develop young scholars and to increase the success and satisfaction of women and minorities. gse.harvard.edu/~newscholars

Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Faculty Survey. Housed at the University of California, Los Angeles Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, the HERI Faculty Survey provides colleges and universities with information about the attitudes, experiences, workloads, teaching practices, and professional activities of collegiate faculty and administrators. gseis.ucla.edu/heri/faculty.html

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES regularly gathers data on postsecondary faculty through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)—numbers of full-time and part-time faculty, demographics, tenure status, and salaries. In addition, the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) is a periodic comprehensive survey of postsecondary faculty. nces.ed.gov/

National Education Association (NEA). NEA’s Office of Higher Education provides data, reports, and policy advocacy related to faculty salaries, tenure, and other issues. 2.nea.org/he/index.html

TIAA-CREF Institute. The TIAA-CREF Institute generates research, policy briefs, and data that address faculty issues. tiaa-crefinstitute.org/index.html

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