They go by different titles—contingent, clinical, contract, or term faculty, lecturers, instructors, adjuncts. Their role, however, is clear: They shoulder an increased share of the teaching workload at many public four-year universities, yet they are not—and most will never be—on the tenure track.

According to data from the U.S. Department of Education’s 2005 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System survey, only 51.4 percent of all faculty at public four-year institutions are tenured or on the tenure track, leaving 48.6 percent in other ranks. Indeed, data from several administrations of the National Center for Education Statistics’ “National Study of Postsecondary Faculty” show a steadily declining percentage of tenured and tenure-track faculty on American campuses and an upswing in full-time faculty not on the road to tenure.

“We are going through another phase of the rebuilding of higher education,” says Eugene Rice, a senior scholar at the American Association of Colleges and Universities and a leader in scholarship looking at faculty roles and rewards. “There is a generational change under way and now the growing cohort is contingent, which is very different from the past.”

In *The American Faculty: The Restructuring of Academic Work and Careers*, a recently published, monumental compilation and analysis of decades of data, Jack H. Shuster and Martin J. Finkelstein conclude that the full-time, tenure-track position is no longer the “modal” academic appointment. In fact, they write, the faculty ranks are “moving, seemingly inexorably, toward becoming a contingent workforce. A majority contingent workforce, no less.”

Several years ago, the movement away from a largely tenured or tenure-track faculty was heavily driven by shrinking resources and expanding enrollments, experts say. The trend often was symbolized by “freeway flyers”—faculty who
taught a course or two at several different institutions during an academic year and spent much of their time hurrying between campuses.

While four-year campuses still hire faculty part-time to teach required courses, for example, or hire eminent professionals to teach a course or two because of their specialized expertise, Schuster and Finkelstein indicate that four-year campuses also are hiring many teaching personnel for full-time, non-tenure-track positions.

Growing costs, enrollment pressures, and cyclical ebbs and flows in state funding are among the challenges that have led presidents and other administrators to limit the number of new tenure-track lines, even as their enrollments grew or they expanded programs.

Thus the current cohort of what many call "contingent faculty" runs the gamut, from full-time "clinical faculty" who offer practical, applied expertise, to full-time teaching faculty who handle composition, foreign language and many other lower-division courses, to adjuncts hired to teach a course or two each semester when student demand for particular courses warrants more sections.

Despite their widespread use, these appointments raise questions about the effects of the changing faculty on some core educational practices formerly associated with a largely tenured or tenure-track faculty. These include questions about responsibility for curriculum development and faculty governance, the role of tenure, and—perhaps most importantly given current calls for more public accountability concerning student learning—the quality of teaching provided.

The short answer seems to be that none of those areas need necessarily suffer great harm, although universities are still "all over the map" in terms of how they've responded to the challenges, says Barbara Cambridge, associate with the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

"There is a wide range, everything from a university that hands somebody a syllabus to teach three weeks after hiring them to institutions that have fully integrated instructors and part-time instructors into their professional life," says Cambridge, who is also a senior program officer at the National Council of Teachers of English.

At a time when many institutions are charged with improving their evaluation of student outcomes, the use of contingent faculty "is not an all-bad story with regard to outcomes," says Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, an organization that helps colleges improve their management capability.

While concerns about faculty members not being able to have out-of-class contacts with students and lacking time to advise them are legitimate, Ewell indicates, if there are full-time teaching faculty available, "you can look at it from the other side." Says Ewell, "If you have people dedicated to teaching, who are not spending time doing research, there is potentially more teaching time. It depends on how you design the curriculum. Arguably, from an outcomes perspective, if you have a centrally designed curriculum with well-articulated outcomes and have been able to train your adjuncts, you might have better outcomes."

Freshman English composition is one area for which some colleges have long used part-timers or full-time instructors not on the tenure track. "There is some good practice out there," Ewell notes, often developed in campus teaching and learning centers.

"There is a very big question about accountability with a shrinking core of full-time tenured faculty," says Rice. Yet some of the evaluation of faculty shows that adjuncts don't turn out to be poorer teachers than regular faculty, he says.

Further, Rice says, "If people have contracts, you can assess them using student evaluations and other measures, and if they are not performing well, you can get rid
of them. You would be derelict if you didn’t drop them.” It is a different situation with tenured faculty, he notes.

The key concerning contingent faculty “is intentionality,” says Russell Edgerton, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. “Many institutions backed into these arrangements of using non-tenured or tenure-track faculty to save money and then woke up to the fact that the configuration of the workforce has been transformed,” says Edgerton, former director of the education program at The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Intentionality underlay many developments over time at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). William Plater, chief academic officer at the campus for 19 years and now a university professor there, says his institution’s use of non-tenure track faculty grew out of economic need, but “what we should be doing is finding a better way to manage towards the goals of our institutions rather than trying to fight the trend.”

These days, IUPUI has several categories of faculty that are not tenured or on the tenure track, says Plater, who also is a visiting scholar at Carnegie and has consulted at many AASCU institutions. “Clinical faculty, first in health sciences, but now also in such areas as business, education, and engineering, typically have five-year contracts and after five years of service would essentially be on a rolling renewable contract,” Plater says. They teach or provide clinical care and participate in curriculum development; at the departmental level, he says, “almost all departments treat them as faculty who are peers with tenure-related faculty.”

The institution, along with many other universities, Plater says, also has lecturers who teach many lower-division courses and do professional or administrative service. “They do a lot of university service. For example, they advise students; they might administer a writing center,” he says. Lecturers include both full and part-time faculty.

“I think more and more institutions are trying to provide professional development and some job stability” for even part-time personnel, Plater says. “We have a wide variety of faculty-development programs tied to university goals, such as higher retention and graduation rates, and the goal is to have as many as possible of part-time faculty participate so they understand the institution’s goals and will be able to help carry them out.” The institution compensates part-time faculty so that they can participate in faculty-development workshops and other activities.

And among full-time lecturers, Plater says, “I think a lot of them are very committed to student learning; they don’t want responsibility for research, but they are willing to take steps to reach our student learning goals.”

However, he notes, “You have to pay well, not abuse them. You have to engage them in the life of the institution.” In recognition of the large role they play on many campuses, he notes that “many institutions, including IUPUI, are allowing contingent faculty to participate in university governance,” including the university senate.

“**It is a challenging situation. Ideally, we would like to be able to pay people handsomely and have more people in the traditional model. On the other hand, having a percentage of contract faculty has provided us with the flexibility to weather challenging fiscal times,**” Jeri Echeverria says.
Even with the expanding duties of non-tenure-track faculty, there are concerns about added burdens for tenure and tenure-track faculty.

In the huge California State University (CSU) System, says Jeri Echeverria, provost at CSU Fresno, “We have some really excellent lecturers, but their presence is putting increased pressure on tenure-track faculty, who have to serve on all the personnel committees, which takes up a lot of their time.”

At Fresno, she adds, “Our full-time lecturers help advise students, and they can help develop courses, although they can’t take them all the way through the approval process; the tenured or tenure-track faculty do that.

“It is a challenging situation. Ideally, we would like to be able to pay people handsomely and have more people in the traditional model. On the other hand, having a percentage of contract faculty has provided us with the flexibility to weather challenging fiscal times,” Echeverria says.

A somewhat unusual feature at CSU is that the collective-bargaining contract specifies that if full-time lecturers successfully complete two three-year contracts, they can move to the tenure track and start the six-year process. “There was concern among tenured faculty, I think, about what would happen if a lecturer gets to that stage but is not an effective teacher,” she says. “In fact, though, if there were a problem, the contract wouldn’t have been renewed. By the time our lecturers get to tenure-track status, we know them and know what they can do.”

At George Mason University (Va.), says Provost Peter N. Stearns, “We have a policy of hiring ‘term faculty’ who are full-timers with essentially just teaching assignments, and we embrace them as regular members of the faculty. They get evaluated according to the same standards as regular faculty; their contracts can be renewed, and many are. They don’t have access to tenure, but they can make a lifetime career here, and some do.”

He adds, “I don’t mean there are no problems. Some tenured and tenure-track faculty are leery of embracing these folks.” But he says, the term faculty “participate in curriculum development, and they are full members in departments in voting decisions, although they would be excluded from certain promotional decisions.”

Emphasizes Stearns, “We are not trying to undo tenure. We have expanded the ranks of our tenured and tenure-track faculty more rapidly than other categories. And we monitor the ratio of tenured and tenure-track faculty to term faculty pretty closely, and it’s probably four or five to one in favor of tenured and tenure-track faculty. The tenured faculty hold the lead reins here.”

There is no question, however, Stearns says, that “in composition and language instruction, but also in other areas,” the term faculty and adjuncts become an important component of the faculty ranks.

Says IUPUI’s Plater, “We are in a period where the roles of faculty are being differentiated—just look at the fact that many institutions also have research faculty who have no role in teaching but are dependent on outside grants and contracts.” He acknowledges that the tenured and tenure-track faculty would still be expected to “carry the main burden of university committee and governance work, even though contingent faculty may serve on committees.”

But, he says, “To the people who are contingent, the university hasn’t made the same kind of commitment as it has to tenured faculty. What
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tenure conveys is responsibility to the institution for maintaining its quality and integrity. With tenure comes responsibility to the university community. If people claim the protections of tenure, they have to accept the responsibilities.”

A few institutions argue that they can provide faculty stability and educational quality without a tenure system. At Florida Gulf Coast University, a public university that opened in 1997 with a system of faculty contracts rather than tenure, outsiders often focus on tenure, but the institution provides stability for its faculty through continuing and fixed-term contracts, says Hudson Rogers, associate provost and associate vice president for Academic Affairs.

“We have a promotion system based on performance,” he says. The institution carefully reviews that performance, providing people with a plan and a year to improve if they are found to be having problems in any area, Rogers says, and adding years to the continuing contract if they meet expectations. If they don’t, they are given a one-year notice that they have to find a new position.

When the institution was created, Rogers says, the Florida Board of Regents wanted the campus to have maximum flexibility to change rapidly based on community demand, Rogers says. “We easily won accreditation, and we meet the same standards” of regional and specialty accreditation that other institutions do, he notes.

Enrollment is growing 12 to 15 percent each year, and the institution is very sensitive to its students’ learning, Rogers says, not only because the state has requirements concerning learning outcomes but also because “we realize that when we put the students out into the public, they are competing against students from every other institution across the country.” Besides local assessments, one way Florida Gulf Coast University assesses students’ learning is through their performance on national standardized tests, “so we can see if they are performing in line with other students,” Rogers says.

Whether faculty members are tenured, tenure-track, full-time on contracts or part-time, the reality is that “the instructional role of the faculty member is changing, independent of the changing character of the workforce,” says Russ Edgerton.

Given the pressures for accountability and assessment, and “given what we know about how students learn,” he says, more and more faculty need to be spending time advising students; helping design assessment tools; and looking closely at students’ performance not just on exams but also in group projects and as reflected in portfolios of the students’ work.

“There are a lot of workload issues and institutions are not facing up to them—for example, how you reward and support faculty for the time spent advising students and for doing the assessment function,” says Edgerton. “The reconfigured workforce makes it hard, but even in the old configuration, you would have a hard time getting faculty to do those things.” He adds, “What modern professional faculties need to do is collectively take responsibility for student learning.”

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