

The Impacts of 2020 on Advancement of Non-Tenure-Track and Adjunct Faculty

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INTRODUCTION

About 71 percent of faculty in the United State are non-tenure-track faculty, including research, teaching, professional, and clinical faculty; 20 percent are full-time and 51 percent are part-time, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, 2021). Non-tenure-track faculty are sometimes referred to as contingent or adjunct faculty, a marker of their marginalization in a system that privileges tenured and tenure-track faculty.

The reality is that non-tenure-track faculty often do not have opportunities for career advancement in the traditional sense, with options for promotion through ranks. Nearly three decades ago, Gappa and Leslie (1993) raised awareness of the ways that institutions treat non-tenure-track faculty as temporary and marginal employees, and the lack of advancement opportunities remains a pressing concern for the faculty members in these positions (GAO, 2017). Therefore, it is important to consider advancement more expansively for faculty in this career, including not only promotion and career rank advancement opportunities but also other aspects of non-tenure-track faculty's working experiences that scholars have identified as shaping their performance and success, including career and economic stability and professionalized working conditions (Finkelstein et al., 2016; Gappa et al., 2007; Kezar, 2013).

We begin by considering the status quo for these three dimensions of advancement opportunities for non-tenure-track faculty, then discuss the impact of the pandemic with special attention to how workplace conditions changed for them with identities underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), including women and faculty of color. We then offer examples of promising practices that can improve advancement opportunities for contingent faculty.

THE STATUS QUO FOR CONTINGENT FACULTY: A LACK OF ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Among tenure-track faculty, career ranks generally offer opportunities for advancement that offer salary increases, employment protections, and professional status with greater prestige.

However, advancement opportunities for non-tenure-track faculty are much more limited, with impacts on all these aspects of the academic career. In fact, a lack of promotion opportunities, career and economic insecurity, and deprofessionalization reflect the structural exploitation of non-tenure-track faculty as the status quo (Kezar et al., 2019).

Promotion

The stark reality is that many non-tenure-track faculty do not have career promotion opportunities, as institutions do not offer promotion tracks for faculty in instructor, lecturer, clinical, and research positions. For adjunct faculty, opportunities for promotions are even more rare. The lack of promotion opportunities and clearly defined ranks is associated with job dissatisfaction for many non-tenure-track faculty (Ott and Cisneros, 2015).

When promotion opportunities are available to non-tenure-track faculty, a lack of transparency and consistency make it difficult for them to access these opportunities. Data from 2004 suggests that roughly 50 percent of institutions offer some type of promotional opportunity for full-time non-tenure-track faculty, including symbolic title-only promotions that do not change faculty's contracts, salaries, or job expectations. However, compared with tenure and promotion process for tenure-track faculty, where the process and criteria for advancement are generally clearer and well-defined, non-tenure-track faculty lack a clear path for advancement (Gappa et al., 2007). Bergom and colleagues (2010) interviewed 123 research faculty working at five institutions and found that institutions lack clear policies and practices related to these non-tenure-track faculty, including arbitrary titling across departments and colleges that make it difficult for faculty to understand job responsibilities and opportunities for promotion, much less how to navigate pathways for promotion that may exist.

Career and Economic Stability

Non-tenure-track faculty often experience career and economic insecurity. The most recent data from IPEDS (2021) suggests that 64 percent of full-time non-tenure-track faculty and

86 percent of adjuncts have contracts that are annual or less. At the same time, a study conducted by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012) including more than 10,000 adjuncts shows that more than 50 percent reported being employed as contingent faculty for more than 5 years and 30 percent for 10 or more years. Thus, the status quo of short-term contracts creates a lack of employment stability for all non-tenure-track faculty and particularly for adjuncts. For part-time faculty, who are nearly all hired on a semester-to-semester basis, their job search is nearly continuous; further, because they are often hired only a few days or weeks before a semester begins, they face extreme employment insecurity and have little time to prepare the classes they are asked to teach (Kezar et al., 2019). It is no wonder, then, that 75 percent of adjuncts would prefer to be in a full-time position, with the majority aspiring to become tenure-track faculty (Yakoboski, 2018).

Non-tenure-track faculty are also paid significantly less than tenure-track faculty. In one analysis of available data, researchers compared the salaries of tenure-track faculty against non-tenure-track faculty. After accounting for a number of factors that may contribute to differences in pay per course, including the administrative and other job responsibilities of tenure-track faculty, highest degree earned, and discipline, they found that full-time non-tenure-track faculty are paid 10 percent less than tenure-track faculty, and part-time non-tenure-track faculty are paid 60 percent less (GAO, 2017). Additionally, institutions often lack clear policies related to salary increases for contingent faculty, especially those who are part-time, resulting in sporadic market adjustments and wide variation in salaries across and within disciplines (Gappa and Leslie, 1993). For instance, one institutional study found that fewer than half of part-time faculty receive raises for good performance (Hollenshead et al., 2007). Research faculty face distinct challenges to career and economic stability. The stressful reality for these non-tenure-track faculty is that their continued employment and pay are often entirely dependent on their ability to raise their own salaries through grants (Bergom et al., 2010).

Non-tenure-track faculty also often face increased workloads without compensation, increasing pay inequality. It is common for instructional non-tenure-track faculty to engage in service, research, and public engagement outside of their stated roles (GAO, 2017). Similarly, many research faculty mentor graduate students, train undergraduate researchers, and fulfill other responsibilities outside of their stated roles (Bergom et al., 2010). These efforts stem both from requests from supervisors and from faculty's own professional sense of responsibility (Gehrke

and Kezar, 2015). In theory, the faculty role has become more specialized over the past several decades through the separation of the instructional and research functions of higher education; however, these boundaries do not hold in practice.

Professionalization

Faculty work is complex and requires high levels of education of the professionals who choose this career (Hutcheson, 2000). However, policies and practices in higher education create explicit and implicit hierarchies among faculty that deprofessionalize non-tenure-track faculty (Kezar, 2013). Gappa and colleagues (2007) identified five elements of faculty work experiences that are critical to attract and retain excellent faculty: employment equity, academic freedom and autonomy, flexibility, professional growth, and collegiality. These scholars center a culture of respect as the foundation for fostering an effective academic work environment.

Policies and practices related to non-tenure-track faculty often reflect a lack of respect for these faculty as professionals. For instance, non-tenure-track faculty are often excluded from participating in faculty governance, demonstrating the lack of collegiality. They often lack opportunities to engage in professional development and have little autonomy, as they are often asked to teach using a standardized syllabus (Kezar and Sam, 2013). Additionally, non-tenure-track faculty often lack office space and are not invited to department meetings, practices that leave them without a sense of belonging or connection (Kezar, 2013). Another issue is the inconsistent treatment of non-tenure-track faculty across departments and colleges. Varied interpretations of policies across units constrain faculty's sense of agency and increase their sense of being vulnerable to changes in leadership. Additionally, full-time non-tenure-track faculty often feel excluded and undervalued by their colleagues (Drake et al., 2019). The lack of respect for non-tenure-track faculty can be seen across all five essential elements of faculty working conditions, providing evidence for the widespread lack of advancement opportunities for non-tenure-track faculty as the status quo.

HOW THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED ADVANCEMENT FOR NON-TENURE-TRACK FACULTY

For many non-tenure-track faculty, the pandemic exacerbated existing issues. In particular, the career and economic insecurity that non-tenure-track faculty face increased significantly, and the workload shifted for contingent instructional and research faculty. While the pandemic negatively affected many non-tenure-track faculty, there were particular issues for those with marginalized identities, including women and racially minoritized non-tenure-track faculty.

Loss of Jobs and Earning Power

The dramatic rise in non-tenure-track faculty over the past several decades has been attributed to institutional financial pressures and the need for organizational flexibility (Ehrenberg and Zhang, 2005; Kezar and Sam, 2014; Levin and Shaker, 2011). However, institutional budgets have not decreased as a result of the move to non-tenure-track faculty; instead, funds have been redirected to administrator salaries and noninstructional activities (Kezar et al., 2019). Given the financial ramifications of lost tuition, room, and board resulting from the pandemic, universities widely implemented hiring freezes, which disproportionately affected adjuncts on semester and single-year contracts (Orleck, 2021). Hiring freezes also significantly affected full-time non-tenure-track faculty who were on semester and annual contracts. Further, the vast number of institutions with hiring freezes across the country meant that non-tenure-track faculty who were not rehired by their institutions had little hope of finding academic work elsewhere (Wong, 2020).

There is only sparse data that can inform the extent of job loss of non-tenure-track faculty because of the pandemic. Preliminary data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported more than 650,000 jobs lost in higher education between February 2020 and 2021 (Bauman, 2021). While it is unclear exactly how many of these jobs were non-tenure-track faculty, the increased outsourcing of staff functions to outside companies in areas like bookstores, groundskeeping, and food services (Kezar et al., 2019) suggests that many of the job losses were among non-tenure-

track faculty. A recent report from the American Association of University Professors (2021) found that 20 percent of surveyed institutions terminated or did not renew full-time non-tenure-track faculty, and it makes sense that adjunct positions were the easiest faculty lines to cut (Bauman, 2020). In addition, salary increases for full-time faculty were historically low in 2021; the median increase was less than the annual inflation rate for both tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty (Bichsel et al., 2021).

Increased Career Insecurity

The pandemic also increased career insecurity for non-tenure-track faculty in ways that are more subtle but equally important. For instance, when institutions extended tenure and promotion clocks, they often failed to think about the implications of moving online for instructional and research faculty. Additionally, many instructional non-tenure-track faculty felt more vulnerable because evaluations for reappointment generally rely heavily on students' evaluations of teaching, and the move to holding courses online threatened the reliability of these scores (Gonzales and Griffin, 2020). Further, the sudden move to online courses when institutions closed created a crisis situation for non-tenure-track faculty who did not have reliable computers or access to the internet (McMurtrie, 2020). Given the prevalence of short-term contracts among non-tenure-track faculty, these faculty felt increased pressure to perform well in what was a new teaching and learning environment for many students and faculty.

Career insecurity was also heightened for non-tenure-track faculty researchers. In a study of the impact of the pandemic on the research productivity of STEM faculty, more than one in four university-based scientists reported facing financial problems for at least one grant as a result of the pandemic, with a majority citing problems related to data collection (Johnson et al., 2021). Among non-tenure-track faculty respondents, the strongest negative home-life impacts on their research were the inability to concentrate on research and feeling anxiety about the health of themselves and their loved ones (Johnson et al., 2021). For contingent researchers, financial problems and challenges to productivity can have significant implications for their salaries and continuing employment.

Changes to Work and Workload

While some contingent faculty positions are focused on research and clinical practice, the overwhelming majority of contingent faculty are primarily focused on teaching. A mixed-methods study conducted among social work faculty found that non-tenure-track faculty had a greater increase in teaching and other responsibilities during the pandemic compared with their tenure-track peers (Washburn et al., 2021). It makes sense that the impact of the shift to online courses was stronger for non-tenure-track faculty, as they generally have a much higher course load than their tenure-track peers; many non-tenure-track faculty teach four or five courses each semester.

Langar and colleagues (2021) surveyed STEM faculty about the impact of the transition to online learning, finding that both part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty reported increased time developing course content and spending more time communicating with students compared with face-to-face teaching. Job responsibilities related to supporting students' learning and success expanded significantly as faculty worked to help students get access to computers and internet, as well as teaching them how to use necessary online learning technologies (McMurtrie, 2020). Non-tenure-track faculty also frequently supported students with a wide range of issues, including mental health, family situations, job loss, and financial struggles, that were created by the pandemic (Jayaram et al., 2021).

In addition to teaching more course sections, non-tenure-track faculty also generally teach introductory-level courses with first-year college students and higher enrollment limits compared with courses in the major (Bousquet, 2008). As a result, many non-tenure-track faculty not only had to redesign more courses than their tenure-track peers but also had to provide support for a greater number of students per course, students who were also likely to need help navigating college.

In general, non-tenure-track faculty were not compensated for this additional labor, exacerbating the gap in pay per course for contingent faculty. Whereas tenure-track positions have salaried time built in for course preparation and flexibility to shift time from other responsibilities, these extra hours of labor came with no extra compensation, worsening job conditions for non-tenure-track faculty and adjuncts especially (Zahneis, 2020). These changes

also further deprofessionalized non-tenure-track faculty through a lack of recognition of their efforts.

Women and Racially Minoritized Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

The underrepresentation of women and faculty of color in leadership positions combined with the significant increase in centralized, top-down decision-making during the pandemic created additional challenges for non-tenure-track faculty with these identities (NASEM, 2021). Women faculty are disproportionately in non-tenure-track faculty positions compared with tenured and tenure-track positions (Kezar and Acuna, 2020) and are significantly overrepresented among part-time adjuncts, who experience the worst job conditions in terms of economic and career security (Kezar and Sam, 2010). Racially minoritized women often enter the academic workforce through non-tenure-track faculty positions (Finkelstein et al., 2016).

Further, women non-tenure-track faculty are in the majority at comprehensive 4-year and public 2-year institutions (Baldwin and Chronister, 2001), where resource constraints that existed before the pandemic have been exacerbated by ongoing decreases in enrollment, including a more than 11 percent drop in community college enrollment between spring 2020 and spring 2021 (NSCRC, 2021). Thus, career equity gaps for women non-tenure-track faculty and for women of color non-tenure-track faculty have increased as a result of the pandemic, as these faculty were more likely to be affected in terms of unemployment.

The pandemic also exacerbated existing inequalities for women and racially minoritized non-tenure-track faculty in terms of workload, undermining efforts to increase representation and equity (O'Meara et al., 2021). Women are more likely to teach remedial and introductory courses where students support needs are higher (Gibney, 2017). Students also approach women faculty more often than men faculty for mental health support (Sprague and Massoni, 2005), so that the increased anxiety, loneliness, and depression that many students faced during the pandemic (Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020) was more likely to be shared with women non-tenure-track faculty. Similarly, as racially minoritized students are more likely to seek out faculty with the same racial/ethnic identities and had increased support needs given the disparate academic and economic ramifications of campus closures, the pandemic increased the burden of support for

racially minoritized non-tenure-track faculty (Cole and Griffin, 2013; Gonzales and Griffin, 2020; Goodwin and Mitchneck, 2020). One study of the transition to online in spring 2020 found that students made more special demands of both White women and racially minoritized women faculty than of White men during this semester (Carpenter et al., 2021).

Women faculty with children and racially minoritized research faculty also faced distinct challenges related to productivity. Academic mothers were particularly affected by changes to work and school that resulted from the pandemic. Before the pandemic, married women with children bore more responsibility for childcare than married men, on average, according to data from the American Time Use Survey. In general, this division of family responsibilities was sustained during the pandemic, and multiple studies have found that academic mothers also spent significantly more time on the additional childcare that resulted from school and daycare closures compared with fathers (Deryugina et al., 2021; Myers et al., 2020). For racially minoritized research non-tenure-track faculty, who are more likely than their White colleagues to conduct community-engaged research (Misra et al., 2021), disruptions to research were more likely.

PROMISING PRACTICES

While many non-tenure-track faculty lack advancement opportunities and experience working conditions that systemically marginalize them, some campuses have developed equity-focused policies and practices that are supportive of non-tenure-track faculty and provide opportunities for them to succeed. In this section, we focus on three promising practices: longer-term contracts that offer greater career stability, inclusion in governance and professional development that recognize non-tenure-track faculty as professionals, and career-track promotion opportunities that provide both career stability and benefits to the professionalization of non-tenure-track faculty. While these practices are primarily implemented at the system or institution level, certain STEM disciplines are also leading efforts to improve support for non-tenure-track faculty. As the work experiences of non-tenure-track faculty are most directly shaped by department-level practices and cultures (Kezar, 2013; Kezar and Sam, 2010; Waltman et al., 2012), there is an opportunity for disciplinary organizations to become stronger advocates for

contingent faculty by fostering discussions of how these practices can be implemented within their specific cultures and by connecting with other disciplines to discuss differences and form coalitions.

Longer-Term Contracts and Employment Guarantees

Temporary, fixed-term positions such as visiting and adjunct appointments were initially designed to meet temporary needs, such as filling in for a faculty member on sabbatical. However, as is clear from the numbers, short-term positions are increasingly used to meet relatively stable instructional staffing needs, creating an unnecessary churn of faculty through these positions (Kezar and Sam, 2013). Despite widely held perceptions that most faculty only spend a few years in these positions, one study of mostly full-time non-tenure-track faculty found that they averaged 9 years of employment at their current institution (Waltman et al., 2012), while a study of mostly part-time adjuncts found that more than 50 percent had been in contingent positions for more than 5 years, including about 32 percent who had been non-tenure-track faculty for more than 10 years (CAW, 2012).

Therefore, some institutions have addressed the gap between policy goals and perceptions and the realities of the contingent faculty career by offering more career stability for non-tenure-track faculty through longer-term contracts and employment guarantees. These positions can include a built-in probationary period similar to pre-tenure appointments, with initial annual appointments that allow for evaluation of performance and potential for long-term success before shifting faculty into multiyear, renewable contracts (Baldwin and Chronister, 2001). IPEDS data suggests that roughly 36 percent of non-tenure-track faculty in the United States are on multiyear contracts, providing some level of employment security, but these still tend to be short (2–3 years). To truly support their advancement, non-tenure-track faculty should have initial probationary contracts of 2–3 years followed by longer contracts that last 5–7 years.

Over the past few decades, growth in unionization of non-tenure-track faculty has also provided increased job security, especially when unions argue that faculty working conditions are student learning conditions (Kezar et al., 2019). Based on this logic, the California Faculty Association, which is the union for California State University faculty, has created better job

protections through multiyear appointments for non-tenure-track faculty who teach long-term in the same department. Additionally, non-tenure-track faculty who teach part-time consecutively for more than a year are guaranteed that future annual appointments will have the same course load as a minimum; for example, non-tenure-track faculty who teach one course per semester must be offered at least one course per semester if reappointed the following year. In examining supportive policies for adjuncts created through such collective bargaining agreements, Rhoades (2020) identifies that contract guarantees such as these are particularly important for improving adjuncts' working conditions, as are policies that provide parity with full-time faculty, including compensation for engaging in professional development and access to instructional resources such as textbooks.

Professionalization

Two opportunities for professional growth among non-tenure-track faculty where some campuses are providing better support for advancement are inclusion in governance and access to professional development. Campuses are increasingly recognizing the importance of including non-tenure-track faculty voices in bodies such as the faculty senate. Policies that support the inclusion of non-tenure-track faculty in governance include designating participation and proportionality, enabling participation through compensation, encouraging departments to appoint contingent faculty in leadership positions (Kezar and Sam, 2014).

Additionally, providing opportunities for non-tenure-track faculty to engage in professional development positively influences their ability to perform (Kezar, 2013). Professional development and the professionalization of teaching also create pathways for promotion of non-tenure-track faculty. Two studies of change efforts related to professional development of clinical faculty in STEM discusses several dimensions of rethinking non-tenure-track faculty roles and creating a culture of respect, including creating mentoring programs to engage non-tenure-track faculty in professional development; redistributing workloads to account for committee, student advising, and other service work; and revising and clarifying evaluation and promotion policies with a focus on holistic performance reviews that capture aspects of non-tenure-track faculty work including clinical service and departmental engagement

(Erstad et al., 2021; Prescott, 2020). At one institution, these changes have resulted in a significant increase in the number of clinical faculty promoted to senior ranks (Prescott, 2020).

Increased access to instructional development is one area where the impact of the pandemic has improved advancement opportunities for non-tenure-track faculty. The emergency shift to online teaching made it clear that non-tenure-track faculty needed to be included in instructional development efforts, and many campuses rethought policies and practices that limited access and resources to professional development opportunities to tenure-track faculty (Culver and Kezar, 2021). While the disruptions due to the pandemic are ongoing, it is likely that these policies will continue, as campuses recognized that it is important to support the professional effectiveness of all faculty.

Promotion Opportunities

Non-tenure-track faculty benefit from opportunities for promotion that offer increased job security, salary increases, opportunities for leadership, and recognition of professional expertise. The University of California system has developed one such model of promotion. Designations of Lecturer with Potential for Security of Employment (LPSOE), Lecturer with Security of Employment (LSOE), and Senior LSOE are designed to mirror the ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor, with parallel probationary periods and appraisal schedules with evaluation criteria based on exceptional teaching, professional development, service, and educational leadership.

A recent study found that among STEM non-tenure-track faculty in the LPSOE track, the three roles are distinct in terms of these job responsibilities. Additionally, faculty and administrators reported expectations that were strongly aligned in terms of the division of work, suggesting that clear policies are in place to guide advancement (Harlow et al., 2020). Many of the surveyed faculty also received funding for conference attendance and the opportunity for sabbatical, and a vast majority received some start-up funds when hired (Harlow et al., 2020). These practices directly support the success of faculty in meeting the evaluation criteria.

Similar models are being adapted at other institutions, including at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (Eckelbecker, 2021) and the University of Denver (DU VPFA, n.d.), which have

developed promotion tracks for teaching and professional faculty. Clinical faculty tracks are also increasingly popular in academic medicine disciplines. A study of institutions with radiology programs found that 73 percent of highly ranked institutions had a clinical track, whereas about half of lower-ranked institutions offered career advancement (Jhala et al., 2017). By designing policies that explicitly define rights such as inclusion in governance, academic freedom, and longer-term contracts for faculty in these roles, institutions are better able to meet their long-term instructional needs with faculty who have opportunities to be successful.

While promotion tracks are generally limited to full-time non-tenure-track faculty, a few institutions have designed similar promotion opportunities for adjuncts. Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is one such institution, where their part-time associate faculty can be promoted to senior associate positions that provide a slight pay increase and priority for course scheduling that provides a higher chance of continuous employment, with an evaluation process similar to the one used for full-time faculty (Fox and Powers, 2017). While opportunities for promotion among adjuncts are rare at 4-year institutions, 2-year colleges such as Valencia College and Sinclair College are increasingly establishing promotion systems for part-time faculty that are tied to credentialing, generally focused on teaching effectiveness. While the benefits offered as part of adjunct career ladders are often not nearly as robust as those often included in promotion opportunities for full-time faculty, the importance of such opportunities becomes more clear in light of the impact of the pandemic on the advancement of non-tenure-track faculty.

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