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The authors discuss important institutional changes that they view as probably permanent for reasons of cost and that may have far-reaching implications for the future of higher education.

How Does University Decision Making Shape the Faculty?

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Even a cursory reading of the higher education literature reveals a growing concern with the changing mix of tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty. The focus a few years ago was on the apparent withdrawal of tenure-track faculty from commitment to instruction, especially at the first- and second-year levels. The focus now is on the rapidly growing use of non-tenure-track faculty for instruction at that same level. Of course, the two phenomena are opposite sides of the same coin, and we are gradually coming to see what may be an important structural change in the way instruction is offered in our institutions of higher learning.

If this trend continues, it will certainly alter the character of higher education. It has already had a substantial impact on the internal atmosphere of colleges and universities. Graduate student teaching assistants and non-tenure-track instructors, responding to the lower salaries and the prospect of reduced job security that accompany non-tenure-track positions, are turning to unionization—a profoundly nontraditional element in academic circles—to protect their economic interests. Looking into the future, one must wonder if we are observing a partial replacement of the institution of tenure with a system of union contracts—with all that implies for the nature of higher education employment, the role of supervisors, and the traditional image of administrators of colleges and universities as extensions of the faculty.

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Opposition to the changing mix of faculty comes from both sides. Most obviously, it comes from the non-tenure-track instructors themselves, who complain that institutions sometimes fail to provide them with job benefits, job security, offices, computers, and professional development opportunities. Books and articles on the subject are appearing more and more frequently, citing examples of recent Ph.D.'s unable to find positions comparable to those enjoyed by their professors in graduate school, extending even to "itinerant" employees who commute from place to place, able to call no one institution home. The tone of these writings and discussions is one of alarm and often condemnation, implying that administrators and senior faculty are deliberately exploiting these individuals for reasons of economics or convenience.

Opposition also comes, however, from these same senior faculty and administrators, who are equally unhappy with the trend. They worry that many non-tenure-track instructors are hired from local rather than national searches, that these instructors are inadequately credentialed (lacking the Ph.D.), and that their lack of full-time commitment to an institution means that they devote insufficient time and attention to their students. They express further concern that the evolving "two-tiered" system of faculty membership will ultimately destroy the systems of faculty governance and collegiality that depend on a relatively horizontal faculty structure.

These concerns are important and worthy of serious attention. They strike at the very heart of higher education and describe a serious threat to its future. However, the literature to date often has more the flavor of advocacy than scholarship, and it relies far too heavily on aggregated data, especially voluntary survey data. Important differences across institutions are masked by broad surveys, and valuable insights are concealed by averages that describe higher education as a whole. In fact, the circumstances and hiring practices of two-year colleges are entirely different from those of comprehensive or small liberal arts colleges, just as these in turn are different from the hiring practices of major research universities. Even in one institution, faculty appointment behavior varies strongly across disciplines, types of academic unit, and levels of instruction. By blurring these distinctions, aggregated data conceal the causes and consequences of the changing faculty mix and make it very difficult to understand how university decision making has brought it about (Gappa and Leslie, 1993).

In most discussions of the growing role of non-tenure-track faculty, cost is presumed to be the driving factor. This belief is summarized in the rhetoric: we repeatedly hear the terms "exploitation," "contingent faculty," and "outsourcing of higher education," all of which reflect an uncomplimentary commercial "bottom-line" image of university decision making. On the one hand, the use of such value-laden terms is understandable, reflecting the strains and pressures that are being generated by changing circumstances. On the other hand, our own experience suggests that this broad attribution to an economic motive is an extreme oversimplification of a very

complex process. What we have yet to learn is whether this process is leading to permanent change in the structure of the professoriate, and if it is, whether it implies that we are entering a period of crisis that threatens the quality and integrity of our entire system of higher education. To answer this question, we need more facts and fact-based analysis. We need to understand why universities operate as they do, what problems are driving their financing and employment decisions, and what consequences flow from them.

An In-Depth Analysis

In this chapter, we describe our own attempt to collect more detailed evidence from which we can draw well-informed inferences. This effort is still at the pilot stage, and we are only able to offer tentative conclusions based on a small sample of institutions of a specific type. Our goal is to investigate the forces responsible for growth in the use of non-tenure-track faculty in higher education—especially in research universities—and the consequences of a changing mix of instructional resources for university functioning. To do this, we sought first to discover whether adequate longitudinal data are available on faculty composition in forms that permit meaningful comparisons across universities by type. Second, we sought to supplement quantitative data with insights into the objectives and motivations of university administrators obtained through detailed interviews on decision-making processes and hiring procedures. (It should be noted that ours is not the first study to include on-site visits at universities; see Baldwin and Chronister, 2001.)

During the academic year 2001–02, we selected four prestigious research universities for a feasibility study. We chose these universities carefully. We included institutions similar in both their research status and their competitiveness for faculty and students. At the same time, we sought institutions with structural characteristics that are clearly different in ways that matter to hiring processes and decisions. Accordingly, we included two public and two private universities; two institutions in large labor markets and two in areas with more limited workforce availability; two institutions that have adopted highly decentralized budgeting systems (“responsibility-centered management”) and two that have not.

After developing summary profiles of each of these institutions, we scheduled two- to three-day visits on campus. Our goals for these visits were threefold. First, we sought disaggregated institutional data on the instructional mix (tenure-track, graduate teaching assistants, non-tenure-track faculty) in arts and sciences over time. To the greatest extent possible, we sought to avoid relying solely on summary data that fail to make distinctions between disciplines and levels of instruction. It is our experience that the selection of instructors is normally quite different for general education courses taught in the first two years than for courses designed for the major

in the second two years. We sought disaggregation by discipline because we recognize that what stands as qualified instruction in one field may be quite different from what serves well in another.

We talked with knowledgeable decision makers about their hiring and budget processes and about the reasons they employ instructors off the tenure track. We explored actual and potential consequences, including unionization efforts and faculty morale. We tried to discover how the system of faculty appointments works, how various instructional needs are addressed (and why), what special problems are addressed by employing non-tenure-track faculty, and whether the numbers of non-tenure-track faculty create problems that are recognized by the university leaders themselves.

Any conclusions based on such a small, pilot effort must be regarded as suggestive and tentative, but the method of combining university or college-level data with interviews has proved to be very useful. Although we gathered institutional data on each of our visits, those data were incomplete in many respects. In each case we worked with various data managers on campus in the months following our visits to extend the time frame, clarify and refine categories, and clear up confusions in the numbers. An important offshoot of this exercise was our growing realization that universities themselves have not been assembling data in a form that would enable them to track their own use of non-tenure-track faculty. Indeed, the presumption that university administrators are consciously recruiting non-tenure-track instructors for economic reasons is difficult to defend in the face of the fact that most of them do not have the management information that would enable them to rationalize such policies! It is this kind of insight that convinced us that existing aggregate national data sets are of very limited utility for understanding how and why changes in the faculty workforce occur.

Lessons Learned to Date

The following paragraphs review what we have learned so far.

Data Challenges. Everyone with whom we spoke—from provosts to budget administrators—welcomed the opportunity to cooperate with our study. They were forthright in offering access to their data, although it was clear that careful data management systems are relatively new on many campuses. In some cases, they are the product of one budget officer's efforts rather than any broader institutional initiative. This means not only that institutions differ in the lengths of their historical records but also that different categories of instructor are often not effectively differentiated. For example, not all institutions have data systems that distinguish graduate student teaching assistants from part-time instructors (a distinction that is often blurred anyway).

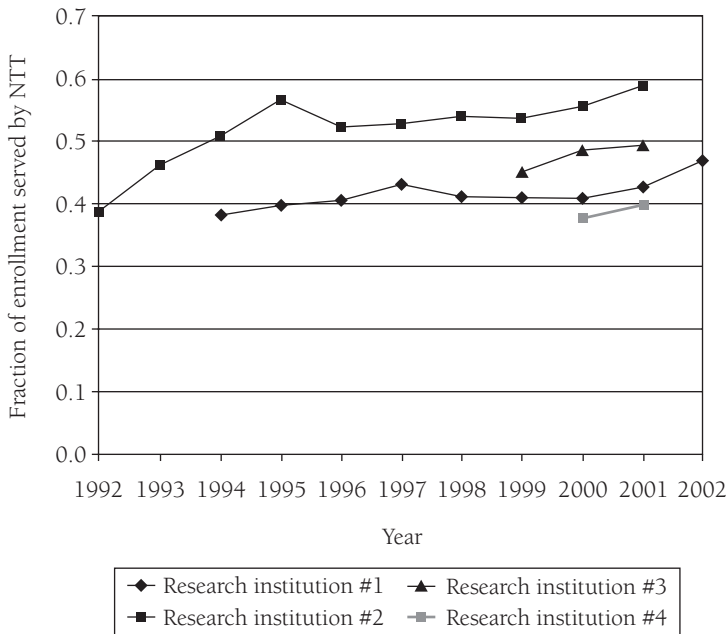
This data deficiency is often compounded by the fact that busy academic administrators tend to restrict the focus of their attention to high-profile faculty. Although most administrators know how many tenure-track

faculty are employed at their institution (and how many FTE they represent), they are much less aware of the numbers of non-tenure-track instructors. The answer to the question “How many tenure-track faculty do you have?” is typically precise (for example, “324”), but the answer to the question “How many non-tenure-track faculty do you have?” is often vague (for example, “I think it is about 20 percent”). Worse, different officers of the same institution often come up with different percentage estimates.

Numbers and Roles of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty. In spite of the differences among our institutions, we heard very similar stories about the appointment of non-tenure-track faculty. First, they teach the same courses everywhere—English composition, beginning languages, laboratory sections in the sciences, and calculus. They are heavily concentrated in courses taught for students in the first two years—the “lower division.”

The trends in non-tenure-track faculty teaching are clearly upward. For example, we considered the total enrollment numbers in lower-division courses taught by tenure-track (TT) and non-tenure-track faculty (NTT) together. Figure 5.1 describes the proportion of these enrollments served by non-tenure-track faculty at our four sample institutions. These institutions all display the same general patterns: a relatively heavy dependence on non-tenure-track instruction at the lower-division level, and a pattern of growth in that dependence. The figure confirms what we have

Figure 5.1. Lower-Division Non-Tenure-Track Faculty as a Fraction of Total Faculty Enrollment



been hearing from all sides: the reliance on non-tenure-track instruction is growing, even at the nation's most prestigious universities. The fact that the numbers are so similar for four quite different universities lends support to the notion that we are observing a national phenomenon rather than the local behavior of only a few institutions. Answers to our questions about *motives and consequences*—which courses non-tenure-track faculty teach; how their appointments are defined; what drives their appointments and reappointments; and how their presence on the teaching faculty affects university functioning—could only come from our interviews with university administrators and not from any institutional data archive.

We were interested to note that the amount of instruction by graduate student teaching assistants has remained relatively flat. There were a few exceptions in cases when recognition of reduced job opportunities for new Ph.D.'s led to deliberate administrative decisions to reduce graduate student populations (especially in the humanities). We considered another force that might reduce the reliance on graduate students in favor of non-tenure-track instructors. At several institutions, the cost of graduate student teaching has grown substantially over time and has passed, sometimes by a large margin, the cost of non-tenure-track lecturers and postdoctoral fellows. At this point, we do not have sufficient data to support a conclusion that this has also led to substitution.

Much of the discussion of the non-tenure-track issue has centered on the humanities, and indeed, the largest number of lecturer and part-time appointments is found in language departments and in English composition. Nevertheless, it would be an error to believe that the phenomenon is limited to humanities disciplines. Non-tenure-track instruction is common in mathematics, and the use of non-tenure-track instruction has been growing throughout the social and natural sciences as well as the humanities.

Non-tenure-track instruction is expanding even into junior-senior courses, but at a much smaller rate. Non-tenure-track faculty members also occasionally move into noninstructional faculty roles, such as student advising and college administration.

Labor market differences clearly influence the parameters that govern non-tenure-track appointments. Rural markets in which there are few alternatives to university teaching appointments are characterized by low turnover and correspondingly high appointment durations. In urban areas where alternative employment opportunities are plentiful, the turnover rates are higher, and urban-based universities sometimes establish formal policies that limit the possible duration of one individual's appointment.

Non-Economic Reasons for Non-Tenure-Track Appointments. Issues of cost are always present, even if they only rest in the background of a conversation. Nevertheless, concerns for quality drive many of the decisions to appoint non-tenure-track instructors. Some stem from a concern for strengthening graduate education and preparation for the job market. Others derive from concern for teaching effectiveness, and still others come from

the need for flexibility in adapting to changing student interests and fluctuating opportunities for faculty support off campus. The list of objectives and motives that we encountered is impressively long. Many elements of the list are related to efforts to improve programs and have little or nothing to do with cost cutting. Not every lecturer is hired for reasons of cost; in practice, many are initially hired for the sake of their special contributions to their university communities. Here are a few examples:

Career Development for New Ph.D.'s. The challenges in the academic job market have made both universities and their graduate students more conscious of the need for adequate preparation in pedagogy. In many universities, graduate students are now required to serve as teaching assistants, sometimes in conjunction with courses in pedagogy. The “Preparing Future Faculty” programs on a number of campuses incorporate a semester of supervised teaching. Other institutions have created systems of “teaching postdocs” as a way of preparing new Ph.D.’s for teaching careers. Many of these individuals will appear in aggregate data as non-tenure-track faculty members, even though the purpose of the activity is to enhance tenure-track career opportunities, not diminish them.

Flexibility. Historically, adjunct or part-time faculty positions have been used to gain flexibility in what would otherwise be a very rigid institution. When a faculty member goes on research leave or takes a visiting position elsewhere, one would not hire a permanent replacement because the individual is expected to return, and so the institution turns to a temporary replacement. This relatively routine procedure has greatly expanded in recent years as universities strive to meet the needs of their students with their available faculty:

- Enrollments in specialized classes or in major disciplines fluctuate widely from year to year. The reasons are not surprising: enrollments in economics classes fluctuate with the current state of the economy, enrollments in science disciplines are influenced by highly publicized scientific advances, enrollments in political science have soared in the period after the World Trade Center disaster. University administrators often assume that these enrollment booms are temporary, and they turn to temporary instructors to accommodate the bulge. This generates a demand for non-tenure-track instructors.
- Since the end of mandatory retirement, faculty members increasingly stay on after age seventy. Universities develop packages designed to encourage retirement, and an important ingredient in these is the opportunity to continue to teach one or two classes each year. These individuals, however, are no longer tenured, and this results in instruction by non-tenure-track instructors.
- In spite of the highly publicized weakness of the academic job market, some individuals are the objects of intense recruitment competition at multiple institutions. Placing partners can be an important ingredient in

recruitment packages, often resulting in the offer of an academic teaching position off the tenure track to a partner.

- The importance of research reputation (especially in a Research I institution) has generated a climate in which the university is concerned with the retention and support of research scientists. When the research funding of such an individual suffers a (temporary) lapse, the response is often the offer of a temporary (non-tenure-track) teaching position.

Instructional Quality and Conditions of Employment. In addition to these administrative reasons for hiring people in non-tenure-track positions, many non-tenure-track faculty members are hired for the purpose of improving undergraduate teaching. The prominence given to research visibility has led many tenured and tenure-track faculty to specialize—not only devoting more energy to research activity but also focusing teaching effort more and more heavily on advanced undergraduate and graduate courses. Over time, this has left lower-division students with less access to faculty. In some cases, the introductory courses in the lower division (composition, beginning language, beginning calculus, and so on) do not appeal to the professional interests of any of the tenure-track faculty. Indeed, one often hears the claim that courses that should have been provided in high school have been poorly taught or neglected altogether, forcing the university into a remedial role that is unsuitable for tenured faculty.

Whatever one's views about the appropriateness of this state of affairs, universities have responded by hiring teaching specialists, individuals who are not necessarily active in research but who are qualified to teach in particular areas of need. Many of these individuals are extremely dedicated and highly competent, and are deeply appreciated by their employers. They are often retained and reappointed over extended periods of time. It is not unusual to find individuals who have committed entire careers to instruction in the same department or university and who retire with non-tenure-track instructional titles. Over the past two decades a number of universities have created special titles for these faculty members, such as "Senior Lecturer," "Specialist in Instruction," or "College Lecturer." These titles are intended to carry prestige and they generally also carry longer terms of appointment as well as higher salaries and access to various developmental opportunities. Although these individuals do not have tenure, they are far from transient employees.

Hard evidence in support of competing claims for teaching effectiveness is scanty. Many universities have instituted systems of course evaluation that give opportunities for student feedback to an instructor (or an instructor's supervisor). Whether these data provide evidence for effective student learning remains a matter of debate, but so far these reports are the only concrete factual bases available for describing how students respond to their classes.

Quality of Teaching and Student Learning. According to the course evaluation data available to us, non-tenure-track faculty members are very

effective. Evaluations for these individuals are consistently higher than for tenure-track faculty members and higher still when compared with graduate student teaching assistants. This is especially true for the various categories of teaching specialist—perhaps not surprising because these instructors' appointments and salaries are specifically linked to teaching performance.

Student learning is the driving force behind the employment of some part-time instructors as well. Many programs bring in practitioners from nonuniversity settings to serve as adjunct (part-time) instructors because they offer experience and skills that regular tenured faculty do not have. This is most obvious in the arts— theater, film, and music are natural arenas for such appointments—but it occurs as well in applied science areas of actuarial mathematics, statistics, business, and engineering. Using adjuncts depends heavily on geographic happenstance. Proximity to cultural centers makes the use of adjunct faculty in the arts practical, as does proximity to technical centers in providing adjunct faculty in the sciences and engineering.

The Importance of Cost. Whatever the motive for appointing non-tenure-track faculty, an important economic reality remains. Non-tenure-track instructors are hired for their teaching contributions while tenured faculty are expected to carry multidimensioned responsibilities, including research and administration. In recognition of the fact that these multiple roles compete for faculty time, tenure-track faculty have lower teaching loads than non-tenure-track faculty. Consequently, measured in terms of credit hours alone, the non-tenure-track instructors are significantly less expensive providers of teaching effort. Prorated across credit hours, non-tenure-track instructors cost on average about half as much per credit hour as their tenure-track colleagues. Once a cohort of non-tenure-track faculty is in place, and once the university budget has absorbed the lower teaching cost (and used the savings for salary increases, new hiring, maintenance, new facilities, or whatever), it becomes almost impossible to retreat. Particularly at public institutions that face annual reductions (or very small increases) in state funding, financial resources are not available to undo decisions made in the past, and the non-tenure-track faculty lines become permanent.

It is also clear from our pilot work that there is frequently a divergence between the objectives of upper administrators and those who make local hiring decisions. Whereas the appointment of tenure-track faculty is always closely monitored by university administrations, non-tenure-track appointments are often governed by decentralized decision making that is almost invisible at the university level. This is particularly the case when universities turn to decentralized funding models—such as Responsibility-Centered Management. These funding models heighten the importance of the cost motive in a decontrolled environment, leading to collective decisions that may be wholly inconsistent with overall university priorities. Some university administrators are only vaguely aware of the extent to which non-tenure-track

appointments have expanded in this environment. These two factors—growing numbers and lack of awareness—create a context in which the nature of the professoriate can change in ways directly contradictory to the educational preferences of university leaders.

Conclusions

Even in this preliminary study, our data are consistent with the available survey data that reveal a continuing and significant increase in the use of non-tenure-track faculty in higher education. Our interviews reveal that the reason for the use of these instructors in Research I institutions is considerably more complex than just cost saving, and we have offered some perspective on the various reasons for hiring them.

It is clear that the conditions of employment have improved for certain non-tenure-track faculty—those in the teaching specialist category. It is not clear that the conditions for others have changed much over the last decade. Given our limited data set, we cannot make explicit comparisons between the non-tenure-track faculty in universities of the type we studied and those in universities not in the Research I classification. Our impression is that conditions are substantially better in Research I universities than they are elsewhere. We found no evidence in our sample of lecturers working without benefits, without office space (shared) or necessary computers, or of itinerant part-time faculty unavailable to students outside of regular class hours. At this point quantitative comparisons with universities outside the Research I category must be reserved for another study.

To date, we have found no systematic support on our pilot campuses for concerns about the quality of classroom instruction offered by non-tenure-track faculty. To the contrary, people in these roles are among our most talented and dedicated undergraduate teachers and they bring special skills and experiences to our students.

Our interviews reveal important structural changes in our pilot institutions, changes that, for financial reasons, are probably permanent and that may have far-reaching implications for the future of higher education. The changing role of non-tenure-track instructors will inevitably be reflected in a changing role for tenured faculty as well—and these two changes together have important long-run implications for university governance and administration, for departmental management, for collective bargaining, and probably for tenure itself.

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