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Despite Heavy Reliance on Part-Time Faculty Members, Colleges and Universities Fail to Support Them Adequately

New report documents low pay, little opportunity for advancement

As of 2009, 75.5% of instructional staff members were employed in contingent positions either as part-time or adjunct faculty members, full-time non-tenure-track faculty members, or graduate student teaching assistants. Despite the majority status of the contingent academic workforce, systematic data on their working conditions is minimal, especially since the discontinuation in 2003 of the United States Department of Education's National Study of Postsecondary Faculty.

In an effort to address this lack of data, the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW) conducted a large survey of contingent faculty members and instructors in fall 2010. The survey received close to 30,000 responses, with just over 20,000 coming from individuals who identified themselves as working in a contingent position in at least one institution of higher education in that term.

In a report released on 20 June 2012, CAW provides initial findings from the survey, focusing specifically on part-time faculty members, the largest group of survey respondents, and reporting on demographics, working conditions, and course-level data.

Key Findings

Several key indicators stand out that show how heavily colleges and universities are relying on part-time faculty members without supporting them adequately.

- The median pay per course, standardized to a three-credit course, was \$2,700 in fall 2010 and ranged in the aggregate from a low of \$2,235 at two-year colleges to a high of \$3,400 at four-year doctoral or research universities. While compensation levels varied by type of institution, part-time faculty respondents report low compensation rates per course across all institutional categories.
- Part-time faculty respondents saw little, if any, wage premium based on their credentials. Their compensation lags behind professionals in other fields with similar credentials, and they experienced little in the way of a career ladder (such as higher wages after several years of work).
- Professional support for part-time faculty members' work outside the classroom and inclusion in academic decision making was minimal.
- Part-time teaching is not necessarily temporary employment, and those teaching part-time do not necessarily prefer a part-time to a full-time position. Over 80% of respondents reported teaching part-time for more than three years, and over half for more than six years. Furthermore, over three-quarters of respondents said they have sought, are now seeking, or will be seeking a full-time tenure-track position, and nearly three-quarters said they would definitely or probably accept a full-time tenure-track position at the institution at which they were currently teaching if such a position were offered.
- Course loads varied significantly among respondents. Slightly more than half taught one course or two courses during the fall 2010 term, while slightly fewer than half taught three or more courses.

Methodology

The survey was open to any faculty member or instructor who wished to complete a questionnaire; it is therefore not a strictly representative sample of faculty members working in contingent positions. Nevertheless, the response provides the basis for a detailed portrait of the work patterns, remuneration, and employment conditions for what is now the largest and what has long been the fastest-growing part of the academic workforce. Faculty members in part-time positions were the largest group of respondents to the CAW survey, providing 10,331 of the 19,850 valid responses by contingent faculty members and instructors who were teaching at least one course in fall 2010. In addition to gathering information about their academic background and other personal characteristics, the survey asked part-time faculty respondents to provide data for each course they taught—a total of 19,615 courses.

The coalition will also be making the data set available to qualified academic researchers for further analysis. To read the full report, please visit www.academicworkforce.org.

The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW) is a group of higher education associations, disciplinary associations, and faculty organizations committed to working on the issues associated with deteriorating faculty working conditions and their effect on the success of college and university students in the United States. CAW works to collect, analyze, and disseminate information on the use and treatment of faculty members serving full- and part-time off the tenure track and to promote conditions by which all faculty members can strengthen their teaching and scholarship, better serve their students, and advance their professional careers. To learn more about CAW and to see a full list of members, please visit www.academicworkforce.org.