

Mission critical: Creating and supporting faculty workforce models to meet changing needs

By expanding its traditional role, HR can provide tools, concepts and approaches for enhancing academic workforce models.

The evolution of the faculty workforce model has advanced in an ad hoc fashion, with too little focus on what best serves the multiple missions of colleges and universities. To meet the myriad challenges they face, higher education institutions need to consider new faculty workforce models, ones that help attract and retain the talent needed in a high-performance culture.

The new status quo

Today roughly 30% of faculty in U.S. colleges and universities are tenured or tenure track. The remaining 70% are nontenure track. Of the latter group, 20% are full time and 50% part time. Thus, half of all current U.S. faculty are part-time nontenure track (Yakoboski, 2015). In 1969, by comparison, 78% of faculty were tenured or tenure track, so the tenure to nontenure ratio has nearly reversed over the past 45 years (Kezar, 2013).

Moreover, 79% today's adjuncts work for one college or university – which belies the stereotype of the part-time “freeway flyer” who pieces together a full-time workload by teaching at multiple institutions. Just 17% of adjuncts work for two institutions, and 4% work at three or more (*Career Experience of Academics in Adjunct Faculty Positions*, Yakoboski, 2015). Two thirds of adjuncts are employed by public institutions; about two-thirds are in the liberal arts, including one-third in the humanities (*Career Experience of Academics in Adjunct Faculty Positions*, Yakoboski, 2015). In terms of race and ethnicity, faculty at two- and four-year colleges and universities are 79% white, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% black, 4% Hispanic, and less than 1% Native American (U.S. Department of Education. *The National Study of Postsecondary Faculty -2004*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.)

Faculty at U.S. colleges and universities today generally fall into one of these categories:

- *Tenured faculty* have been awarded lifetime employment barring significant failure to fulfill their responsibilities, which most often include teaching, research, and service to their institution. *Tenure-track faculty* have the possibility of attaining tenure should their performance warrant that status.
- *Full-time nontenure-track faculty* teach full time and may have service-related responsibilities, but are rarely expected to conduct research and publish. They are commonly called *contingent faculty*, as their contracts typically are renewable contingent upon performance. Full-time nontenure-track faculty generally are hired on an annual basis, but some have multiyear contracts, often for three to five years.
- *Part-time nontenure-track faculty*, also known as *adjuncts*, typically focus on teaching remedial, introductory, and lower-level courses. They are usually hired via semester-to-semester or year-to-year contracts. Adjuncts are a subset of contingent faculty.
- *Academics in adjunct faculty positions* are employed part time on the nontenure track.
- *Executives in residence* and *professors of practice* are part-time nontenure-track faculty with careers outside academe, and they typically teach in those fields.

The rise of the contingent workforce

The movement away from tenured faculty and toward the increased use of contingent faculty is the result of numerous market and societal forces, including these:

- *Massification* and *changing institutional goals* – Growth in higher education enrollment since World War II and, more recently, increased diversification of the student body have exceeded the capacity of the traditional faculty, leading to more hiring. In the last 40 years, much of the enrollment growth has been at institutions focused on teaching (as opposed to research) and job preparation. These shifting institutional goals are perhaps the most significant factor driving a new faculty workforce model – one leaning toward adjunct faculty who teach part time and, originally, who

brought practical knowledge and expertise from their fields into the classroom. The model has since extended to include academic adjuncts (as opposed to “professors of practice”).

- *Market fluctuations* – Fluctuations in overall enrollment and within specific fields have led campus administrators to question making the long-term hiring commitments the tenure track entails. Some scholars, however, question the impact of market fluctuations, noting that enrollment has in fact increased over the last 60 years in all periods except the late 1970s and early 1980s. Moreover, English, math, foreign languages and other fields have sustained consistently high enrollments due to general education requirements.
- *Decreasing funding and economic factors* – Reduced government support starting in the late 1980s has led institutions to consider different types of faculty engagements to help manage costs. Yet, data from the Delta Cost Project suggest expenditures on the academic mission and instruction have mostly remained flat or declined slightly over the last 30 years, while expenses in other areas have increased, sometimes dramatically. Thus, it is not clear whether hiring NTTF actually results in cost savings or if rather costs are merely being shifted.
- *Corporatization* – Higher education has become more heavily influenced by corporate and market values over the last 30 years. Boards of trustees, often filled with corporate leaders, have encouraged new employment arrangements similar to those common in the for-profit sector. The shift in faculty hiring practices and composition of faculty thus reflect, perhaps, the influence of different value systems emerging among boards and other higher ed leaders.
- *Technology and competition from for-profits* – New technology has enabled new learning platforms and educational delivery methods that upend traditional faculty roles, leading to calls to restructure the academic workforce. Competition from for-profits, enabled by new technology, also is pushing higher ed leaders to rethink their business model, including considering the for-profit sector’s unbundled faculty roles and contingent workforce (*Changing Faculty Workforce Models*, Kezar, 2013).

An expanded role for HR

The immediacy of the faculty talent challenge is a call to action for governing boards and presidents to rethink HR’s role in enhancing institutional capacity. With HR at the decision-

making table, institutions gain the benefit of talent strategists who can provide tools, concepts and new approaches for creating successful workforce strategies. HR needs to be empowered with the resources and training required to fulfill this expanded role.

For its part, HR must prepare for its enhanced role as strategic adviser on faculty workforce issues by gaining the required expertise and competencies. In addition, close collaboration with academic affairs will be essential to realize a strategic HR operation in the academy.

TIAA Institute: Building and sharing knowledge

The TIAA Institute’s work is designed to help higher education leaders create and execute strategies to proactively shape their workforce models. We are a thought leadership and knowledge-building organization that produces original research and insights on financial security and organizational effectiveness for the education, nonprofit and public sectors. To carry out our mission, we conduct and sponsor in-depth academic research ...support analyses and white papers produced by subject matter experts...organize convenings of scholars, higher education leaders, and policymakers... collaborate with premier associations and think tanks...and implement a robust communications strategy to disseminate our work.

Resources from the TIAA Institute

The TIAA Institute is producing a robust body of knowledge regarding faculty workforce trends and issues. Below are some of the materials we have developed that can help HR practitioners formulate well-informed recommendations for creating and supporting a faculty workforce that best advances the objectives of their institutions. These materials can all be found on the TIAA Institute web site (www.tiaainstitute.org) . They also are shared in presentations delivered at higher education leadership meetings and at convenings hosted by the TIAA Institute. The Institute will continue to build on this body of work, recognizing the significance of faculty workforce trends and their implications for student outcomes, institutional competitiveness and success, and the well-being of the academy.

Career Experience of Academics in Adjunct Faculty Positions, by Paul Yakoboski

Strategic Utilization of Adjuncts and Other Contingent Faculty, by Paul Jakoboski and Jean Foster

Exploring Emerging New Faculty Workforce Models, by Paul Jakoboski

Taking the Measure of Faculty Diversity, by Valerie Conley, Martin Finkelstein, and Jack Schuster

Rethinking Faculty Models/Roles: An Emerging Consensus about Future Directions for the Professoriate, by Adrianna Kezar, Elizabeth Holcombe, and Daniel Maxey

Changing Faculty Workforce Models, by Adrianna Kezar

Flexible Workplace Agreements: Enabling Higher Education's Strategic Advantage, by KerryAnn O'Meara

Designing and Implementing Strategies for the Development of a Winning Faculty Workforce, by Edna Chun and Alvin Evans

Reluctant Retirees and Managing Change in Higher Education, by Teresa Hassara, Herman Berliner, and Hugh Penney

Understanding the Faculty Retirement (Non)Decision, by Paul Jakoboski

Data Summary—2014 Faculty Career and Retirement Survey: Retirement Planning and Confidence Among Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty, by Paul Jakoboski

The Shifting Academic Workforce: Where Are the Contingent Faculty? by Steven Hurlburt and Michael McGarrah (forthcoming)

Cost Savings or Cost Shifting: The Relationship between Part-Time Contingent Faculty and Institutional Spending, by Steven Hurlburt and Michael McGarrah (forthcoming)