

The Implications Contingent Faculty have on Faculty and Students at Community Colleges

The article ‘The Fear and Frustration of Faculty at For-Profit Colleges’ detailed a wide array of problems and issues related to college teaching and student learning. Select a specific college teaching or student learning problem or issue identified in this article, select an institutional type, and use the relevant previous literature as guides to discussing some implications of this problem or issue either for faculty or students in this institutional type. Why is this educational problem or issue important to address? What are some possible outcomes of this problem or issue?

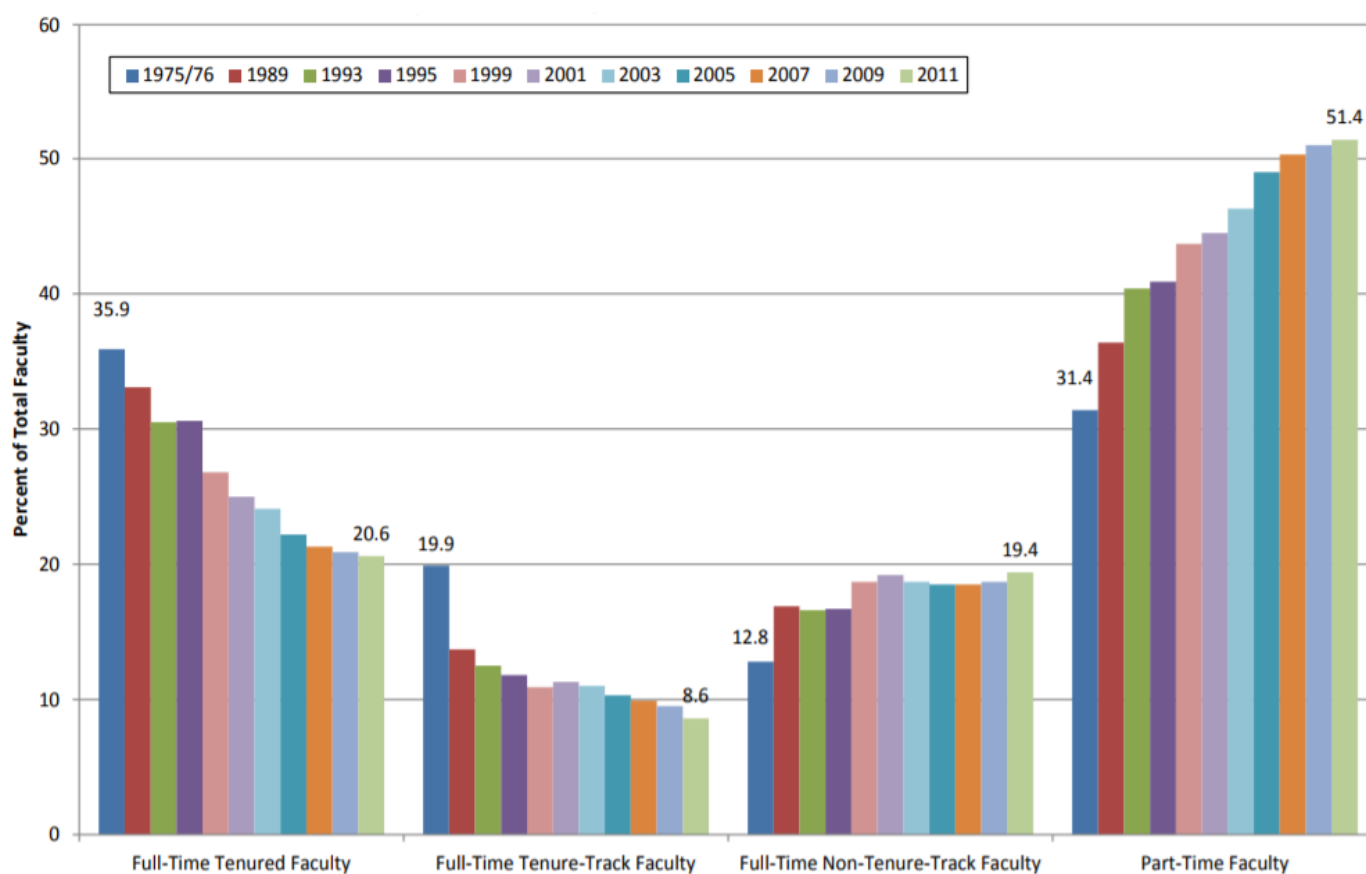
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Over the last decades, one of the most significant changes in the delivery of postsecondary education involved the increase in the use of contingent faculty- those employed outside of the tenure track including adjuncts and part-time faculty (Jacoby, 2006). Jacoby published the article about the increase in the use of contingent faculty 11 years ago, but even today, institutions continue to increase the number of contingent faculty. Figure 1 was adapted by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (2014) from the US Department of Education, IPEDS Fall Staff Survey and demonstrates the trends in faculty employment status, 1976 and 1976 to 2011 (Curtis, 2014).

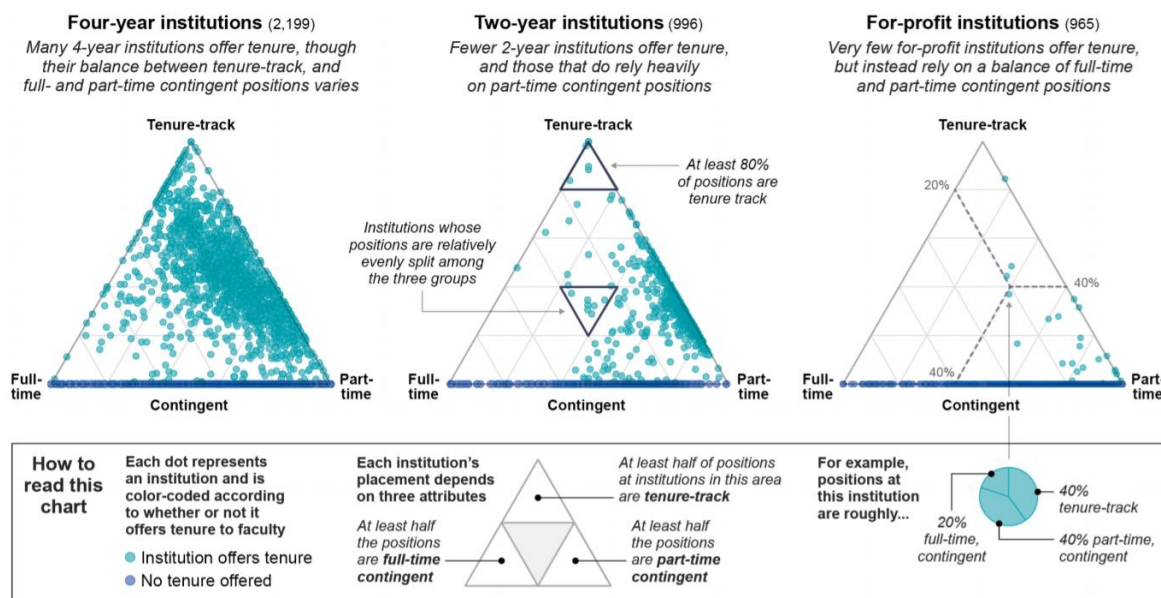
*Figure 1. Trends in Faculty Employment Status, 1975 and 1976 to 2011*



*Source: Adapted by AAUP from the: US Department of Education, IPEDS Fall Staff Survey. Tabulation by John W. Curtis, American Association of University Professors, Washington, DC.*

The full-time tenured faculty decreases each year as the as the part-time faculty steadily increases. The 2015 Department of Education data reported that contingent faculty made up about 70 percent of postsecondary instructional positions nationwide, though the percentage varied by type of institution (GAO, 2017). One of those institutional types is community colleges which are known for their accessibility, affordability, and flexibility. They have expanded tremendously throughout the U.S. and have become a primary portal to higher education for first-generation, low-income, minority, non-traditional, minorities, and underrepresented students (Bastedo 2016, p. 463). Currently, 39 percent of undergraduates attend public two-year colleges (AACC, 2017) and at 83.5 percent, they are the institutional type with the largest share of contingent faculty (GAO, 2017, p. 10). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the community colleges' reliance on contingent faculty as compared to 4-year

*Figure 2. Distribution of Institutions Based on Their Balance of Instructional Position Types Nationwide, 2015*



*Note: GAO analysis data from the integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).*

Institutions and for-profit institutions and also that community colleges have far fewer tenure-track and full-time faculty. The community college administrators interviewed in the GAO (2017) study cited financial, institutional, faculty needs, and students as factors that may affect their decision about faculty makeup. The rationale for increasing the contingent faculty makes sense from their administrative point-of-view but, their use doesn't come without repercussions (Jaeger, 2008). Jacoby (2006) noted that the increasing proportions of contingent faculty have a significant and negative impact on community colleges. In this essay, I will analyze the implications of contingent positions on faculty and students. Additionally, I will explain why having contingent faculty is an important educational problem to address. Last, I will provide some possible outcomes of having contingent faculty.

### **Implications for Faculty**

Contingent faculty play a large role in postsecondary education, but they do not have the same job protections as full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty. They “earn less, are less likely to have work-provided benefits, and are more likely to experience job instability.” (GAO, 2017). For this essay, I will only discuss the main implication for contingent faculty to demonstrate how it directly affects the students. The implication is that the increased use of contingent faculty within community colleges creates hostile job conditions and governance issues. Contingent faculty are labeled as the “invisible faculty” and are “largely unrecognized, under-rewarded and an invisible part of the academy” (Brewster, 2000, sec. 1, par. 10 as cited in Christensen, 2008). Many contingent faculty members have expressed that they “feel disconnected and not a part of any concepts of ‘shared governance,’ including being unable to serve on college committees or have input into other college initiatives” (Heuerman et al., 2013, p. 2-3). In the GAO study, contingent faculty during some of the discussion groups expressed that they were reluctant to

voice their views. Furthermore, some contingent faculty members were unwilling to participate in institutional governance even when invited to do so because they feared that anything they said could jeopardize their future contracts at the institution. As a result, they are unforthcoming and avoid voting on major issues (Adamowicz, 2007).

In addition to the lack of inclusion and freedom of speech, they receive little support from the institution, administrators, and full-time-tenured- track faculty. The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012) found that professional support outside the classroom and inclusion on academic decision making was minimal. Street, Merves, and Rhoades (2012) found that the majority of new contingent faculty members didn't even receive the appropriate orientation to the institution or discipline. I believe that it is crucial for the contingent faculty to be able to speak up and be part of the governance because they are the ones working with the majority of the students and therefore know what the students need. Without the contingent faculty's input, poor decisions are likely to be made for the institution. In other words, "Colleges need to do a better job of working with part-time faculty because engaging all faculty is a vital step toward meeting college completion goals" (Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Last, the worst part is that "Faculty working conditions are student learning conditions" (New Faculty Majority). What this means is that students will only learn and develop as much as the faculty allows them to. If a contingent faculty doesn't provide the students the needed knowledge and resources, then the students will not be able to have a holistic development.

### **Implications for Students**

Rogers (2015) explained that "the tacit assumption is that full-time faculty are more engaged with their home institution, and this engagement translates into the engagement of the students taught," giving the suggestion then the more contingent faculty members are hired, the

less engaged the students will be. As a result, the community colleges' retention, transfer and graduation rates will significantly be negatively impacted.

### **Engagement with students**

The respondents in the survey by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012), clearly demonstrated how little professional commitment and support part-time faculty members receive from their institutions especially when it costs money. As previously explained, the lack of support and the lack of contingent faculty's connection with the community college creates a hostile and limiting environment that significantly affect the contingent faculty, but they are not the only ones being affected. Students are also directly affected, for example, contingent faculty members consistently express the need for having office space to work with students and provide the extra assistance they need (Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Some of the contingent faculty members explained, "Some of them [students] do need a little push or a little extra help" but the lack of space makes it difficult to assist the student outside the classroom. Students expect the contingent faculty members to provide more than just a lecture or information in the class, "Some of them are serious and really want some help." However, it is difficult for the contingent faculty members to provide assistance when they lack the necessary resources such as the office space. Contingent faculty members are forced to be less available to the students which robs the students from their right to learn (Community College Student Engagement, 2014). From my experience, it was crucial to my success that professors meet with me outside the classroom for assistance with material I was not understanding. Therefore, having instructors that are unable to meet with the students outside the classroom as needed creates a barrier for students to be successful.

## **Retention rates**

There is already a considerable amount of research addressing student retention. The studies portray student retention as “a complex issue that involves the interaction of different variables including gender, race, ethnicity, and age as well as complex psychological variables such as intention and commitment” (Jaeger et al., 2008, p. 266). However, there is little research about the effects of the employment status of faculty on the retention rates of students. Most of these studies focused on 4-year institutions such as the one by Schibic and Harrington (2004) which demonstrated that the utilization of contingent faculty does impact students’ retention. A study conducted by Jaeger explored the effects of exposing students to contingent faculty at community colleges. The results in Jaeger’s (2008) study demonstrated that as the contingent faculty instruction increased, the retention rates of students decreased. Shuster (2003) indicated possible reasons why the contingent faculty tended to decrease the student retention. Those reasons, which are mentioned throughout this paper, are that contingent faculty are less accessible to students, bring less scholarly authority, and are less integrated into the institution (Schuster, 2003).

## **Transfer Rates**

Eagan and Jaeger (2009) examined how the exposure to part-time faculty at community colleges affects students’ likelihood of transferring to a four-year college or university. The study sought to address the following research question, “controlling for background characteristics, does exposure to part-time faculty in community colleges negatively relate to students’ likelihood of transferring to a four-year college or university?” To attempt to answer the question, Eagan and Jaeger (2009) drew from social and human capital frameworks as well as hierarchical generalized linear modeling. The results of this study suggested that “students are to be significantly less likely to transfer as their exposure to part-time faculty increases” (Eagan

& Jaeger, 2009). These results coincide with prior research studies on the relationship between exposure to part-time faculty and persistence among students at four-year institutions which include Harrington and Schibik 2004; Eagan and Jaeger 2008; Jaeger and Hinz 2008; Ronco and Cahill 2004 (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009).

### Graduation/Completion rates

Last, there is also research that analyzes the rates of community colleges completion rates as the number of contingent faculty members rises. A study by Tincher-Ladner and King (2014)

*Table 1. Determinants of Graduation Rates at All Public Community Colleges for 2001: Regression Results*

Independent Variables	Graduation Rate (IPEDS FTFY Graduation Rate)				Net Graduation Rate (NCES FTFY Graduation less Transfers)		
	1		2		1		2
	R <sup>2</sup> = .207 R <sup>2</sup> = .193 F=14.80***		R <sup>2</sup> = .375 R <sup>2</sup> = .352 F=15.73***		R <sup>2</sup> = .226 R <sup>2</sup> = .212 F=16.54***		
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B
(Constant)	0.435	0.00	0.482	0.00	0.459	0.00	0.502
Part-time Faculty Ratio	-0.158	0.00	-0.141	0.00	-0.176	0.00	-0.144
Faculty Student Ratio	1.333	0.00	1.634	0.00	1.217	0.00	1.516
Tuition	-2.99E-05	0.00	-1.65E-05	0.069	-3.14E-05	0.00	-1.41E-05
Financial Aid %	6.31E-04	0.03	5.32E-04	0.045	9.62E-04	0.004	8.61E-04
African American %	-1.70E-03	0.00	-1.68E-03	0.00	-2.22E-03	0.00	-2.12E-03
Native American %	-2.73E-03	0.00	-2.70E-03	0.00	-3.20E-03	0.00	-3.07E-03
AsianAmerican Percent	-1.05E-03	0.096	-1.50E-03	0.012	-8.17E-04	0.26	-1.46E-03
Hispanic Percent	-8.78E-04	0.024	-8.12E-04	0.043	-5.67E-04	0.201	-5.55E-04
Urban	-1.10E-03	0.922	-1.22E-02	0.241	-3.38E-04	0.979	-1.26E-02
Part Time Students	-0.12	0.002	-0.184	0.00	-0.124	0.005	-0.195
Percent Degree Seeking Students	-5.99E-02	0.013	-3.99E-02	0.101	-6.26E-02	0.023	-3.83E-02
Percent Liberal Arts Degrees	-1.59E-02	0.459	-9.71E-02	0.00	2.64E-02	0.281	-5.70E-02
College Size	-5.27E-03	0.299	-1.13E-02	0.015	-9.31E-03	0.109	-1.70E-02

Source: Daniel Jacoby, a. (2006). *Effects of Part-Time Faculty Employment on Community College Graduation Rates. The Journal of Higher Education, (6), 1081.*



revealed that graduation rates were found to correlate with ratios of full-time faculty, institution size, instructional spending, and ratios of full-time students (Tincher-Ladner, & King, 2014).

Jacoby (2006) conducted one of the most popular studies. He used IPEDS data from 1,209 community colleges to examine how contingent faculty employment in community colleges impacted student graduation rates in the 2001 academic year. He concluded that community college graduation rates decreased as the proportion of part-time faculty employed at institutions increased (Jacoby, 2006). Jacoby created a complex formula to precisely analyze the IPEDS data and noted that the main results from the study were that the increases in the ratio of contingent faculty at the community colleges had a very significant and negative impact on the graduation rates (always at levels  $p > 0.001$ ) which can be seen in table 1 (Jacoby 2006).

### **Implications for the Results on Retention, Transfer and Graduation Rates**

Research studies analyzing the impact of contingent faculty on the retention, transfer and graduation rates of students at community colleges are scarce. Bailey and Alfonso (2005) pointed out that data and research studies relating to this topic are outdated and lack good data that can allow effective analysis of the effects. For example, Doctoral dissertations such as “Correlational Analysis Of Course Retention And Faculty Status In A Community College Setting” published in 2013 and “The Relationship Between Adjunct Faculty Staffing and College Student Retention and Graduation” published in 2015 contradicted earlier research studies mentioned in the “Implication for Students” section of this paper (Lesko, 2017). I believe there will be no accurate results about the implications contingent faculty positions have on faculty and students until more updated data is used. However, I do think that contingent faculty members play a significant role in both academic and social development of the students.

### **Why Is This Educational Problem Important To Address**

In 2009, now former President Barack Obama called college an "economic imperative that every family in America has to be able to afford" and set a goal that by 2020, "America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013). His new initiative established 2020 as the goal for reaching 60 percent degree attainment for the country. Moreover, the Lumina Foundation also established a goal that by 2025, "a system exists that is easy to navigate and has helped 60 percent of Americans earn credentials that prepare them [students] for informed citizenship and success in a global economy" (Lumina Foundation, 2017). The Lumina Foundation's report further explained that "the nation faces an urgent and growing need for talent. To meet that need, many more people must earn college degrees, workforce certificates, industry certifications and other high-quality credentials" (Lumina Foundation, 2017). Therefore, Community colleges are vital to reaching the goals set by Former President Obama and the Lumina Foundation.

A major mission of community colleges is to create access to higher education. Whether a student's goal is to transfer to a 4-year institution or to join the workforce immediately, community colleges can provide the needed preparation, training, and services for success (NCES, 2017). An implication, however, is that they are a primary portal to higher education for first-generation, low-income, minority, non-traditional, minorities, and underrepresented students (Bastedo 2016, p. 463). Those characteristics along with other inconvenient circumstances like having to work, living off-campus, family obligations and commitments, and other life circumstances create many barriers and make it difficult for the students to stay in school, transfer or graduate. Therefore I believe it is significant that community colleges aim to eliminate or at least reduce additional barriers to the students such as having too many contingent faculty members.

### **Outcomes**

Currently, there are some organizations dedicated to improving and advancing professional equity and academic freedom for all contingent faculty. Examples are Adjunct Nation, The Changing Faculty, and Academic Workforce. However, with the continuing cuts in institution budgets, the contingent faculty reliance will continue to grow not only at the community colleges but also at the other institutional types (Jacoby, 2006, p. 1097). Community colleges that seek to stretch their instructional dollars by using more part-time faculty will find this counterproductive because, in the end, they are held accountable for the student success. Therefore, “the dangers in expanding part-time faculty appear to outweigh any benefits” (Jacoby, 2006, p. 1097).

With the pressure community colleges are experiencing to find ways to promote and improve student success, a suggestion has been to limit the reliance on part-time faculty (Rogers, 2015). Other previous research has shown ways colleges can improve working conditions for adjuncts that are either free or relatively inexpensive. For example, institutions could collect more data on the adjuncts they employ should create better hiring guidelines and standards to more appropriately select faculty members. Another suggestion is to invite adjuncts to participate in curricular discussions or institutional governance and simultaneously hold that their input will not be held against them (Fain, 2014). Finally, it is important to understand that the causes for an increased contingent population are much more complicated than economics alone. But the most significant problem to keep in mind is that community colleges allow access to higher education for many disadvantaged students, and these students will continue to struggle if what was consider to help them develop is actually going to hinder their success.

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