Dreams of Tenure and the Program for Change

Jack Longmate

MANY non-tenure-track faculty members dream of a tenured position, to put their days of precarious contingent employment behind them, to receive a stable income, to be accorded the dignity and respect and professionalism they likely do not receive. But fulfillment of that dream is improbable at best, especially for those in disciplines in which the majority of faculty members are nontenured and part-time, such as English as a second language, adult education, English composition, and foreign languages. Even if all tenured professors were to resign, the resulting job openings still wouldn’t be enough to accommodate all the nontenured faculty members.

The dearth of tenured positions, compounded by the lack of meaningful workplace improvements through conventional collective bargaining or legislation, creates a demoralizing outlook. Nontenured faculty members’ dismal prospects recall a 1951 Langston Hughes poem that asks:

What happens to a dream deferred?

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

Soundings of the nontenured temperament rarely suggest an imminent explosion. Indeed, the contingent nature of their jobs induces many to be on their best behavior and undercuts the impulse to become squeaking wheels for change (much as it does for undocumented workers). Cary Nelson, former president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), suggested tenure for contingent faculty members could provide “the job security they need to advocate for better working conditions without fear of reprisal, and it eliminates the sometimes crippling stress accompanying at-will employment.” Alas, until a certifiable instance of tenure is extended to nontenured faculty members, such statements amount to wishful thinking or, by deflecting attention away from what could be concrete and achievable gains, possibly a step backward.

Excessive reliance on nontenured faculty members has long been a prominent topic within such disciplinary associations as Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the Modern Language Association (MLA) and within collaborative initiatives such as the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW). But as Brad Hammer, the former editor of the CCCC’s newsletter Forum, notes, while the causes for the reliance on contingent faculty members might be understandable, less clear is “what can be/is being done . . . and how our professional organizations have worked/failed to reverse employment trends over the past 25 years” (A2).

Fortunately, a viable alternative to dreaming about tenure is offered by colleges in British Columbia, especially in the province’s largest, Vancouver Community
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College (VCC). Its workplace features provisions designed to treat all faculty members with equality and professional dignity. The VCC workplace is actual and extant, not hypothetical or conditional, and is at striking variance with the two-tier system typical of institutions of higher education in the United States.

The Program for Change and the Vancouver Model

The Program for Change is a plan of action to transform the precarious working conditions of contingency into those of standard, stable employment. It lays out goals with steps and milestones as guidance for action and as an aid to measuring progress. Frank Cosco, the longtime president of the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, and I are the joint authors of the Program for Change, which we presented at the conference of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor in 2010. We were assisted by the New Faculty Majority board members Ross Borden, Maria Maisto, Matt Williams, and the late Steve Street, as well as by such long-standing leaders in the contingent faculty movement as Joe Berry and Rich Moser. The Program for Change can be used by an individual grassroots activist or a collective bargaining agent. It is intended “to provide ideas to all those working to reform the academic workplace into one that truly embodies the values of equity, justice, and commitment to providing the highest possible quality of education to all students” (Cosco and Longmate, “Program” 2). It is not meant for those who would resist change. Unlike a set of “should” statements describing an idealized hypothetical vision, the Program for Change is based on the extant workplace provisions of colleges and universities of British Columbia, Canada, particularly VCC.

At VCC, all faculty members, whether permanent (regular) or probationary (term), full- or part-time, are compensated according to a single salary schedule: those teaching at 60 percent of full-time receive 60 percent of full-time wages. Workload assignment is made at the department level, and, unlike the standard commonly used in the United States, where part-time non-tenure-track faculty members are hired only to teach, VCC part-time faculty members are expected to perform the full job of teaching on a proportionally reduced basis. Probationary faculty members, after two years of teaching at 50 percent or more of full-time and assuming no unsatisfactory evaluation, become permanent faculty members, with tenure-like job security that regularized status confers, so that virtually all faculty members are either permanent or on track to become permanent. At VCC, the chief determinant of workload assignment is seniority, not full- or part-time status as it is in the United States, and all faculty members accrue seniority. Probationary faculty members accrue seniority on a prorated basis, whereas permanent faculty members accrue seniority at the full-time rate whether they teach full- or part-time; this convention protects the seniority ranking of those who teach part-time, ensuring that their ranking will not be overtaken by another instructor who happens to teach more classes (for more on the Vancouver model, see Cosco and Longmate, “Instructive Model”; Longmate and Cosco). Although VCC is a two-year institution, the Program for Change is applicable to two- and four-year institutions. VCC faculty members belong to the Federation of Post-secondary Educators (FPSE) of British Columbia; the principle “upon which university-related FPSE
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Policies are based is of a collectivist, egalitarian, equitable university workplace model as opposed to a competitive, stratified model of employment” (Policies 1). In addition to VCC, examples of the same type of regularization process exist at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and Vancouver Island University, among others.

How the Program for Change Works

To move institutions toward the sort of equitable one-tier workplace of the Vancouver model, the Program for Change identifies over thirty goals, many of which are segmented into stages or steps, recognizing that even the most benign change may entail opposition and struggle. Regarding hiring, for example, the Program for Change echoes a goal shared by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), the former recommending that part-time or adjunct faculty members “be initially hired with the same care and subjected to the same interview process as any other applicant to the department” (Standards), and the latter recommending that contingent appointments be “made with the same care, timeline, and schedule accorded to tenure-track faculty” (“Contingent Faculty Bargaining”). The Program for Change breaks achieving this goal into two parts. The initial phase aims to establish standardized, transparent, formal procedures at the department level. The next phase entails developing cross-departmental, institution-wide standards so that departments can learn from one another and best practices can be reinforced. At VCC, the candidate search can be based on as wide a call and be as rigorous as a department feels is necessary. Candidates can be hired directly into a regular position, but it is more common for them to be hired into term positions; automatic regularization, however, makes it unnecessary for candidates to repeat the interview process.

Achieving full equity for contingent faculty members would require an increase in funding, to be sure. But since the substandard working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty members are so extensive, there are literally dozens of ways to improve them, many of which require either no funding or nominal one-time funding, such as establishing a fair, transparent system of hiring or evaluating faculty members or a seniority list. Especially for entities with limited funding at their disposal, such as faculty departments or senates, the Program for Change can provide guidance and a means to monitor progress.

Improving Working Conditions

A distinguishing feature of the Program for Change is its focus on improving the working conditions of nontenured faculty members: “after a faculty member has undergone a defined probationary period, he or she becomes a normal employee whose status is no longer probationary or contingent, with the attendant rights and protections that accompany non-probationary status” (Cosco and Longmate, “Program” 2). This emphasis contrasts with other documents, such as the MLA’s 2003 Committee on Professional Employment’s final report:

To ensure the educational quality of English and foreign language courses and programs, maintain the integrity of the profession, and improve employment opportunities for new PhDs, administrative reliance on part-timers for course
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Noteworthy in the MLA statement is the emphasis on additional full-time tenured positions instead of on improving the working conditions of nontenured faculty members. Also noteworthy is the presumption that instructors employed part-time threaten program quality and integrity. That presumption, commonplace within the United States academy, is predicated on the two-tier system, where compensation, job protection, professional support, due process, and other services significantly differ between tiers.

Achieving Equity for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members

The Program for Change defends tenure and urges that tenure be extended to qualified part-time faculty members; that it be conferred to the individual faculty member, not the position that faculty member happens to occupy; and that, over time, tenure be disassociated from compensation, which coincides with FPSE’s bargaining principles (Policies 3). In this way, eventually tenure may be granted without significant budgetary impact.

Achieving full equity for non-tenure-track faculty members requires overcoming resistance from those who see contingency not as a problem but as a great idea because it reduces costs and provides greater institutional flexibility. Countering such a position requires consideration of factors beyond cost reduction and institutional flexibility, which brings to mind Einstein’s aphorism that a solution to a problem cannot be arrived at by using the same thought process that created it. Data showing that contingency erodes educational outcomes would be useful in countering contingency, but it is doubtful that compelling evidence is accessible, since we are dealing with human subjects, not test tubes and inert substances. Surely no reasonable person would assert that improving the lot of contingent faculty members would decrease educational quality. Contingent faculty members themselves hardly need research to know that their effectiveness could be improved if they had job security, earned a livable wage, and had the confidence to consider teaching their career.

Full equity means that non-tenure-track faculty members would be contracted not only to teach but also to execute the full range of activities as academic professionals—service, teaching, and, where applicable, research. Such a redefinition would bring about true flexibility for the educational enterprise; moreover, students would surely benefit from their nontenured instructors’ regarding themselves as whole.

Placing the Onus on Those Opposing Equity

Those inclined to dismiss equity for non-tenure-track faculty members as unrealistic or impossible must reconcile contingency with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 23.1, which proclaims, “Everyone has the right to . . . just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.” Contingency defies this right, because the working conditions, discounted pay, and limited
benefits associated with it are hardly just and favorable and provide no protection whatsoever against unemployment, since nontenured faculty members are laid off at the end of each academic term. The declaration further asserts, “Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work” (art. 23.2). The nonprorated pay scales that are common in institutions of higher education in the United States constitute a square violation of this principle. Course fees are the same and the grades and credits awarded by nontenured faculty members are valued the same as those awarded by tenured faculty members. Article 7.c of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights further recognizes the right “for everyone to be promoted in his [or her] employment to an appropriate higher level, subject to no considerations other than those of seniority and competence,” yet nontenured faculty members very rarely have an option for promotion or for transition from probationary to permanent employment. Thus, since contingency violates basic principles and since the establishment of equity is warranted to respect basic human rights, the onus is on those who oppose equity to justify their opposition.

Just as no one is surprised when water runs downhill, no one seems surprised when tenured faculty members receive salaries that may be twice that of their nontenured colleagues who are engaged in the same work or when they receive stipends for professional development, pay raises based on time in position, sabbaticals, and early retirement options, benefits not generally available to non-tenure-track faculty members. As Keith Hoeller and I have written about the resulting cognitive dissonance: “Whenever you treat one class better than another, there is a false assumption that the upper class is somehow more deserving than the lower class.” As a result, many, including non-tenure-track faculty members themselves, are predisposed to oppose equity or do not conceive of it as a possibility.

Attitudes toward non-tenure-track faculty members and equity, even among those who think they may hold common assumptions, can differ. They can be classified according to a simplified three-part taxonomy as egalitarian, advocate or moderate, or elitist, which could be conceived of as a continuum.

Egalitarian

The egalitarian motto might be, “If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it’s a duck.” The egalitarian seeks to minimize status distinction among faculty members and assumes that every faculty member is worthy of respect in his or her own right. While egalitarians support the principle of equal pay for equal work, they might extend it to equal pay and equal work, to reject the workload distinctions imposed by the two-tier status quo.

The model is offered by Vancouver Community College, where all members of the faculty, full- or part-time, permanent or temporary, are paid according to the same salary schedule; where there is job protection; where, after demonstrating one’s competence as an instructor for a defined period of time, probationary instructors automatically become permanent; where all faculty members accrue seniority, and seniority is the primary though not the sole factor in workload assignment; and where a part-timer can be senior to a full-timer.
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The egalitarian position is the left side of the continuum; the solution favored is improvement in the working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty members.

Advocate or Moderate

The most widespread perspective, the advocate or moderate recognizes that reliance on nontenured faculty members is a problem, that their working conditions should be improved, and that, for the sake of educational quality, reliance on them should be kept to a minimum.

While advocates or moderates may agree that “[c]ontingent faculty should be paid at a rate equal to that paid tenured faculty having the same qualifications and for doing the equivalent instructional and non-instructional work” (“2005 Best Employment Practices”) and may subscribe to the principle of equal pay for equal work, they may feel no contradiction in offering discounted pay for nontenured instructors since nontenured faculty members don’t perform the same work as their tenured colleagues.

The advocate or moderate position occupies the midpoint on the continuum; it sees the creation of more tenure-track positions as the solution because, in the United States, tenure is the lone satisfactory model. Yet creating more tenure-track positions does little to improve the working conditions of the majority of non-tenure-track faculty members.

Elitist

The elitist perspective opposes equality for non-tenure-track faculty members. It envisions tenured faculty members as the “real faculty,” who deserve respect for having earned an advanced degree, successfully competed in a national search for their job, undergone the rigors of tenure review, and merit recognition for having been awarded tenure.

This perspective considers nontenured faculty members supplemental employees, hired to fill in when required and not deserving of equal pay, job protection, or access to professional development activities; that is, the elitist views non-tenure-track faculty members more as paraprofessionals than as equal colleagues of tenure-track faculty members. Sometimes the elitist sees nontenured faculty members as uninvited or unwelcomed intruders on the turf of the tenured, whose lack of refinement tarnishes the prestige of the profession. The strongest form sees nontenured faculty members as scabs.

To elitists, nontenured faculty members’ calls for equal pay for equal work are offensive requests for a reward that is not deserved. This perspective occupies the opposite end of the continuum from the egalitarian.

If faculty unions or associations, senates, boards of trustees, and state legislators, among others, are dominated by the advocate or moderate perspective toward non-tenure-track faculty members, which envisions more tenured positions as the solution, or by the elitist perspective, which opposes equity outright, meaningful workplace improvements for non-tenure-track faculty members are unlikely. Advocates or moderates may dismiss the ideas of the egalitarians, arguing that they are simply not realistic or are messianic.
To Martin Luther King, Jr., the “greatest stumbling block” was not the outright opposition, like the Ku Klux Klan, but the “white moderates” who “become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress” (817, 817, 818). Likewise if those who consider themselves advocates of non-tenure-track faculty members accept that non-tenure-track faculty members deserve a pay increase but not equal pay or job security or an equal voice, their actions also block progress.

My own perspective on equity for non-tenure-track faculty members underwent a jolting shift at the TESOL convention in 2000, when I learned about the workplace provisions of VCC. I had real trouble believing what I was hearing, since the Vancouver model contrasted so radically with the paradigm in my mind about how the world worked. But once I came to understand the Vancouver model, my perspective shifted from the advocate or moderate to the egalitarian.

Goals of the Program for Change

The Program for Change aims to transform the working conditions of the lower tier of the non-tenure-track faculty into what might be considered “normal” employment and thus assumes a paradigm shift for higher education in the United States. As a strategy, it does not presume a single script for all institutions to follow in lockstep, since it “is not meant to be prescriptive or proscriptive. It is hoped that activists working for change can find some aspects to work on and start to achieve measurable successes” and recognizes the need for local control: “Goals, strategies and tactics have to be determined locally where activists know what’s needed most, what’s achievable with reasonable risk, and how best to achieve it” (Cosco and Longmate, “Program” 2).

In the Program for Change, the more than thirty goals are laid out in incremental steps over time that serve as a means to track progress in a log and are classified as no-cost, cost, union or faculty association, and legislative. Selected goals are elaborated below.

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is heralded as essential to quality higher education instruction. Yet academic freedom cannot exist without job security. As Hoeller noted at the conference of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor in 2006, because contingent faculty members lack job security, they lack academic freedom, a point elaborated by Sarah Schneewind in response to an Inside Higher Ed feature:

Let’s not forget . . . that tenured faculty in particular, but even tenure-track faculty, don’t have to worry from day to day about losing their jobs. That means they can encourage real discussion of controversial issues in the classroom, try out new pedagogical techniques, require plenty of reading and writing, and hold the line on grades, without fear. That is good for students, and it grants appropriate autonomy to highly-educated, motivated professionals.

The Program for Change proposes that academic freedom for all faculty members, including those working off the tenure track, be protected by due process, seniority,
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and grievance procedures from the moment they are hired, recognizing that academic freedom cannot exist without job security.

Job Security

Job security is the antithesis of contingency and must be seen as the primary goal in achieving equity for non-tenure-track faculty members. Even though job security makes no budgetary impact, it is likely to face opposition from several quarters. Those who hold an elitist perspective on equality for non-tenure-track faculty members may argue that protecting the jobs of the nontenured will undermine the institution’s administrative flexibility by limiting the institution’s ability to lay off members of the nontenured faculty at will. Some may argue that protecting nontenured faculty jobs protects inferior instruction since nontenured faculty members have not undergone tenure review; others claim that giving nontenured faculty members job protection would create a middle tier of faculty and complicate the higher education system. Some feign concern for non-tenure-track faculty members, suggesting that callous administrators would dismiss candidates as they approach the job security threshold. Some alarmists claim that job security for contingent faculty members could threaten tenure itself. Many such arguments opposing job security for nontenured faculty members can be a reflection of the direct conflict of interest between tenured faculty course overloads—courses in addition to their full-time load, that is, overtime—and non-tenure-track jobs. When tenured faculty members teach course overloads, they displace those in non-tenure-track faculty jobs; thus tenured faculty members may oppose job security for their nontenured colleagues because it could interfere with their ability to teach course overloads.

Several Program for Change goals address job security, such as reappointment rights during the probationary period, which provide the protection of due process, and seniority rights, which call for accruing seniority from the first hire, retaining seniority between appointments, and ensuring transparency through the annual publication of seniority listings. The key job security measure is conversion from probationary to nonprobationary status, or regularization.

With regard to job security, the Program for Change is somewhat at variance with principles advocated in the United States. The MLA’s Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions, for example, states:

[Non-tenure-track] faculty members should ideally be hired on three-year contracts with full benefits; after six years, they should be eligible for longer-term review; past six years, they should be given longer (five- or six-year) contracts and be allowed to participate in departmental governments regarding [non-tenure-track] lines. (1)

In line with this recommendation, the California Faculty Association (CFA), which represents faculty in the California State University system, has negotiated a revised contract for its non-tenure-track faculty members. Once granted a three-year appointment, “a lecturer has the expectation of reappointment to a subsequent three-year appointment” (CFA Lecturers’ Handbook 12). This virtually automatic renewal
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of a three-year appointment is absolutely remarkable by the usual standards for contingent faculty in the United States.

The Program for Change, however, does not propose three-year (or multiyear) contracts. While certainly superior to a one-year or one-term contract, such multiyear contracts are still fundamentally contingent. CFA members holding these contracts do not consider them the solution to contingency and still seek the protections of tenure (Olson); moreover, holders of these contracts customarily receive unemployment between terms, attesting to the absence of reasonable assurance of employment and the contingent nature of the appointments. The Program for Change relies on the tenure-like job security inherent in regularization, which offers full due-process protections such as reappointment and seniority rights.

At present, some contingent faculty members in the United States face a workload cap that limits their assignments to a percentage below full-time, such as no more than 67 percent in a single district in California community colleges (“EDC 87482.5”). The Program for Change seeks to lift the cap, so that part-time faculty members can ratchet their workload up to full-time, as is standard for their part-time counterparts in Vancouver. As the cap limiting part-time workload is being removed, limits should be imposed on full-time faculty members’ access to course overloads. Allowing full-time faculty members to teach overtime does not always serve the best interests of students and can contribute to full-time faculty members’ reluctance to promote job security for their part-time colleagues, since protecting the jobs of part-timers could interfere with the ability of full-timers to teach course overloads and thus earn more income. Full-time faculty members at VCC are not permitted to take on course overloads.

Evaluations

For most non-tenure-track faculty members, a positive evaluation results in little or no benefit while a negative evaluation can threaten their job. A nonexistent or informal evaluation system contributes to the bias against them that they are lesser members of the faculty and less competent instructors. In replicating the Vancouver model, the Program for Change proposes two evaluation goals. Summative evaluations determine the suitability of the individual as an educator during the probationary period of employment in much the same way that tenure review determines the suitability of the individual to receive tenure. Summative evaluations must be conducted according to an established procedure that is transparent, as free of bias as possible, and with safeguards to protect the rights of the individual being evaluated. A robust summative evaluation system during the probationary period helps allay fears of granting job security to the underqualified. Formative evaluations are for the enrichment of the individual instructor and, after regularization, are conducted periodically as constructive feedback. If no distinction is made between the two, all evaluations of non-tenure-track faculty members become summative, cause unwarranted concern, and defeat one purpose of evaluation—to promote quality instruction. Excessive or unprincipled evaluation can be considered a form of workplace harassment.
Compensation and Workload

The ultimate goal is a single salary schedule for tenured and nontenured, full- and part-time faculty members, determined according to a commonly shared set of workplace expectations (as exists at VCC) that would include compensation for office hours and a fully prorated set of responsibilities and service. At present, while many non-tenure-track faculty members are hired only to teach, the presumed limited scope of their workload stands as hollow justification for the significant distinction in pay and status in the two-tier system.

To quote Rich Moser of the AAUP, “Culture changes slowly, painfully so, and it entails struggle and discomfort.” Thus, even if funding became available at once, it may not be realistic to suppose that equal compensation and workload can occur immediately.

Professional Advancement and Professional Development

Non-tenure-track faculty members are integral to higher education in the United States, and their professional development, widely overlooked, is at least as important in maintaining quality instruction as it is for tenured faculty members. Given the often harried lives of non-tenure-track faculty members—coping with low pay and a restricted workload—many must hold multiple jobs, which effectively reduces their disposable time for professional development activity. A time allotment for professional development is a discrete need. Not only should non-tenure-track faculty members have access to the professional development stipends, as tenured faculty members generally do, but they should also have similar incentives to engage in professional development activities such as salary steps, which would lead to full equity in compensation.

Faculty Governance and Voice in Campus Affairs

To expand non-tenure-track faculty members’ limited involvement on campus, it is important to reckon with the cultural as well as the pragmatic reasons behind it. First, as noted above, many nontenured faculty members hold more than one job and thus have limited time at their disposal to take part in faculty governance or other campus activities. Second, despite the imperative for non-tenure-track faculty members to have a voice in their own affairs, as argued eloquently by Monica Jacobe at the 2012 MLA convention, the sociopolitical reality is that many are reluctant to speak out about their needs in the presence of tenured faculty members. Some are afraid of offending or alienating those in the dominant social group, others fear losing any hope of being hired for a future tenure-track position, and still others fear retaliation, a response directed at some nontenured individuals courageous enough to call for equal treatment.

Perhaps the primary factor explaining the meager participation of non-tenure-track faculty members in campus affairs is the tendency to overlook them as faculty. An anecdote from my institution suggests this tendency. In an e-mail call for candidates for union officer positions, the announcement implied that only tenured faculty members were eligible candidates. After it was noted that the union bylaws did
not stipulate that officers be tenured, a clarification was promptly issued. But this oversight reflects the underlying presumption that faculty refers to the tenured faculty, not to members of the nontenured faculty, who are secondary, an afterthought.

The Program for Change goal of workplace equity aims to remove roadblocks to non-tenure-track faculty members’ participation in campus governance and affairs. The program’s set of staged goals would ensure the right of non-tenure-track faculty members to elect and be elected and would eventually provide paid release from teaching in order to facilitate their participation. The program proposes a similar goal regarding faculty unions and associations that guarantees non-tenure-track faculty members a voice and vote in any election process. The Program for Change recognizes the need for a union to underwrite the expense of an exclusive non-tenure-track faculty union organizational entity—up to 0.5 percent of the union’s total budget—for a safe, private forum for non-tenure-track faculty members to discuss workplace-related issues with one another. This is an area for faculty unions to “walk the talk.” If they are genuinely working for and with their nontenured members, then they must grant them equity in a form completely under their control, with union meetings, elections, and processes. To make the non-tenure-track faculty voice a reality, additional safeguards—such as those in union bylaws—must be honored.

Benefits

Non-tenure-track faculty members deserve the range of benefits available to tenured faculty members, including educational leaves and sabbaticals; medical, dental, or sick leave; paid vacation; and other paid leaves, such as maternity and parental. Classified as temporary employees, non-tenure-track faculty members are excluded from federal programs such as the flexible spending account and the Family and Medical Leave Act. Once their jobs are no longer contingent and temporary but permanent, non-tenure-track faculty members would gain access to federal benefits programs.

All defenders of higher education in the United States can concur with the Program for Change that the two-tier status quo “cannot go unchallenged”:

It is not acceptable for the majority of those who deliver U.S. higher education to be without job security and academic freedom, to receive pay that is not commensurate with their academic and professional training nor the effective set of responsibilities they execute, and to be denied the professional dignity that is warranted by their station as educators. (Cosco and Longmate, “Program” 6)

But the status quo is unlikely to change spontaneously. The Program for Change aims to serve as a roadmap for those who seek change to help guide the “tireless efforts and persistent work” that are necessary to bring about real progress (King 818).

Those who dream of tenure are not without hope. Those faculty members employed in a system like Vancouver Community College’s or the California State University’s enjoy reasonably stable employment and professional respect. The movement to improve the professional lives of non-tenure-track faculty members has, through examining these systems carefully, the advantage of a working model where equity
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exists. These models can and should be used more widely to lever change wherever and on whatever issue it is possible to do so.

While it may be unrealistic to suppose that the lives of non-tenure-track faculty members can be immediately transformed, there is every reason to believe that most faculty members can hold normal, stable employment where they can presume their jobs will continue and where they are compensated to perform the full range of faculty functions. The Program for Change aims to be a blueprint for such action.

Note

1. In the 2007 legislative session in Washington State, House Bill 1452, a job security bill for nontenured faculty members in Washington’s community and technical college, inspired by VCC’s regularization, was heard in the House Higher Education Committee. On 29 January 2007, a representative of the Washington’s NEA affiliate, Washington Education Association (WEA), opposed HB 1452, characterizing it as a threat to instructional quality, a way of marginalizing nontenured faculty members in a “permanent middle tier,” and, as if to scare legislators, as “lifelong employment.” Below is a portion of the WEA representative’s transcribed testimony:

[There’s no evaluative process in [HB 1452]. What it means is the criteria are cumulative, chronological, and retroactive. If you’ve been teaching one course for nine quarters, if this bill passed, you would immediately have this status. As written and without other part-time faculty circumstances significantly revised and improved, this bill could create a permanent middle tier of underpaid faculty, and we don’t want to see that happen. Over the long term this status could potentially be the Trojan horse that could be used against the tenure system itself. Some college administrations will balk at the lack of robust evaluative process to determine the suitability of taking on a nine-quarter part-time teacher candidate for lifelong employment. And what I fear is that administrations will start terminating part-time people at eight quarters because they don’t want to go through this. The collective bargaining part of this bill seems to be gratuitous in a sense because I’m not sure what’s left to bargain. It is very prescriptive.

(House Higher Education Committee)

In voicing concern about the lack of evaluation of nontenured faculty members and the threat to tenure they pose, these words are hardly those one would expect to hear from a union representative. In citing the possibility that administrations could capriciously dismiss adjuncts as they approach the qualification threshold, this union representative effectively underscored the need for legislation mandating protection against such capriciousness—there was no suggestion of union willingness to fight for such protection for non-tenure-track faculty members. Further suggestive of the union leadership’s intent, the next year, in the 2008 legislative session, when a hearing on similar legislation addressing adjunct job security was scheduled to be heard, the AFT Washington and WEA faculty union leadership conducted a premeditated walkout from the legislative hearing as the bill arose on the committee’s agenda.

Works Cited


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Olson, Judy, with Mayra Besosa and two other CFA members. Personal interview. 9 Aug. 2012.


