INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1992, nearly 42 percent of all college and university faculty teaching courses for credit were employed part time, and a growing percentage of full-time faculty (15 percent) were not eligible for tenure (Harper, 1998). Changes in the employment patterns of American academics have occurred far more quickly and substantially than has been commonly recognized—and the potential consequences of these changes have yet to be clearly understood.

These changes and their results appear to follow from, among other things:

- Supply and demand imbalances in the academic work force;
- Developing patterns of work and employment unique to individual academic disciplines;
- Changes in the economic foundations and organization of American colleges and universities; and
- Large underlying shifts in patterns of work in American society.

The causes and effects of these trends were the subject of a seminar sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation on December 2–3, 1997. Seminar participants prepared analyses of these changes to address the following questions:

- Who are the “new” part-time, adjunct, and non-tenure-track faculty?
- What are the trends in academic careers?
- Are patterns of part-time work in academe similar to or different from the same patterns in other sectors?
- How does the economic condition of higher education affect the academic workforce?
- Is the use of part-timers and adjuncts supply driven or demand driven?
Why do institutions elect to hire more part-time and adjunct faculty?

What are the consequences for the production of knowledge? For the quality of teaching?

The answers to these questions will say a great deal about the current state of academe, but they will also say a great deal about the future of academic employment and its relationship to:

- Continuity and progress in the production and application of knowledge.
- The relative attractiveness of academic careers to people of talent.
- The quality and integrity of undergraduate and graduate education.
- The ability of colleges and universities to respond to their changing environments.
- The renewal of the nation’s intellectual capital.
- And, in a broader sense, the nature and meaning of work and its relationship to the idea of careers in American culture.

Is it in the nation’s interest to convert such a large proportion of academic work to short-term and temporary jobs, and thereby to undercut the protections of tenure and perhaps weaken academic freedom? Can the answer be a simple “yes” or “no”?

PART-TIME AND ADJUNCT FACULTY: THE NEW MAJORITY?

Where do the part-time and adjunct faculty teach and in what fields? Numbering over 376,000 (up from just over 250,000 in 1987), they teach in substantial numbers in all types of institutions (Kirshstein, Matheson, and Jing, 1997). More than 40 percent of all teaching faculty are part time, and over 60 percent of faculty teaching courses at community colleges are part time (Table 1). Research universities use proportionally far fewer part-time or adjunct faculty. (Adding the work of teaching assistants to that done by part-time faculty in research universities would probably show that proportionally as many undergraduates are being taught by other-than-full-time, tenure-track faculty at those institutions as at some of the others.)
### TABLE 1: PROPORTION OF PART-TIME FACULTY BY INSTITUTIONAL TYPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Type</th>
<th>Part-Time Faculty</th>
<th>Full-Time Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Liberal Arts</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Two-year</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 41.6% of all teaching faculty are part-time.
- Over 60% of community college faculty are part-time.
- Very nearly half of all women faculty are part-time.

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)
Individual disciplines also use part-time and adjunct faculty in different proportions (Table 2). Specific teaching fields in which 49 percent or more of the faculty were part time included law (61.4 percent), fine arts (50.9 percent), English and literature (50.0 percent), computer sciences (49.5 percent), and mathematics and statistics (49.2 percent). (“All other,” with 49.3 percent part-time faculty, principally represents vocational fields taught mainly at community colleges.) Teaching fields with the lowest levels of part-time faculty included agriculture and home economics (19.5 percent), economics (23.7 percent), political science (24.7 percent), biological sciences (25.5 percent), and physical sciences (27.3 percent). These dramatic differences beg for further study of a disaggregated academic labor market, discipline by discipline—much along the lines suggested by Burton Clark’s “small worlds, different worlds” (1997).
HOW DO PART-TIME FACULTY DIFFER FROM FULL-TIME FACULTY?

Who are the part-time faculty? They resemble full-time faculty far more than is commonly supposed. Most have middle-class incomes, families, and well-paying full-time jobs.

- The mean age of part-time faculty who responded to the National Center for Education Statistics’ National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) in 1992 was 45.8 years, compared to 48.0 years for full-time faculty.

- Almost two-thirds (63.7 percent) held full-time jobs elsewhere while teaching part time.

- Mean household income of part-time faculty was $67,637, compared to $81,248 for full-time faculty.

- Individual part-time faculty were the principal income producers in their households, averaging $48,743 in total individual income from all sources. (Their pay from their teaching jobs averaged $10,180 per year.)

- Roughly three-quarters of both part-time (72.4 percent) and full-time (75.2 percent) faculty were married.

- Both groups lived in households of just under three members.

- Part-time faculty are individually committed (on average) to their employing institution; they have held their present teaching positions for an average of 6.3 years (versus 11.2 years for full-time faculty).

- Part-time faculty differ from full-time faculty in two important respects. Most part-timers held a master’s degree or less—only about 15 percent held the doctorate, and 11 percent held the first-professional degree.

Women faculty were substantially more likely to hold part time or adjunct positions than were men faculty. Very nearly half of all women faculty were part time, while close to two-thirds of male faculty were full time (Table 3).
TABLE 3: PART OR FULL-TIME STATUS OF MEN AND WOMEN FACULTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Part-Time Faculty</th>
<th>Full-Time Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

The majority of part-time and adjunct faculty (52 percent) reported that they “prefer” part-time teaching. A smaller proportion (43 percent) reported that they were teaching part time because full-time jobs were not available.

WHY ARE THERE MORE PART-TIME AND ADJUNCT FACULTY?

Multiple “causes” are undoubtedly responsible for the dramatic increase in part-time and adjunct faculty. Has oversupply of doctoral-prepared prospective faculty been a principal factor in the heavy reliance on part-time faculty? Is the increase a way for institutions to save money on faculty salaries? Is it a product of the uncapped retirement age? supply and demand? The increase has clearly paralleled a rise in production of doctorates. Data from NSOPF suggest that oversupply is only one factor, and then only in some fields. In the fields that used the highest proportion (not including law), part-time faculty were less likely to hold the doctorate than part-time faculty in all fields taken together; in the fields that used the lowest proportions (not including agriculture/home economics—apparently a unique case), part-time faculty were more likely to hold the doctorate than part-time faculty in all fields taken together. This is the opposite of what one would expect if, in fact, there were a surplus of doctoral graduates queuing up for academic positions. When one considers that the large majority of part-time faculty are otherwise employed and that a majority prefer to teach part time, it appears more likely that the demand for teaching faculty is a stronger factor than the oversupply of doctorates.

Financial stress? The rise also paralleled increasing financial stress in many colleges and universities, particularly with the dramatic leveling off of state support for higher education in the early
1990s. Two of the papers prepared for the Sloan seminar (Haeger, Wyles) suggested that increasing enrollment without a commensurate rise in institutional income was indeed an important factor in reallocating faculty positions from full time to part time. These conditions made it harder to hire more full-time faculty, given the lower salaries paid to part-timers, the shorter time commitment to them, and the fact that part-timers mostly need not be paid benefits.

**Aging of full-time faculty?** Seminar participants questioned whether the aging and commensurate “tenuring in” of full-time faculty might have contributed to hiring more part-timers. The loss of control over mandatory retirement of full-time faculty, for example, may have forced institutions to limit offers of tenure to younger faculty.

On the whole, faculty were middle aged, whatever their status.

- The mean age of tenured faculty was 52, older than faculty on track (41.5) or not on track (44.7).
- Part-time faculty averaged 45.8 years, while full-time faculty averaged 48.0.
- The average age of full-time faculty who answered that they were very likely to retire within three years was 60.8 years.
- The very large majority of faculty plan to retire beginning at the age of 65.
- Just over 40 percent of those aged 55 to 64 indicated that they would be at least somewhat likely to retire in three years.
- Of those aged 65 to 70, 71.8 percent indicated that they would be at least somewhat likely to retire in three years.
- But of those 71 or older—a minuscule .8 percent of all full-time faculty—41.2 percent reported that they were unlikely to retire in three years, so it appears that there is a bi-modal distribution, with a very tiny number of older faculty interested in continuing past the traditional retirement age.

While institutions may have been making long-term calculations about the effects of an uncapped retirement age, the data from the 1992 NSOPF did not indicate that this was an immediate, or even a short-term, crisis that might explain the relatively rapid increase in employment of part-time faculty. A similar conclusion was reached by Baldwin and Chronister (1996).
Full-time faculty doing more research, less teaching? If full-time faculty are doing more research and graduate teaching, and less undergraduate teaching—as is often alleged—part-time and temporary faculty may have been hired to take up the slack. Table 4 shows that full-time faculty, on the average, taught three courses per semester—mostly undergraduates—and generated more student credit hours per course taught (104.7) than part-time faculty did (77.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Classroom Credit Hours</th>
<th>Total Student Credit Hours</th>
<th>Total Undergrad Classes Taught</th>
<th>Total Graduate Classes Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time Faculty</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>139.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time Faculty</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>293.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

Seminar participants did suggest that part-time faculty may be hired to help absorb increasing enrollments or to help develop new or changing programs. But there is no compelling evidence that full-time faculty have diverted their efforts away from undergraduate instruction and that part-timers have taken up the slack.

Part-time faculty help absorb increased enrollment and start new programs; there is no evidence that part-time faculty are replacing full-time faculty who do research instead of teaching.

Do women prefer part-time teaching? The changing gender composition of the professoriate is sometimes offered as an explanation. Do women prefer part-time work arrangements more than men do? The data suggest they do not. Table 5 shows that among part-time faculty, just over half of both genders preferred part-time work—the proportions being virtually the same.
### TABLE 5: GENDER PREFERENCE FOR PART-TIME WORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

**Do more “applied” majors hire more part-time faculty?** Have shifts in enrollment from the traditional arts and sciences disciplines and into the more applied and professional fields—with the accompanying need for clinical expertise—been a factor? Seminar participants suggested that new professional programs may often be staffed by part-time faculty to hedge the risks involved. The evidence from the NSOPF is inconclusive on this point. Just under 45 percent of all full-time faculty taught in the traditional disciplines of humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. Almost the same proportion (41.5 percent) of part-time faculty also taught in these disciplines. Just over 16 percent of all part-time faculty taught in one of the “other” fields—principally, occupational subjects mainly taught in the community colleges—while 11.9 percent of full-time faculty did the same. Part-time faculty were employed proportionately more often than full-time faculty in fine arts, business, and education. The pattern generally skews in the direction of the hypothesis, but it is certainly not so marked as to imply any kind of causation.

**Main effect: Community college expansion.** The expansion of enrollments and program offerings in community colleges has, in all likelihood, driven the rise in part-time faculty. “Overall, from 1970 to 1995, the number of faculty members at two-year institutions grew by 210 percent, compared with 69 percent at four-year institutions” (Schneider, 1998). Twenty years ago, just over one-half of all community college faculty were part time; that figure had risen to 60 percent by 1992. Anecdotal accounts suggest that as many as 80 percent of teaching faculty at some community colleges are part time (Selingo, 1998).
No one “cause.” Undoubtedly, there is no one single, simple explanation for the increase in the number of part-time and adjunct faculty in American colleges and universities. The increase is clearly not uniform across all sectors of higher education—patterns of faculty employment seem to be different in each sector, as Clark (1997) and Gumport (1997) have suggested. Apparently, the various academic disciplines act as somewhat unique “labor markets,” affected in different ways by changing enrollments, uneven production of doctorates among the different fields, the shifting emphasis on program content away from traditional disciplines and toward more applied studies, and many other issues.

Understanding faculty work may require disaggregation into the “small worlds” of the individual disciplines and the particular contexts—the “different worlds”—of the varied strata of institutions (Clark, 1997). Why should there be such high levels of part-time faculty in fine arts (50.9 percent) and English (50.0 percent) and such low levels in agriculture (19.5 percent) and economics (23.7 percent)? What is so different about these fields? Why do community colleges use so many part-time faculty and research universities use so few? How, more precisely, do the microeconomics of these submarkets work?

When all of this evidence is boiled down, it appears that two factors do stand out above the others:

- Community colleges have expanded rapidly, and have employed large numbers of part-time and adjunct faculty to staff that expansion.
- Financial hard times and increased competition have forced colleges and universities to hedge on their commitments to long-term employment of full-time, tenure-track faculty.

Less clear—but no less worrisome—is the apparent competition for prospective faculty with other employment opportunities in certain fields.

EFFECTS ON “QUALITY”

The effects of increasing reliance on part-time faculty raise important questions about the quality of higher education:

- Are too many part-time faculty “threatening the quality” of higher education?
- Are young people less willing to invest in academic careers, thereby shunting talent away from college teaching?
Is the production of new knowledge—the heart of the research enterprise—likely to be attenuated as individual institutions gradually lose their critical mass of productive teams of full-time faculty?

Are traditional institutions and patterns of faculty employment sustainable, as “electronic virtual campuses” begin to compete with traditional institutions?

Quality can only be addressed indirectly. Gappa and Leslie (1993) found essentially “no difference” in quality of teaching between part-time and full-time faculty. Yet it is clear that part- and full-time faculty differ on many measures that might be proxies for quality. Table 6, for example, shows that full-time faculty are far more likely to hold a Ph.D.

Do part-time faculty affect quality? Part-time faculty are as committed and satisfied as full-time faculty. But they are less likely to hold the Ph.D. and spend little time on research. Both groups use similar teaching methods.

| TABLE 6: HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED BY PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME FACULTY |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  | Ph.D.            | First-Professional | Master's         | Bachelor's        | Less than Bachelor's |
| Part-Time Faculty| 16.0%            | 10.7%             | 51.6%            | 17.0%            | 4.7%                |
| Full-Time Faculty| 54.0%            | 11.1%             | 29.7%            | 4.0%             | 1.2%                |

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

Yet, we know that part-time faculty are far more likely to be teaching in community colleges, where only 19.1 percent of full-time faculty hold a doctorate or advanced professional degree. They are also more likely to be teaching occupational or professional subjects in which the doctorate is either uncommon or simply not relevant.

The morale of part-time faculty may at least indirectly affect the effort they invest in their work. Their overall job satisfaction was high. Over 85 percent reported that they were satisfied or very
satisfied with their jobs, on the whole. This was not different from the satisfaction level expressed by full-time faculty (84.1 percent). They were substantially less satisfied with benefits and job security, though, and this is clearly a cause for concern. Part-time faculty did not report spending a substantially different amount of time on “professional development” (5.8 percent versus 4.6 percent) than full-time faculty. But they reported being more satisfied with their ability to keep up with developments in their field (67.9 percent versus 48.3 percent for full-time faculty).

Is academic freedom at risk with the appointment of more part-timers who do not enjoy the protection of tenure? Ironically, the survey data show that part-time faculty were more likely than full-time faculty to say that the atmosphere for free expression on their campus had improved (by 36 percent, to 22 percent). Relatively few of either group thought it had worsened. Similarly, 88 percent of both groups (part- and full-time faculty) reported that they would choose an academic career again. If the fundamental freedoms and attractiveness of the academic career are threatened by increasingly insecure job prospects, it was not clearly evident in the results of that survey.

These data suggest that part-time faculty are as engaged in and as satisfied with their professional commitment as full-time faculty. While not direct measures of quality, the data seem to put to rest the contention that part-timers, on the whole, are alienated, demoralized, and/or disengaged from their work.

On the other hand, part-time faculty reported doing far less research, spending 7.1 percent of their time on it, versus 17.6 percent spent by full-time faculty. But part-time faculty are most likely to work in community colleges, where research is not expected of full-time faculty either. Table 7 compares the proportion of time devoted respectively to research and teaching by full-time faculty at research universities and public two-year colleges. Research university faculty reported averaging close to eight times as much of their work week on research as did faculty at two-year colleges. They are “different worlds,” indeed.
Do part-time faculty add value by bringing more vivid examples and clinical experience to the classroom? While the NCES data do not allow a direct answer to this question, it is possible to compare teaching methods used by part-time and full-time faculty. Table 8 shows that about two-thirds of all faculty relied principally on lecture, and that part- and full-time faculty use other methods in about the same proportions. If health sciences are removed from consideration, the differences in reliance on labs and internships practically disappear.

TABLE 8: TEACHING METHODS, PART-TIME FACULTY VS. FULL-TIME FACULTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Seminar or Discussion</th>
<th>Labs or Internship</th>
<th>Active Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES, 19993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

These data suggest it is not possible to generalize about what kind of value part-time faculty add to the instructional program—although they may well mask the contributions of individual faculty to specific courses.
ATTITUDES OF PART-TIME FACULTY

While the global picture of part-time faculty is one of competence, high morale, and a healthy level of professional engagement, pockets of discontent do exist. The press, for example, continually reports on exploitation of part-time faculty and on their serious disaffection. A closer look at the basis for these impressions suggests issues that deserve further attention.

First, what are the feelings and attitudes of part-time faculty who report that they cannot find full-time work? Just over 65 percent of the part-time faculty in fine arts and 61 percent of those in the humanities reported teaching part time because full-time work was not available. These are far higher percentages than in other fields, suggesting that too many potential faculty are chasing too few jobs in these fields. Almost one-third (32.2 percent) of the part-timers in the humanities reported overall dissatisfaction with their jobs, as did 27 percent of those in the fine arts—much higher than the overall levels of dissatisfaction among part-timers in all fields. So those who were most trapped in part-time work were also the least satisfied. And this pattern is clearly specific to the humanities; there is some indication that employment patterns in the arts are too varied to permit as clear an inference (see Gappa and Leslie, 1993).

Exploitation exists, and there is discontent among part-timers. Too many potential faculty are chasing too few jobs in the humanities and the arts. Those who are most trapped in part-time work are the least satisfied.

PART-TIME FACULTY AND THE CHANGING ACADEMIC PROFESSION

The changes now observable in the American academic profession certainly challenge traditional assumptions. But higher education in the United States is no longer the growth industry it once was, when it could depend on more of everything to cover the expansiveness of its ambitions and to sustain the remarkable value it added to society’s fund of human capital (Breneman, 1997). It is a highly labor-intensive “industry.” The cost of doing business in traditional ways has obviously outstripped the available resources (Rand, 1997). While demand for higher education has continued to rise and state appropriations have turned flat, institutions have been under public pressure to hold tuition increases within bounds. In short, something has to give, and that something has been traditional academic employment relationships and policies. The big question is whether turning over more teaching to faculty on short-term, part-time contracts will accomplish the dual goals of controlling cost and maintaining the quality of undergraduate education.
But other questions about the future of the academic profession arise, as well:

- Who will teach, and how are they to be prepared?
- Is the Ph.D. the essential qualification for college and university faculty? Why?
- Are there too many Ph.D.s seeking too few full-time jobs now?
- What kinds of rewards and incentives will attract and hold the best minds and most promising talents?
- If academe can no longer sustain full careers of scholarship, how will knowledge be produced and advanced?

A certain measure of altruism has always motivated college and university faculty because the financial rewards of teaching have generally been less than alternative employment. The 1992 NSOPF established that the intrinsic rewards of faculty work are high, and that the related satisfactions are a central attraction to academic careers.

Rasell and Appelbaum (1997) estimated that “the growth in part-time faculty likely exceeds the growth in non-standard work arrangements” in the economy as a whole, considering trends in part-time, temporary, and self-employment jobs. They also report that workers in these jobs appear to have a relatively strong preference for such nonstandard arrangements. Although higher education appears to be entering uncharted territory by relying so heavily on part-time, adjunct, and temporary faculty to do the basic job of teaching, it may simply be reflecting, to some extent, the changing norms of work and jobs in the broader economy. It is very unclear where these trends may lead, and it is very unclear what the consequences of these trends might be for traditional institutions and for the various kinds of scholarly work they support.

Although higher education appears to be entering uncharted territory by relying so heavily on part-time, adjunct, and temporary faculty, it may simply be reflecting the changing norms of work and jobs in the broader economy.

**External pressures to use more part-time faculty.** The pressures that have led to increasing use of part-time and adjunct faculty—the “contingent” academic workforce whose contracts are outside the traditional tenure system and whose employment is largely dependent on the short-term needs of their institutions—seem largely to be coming from outside the academy, not from within it. Participants in
the Sloan conference noted that higher education has become a “mature industry” with little room for expansion. And, although competition has therefore increased, there are few signs that productivity has improved—as might be the case in the broader economy. Because productivity remains relatively flat, cost increases (aging faculty, increased benefit costs, need for repair and replacement of facilities, cost of regulatory compliance, need to buy computers and retrofit campuses, etc.) continue at a time of flattening state appropriations, and the public has shown signs of sensitivity to continued increases in tuition and fees, reliance on less expensive “labor” is perhaps the most direct way to keep expenditures under control. Salaries and wages are, after all, by far the largest part of college and university budgets.

**Supply and demand: Balanced or imbalanced?** At the same time, there appear to be imbalances between supply of and demand for potential faculty among the varied disciplines. Arts and humanities part-time faculty responded at the highest levels to the NSOPF that they taught part time because they could not find full-time work. Those in health professions, engineering, law, and computer science responded at the lowest levels (Table 9).

**TABLE 9: FULL-TIME WORK UNAVAILABLE, BY TEACHING FIELD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Professional Health</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Sciences</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and Literature</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Languages</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and Religion</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)
In just the opposite proportions, as reported in Table 10, the same fields ranked highest and lowest when faculty reported “preferring” to teach part time. These parallels are sufficiently dramatic to suggest that the economic state of the individual disciplines—at least with respect to supply and demand—affects the dynamics of employment far more than any overarching institutional strategy or policy. Competing job opportunities—or lack of them—appear to play a substantial role in whether people with appropriate qualifications are available and willing to teach part time, and whether they do so voluntarily or involuntarily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Field</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Professional Health</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Sciences</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and Literature</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Languages</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and Religion</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

These data suggest a change in college or university teaching as a career path. They suggest an increasingly powerful differentiation of career paths among disciplines or professions, and serious disparities in the relative economic condition of those individual disciplines or professions. The large number of part-time faculty being paid low wages in some fields (either because there is an oversupply or because competing opportunities for full-time work pay well) may ultimately distort the entire salary and benefit structure of the “industry,” but surely distort it in those fields that now rely heavily on part-timers.
Changing family roles and responsibilities. The dramatic entry of women into the academic profession in the short space of a generation or two may have had an impact, too. It is not clear that women prefer part-time work to full-time work—the evidence appears to show that they do not. On the other hand, the reality that both genders increasingly share in work and family responsibilities may create pressure for options in jobs and careers that include nonstandard work arrangements for everyone during parts of their lives. Academic jobs with their heavy pressure during tenure-earning phases may be too rigid to accommodate these new realities (Gappa, 1996; Gappa, 1997).

Student enrollment patterns. Patterns of student enrollment and demand have shifted as new fields emerge and as those with a greater immediate payoff on the investment of tuition dollars become more attractive. Some of the more traditional arts and sciences disciplines have undoubtedly given up students (and economic strength) to more applied studies. The half-life of an academic career may be considerably shorter than it was when the tenure system was introduced in the 1940s, making institutions reluctant to commit to faculty in a discipline that may or may not enjoy a consistent demand (and enrollment) in 10 or 20 or 30 years. Logically, this kind of pressure would redirect the appointment of faculty from tenure-earning to non-tenure-track positions. Similarly, the need to meet fluctuating student demand as new kinds of work open up and different kinds of training are required argues for a high level of flexibility in faculty appointments.

So, changes outside academe’s control may be increasingly influential in shaping incentives and career trajectories. Those changes seem to be overriding the customs, traditions, and patterns of faculty work—and may continue to do so in ways that are, as yet, unforeseen. But it is now at least clear that studies of “faculty” employment ought to be disaggregated to take these forces into account and to accept their differential impact.

At the same time, Sloan conferees recognized a number of factors over which academic institutions may have more control but that also reinforce differentiation among disciplines. Studies of how work is divided up show that some disciplines (foreign languages and literature, for example) have gone so far as to create different departments based on whether instruction is basic (say, in the French language) or whether it is more advanced and theoretical (say, in linguistics or literary theory) (Tolbert, 1997).

Similarly, Sloan conferees who have tracked the production of doctorates note a substantial increase in recent years. Whether that production responds to market demand was a matter of debate.
Overproduction in some areas and underproduction in others was seen as a serious problem, although of as yet unspecified dimensions. Perhaps a tighter connection between the number of doctorates and the demand for them in the marketplace might reduce production—at least in some fields—or redirect resources into fields where demand is stronger, in or out of academe. This is a difficult balance to strike, because institutions may see their graduate programs as both a source of prestige and of teaching assistants, and because predicting demand years in advance is a very imprecise art.

PART-TIME FACULTY AND THE INTEGRITY OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Several generalizations emerged from the Sloan conference on part-time, adjunct, and temporary faculty. The academic workforce is increasingly comprised of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty. The proportion of these nontraditional faculty appears to be at a far higher level than workers in “nonstandard arrangements” in other sectors of the economy—marking higher education as an anomalous case, even in a time of remarkable change and instability in employment. These changes appear to be substantially affected by external forces in the economy and by lagging responses on the part of colleges and universities—including a rigid time schedule and inflexible standards for awarding tenure. A large share of the escalating numbers of part-timers can be traced to increased staffing in community colleges and to financial pressures to control the cost of salaries and benefits for full-time faculty.

Ironically, the effects do not appear—on the whole—to have diminished morale or professional commitment among part-time faculty. In part, this may be a result of changing preferences that favor part-time work and because nonacademic opportunities in some fields are more attractive than tenure-track faculty jobs. Whether quality of instruction may differ if done by part-time faculty instead of tenured or tenure-track faculty is hard to determine from existing evidence.

The supply and demand equations of the different disciplines show that demand for instructional faculty is strong, overall. But pockets of oversupply are probably weakening the bargaining power and stature of present and prospective faculty in selected fields—especially in the humanities and arts. In these fields, part-time faculty appear to be more affected by the economic realities and less satisfied with their working conditions. Disaffection and low morale in these fields need attention.

Is the increasing use of part-time and temporary faculty a cause or a symptom of the profound changes buffeting American colleges and universities? The Sloan conference concluded with questions...
about higher education’s value to society—what is produced, at what cost, and for whom? If traditional
degrees offered to traditional students on traditional campuses at unlimited cost is valued, then perhaps
traditional faculty careers are sustainable. On the other hand, if society wants and needs just-in-time
preparation for new careers at different stages in life without regard to physical location and at
reasonable prices, then perhaps a more nimble and adaptable kind of institution is needed—one in
which the faculty may or may not hold traditional doctorates, may or may not be full-time employees
of one institution, and may or may not even be physically present in a particular place at a particular
time.

Current employment arrangements for part-time faculty may or may not provide the kind of
flexibility, creativity, adaptability, and efficiency that such an imagined institution would need. Part-
time faculty in some fields report feeling exploited, insecure, and alienated.

Can valid and effective academic programs grow and flourish with faculty who feel that way? The
collegiate traditions of shared governance, of an integrated liberal arts curriculum, and of values that
respect intellectual freedom may also be more difficult to preserve when the faculty is more
fragmented and transient. Would it be better to reconsider the conditions under which all faculty work,
and to build opportunities that combine ways to make intellectual contributions—clearly the most
intrinsic motivator for most faculty—with protections and rewards that allow good people to do so with
enough security to make real, lasting commitments?

Fairness and justice may be important questions, but this Sloan conference has made abundantly
clear that the effectiveness and validity of the whole higher education enterprise is entangled in the
question of what faculty do, how their work and careers are constructed, and whether they can achieve
the ends that society wants from its colleges and universities. It is not clear that one system—the
traditional tenure track—is best. But it is also not clear that the path toward an increasingly temporary
and contingent faculty is necessarily better. If we have succeeded in provoking a deeper—yet more
nuanced—look at how the production of knowledge, the teaching and learning process in
undergraduate education, and the application of knowledge to society’s problems may best be
conducted by the most talented and most committed minds, we will have taken one step in the right
direction.
END NOTES

1. The term “part-time” faculty will refer to individuals appointed to teach courses and whose employment is on some basis other than a full-time contract. Sometimes referred to as “adjunct” faculty, whose employment is typically long term but part time, this group also includes temporary hires who teach as substitutes, as “fill-in” appointments, or as on-call instructors whose employment depends on adequate enrollment in courses. It does not refer to graduate teaching assistants, nor to faculty appointed to full-time positions without eligibility for tenure. The latter group is commonly referred to as “temporary” faculty. But terminology varies, making it difficult, in some cases, to define clearly who may be included in a generalization and who may not. The data in this report are drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics’ National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) conducted in the fall of 1992. Respondents to the survey self-reported their full- or part-time status.

2. We caution against the assumption that part-time faculty teach intermittently, irregularly, or only for brief periods. They averaged 6.3 years in their teaching jobs in 1992, and appear—on the whole—to be a stable, loyal, and committed workforce (see also Gappa and Leslie, 1993).

REFERENCES


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While this report draws heavily on ideas and perspectives shared at the Sloan Conference, the author assumes full responsibility for its substance. Particular thanks are extended to Kathleen Christensen, program officer at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, for her thoughtful support in organizing and designing the conference. Judith M. Gappa, Joan S. Stark, and S. Anthony Foster were particularly thorough readers of this report in its early drafts. Participants in the conference are listed in Appendix A. Each of them deserves a special note of appreciation for their willingness to prepare so thoroughly and thoughtfully for the intensive presentations and discussions that enlivened the conference. Staff at The College of William and Mary provided essential professional support—in particular, Beth Stokes, administrative assistant to the dean of the School of Education.

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