

Managing Temporary Faculty

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Department chairs have many decisions to consider about full-time temporary faculty members. In this article, full-time temporary faculty are those individuals who are employed full-time in a college or university, teach a full course load, have little to no scholarship requirements, and are assigned very few departmental or institutional service duties. In effect, these individuals resemble traditional (tenured or tenure-track) faculty in the eyes of students, but they have no institutional commitment beyond their contract term. The literature on academic leadership has neglected this class of "contingent" faculty (relative to adjunct and part-time faculty). The paucity of coverage exists even though the percentage of full-time temporary faculty at colleges and universities continues to increase while the percentage of tenured or tenure-track positions is decreasing (see American Association of University Professors, 2006).

BENEFITS AND LIABILITIES OF TEMPORARY FACULTY

There are benefits and liabilities associated with having temporary full-time faculty in your department. Benefits include cost efficiency (salaries are lower than for traditional faculty) and weaker institutional commitment (the institution is not "locked in" with this person). These individuals tend to be effective teachers, are current in their field, and have useful ties to the community (because many have been employed in applied settings). They are rarely unionized and are a viable recruitment source for permanent positions. Perhaps the greatest benefit is that they are employed full-time so they can assume significant teaching responsibilities.

Liabilities include that they contribute to poor program continuity (because different individuals float in and out of temporary lines); they are assigned few service duties (including advisement) and therefore are not available to help with the day-to-day running of the department; they are often poorly perceived by other faculty, administrators, and occasionally students (i.e., less rigorous, less effective teachers, etc); and, if they are high in numbers within a department, temporary faculty may be threatening to traditional faculty. From the students' perspective, temporary faculty often know less about an institution (e.g., the library, university policies, etc.) than traditional faculty; they are often unable to comply with students' needs. Students have expectations for their professors, regardless of their temporary or permanency status such as writing reference letters or teaching independent studies. Another liability that stems from their full-time status is that temporary faculty may feel a false sense of security about their future in a department. In other words, precisely because their day-to-day life is

much like a traditional faculty member, temporary faculty members may develop the illusion that they are indispensable or are a shoo-in for any permanent openings that may emerge.

CREATING POLICY PERTAINING TO TEMPORARY FACULTY

The benefits and liabilities discussed here suggest that department chairs may be wise to create policy for managing the issues associated with temporary faculty. Typically, institutions have policy in place for the hiring, evaluation, and termination of temporary faculty. However, it may more likely be the case that the individual departments are put in control of the governance associated with temporary faculty. If so, then it is the chair's responsibility to set in place policy pertaining to temporary faculty. This policy might concern such issues as hiring practices, termination processes, and the degree to which temporary faculty are involved in departmental practices (such as meetings).

An important part of any policy pertaining to temporary faculty is the extent to which the traditional faculty become involved in matters related to temporary faculty. There are two ends of the continuum: Faculty can choose to be highly involved in department policy or they can choose little to no involvement. There are pros and cons associated with each option. On the pro side of strong involvement there is greater administrative transparency and shared governance. The con side of this is more work for faculty, which they may not want. In addition to the increased faculty workload, greater involvement may also be associated with more drawn-out decision processes and longer decision time. This can be problematic when decisions involving temporary faculty must be made quickly or at a time during the academic year when many faculty are unavailable or unpaid (i.e., during the summer). On the pro side of a low amount of faculty involvement, the faculty workload in this area is nonexistent and decisions can be made quickly. This can be good, especially when hiring needs to be done quickly (e.g., during the first week of class). This option requires the faculty to trust the chair. The downside is that the potential is high for reduced transparency, which may lead to a disconnect between the chair and the faculty.

An obvious starting point for any department policy related to temporary faculty is to consider the parameters set forth by the college and/or institution. These parameters will most likely concern areas such as workload, salary, fringe benefits, as well as other parameters like reporting grades, office hours, and syllabi. Before considering any other policy issues, it is wise to gauge your faculty's collective attitude about temporary faculty. For example, if there is a strong norm of inclusion (i.e., anyone who is part of the corps of instructors should be included in discussion of policy pertaining to teaching), then this attitude will need to be considered in any policy that is crafted.

After gauging your department members' overall attitude about temporary faculty, the policy will need to be created. The following is a nonexhaustive list of issues that most likely should be considered:

- *Resource allocation.* Do temporary faculty merit travel money support—support to attend workshops? If the norm is that they do not merit travel money, then there may be some circumstances under which they do: If the temporary faculty member is directing a specific departmental effort (e.g., a clinic), monies in support of that effort may need to be allocated to him or her.
- *Departmental standards and practices.* How do temporary faculty learn about departmental norms, for example, those having to do with syllabi, grades, exams, finals, textbook selection, class meetings? This issue is not unique to temporary faculty but also applies to any new faculty member. It may be worth having a committee create a departmental tool kit containing forms, sample materials, standard instructions about photocopying, and so forth.
- *Evaluation.* Is there an evaluation system in place for temporary faculty? If yes, is it the same for traditional faculty? Should it be? Given that temporary faculty have a different profile of responsibilities, perhaps the standard evaluation model is not appropriate. The system you create could be as simple as a checklist with a few questions or it could be more elaborate, with a narrative describing their accomplishments. Related to this issue is whether temporary faculty should submit an annual report that outlines their accomplishments for a given year. This may be appropriate for long-term temporary faculty.
- *Hiring.* Should there be an organized search for temporary faculty as with tenure-track faculty? Is there money for such a search? Can a modified search practice take place? Once a search practice is established, should there be an interview where tenure-track faculty meet and evaluate candidates? Departments will vary in the extent to which this is financially possible and desirable (is such an investment in a temporary hire appropriate?).
- *Rehiring/termination.* This is related to evaluation and hiring. Should there be a departmental vote or other sort of process to keep temporary faculty? Alternatively, this decision could be left entirely up to the chair. Of course, there are obvious benefits with the former (transparency, shared governance) along with liabilities (time commitment). One benefit of a faculty vote is that any negative decision is shared by the faculty and does not ride solely with the chair.
- *Involvement in departmental business.* To what extent should temporary faculty be involved in departmental business—curriculum, searches for permanent faculty and other staff, mission/vision creation? There are benefits and liabilities associated with high and low

involvement. This issue should be spelled out clearly, so the temporary faculty member knows it up front.

WHAT TO DO, AT A MINIMUM

Regardless of whether chairs facilitate the development of policy about temporary faculty, there are some basic principles that they may wish to follow regarding temporary faculty members:

- *Ensure that temporary faculty have basic infrastructure.* Despite their contingent status, temporary faculty serve an important function. It is the chair's responsibility that these individuals have an adequate office setup that includes a telephone, computer, printer, and other office equipment. Because they are often at the bottom of the academic caste, even these basic needs are sometimes not provided.
- *Encourage respect, support, and acknowledge effort.* Perhaps the highest priority of any chair is to attend to the faculty in your department. Chairs have a great deal of influence over department climate. A climate of respect, support, and acknowledgment of effort goes a long way toward making day-to-day life pleasant for all faculty.
- *Assert equality of all faculty members.* Although tenured and tenure-track faculty members obviously have a greater stake in what goes on in an academic department, there are ways in which all faculty must be treated equally. Listening to grievances, celebrating successes, and providing letters of reference are examples.
- *Include temporary faculty in shared governance where appropriate.* Ideally, all faculty should be consulted about issues that are relevant to them. With temporary faculty, a chair may include these faculty in the creation of policy that pertains to them. Of course, this can be dicey if the primary responsibility of the faculty member is to teach and *not* to provide departmental service. Nevertheless, asking whether they would like to be involved, even if they decline, goes a long way in maintaining a good relationship with that faculty member.

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REFERENCE

American Association of University Professors. (2006). *AAUP contingent faculty index 2006*. Washington, DC: Author.