Contingent Faculty Unique Contractual Needs: Job Security and Academic Freedom

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Cover Page Footnote
In most community colleges, there is a growing use of contingent/adjunct or part-time faculty who perform relatively the same duties as full-time faculty usually under separate collective bargaining agreements and units. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to operating in this mixed-environment. Many full-time faculty do not see the advantages of merging with contingents to form one bargaining unit, which may be evidenced by the lack of full-time faculty bargaining units merging with contingent faculty. The only time when full-time faculty may see contingents as a partner is when the full-time faculty is in the middle of contract negotiations, have issued “intent to strike” and will approach contingents to participate in campaign efforts such as wearing buttons or attending public events. Many of the contingents are reluctant to participate in these activities for fear of retaliation from the administration such as canceling contracts or hiring substitute teachers. Some campuses have prevented contingent faculty from participating in strikes with the full-time faculty. One can ask does this prevention violate contingent’s freedom to participate in union activities as covered under the National Labor Relations Act.
Contingent Faculty Unique Contractual Needs:
Job Security and Academic Freedom
Katherine Starks-Lawrence, Heartland Community College

The purpose of this panel (workshop) is to look at providing solutions to unique contractual needs as they relate to job security and academic freedom. This paper will address those emerging needs in community colleges.

In most community colleges, there is a growing use of contingent/adjunct or part-time faculty who perform relatively the same duties as full-time faculty usually under separate collective bargaining agreements and units. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to operating in this mixed-environment. Many full-time faculty do not see the advantages of merging with contingents to form one bargaining unit, which may be evidenced by the lack of full-time faculty bargaining units merging with contingent faculty. The only time when full-time faculty may see contingents as a partner is when the full-time faculty is in the middle of contract negotiations, have issued “intent to strike” and will approach contingents to participate in campaign efforts such as wearing buttons or attending public events. Many of the contingents are reluctant to participate in these activities for fear of retaliation from the administration such as canceling contracts or hiring substitute teachers. Some campuses have prevented contingent faculty from participating in strikes with the full-time faculty. One can ask does this prevention violate contingent’s freedom to participate in union activities as covered under the National Labor Relations Act.

- Contingent faculty will have to obtain a job security clause in their contracts that gives them the right to participate in all forms of collective bargaining activities with full-time faculty without any retaliation.

Potential conflicts that may arise from operating under separate collective bargaining units with the same labor organization; for example, is when a contract item is negotiated by full-time faculty that directly impacts contingent faculty and contingents are not asked how the issue would impact them.

- Contingent faculty should carefully look at the advantages and disadvantages of forming a collective bargaining unit under the same labor organization as full-time faculty, and the advantages and disadvantages of operating under separate agreements.

Participation in academic governance or service is available to some contingents. However, many contingents are too busy traveling between two-three educational institutions to make a living and do not have time to participate. In addition, situations have occurred where contingents’ participation was not viewed as being valuable especially when contingents were not hired for internal full-time faculty positions. In private industry, the new trend is to develop an organizational culture that promotes employees from within by growing your own. This new trend is not the norm in many community colleges.

- Contingent contracts should include a reasonable amount of compensation for participation in academic service.
There is a substantial amount of research and evidence that shows many high school graduates are not academically prepared to do college-level work and are enrolling in remedial courses at a high rate. Many of these students are enrolling in community colleges and are being taught by contingent faculty who receive little or no training in how to reach these remedial/marginal students; especially if the institution does not require some type of assessment or college success course. As these students become comfortable with a particular instructor, they may seek them out for additional courses, which can become a retention issue for the institution.

- Contracts may need to provide provisions for experienced contingents to teach a variety of 100 and 200-level courses to serve as role models to students, to write letters of recommendations, and to expand teaching competencies.

The increased use of contingent faculty affects the workload for all faculty. More institutions have a faculty ratio of 60% contingent and 40% full-time faculty. Full-time faculty is required to teach 5 courses per semester and participate in academic committees/governance. This is creating increased strains on the small pool of full-time faculty who find themselves over committed. Therefore, indicating a need for more full-time faculty.

- Contracts should provide for the provision to pay for participation in committee/governance to reduce full-time faculty workload.

Another issue with workload is the course selection process. At some institutions, each semester, full-time faculty self-select the courses they want to teach on a particular day offered at a particular time. However, they will select the course sections they know will meet enrollment and are offered at the most popular times of the day. While contingents are given the leftover sections which may not meet enrollment because they are offered in late afternoons; which is an unpopular time for some students. This creates a workload problem for contingents who must teach at two-three other institutions to make a living. It becomes difficult to juggle the schedules. Many contingents may find out one to two weeks or as little as one to two days before a semester starts that they will not be teaching a course because it did not meet enrollment and it is too late for contingents to find work at another institution to make up the lost income.

- Contracts should provide for contingents to be paid if an assigned course is cancelled because of insufficient enrollment levels.

There is a greater need for professional development for “career contingents”, those who have been teaching 5-15 or more years at the same institution. These contingents have a different set of professional development needs than contingents with 1-4 years of teaching experience. Professional development funds should be enough to cover one graduate-level course at a nearby college or university. Contingents are now caught in a quandary because they are not able to enroll in one or two graduate-level courses because they can't afford the tuition which may range from $600 to $2,500 per course or $3,000 to $10,000 for a short-term graduate certificate program. In addition, contingents are not eligible to receive financial aid because they must be enrolled in a full-time program.

- Contracts need to provide adequate professional development funds for contingents to expand their education, skill sets, and competencies.
Another unique issue is why an institution would offer professional development to contingent faculty when the administration has no intention of hiring contingents. In some institutions, contingents with 15 or more years of teaching and service experience are not being hired for internal full-time faculty positions. The organizational culture is to hire from outside the institution, which affects quality of education and contingents’ morale and job security.

- Contracts need to provide a clear path for promotional opportunities to full-time positions within the institution.

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