

Brave New (Insecure) World

Teaching without Tenure— Policies and Practices for a New Era

by Roger G. Baldwin and Jay L. Chronister,
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Reviewed by Tom Shipka

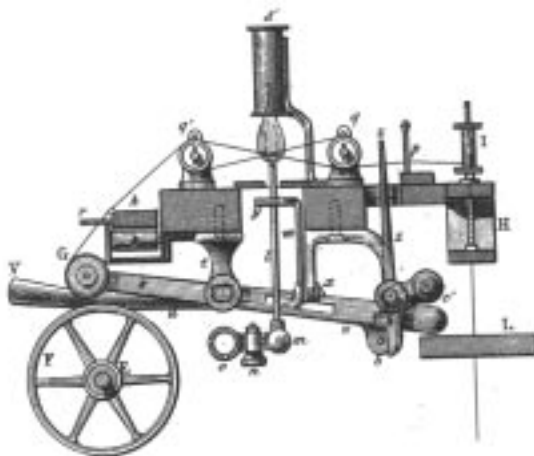
This book is a systematic study of what the authors call a “major shift in the staffing of American colleges and universities”—the increasing use of full-time non-tenure-track (FTNTT) faculty. FTNTT faculty hold various titles: term faculty, adjunct professors, lecturers, and visiting professors, and they work at two-year, four-year, and graduate institutions. With some exceptions, they are hired exclusively to teach, and their annual or multiyear appointments are renewable. Unlike full-time tenure-track faculty, FTNTT appointees typically have no career ladder to climb. The authors peg the current percentage of FTNTT faculty in American higher education in the 20 percent to 27 percent range of total full-time faculty and their number in excess of 70,000. The authors note that this “major shift” parallels the corporate world where there has been “a shift from stable, single-institution careers with long-term security to short-term contingent jobs and nonlinear paths covering many institutions.” (p. 173)

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The authors see their book as a continuation of the efforts of previous investigators of the higher education staffing scene, including Chat and Ford’s *Beyond Traditional Tenure* (1982), Bower and Schuster’s *American Professors: A National Resource Imperiled* (1986), Ernest Lynton and Sandra

Elman's *New Priorities for the University* (1987), Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Gappa and Leslie's *Invisible Faculty* (1993), Gappa's *Off the Tenure Track: Six Models for Full-Time, Nontenurable Appointments* (1996), Matthew Finkin's *The Case for Tenure* (1996), and Finkelstein, Seal, and Schuster's *The New Academic Generation: A Profession in Transition* (1998). They also cite other key publications on this topic, such as a special issue of *Daedalus* in 1997 (126, 4) on "The American Academic Profession" and an article in *The New Republic* by John Hickman entitled "Adjunct U." (December 7, 1998).

The authors report that the two most commonly cited reasons for hiring FTNTT faculty are "the need for flexibility in staffing and the ability to respond to financial fluctuations" (p. 93). But there are other reasons, especially at public institutions: increasing demands for accountability of institutions and employees; perceptions among many trustees, legislators, benefactors, students and taxpayers that tenured faculty are preoccupied with their research, unconcerned about teaching, arrogant, inflexible, too autonomous, and immunized from the realities of the marketplace; scarce resources due in part to declining government support in real dollars; new instructional delivery technology; new and increasing competition for traditional colleges and universities from for-profit educational organizations and virtual universities; spiraling tuition; unpredictable enrollment patterns of nontraditional students; rapid program and curricular changes requiring staffing flexibility; tenure caps; and the availability of qualified instructors who may lack the credentials traditionally required for a tenure-track appointment. The authors are confident that the FTNTT phenomenon is a permanent part of the higher education landscape. (The worsening economy since the book was published, with cutbacks in state appropriations to higher education in vir-



tually every state due to revenue shortfalls, probably reinforces their confidence.)

In their research, the authors mined two national data bases, the 1988 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty. They conducted a survey of a cross-section of U.S. colleges and universities about FTNTT faculty, they studied campus policies regulating such appointments, and they visited 12 campuses where they interviewed a total of 385 persons.

The authors devote a good deal of space to describing the terms and conditions of employment of FTNTT faculty. Among the 86 institutions surveyed, FTNTT faculty are paid less than regular, full-time faculty at about half the public institutions but paid comparably at about two-thirds of the private institutions. At most institutions, public and private, FTNTT faculty receive the same fringe benefits, including life insurance, health insurance, and pension plans as tenure-track faculty. FTNTT faculty have higher teaching loads overall than tenure-track faculty at roughly half of the institutions surveyed, and they are often restricted from teaching upper division courses, courses required for the major, and graduate courses. Many FTNTT faculty teach multiple sections of one or two courses term after term, year after year.

Opportunities to participate in institutional governance vary from campus to campus, but there is seldom parity for FTNTT faculty with regular faculty. Confusion as to the scope of their governance rights abounds. Evaluation of FTNTT faculty is usually mandatory and reliance on student evaluations is heavy. Opportunities for professional development of FTNTT faculty—conference fees, professional travel, association dues, sabbaticals, campus grants—are restricted when compared to tenure-track faculty at most institutions. Although institutions claim to extend academic freedom to FTNTT faculty, the authors found few institutions with procedures in place that such faculty may turn to if there is a problem. Further, they report that many FTNTT faculty report that they are reluctant, due to their lack of job security, to broach controversial issues in class or among colleagues or to try teaching innovations.

The authors' research prompted them to identify three discrete models of FTNTT employment across a spectrum—the "marginalized model," the "integrated model," and the "alternative career track model." The gap between FTNTT faculty and tenure-track faculty on most professional criteria—governance, teaching load, job security, professional development, salaries and fringe benefits, evaluation, career progression—closes, but not entirely, as one moves from the first model to the third.

Teaching Without Tenure presents extensive information about who the FTNTT faculty are and what they do. The reader discovers, for instance, that women and persons of color are a greater proportion of the FTNTT

than of faculty overall; that most FTNTT faculty teach significantly more than tenure eligible and tenured faculty; that most publish significantly less than tenure eligible and tenured faculty; that their job satisfaction lags tenured faculty but not tenure-track faculty; that they are concerned about job security; that about one-third holds the doctorate; that some voluntarily choose FTNTT status over a traditional appointment for personal or professional reasons; and that, working conditions notwithstanding, a very high percentage would choose an academic career again.

The volume takes a normative turn in Chapter 6 when the authors feature “exemplary policies” or a “Best Practices Model” for FTNTT employees. In this chapter the authors identify 13 factors that an institution should address in an ideal package of personnel policies. The authors concede that no single institution addresses all factors satisfactorily but say that many schools follow “enlightened policies” that, taken together, can form a “template” to guide institutions in the future. The factors are a defined probationary period, explicit evaluation criteria, multiyear contracts after a probationary period, defined dates for contract renewal or termination, an equitable salary system (which may mean higher salaries than those of tenure eligible and tenured faculty to compensate for the greater risk), an equitable fringe benefit system, a system of sequential ranks, support for professional development, meaningful involvement in governance and curriculum development, recognition of meritorious service, explicit policies and procedures to protect academic freedom and safeguard FTNTT faculty from arbitrary and capricious dismissal, development and monitoring of a policy stating when, how, and for what purpose FTNTT faculty are to be employed, and an orientation program for newly appointed FTNTT faculty.

Teaching Without Tenure is a thorough, balanced, and relevant investigation that deserves a wide audience among all of higher education. The authors follow a sensible methodology to document and understand a major new challenge to those concerned about fair treatment for educators. Further, they don’t simply whine about the sky falling in; they craft thoughtful policies, a “Best Practices Model,” for institutions, employee organizations, and individuals to consider. (I suspect that many readers will conclude, however, that their “Best Practices Model” extends to FTNTT employees a status so similar to that of tenured faculty that it undermines the rationale for hiring FTNTT in the first place.)

If the book has a flaw, it is the authors’ failure to bring the NEA specifically and faculty unions generally into the picture. When the authors lay out a proposed “action agenda” to implement their “Best Practices Model,” they identify various “key players” and the role that they should play. The key players, they tell us, are FTNTT faculty, deans and department chairs, faculty senates, senior administrative leaders, “professional associations including the AAUP,” governing and coordinating agencies,

and graduate schools. In that the NEA is the largest organization of education employees in the land, that its affiliates include faculty unions on hundreds of the nation's campuses, and that faculty union members are likely to be deeply concerned about salaries, benefits, due process, academic freedom, and other factors discussed by the authors, one expects the authors to recognize the NEA and faculty unions as key players.

That said, this is, overall, an important contribution to the subject.



Tom Shipka chairs the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Youngstown State University. He is former chair of the NEA Higher Education Council and Higher Education Caucus, former member of the Review Panel of Thought & Action, and recipient of the James M. Davenport Memorial Award. His published work includes Philosophy: Paradox and Discovery, McGraw-Hill, 5th edition forthcoming.