

Challenging Stereotypes That Interfere With Effective Governance

by Adrianna Kezar, Jaime Lester, and Gregory Anderson

There is a growing concern among faculty and administrators in higher education institutions at all levels that shared governance¹ is being diminished, primarily due to the decline of tenure-track faculty and growth of contingent faculty who have been historically excluded from formal participation in university governance.² Since governance forms a main part of service, one of three roles in the triumvirate of teaching, research, and service, as the demographic profile of faculty changes,³ this is an important time to reflect on governance—one of the main aspects of academic work.

Clark Kerr⁴ noted that shared governance is one of the defining hallmarks of universities. Shared governance demonstrates the commitment to freedom of ideas, the professionalization of faculty, and the importance of deliberative decision-making. Historians of higher education note that faculty look romantically at shared governance as a much more deeply embedded pattern in higher education than the historical record actually demonstrates. Nevertheless, the case can be made that shared governance has been an important part of many higher education institutions over the last 75 years.⁵

Although the role of faculty in governance differs by institutional sector and over time, historically there has often been debate and interest in the role of faculty in governance.⁶ Traditionally, only tenured and tenure-track faculty work with

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upper-level administrators to design policy and create strategic initiatives through the governance process. There is no tradition or systematic policy for including contingent faculty in governance. In this essay, we examine the idea of governance—an often overlooked and under-conceptualized aspect of academic work—particularly in relation to contingent and part-time faculty.

No empirical studies have actually demonstrated that shared governance has declined with the increase in contingent faculty, but many observers suspect and fear the correlation. This concern arose largely as a result of a common observation: Shared governance has declined as contract and part-time faculty positions

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have grown in number. But is this a necessary relationship? Based on research and our own experiences, we would like to offer another perspective: that contingent and part-time faculty are a valuable and underutilized resource that can contribute greatly to shared governance on college and university campuses. This perspective is probably already accepted by many contingent and part-time faculty. Therefore, we direct these comments toward tenure-track faculty and administrators, the groups that generally create governance structures and cultures within colleges and universities. These groups are often unaware of the biases that they hold and the ways that they exclude contingent and part-time faculty from performing a valuable service role for the institution. We hope to strengthen the academic profession by identifying a needed institutional direction: increased inclusion of contingent and part-time faculty in governance.

Universities do not expect most non-tenure-track faculty to do the same amount and type of research, teaching, and service as tenured faculty. According to Gappa⁷, colleges employ full-time non-tenured faculty as specialists in certain curricula or fields, especially in professional schools. The primary responsibilities of such faculty are in teaching. Few institutions even mention other aspects of typical academic appointments, such as student advising or service, in employment contracts.⁸ Gappa and Leslie also found that part-time and contingent faculty are rarely included in departmental activities such as service. As the authors noted:

Part-time faculty expressed anger and frustration about their perceived exclusion from collegial activities and career opportunities and a lack of appreciation for their efforts. Many expressed clear annoyance over the lack of consultation and involvement in decisions affecting them, and annoyance that was only exacerbated

by their feelings that protesting or demanding more substantive roles would jeopardize their continued employment.⁹

Another research study found that part-time and contingent faculty were told by their department chairs not to attend departmental or university meetings.¹⁰ Even when contingent and part-time faculty gain such rights, some senior tenure-track faculty members treat them with disrespect and insensitivity. Many non-tenure-track faculty voiced hesitation to truly participate in governance because tenure-track faculty would not permit their full participation. Gappa described

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one faculty member's story: "There's a lot of territorial protection and jealousy on the part of full-time faculty. A proposed new philosophy course that was badly needed got shot down on the basis of things other than merit, as I see it. There's a heavy sense that you don't threaten someone's territory."¹¹

In addition, Baldwin and Chronister¹² note how some policies designed to include non-tenure-track faculty in governance reinforce a second-class status. In almost all cases, tenure-track faculty decide on which issues non-tenure-track faculty can vote. The very decision to limit their role in governance to selected issues trivializes their contribution. The traditional professoriate not only decides the major issues, but also decides the level of participation. Baldwin and Chronister warned that such policies preclude a shared understanding of the roles and status of non-tenure track faculty. Contingent and part-time faculty are largely excluded by institutional policies that do not allow them to vote or even attend meetings. In a few instances where they gain these rights, policies marginalize their involvement or tenure-track faculty try to prevent their participation.

Studies of part-time and contingent faculty show that, despite institutional barriers to participation, many of them would like to be involved in governance. One part-time faculty commented, "Institutions should realize that part-time faculty want to be included in the institution. I for one would love to feel more a part of this university."¹³ Gappa and Leslie,¹⁴ and Baldwin and Chronister¹⁵ consistently found interest by non-tenure-track faculty in institutional governance.

Why include contingent faculty in governance? Should they be included merely because of their increased numbers? In an academic environment based on shared governance and stakeholder participation, the exclusion of contingent faculty is problematic. These faculty have valuable expertise, teach large numbers of

students, and understand the learning contexts of the institution. Just as students fought for their right to be included in institutional governance in the 1960s, we should learn from the past and include faculty stakeholders, taking into account their commitment and investment. We are particularly concerned with full-time non-tenure-track faculty who have a major commitment to the institution and are largely still excluded from decision-making. Most full-time contingent faculty serve on campuses for five years or more and have multi-year contracts.¹⁶ Moreover, studies of governance consistently find that faculty governance committees are often understaffed; and much governance is left in the hands of committee members who are unrepresentative of the broader ranks of instructional staff.¹⁷ If contingent and part-time faculty seek to be involved with governance and there is a problem of low faculty participation in governance, why does the academy not embrace this new cadre of colleagues? Why are policies to include contingent faculty in governance slow to emerge and consistently resisted?

One of the sources of the resistance to fully integrating contingent and part-time faculty into shared governance is unspoken biases. These biases discount the work of these faculty and place them at the bottom of the faculty hierarchy. To illustrate some of these assumptions, we present evidence from a case study of a campus attempting to restructure its governance process to include non-tenure-track faculty. This example demonstrates the role that these biases and stereotypes play in preventing contingent faculty from gaining the right to participate in governance. After the research is presented, we present literature about these common biases and conceptualize ways to address them.

The case study involves a university that had recently undergone a substantial shift in the number of contingent faculty.

In 1998, the college of education in the university had approximately 25 per-



cent non-tenure-track faculty and by 2003, the number had increased to 50 percent. The shift was primarily related to budget constraints, but administrators also sought to redefine programs to capitalize more on practitioner knowledge. Administrators and faculty leaders realized that they had few policies related to non-tenure-track faculty in terms of promotion, merit, evaluation, workload, and governance, so the college engaged in a year-long process to redesign its governance structure and faculty handbook. The planning team was made up of seven tenure-track faculty, four administrators, and one clinical faculty member. An initial problem was that tenure-track faculty were in charge of efforts to revise cur-

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rent governance structures even as they related to non-tenure-track faculty. When included at all, non-tenure-track faculty were given only token status.

Early discussions about the participation of non-tenure-track faculty in the governing body for the college resulted in concern among tenure-track faculty about whether non-tenure-track faculty could be critical of the administration and whether such individuals were really faculty. “I just worry that we are compromising the future of the school by allowing faculty who have no protection from the administration to become part of the decision-making process,” said one faculty member. “I really worry whether they can honestly speak freely and bring up controversial issues.”

Some faculty members felt that, due to the nature of the employment contract of contingent faculty, such professors were more aligned with the administration and did not have a strong faculty identity. Another faculty member on the planning committee stated, “I am not sure that these faculty really understand what it is like to be a faculty member because they do not go through the rites and passages to obtain tenure. Can they really represent the faculty perspective? I am afraid that they will merely rubber stamp ideas from the administration because that is more where their allegiances are than with the faculty.” Beyond the stereotype of “lacking courage,” this statement also suggests that tenure-track faculty members see the process of becoming tenured as central to understanding the identity of being a faculty member. Non-tenure-track faculty cannot really represent or understand being a faculty member, they suggest, without undergoing a standardized set of experiences. The only authentic faculty member, according to this line of thinking, is one who goes through the tenure process.

Other faculty members were concerned that including non-tenure-track fac-

ulty in the governance process legitimized a role that they perceived as troublesome. The faculty members who felt this way resisted inclusion as capitulation, demanding that the institution make a greater investment in tenure-track positions. As one faculty member stated, “I don’t have anything against non-tenure-track faculty members, but if they are included in governance it is as if we are saying that we endorse the university’s choice of continuing to increase the number of nontenure-track positions. I do not want to exclude this group *per se*, but it seems there are ramifications if we include them, like we are endorsing this role.” Many tenure-track faculty members have difficulty separating the issue of the

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growth of non-tenure-track faculty and the rights of this group. Helping faculty members to distinguish between these two related, but separate, issues assisted members of the committee to endorse involvement of nontenure-track faculty and governance.

The committee would likely have recommended non-tenure-track faculty not be included in governance, even though their charge was to develop a system to include non-tenure-track faculty in governance. However, two administrators and one tenure-track faculty member advocated for the importance of non-tenure-track faculty members in governance, using arguments we noted earlier in this paper. For example, the administrators provided evidence that non-tenure-track faculty had spoken up in a variety of settings, even though they were not provided official designation to vote or allowed to be part of the formal process. Administrators and faculty brought national data and literature (including resources from NEA and Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered*, for example) to show alternative paths to the perceived authentic role of faculty member.

Administrators, in particular, provided evidence from their experience of how contingent faculty helped broaden the academic perspectives and expertise of the faculty (e.g., the novel manner in which many contingent faculty taught or professional experience they had within academic administration). They also cited evidence that illustrated how the exclusion of contingent faculty from governance had created a second-class status that impacted non-tenure-track faculty morale. Lastly, administrators reminded tenure-track faculty that the college had a long history of difficulty staffing committees and meeting service obligations; such difficulties had only increased as several tenure-track faculty members retired.

Old habits die hard and entrenched beliefs take a long time to change. Even

as agreement on the value of non-tenure-track faculty contributions grew, some tenure-track faculty mounted opposition months later, trying again to stop the initiative. Administrators and faculty allies should understand the need to continually reinforce the decision for a year or two after the decision has passed. Even after this period of time, some faculty and administrators will probably continue to question the ability of non-tenure-track faculty members to participate in governance.

The initial proposal from the committee included non-tenure-track faculty as partial members of the governance process, without equal participation and rights.

Over time, the tenure-track faculty who were strongly against involving non-tenure-track faculty became advocates for their involvement.

But with more discussion about why the school would only grant partial participation, and by questioning the values and assumptions that supported such a decision (the biases against non-tenure-track faculty), the committee was able to move to a unanimous decision to include non-tenure-track faculty and governance as equal participants. Non-tenure-track faculty were provided an equal number of positions in the faculty governing body, the right to vote on all faculty decisions (with the exception of tenure and promotion for tenure-track faculty members), and allowed to serve on all committees. Their participation (for full-time contingent faculty only) would be equivalent to the percentage of their composition of the faculty.

The committee reached this decision through lengthy discussions over the course of a year. This sustained commitment revealed biases and stereotypes and allowed them to be discussed in terms of alternative evidence. Without adequate time for people to discuss such issues, these hidden assumptions and values would not have emerged. Over time, the tenure-track faculty who were strongly against involving non-tenure-track faculty became advocates for their involvement. Acknowledging their own biases encouraged certain committee members to help other tenure-track faculty to overcome similar biases. Having been against the idea, these individuals became the greatest advocates for inclusion with the most legitimacy. When the proposal went to the full faculty for vote, it passed easily because these tenure-track faculty advocates laid the groundwork.

The process has been in place for almost two years now and the results have been extremely positive. Non-tenure-track faculty feel free to challenge the administrators and tenure-track faculty members on their perspectives. In addition, non-tenure-track faculty members respect and support tenure-track faculty

positions on many issues; tenure-track faculty often advocate for non-tenure-track faculty issues. The fear that non-tenure-track faculty could not understand and respect the work of tenure-track faculty has proven to be without merit. The process of working together in governance has helped these two groups to better understand each other's interests and build a stronger college community. Ongoing communication has improved between these two groups of faculty that were mostly divided three years ago. A variety of policies have now been initiated that relate specifically to non-tenure-track faculty, clarifying their roles and responsibilities. Non-tenure-track faculty members feel not only more valued in

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the school, but experience greater equity on a host of issues; for example, a new and more equitable set of merit criteria have been developed. Both sets of faculty believe that the school needs to examine carefully the ratio of tenure and non-tenure-track faculty.

This case study provides four key lessons about revising governance structures to include non-tenure-track faculty. First, it is important to include more than a token number of non-tenure-track faculty in the planning process. Allowing contingent faculty approval after the policies are devised is too late; they should be instrumental in developing new procedures. Such early inclusion presents a dilemma, of course, because tenure-track faculty are the only ones who create policy (the very problem we are trying to address).

Second, stereotypes and biases must be challenged. If there were not a few tenure-track faculty and administrators willing to challenge the damaging stereotypes that emerged, the effort to create a new governance structure that included non-tenure-track faculty would not likely have happened. Also, administrators need to find tenure-track faculty allies to support non-tenure-track faculty that serve on these planning committees. Non-tenure-track faculty, though willing to challenge tenure-track faculty on their stereotypes and biases, need support in their efforts. And if administrators are not supportive of including contingent faculty in governance, such faculty may need to form their own alliances with tenure-track faculty who seem sympathetic to their cause. On each campus the politics and dynamics will differ.

Third, the case for including non-tenure-track faculty in governance will need to be made repeatedly in various forms and over a long period of time. The belief that tenure-track faculty are the only legitimate group of faculty to be included in governance is deeply entrenched in most parts of the academy. In addition, the inclusion of faculty who are against contingent faculty involvement can be a strat-

egy for creating strong advocates in the future. As this case demonstrates, once these tenure-track faculty members were convinced of the value of including non-tenure-track faculty, they worked hard to convince others.

Fourth, simply establishing a policy or practice to include contingent faculty in governance will likely not work. Instead, a committee process needs to be established that allows for extended discussion so that biases can emerge and people can develop new perspectives. This will require individuals that support the involvement of contingent faculty to have the courage to stand up to what are often the most vocal and powerful faculty members. It is also important to create advocates

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among tenure-track faculty who can provide legitimacy to the decision. Academics are influenced greatly by colleagues; it is important to win over idea leaders.

As this case demonstrates, several unspoken assumptions need to be dispelled and some biases examined. The literature on non-tenure-track faculty reflects certain damaging stereotypes that prevent their full participation. Unless these stereotypes and biases are challenged, little can be done to move towards more inclusive and effective governance structures. In this section, we challenge these stereotypes, provide rationale for advocates to use to support involvement of contingent faculty in governance, and ideas for addressing some of the conditions that lead to these stereotypes.

Lacking Courage: Perhaps the most often cited assumption is that without the security that tenure provides, contingent faculty will not express unpopular, challenging, or even innovative ideas because they fear that their contracts will not be renewed if they do.¹⁸ Such a claim is not spurious, given the centralization of power that has occurred in the last 20 years. But little empirical data exists to support this assertion. In our own experience on seven different campuses, contingent and part-time faculty were generally vocal and engaged in discussions of important issues. This is not to say that from time to time such faculty did not worry about a particular comment and how it might affect their performance appraisal or continued employment.¹⁹ In the case study presented below, non-tenure-track faculty, once included in the governance process, actively questioned actions of both the administration and tenure-track faculty.

Developing policies that provide contingent faculty greater stability would strengthen their participation in governance. A first step in this process would be the development of multi-year contracts that reward performance in the classroom and loyalty to an institution. Many instructors currently off the tenure track are comfortable with their status, but would benefit from the assurance of employ-

ment over three, five, or even 10 years. Such a longer term commitment from the university would encourage these faculty members to contribute more than just their teaching hours.

Not a Real Faculty Member: Many tenure-track and tenured faculty believe that contingent faculty are not equivalent in terms of their roles and status. They equate the tenure process as pivotal to understanding the faculty identity and responsibilities, particularly around the identity of the researcher. This conception of academia is becoming increasingly problematic. Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered*²⁰ suggested that faculty responsibilities be examined more broadly to

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include more of an emphasis on teaching and service, the very work that contingent faculty do and that the public expects and wants. Because most higher education institutions in the U.S. are classified as teaching institutions (as opposed to more of an emphasis on research), it seems misguided to suggest that faculty that focus more time on teaching than research do not understand the responsibility of being a faculty member.

Others fear the weakening of faculty governance since contract faculty are often barred from governance activities because they are not considered "real" faculty.²¹ This is a concern; as demonstrated in the research many part-time and contingent faculty are barred from involvement in governance.²² However, this may be more oversight than intent. If we believe in the value of part-time and contingent faculty, it would be possible to change our policies and procedures to include contingent faculty in the process and give them voting rights.

Corporate Sellout: Many faculty blame the decline in tenure-track faculty on contingent and part-time faculty; the presence of such professionals, they say, furthers the aims of corporatizing administrators and weakens the position of tenure-track faculty. In order to punish non-tenure-track faculty, tenure-track faculty exclude them from positions of power. In terms of fear, tenure-track faculty assume that part-time and contingent faculty do not have the critical insight to fight against corporate values and are too closely aligned with corporate, administrative values. In addition, tenure-track faculty often perceive themselves as having the most power within the university to act as a counterweight to corporate values. Yet, there is consistent evidence that tenure-track faculty are actively involved in academic capitalism²³ and just as much evidence that part-time and contingent faculty have been highly resistant to corporatization,²⁴ perhaps even more so than tenure-track faculty. The quintessential anti-corporate action, union-

ization, has in recent times often been initiated and supported by contingent faculty, and resisted by the traditional professoriate.

A recent American Association of University Professors policy statement on part-time and temporary faculty noted that the question of the role of part-time and temporary faculty and institutional governance is a thorny issue. “On the one hand,” the statement notes, “their connection with any campus may be tenuous and as they might work at several campuses, moving from campus to campus, which may impair their ability to participate. On the other hand, they are teaching large numbers of students on campus and their experiences and expertise are relevant to

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promoting quality education.”²⁵ The policy statement then goes on to say that part-time and temporary faculty should be treated as professionals and involved in the governance of the campus. In addition, Baldwin and Chronister note that “respectfully engaging nontenure track faculty in substantive discussions around important issues acknowledges them as a full-fledged professionals. We believe a policy that encourages meaningful participation in governance is a key element of a comprehensive plan to minimize harmful status differences between tenure class and nontenure track faculty.”²⁶ We agree and believe that campuses across the country need to examine their policies and actively institute measures that support part-time and contingent faculty in governance. However, what we learned from the case study is that campuses need to do more than simply change their policies. They need to address biases and stereotypes that prevent contingent faculty from becoming valued members of the community.

Part of combating stereotypes is knowing more about this group of faculty. As universities employ more and more faculty in non-traditional part-time positions, academia needs to develop an awareness and understanding of these individuals. We must ask how much they are becoming involved in governance, one of the best ways for the academe to harness their valuable expertise. Most institutions know very little about the experiences of part-time and contingent faculty; we believe this is an important area for institutional research offices to focus attention. For example, community college part-time faculty often work full-time jobs during the day or teach at other colleges and are unable to attend governance meetings during the early morning or afternoon. A lack of attendance in the governance meetings may not be due to a lack of interest, but a conflict with other responsibilities. In addition to surveying part-time and contingent faculty on a

range of issues, deans and department chairs should have focus groups from time to time with these faculty members in order to find out the most valuable ways to include them in governance processes and to ensure they are not treated with disrespect and discrimination. Contingent faculty still remain invisible on many campuses. Data will both inform our decisions and combat stereotypes.

One of the ways that the administrators in the case study were so successful is that they had collected and analyzed data about contingent faculty. For example, they had data to support that these faculty members received teaching evaluations equivalent to those of tenure-track faculty. They also had focus group data from students about mentoring and advisement from contingent faculty that was extremely positive, reflecting their commitment and involvement, which many tenure-track faculty often questioned. Data about contingent faculty can be extremely important in providing evidence about the value and contribution of this group. ^{nea}

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Governance refers to the process of policymaking and macro level decision-making within higher education. The process typically includes faculty senates, governing boards, schoolwide committees, and executive cabinets. Shared governance is defined by the joint statement formulated by the American Association for University Professors, American Council on Education and Association for Governing Boards in 1966 titled *Statement on Government for Colleges and Universities*, which described the ways that governance might be split between various stakeholders.
- ² Contract or contingent faculty are characterized by a full- or part-time status without the possibility of tenure. Other terms that may apply only to the full-time non-tenure-track faculty include term faculty, adjunct professors, visiting professors, and lecturers (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001). Part-time contingent faculty typically have limited contracts without the benefits of a long-term commitment from their hiring institution, and one-year appointments are common.
- ³ While the numbers vary by study, the percentage of part-time faculty is over 40 percent at present and had reached 40 percent by 1999 (NEA, 2001). Non-tenure track full-time faculty figures went from 19 percent to 27 percent by 1997 and have continued to grow (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001).
- ⁴ Kerr, *The uses of the university*, 1964.
- ⁵ Lucas, *American higher education*, 1994.
- ⁶ A. Kezar & Eckel, "Obtaining Intergrity?", 2004; Lucas, *American higher education*, 1994.
- ⁷ J. Gappa, "Off tenure track," 1996.
- ⁸ Gappa & Leslie, *The invisible faculty*, 1993.
- ⁹ Ibid., 189-190.
- ¹⁰ G. Sheeks & P. Hutcheson, "How departments support part-time faculty," 1998.
- ¹¹ J. Gappa, "Off tenure track" *op cit*, 191.
- ¹² R. Baldwin & J. Chronister, *Teaching without tenure*, 2001.
- ¹³ G. Sheeks & P. Hutcheson, *op cit*, 87.
- ¹⁴ Gappa & Leslie, *op cit*.
- ¹⁵ R. Baldwin & J. Chronister, *op cit*.

- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Bok, *Universities in the marketplace*, 2003; Williams, et al “One faculty’s perception of its academic governance role,” 1987.
- ¹⁸ American Association of University Professors, *Contingent appointments and the academic profession*, 2003; Gappa, *op cit*.
- ¹⁹ Gappa & Leslie, *op cit*.
- ²⁰ Boyer, *Scholarship reconsidered*, 1990.
- ²¹ Bess, “Contract Systems, Bureaucracies, and Faculty Motivation,” 1998.
- ²² R. Baldwin and J. Chronister, *op cit*; J.M. Gappa, *op cit*.
- ²³ For example, Slaughter & Leslie in *Academic Capitalism* discuss how in the process of seeking research funds, faculty members compromise their academic freedom and integrity.
- ²⁴ Ludlow, *Priorities and Power*, 1998.
- ²⁵ AAUP, *op cit*.
- ²⁶ Baldwin and Chronister, *op cit.*, 160.

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