



Rhode Island Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Issues Statement on the Contingent Faculty Role in Higher Education in Rhode Island

July 1, 2021

The Rhode Island Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights offers this statement to highlight the need to ensure that contingent Higher Education faculty, including but not limited to adjunct professors, part-time lecturers, graduate teaching assistants, and laboratory assistants and technicians are afforded fuller inclusion in the life of the institutions they serve and receive compensation and professional status more commensurate with the important teaching and mentoring mission they serve. Their working conditions affect multiple protected groups. Repeated studies over many years have outlined numerous issues in the Higher Education Labor Model that negatively affect people of protected status across the nation.

1. Over 70% of College Faculty are Contingent Employees;¹ 70% of those are over 40 years old and more than half are female.² 63% are over 50 years old.³ Additionally, “Of the 10.4 percent of faculty positions held by underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in 2007, 7.6 percent are contingent positions—which means that 73 percent of underrepresented faculty hold positions that do not give them adequate wages or benefits, job security, or meaningful academic freedom.”⁴

2. Minority Students and First Generation College students are more likely than their majority peers to enroll in Remedial Courses.⁵ A majority of remedial and Introductory Course are taught

¹ “Background Facts on Contingent Faculty.” American Association of University Professors, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.aaup.org/issues/contingency/background-facts>.

² Paul Jakobowski. (November 2018) TIAA Institute, Trends and Issues, Adjunct Faculty: Who Are They and What is Their Experience? Accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.tiaainstitute.org/sites/default/files/presentations/2018-10/TIAA%20Institute%20Adjunct%20Faculty%20Survey%20November%202018.pdf>.

³ “An Army of Temps: AFT 2020 Adjunct Faculty Quality of Work/Life Report.” American Federation of Teachers, accessed June 24, 2021, https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/adjuncts_qualityworklife2020.pdf.

⁴ “Promoting Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Faculty: What Unions Can Do.” (2010) AFT Higher Education, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/facultydiversity0310.pdf>. *See also:* Colleen Flaherty, August 22, 2016. “More Faculty Diversity, Not on Tenure Track: Inside Higher Ed, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/22/study-finds-gains-faculty-diversity-not-tenure-track>.

⁵ “Remedial Education is a ‘Black Hole from which Many African-Americans Won’t Emerge.’ Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. October 10, 2016. Accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.jbhe.com/2016/10/remedial-education-is-a-black-hole-from-which-many-african-americans-wont-emerge/>. *See also:*

by Adjunct Faculty.⁶ It has been shown that these students are less likely to succeed in college if taught by Adjunct Faculty.⁷ The reason for this has less to do with teaching ability than it has with working conditions.⁸

3. Working Conditions that negatively impact faculty also negatively impact their students. A 2018 American Federation of Teachers Report that documented the high number of Contingent Faculty receiving Public Assistance, foregoing medical care, not having access to training, office space, enough time to meet individually with students, security of future teaching assignments allowing students time to have faculty know them well enough to offer recommendations, academic guidance, etc., summarized it this way: “Contingent Faculty Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions.”⁹ Especially affected are students with disabilities. Contingent faculty “may find meeting their needs for accommodation overwhelming or unachievable.”¹⁰ Adjunct Faculty with disabilities are “often fearful” of requesting accommodations for themselves.¹¹

The Rhode Island Advisory Committee recommends that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights encourage Rhode Island state and local officials to consider ways in which the work life of its Contingent Higher Education Workforce can be improved since the effect on students, especially those in protected classes, is so direct. The Committee asks that Rhode Island State and local officials work to ensure access to the full life of the academy, pay commensurate with the responsibilities and create pathways to a more permanent employment; that educated and competent professionals deserve, for the benefit of the students they serve, the faculty, and the long-term stability of the institutions. As stated in *The Atlantic: There is No Excuse for How Universities Treat Adjuncts.*¹²

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Jimenez, Laura; Sargrad, Scott; Morales, Jessica; Thompson, Maggie. “Remedial Education: The Cost of Catching Up.” Center for American Progress. September 2016. Accessed June 24, 2021, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/12082503/CostOfCatchingUp-report.pdf>.

⁶ Supiano, Beckie. (2018). “IT Matters a Lot Who Teaches Introductory Courses. Here’s Why.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. April 15, 2018. Accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/it-matters-a-lot-who-teaches-introductory-courses-heres-why/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Schaffhauser, Dian. “The Use of Part-Timers Driving Down Success at Community Colleges.” *Campus Technology*. October 29, 2019. Accessed June 24, 2021, <https://campustechnology.com/articles/2019/10/29/use-of-part-timers-driving-down-student-success-at-community-colleges.aspx>.

⁹ American Association of University Professors. Data SnapShot: Contingent Faculty in U.S. Higher Education. October 2018. Accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.aaup.org/news/data-snapshot-contingent-faculty-us-higher-ed#.YNTmRkIKiUk>.

¹⁰ Julie Avril Minich, “Enabling Whom? Critical Disability Studies Now,” *Lateral* 5.1 (2016). Accessed June 24, 2021, <http://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-critical-disability-studies-now-minich/>.

¹¹ Adjunct, A.K. (2008). *The Revolving Ramp: Disability and the New Adjunct Economy*. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 28. Accessed June 24, 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v28i3.110>.

¹² Fredrickson, Caroline. “There is No Excuse for How Universities Treat Adjuncts.” *The Atlantic*. September 15, 2015. Accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/higher-education-college-adjunct-professor-salary/404461/>.

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