

## SCE Statement on Contingency

Members of the Society of Christian Ethics are greatly concerned about higher education's growing dependence on contingent faculty labor. This development, which began in the 1980s, represents a threat to the integrity of the academic profession itself, which is founded on the interaction of research, teaching, and service, and is dedicated to the protection of academic freedom and the modern notion of tenure (<http://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>). Increasing dependence on contingent faculty members in higher education threatens the foundations of our profession.<sup>1</sup>

The commitment to academic freedom is widely recognized and supported as a foundational aspect of higher education that ensures faculty have the ability and support needed to develop and communicate ideas or facts that might be deemed inconvenient or unpopular. In a country that is increasingly politicizing even the most basic facts and scientific evidence, and in a world where teachers may be targeted for teaching heterodox or unpopular ideas, the importance of academic freedom must be reaffirmed and its adherence in higher education strengthened rather than diminished.<sup>2</sup>

The shift from majority stable and secure tenured/tenure-track faculties to majority contingent faculty reflects the encroachment of a revenue-driven value system into the educational sector. This shift represents the embracing of an instrumental rationality that seeks to use contingent labor to teach classes without honoring, recognizing, and supporting the professoriate as a professional occupation with intrinsic value and significance for the well-being of society. Such a shift threatens both academic freedom and any notion of mission in higher education.

The strength of the academic profession and the strength of the academy is dependent on the capacity of individuals to enter the profession and establish a career. Like any professional career, the professoriate must continue to offer the possibility of secure financial support and opportunities for advancement and making meaningful contributions to society.

For higher education to continue to fulfill its dual mission of educating citizens and furthering the advancement of knowledge, there must be a professional class of academics who engage in both teaching and research. And while all institutions of higher education must have a reasonable business model that allows them to operate in ways that reflect financial solvency, as non-profit entities, colleges and universities cannot and should not reflect the values and priorities that drive the corporate sector. Furthermore, in a world that continues to blithely embrace the belief that profit ought to be the primary indicator of success, educators everywhere, and the sector of higher education in particular, ought to refuse to allow the values and priorities of neoliberal capitalism to infiltrate the mission and

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<sup>1</sup> The first paragraph of this statement is taken from *AAR Statement on Contingent Faculty Practices*, originally approved by the AAR Board of Directors, Sept 2015, subsequently adopted by the SCE Board of Directors on August 7, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> AAUP 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, <https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure#3>

work of education. In pursuing their goals as institutions of higher education, colleges and universities have a responsibility both to their students and to society. In both instances, the establishment and support of a permanent and professionally supported professoriate is the most just and effective means to achieve both goals. Rather, there must be proportional benefits, pay and research support for all faculty and extra measures to support academic freedom and long-term stability for the good of the faculty member themselves, students and the university as a whole.

Shifting the structure of faculties away from permanent faculty positions toward the use of contingent faculty as a cost-saving measure is a reflection of a cultural shift toward a misguided notion of “increasing efficiency.” This language of “increasing efficiency” is code for decreasing costs through the exploitation of labor. When we breakdown the meaning of “efficiency” in this context, it is clear that underpaying faculty for their work, failing to create permanent faculty positions, failing to insure the academic freedom of their teaching and research, and refusing to pay benefits is not an “efficient” arrangement for the people who are forced into contingent positions. Nor is it “efficient” for students and student-learning, as students would certainly be better taught by faculty who were not overextended by their efforts to cobble together enough adjunct classes to pay their bills. The “efficiency” here described is solely an economic benefit for colleges and universities that is associated with destabilizing their academic workforce through reduction of their ranks. This situation also results in an increased burden of faculty governance on the remaining tenure track faculty who must pick up the increased workload of shared governance and student advising and mentoring that is left in the wake of replacing permanent faculty with temporary labor.

It is axiomatic that healthy institutions require good governance and the basic principles of democracy support the belief that shared governance also significantly contributes to institutional health. Where administrators share leadership and governance with faculty, institutions are able to create more stable relationships that lead to more trustworthy and healthy organizations. The shifting of organizational staffing models away from a permanent faculty and toward an increased part-time and contingent faculty under the guise of “flexibility,” “efficiency,” or “prudential leadership” compromises the health of colleges and universities in measures that go far beyond economic calculations. Not only does it compromise the ability of institutions to meet the legitimate needs of their students and the faculty themselves, but by increasing the inequality between and among faculty and staff, such moves also sow disparity and discord among the very people who ought to provide the long-term stability and leadership to these same institutions.

We believe that the health of our institutions is best served by ensuring that the formal structures of those institutions reflect the foundational principle of justice. One measure of structural justice is to ensure that the makeup of the faculty reflects fairness and equality, participation and transparency. In a culture marked by patriarchy and white supremacy, we recognize that formal principles of justice in governing go far beyond securing the stability of the professoriate--particularly when those self-same structures have often been mobilized to draw lines to keep certain people in and protected, and others outside and vulnerable. This is exacerbated by the fact that in most university departments the

difference among the tenure and tenure-track, full-time non tenure, and part-time has evolved into a three-tiered caste system, with different tiers of support for scholarship and teaching.

And while attention to the problem of contingency in the academy is our primary concern in this statement, we also want to name our deep and abiding concern for the impact these structural changes have had on the people who fill these contingent roles in our colleges and universities. It is essential to name and recognize that the burden of contingency has fallen disproportionately to women and people of color while the traditional tenure system has historically benefited our white male colleagues. Given the problems associated with addressing the deep reality of white supremacy and patriarchy in the context of our increasing adoption and embrace of neoliberal capitalist values, we are not calling for a return to some imagined, halcyon era of “the good old days.” Rather, in recognition of the ways that higher education has institutionalized the exclusion of women, people of color, non-elites, etc., we seek to move forward in ways that refuse to participate in the exploitation of academic labor through the late-capitalist model of neoliberalism. This model has forced the reduction of permanent faculty lines and increased reliance on contingent faculty in an effort to reduce costs.

We recognize that the crisis of higher education is part of a larger cultural crisis that has redefined our self-understanding from a community of interdependent human beings with a shared interest in the common good to atomistic individuals who exist primarily as consumers in a world defined by commerce and profits. In such a world as this, recognizing the intrinsic value of education as well as the larger contribution to the common good of an educated citizenry is virtually impossible.

While the Society of Christian Ethics is a professional organization committed to promoting scholarly work in Christian ethics, we are also an organization of committed scholars who care deeply about the kind of people we are becoming. Who we are becoming as professional scholars, as institutions of higher education, and as a society will be deeply shaped by the values and commitments we make in the structures and organization of our communities and our institutions. If we seek to build a world that is just, a world that recognizes the equality of all peoples, a world that embodies the best of human compassion and solidarity - we must build (or rebuild) institutions that treat people with fairness and justice.

**In this context, we call on faculty and administrators in higher education to:**

- Lead the way in changing the public conversation about education in this country in ways that identify and highlight the necessity of high-quality education at all levels for the common good of society
- Reimagine what academic jobs looks like in a way that prioritizes the well-being of women and people of color
- Developing innovative approaches to restructuring the funding and supporting of public education in general and higher education in particular

- Provide a “place at the table” for non-tenure track faculty to voice issues and problems that are particular to those working off the tenure track.
- Provide just pathways for non-tenure track faculty to secure tenure-track lines that have recently been reduced to contingent positions and to create more permanence and protections for non-tenure track lines.
- Commit to structuring departments and faculties with enough permanent, full-time faculty positions to cover all courses offered, with preferential consideration for long-serving non-tenure-track faculty.
- Establish compensation structures for graduate students that reflect their position as professional teachers and that provide a living wage and adequate benefits
- Establish faculty union representation and faculty senate or institution-wide committees to receive and advocate for the interests of non-tenure-line faculty
- Write academic freedom protections and appeals procedures into contracts for all faculty, both tenure-line and non-tenure-line
- Make one-year contracts the baseline for part-time faculty and three-year contracts the baseline for full time non-tenure-line faculty