

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 498

HE 032 089

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 TITLE The Rise of Temporary Faculty Appointments and the Decline of the Liberal Arts.  
 PUB DATE 1998-04-00  
 NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (49th, Chicago IL, April 1-4, 1998).  
 PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*College Faculty; Educational Change; Educational Demand; \*Educational Economics; Educational Resources; Full Time Faculty; General Education; Higher Education; Humanities Instruction; \*Liberal Arts; \*Part Time Faculty; \*Women Faculty

ABSTRACT

Part-time faculty employment has increased by roughly double over the last twenty years, with temporary faculty especially prevalent in English, history, modern language, and mathematics. Women hold 47 percent of part-time positions. This paper charges that the growing use of part-time and nontenure-track faculty is linked to a national crisis in support for liberal arts education and the increasing demand for technology education. Money in college budgets once available for the humanities has been siphoned off to sustain research programs built with federal dollars but now facing cuts in federal funding. Additionally, state legislatures are requiring their higher education institutions to more directly serve the business world. Because these patterns threaten the integrity of university research funding, it forces the humanities to compete with the sciences for a share of a tighter budget. With most of the observable trends in higher education moving in the direction of responding to the demands of business, new technology, distance education, and building partnerships with nonacademic communities, the humanities and the centrality of classroom teaching are being side-stepped.

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The Rise of Temporary Faculty Appointments  
and the Decline of the Liberal Arts

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## The Rise of Temporary Faculty Appointments and the Decline of the Liberal Arts

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The increase in part-time faculty employment in the last twenty years has roughly doubled, and nothing suggests the pattern is slowing down. Forty percent of all U.S. faculty works part-time; in the community colleges, 65% of the faculty is part-time. Temporary faculty are especially prevalent in English, history, modern languages, and mathematics. Women hold 33 percent of full-time faculty positions but 47 percent of part-time positions.<sup>1</sup> For the last several years, many disciplinary societies and professional organizations have reported on the growing use of part-time and temporary faculty.<sup>2</sup> Most of these studies approach the problem from the economics of non-tenure track faculty and the unprofessional practices that accompany the economic exploitation of a class of employees. Another key factor, however, is the diminishing value of the liberal arts education in an era of increasing demand for technology. The administration's desire for economic flexibility combines with its willingness to perpetuate exploitative conditions of employment when the question of staffing in the liberal arts is the issue.

In assessing the stubbornness of this problem, we need to remember who works part-time and in what areas. Surveys by the Department of Education indicate that the majority of part-time

faculty do not seek full-time employment. Only 22 percent of part-time faculty in four-year institutions have the Ph.D., in comparison with 73 percent of the full-time faculty. Among full-time temporary faculty, only 30 percent have the Ph.D. For these faculty, part-time or temporary employment provides the opportunity for college teaching which would otherwise be barred for lack of the terminal degree, or enables people who do not want to work full-time to pursue their interest in college teaching. In discussing where and for whom part-time employment is a problem, we must focus on those who have credentials appropriate for tenure-track positions but work part-time because full-time positions are not available. This group is located primarily in the liberal arts, where the job market has generally been severely depressed for over twenty years. Across all disciplines, 41 percent of faculty indicated that they held part-time positions because a full-time position was not available, but in the liberal arts, that figure rises to 60 percent.

The exploitive use of part-time and non-tenure track faculty is linked to the crisis in support for the liberal arts. Although liberal education remains the center of the typical undergraduate core curriculum, the humanities in particular are losing their hold on the budget. To understand why we've made so little progress in improving the status of temporary faculty, we must connect the over supply of Ph.D.'s, the pressures on college and university budgets, the changing patterns of student demand, and the declining role of the humanities in the information age.

One major factor has been the redirection away from the universities of federal and industry funding for research between the 1960's and the 1990's. According to a 1998 report prepared by Carol Frances for TIAA-CREF on enrollment trends and staffing needs in the future, in the 1960's every one dollar of university money that was invested in scientific research was matched by as much as nine dollars from outside sources. By 1995, only a little over three dollars was coming from outside to match each dollar the institution invested (Frances 17). Money in college budgets once available for the humanities was siphoned off to sustain research programs that were built with federal dollars before the outside money began to dwindle. The shift in college budgets to shore up science programs reduced both the permanent budget funds available for humanities and the temporary funds from "overhead."

Although the economy is booming, federal agencies have not restored the level of funding for university research. A new pattern of increasing support *within* industry for research has emerged. Industry, which once looked to the universities for much of its research, has increasingly directed its funding back into its own labs, so that only two percent of its \$50 billion in research funds is being directed to the colleges and universities (Frances 17). Among major industrial nations the United States was exceptional in the 1960's through the 1980's in relying heavily on the universities for research. The corporate world has also become more adept at pressuring legislatures to force

universities to use their public funding more directly to serve the business world. These patterns threaten both the health and integrity of university research funding in the sciences. They also mean that the humanities will continue to have to compete with the sciences for our share of tighter budgets. Low paid, part-time English teachers are in supply to meet enrollment pressures, but in most institutions, there is no similar supply of low-paid chemists or biologists and few courses in the sciences that don't require expensive labs.

As federal funding for science declined, the state appropriations for higher education did, too. In the early 1990's many state institutions had zero increases or actual cuts of from 3 to 10 percent of their budget, and everywhere higher education lost ground to K-12 schools. If we look at the percent of change in appropriations of state tax funds for higher education per \$1,000 of personal income in the last twenty years, we find that only one state--New Mexico--showed an increase in the proportion of the state funds directed to higher education (Frances 18).

College and university enrollments have continued to grow, but the number of new administrative and nonfaculty professional positions increased much faster than faculty positions. From 1976-1989 when faculty positions increased by only 30 percent, administrative positions increased by 44 percent and nonfaculty professionals by 123 percent. The colleges and universities were hiring many more people, but not for instructional purposes.

From 1989-93, the pattern reversed itself and the faculty increased and the administrative/non faculty professionals declined. However, part-time faculty account for 58 percent of the increase in the total number of faculty between 1985-995 (Frances 13).

College enrollments are projected to increase by as much as 14 percent by 2005, and large numbers of faculty are due to retire. The MLA and others tell us that the projected need for new faculty should create a better job market, and substantially more jobs were listed in Fall 1998 in the MLA Job Listing than in previous years. TIAA-CREF projects that as many as 282,000 to 345,000 new hires may be possible from 1995-2005. The questions are how many of those jobs will be in the humanities, and how many of them will be full-time tenure-track? Unless we reverse the erosion of the liberal arts degree and the place of the humanities in our society as a whole, my guess is that the claim of the liberal arts on the new jobs will not keep pace with that in other disciplines.

Almost all of the most observable trends in the academy are in the direction of responding to the demands of business, developing new technologies, increasing instruction through distance education, and building partnerships with non-academic communities of "stakeholders." These trends basically sidestep the humanities and the centrality of classroom teaching. Although faculty in composition courses teach writing as part of liberal education, the demand for required freshman English classes is

tied to the vocationalizing of college. The pressure we face is that most of our students, their parents, and our colleagues in other disciplines want us to turn out products who can write better term papers or business letters for job-related literacy. In a survey of opinions about liberal arts education published June 1997 in *Change* magazine, neither students nor parents assigned the liberal arts much importance.<sup>3</sup> Only among faculty and the upper echelons of leadership in business and the professions was there a high value placed on the liberal arts.

Patterns in the net increase in enrollment are changing in ways that may also trouble the humanities. In the last twenty years, rising numbers of minority and non-traditional students entering or returning to college increased enrollments. Enrollment by nontraditional students has already declined and, if the economy remains sound, is not likely to grow. By 2005, white students will account for about half the increase in college enrollment (Frances 21). Growth in enrollment that is dominated by the 18-24 year-old white students may not auger well for the humanities since this generation of students will arrive at college already oriented to information technology as the standard for knowledge.

The excessive reliance on part-time faculty resides mainly within the humanities and is symptomatic of a devaluing of the liberal arts generally. Many of the signs suggest that academia is moving away from the liberal education. As we think about what can be done to improve the status of part-time and temporary



faculty, we must situate this issue within the growing indifference to the humanities in this age of information technology.

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## Notes

1. Statistics are from the Department of Education. Much of the analysis of them comes from the work of the national AAUP's Committee G on Part-time and Non-Tenure Track Faculty. See in particular the report, "On the Status of Non-Tenure Track Faculty" in *Academe* in 1992 and the special issue of *Academe* on part-time appointments (January-February, 1998).
2. For example, many of the disciplinary societies, such as the Modern Language Association, have written and published their own statements and policy documents about part-time employment. In September 1997 eight disciplinary organizations and two professional associations met in Washington to draft a joint statement and plan of action for combatting the growth of non-tenure track positions. See "Statement from the Conference on the Growing Use of Part-time and Adjunct Faculty" in *Academe* (January-February 1998):54-60.
3. See Hersh, "Intentions and Perceptions. A National Survey of Public Attitudes Toward Liberal Arts Education."

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