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March 5, 2013

U. of Maryland Weighs Big Changes for Faculty Members Off the Tenure Track

By Peter Schmidt

The University of Maryland at College Park is poised to embark on an unprecedented effort to improve the conditions of its faculty members who are off the tenure track.

The campus's University Senate, which represents faculty members, administrators, students, and staff members, is scheduled to vote on Wednesday on an internal [task-force report](#) that extensively documents the disparities between different categories of faculty members there and proposes sweeping changes intended to give non-tenure-track faculty members more pay, job security, respect, and clout.

A University Senate vote in favor of the report will not amount to an explicit endorsement of its recommendations, which include calls for the institution to give non-tenure-track faculty members new titles, pay them at levels commensurate with their tenure-track colleagues, shield them from extensive demands to perform work for which they are not compensated, and improve their prospects of obtaining long-term employment contracts.

However, should the University Senate approve the report, as is expected, the campus's administration, faculty members, and various shared-governance bodies will be obliged to seriously consider carrying out what the document proposes.

The report's findings, in themselves, break ground in terms of the detail and candor with which they describe how much the institution relies on non-tenure-track faculty members and how little many of them receive for their efforts.

For example, the report says that the campus's non-tenure-track faculty members are especially highly represented among the instructors in special programs geared toward the campus's best

students, and are "significantly more likely to teach courses that require direct contact with students" and "much less likely to receive teaching support" from teaching assistants or other college personnel than are faculty members who are tenured or on the tenure track.

The process by which the campus's non-tenure-track faculty members are hired, the report says, varies by academic unit, creating "confusion and frustration for faculty and unit administrators alike." The semester-by-semester reappointment of many faculty members results in high administrative costs and unseen costs associated with such faculty members' "low morale and frustration."

Maria Maisto, president of the advocacy group New Faculty Majority, on Monday praised the Maryland report for gauging the views of the sorts of contingent faculty members represented by her organization. "Its ethos is really to recognize and respect the role of these faculty," she said.

Ms. Maisto added that she was especially pleased to see the report's effort to document the "hidden costs" colleges incur in relying on contingent faculty members. "People think," she said, "that contingency is a cost-saving device. This is exposing how expensive it is on so many levels."

Expecting Resistance

The task force that prepared the report was established early last year by the University Senate's executive committee and by Ann Wylie, who was then the College Park campus's provost. The panel's members studied policies and procedures both at their university and at peer institutions, engaged focus groups, and examined campus data dealing with teaching loads and research grants awarded to faculty members over the past four years. The panel surveyed administrators last July and faculty members last September, and examined who was teaching every active undergraduate course section offered on the campus last fall.

Marybeth Shea, a lecturer in English at College Park who has been working on the campus since 1987, described the report's findings as "sobering and stunning," and called the university's willingness to undertake such a self-examination "quite brave."

Mary Ann Rankin, who became the institution's provost in October, last week declined through her executive assistant to comment on the report until it had been more thoroughly vetted on the campus. Juan Uriagereka, College Park's associate provost for faculty affairs, said that the report "touches on the fundamental issues we all would like to address" but that some of its recommendations "are more realistic than others."

Devin H. Ellis, who represents non-tenure-track research faculty on the University Senate, predicted institutional resistance to some of the report's recommendations, such as a call for the university to change its academic title system and refer to all faculty members who are not tenured or tenure-track as either "professional faculty" or "professional-track faculty." The report argues that its recommendations "should not be seen as an attempt to undermine the tenure system."

Mr. Ellis, who is director of policy and research for a university program that uses role-playing simulations to teach international negotiating skills, said he expected the level of support for other recommendations to vary significantly by academic discipline because non-tenure-track faculty members in some disciplines fare much better than do those in others in terms of merit pay and other matters.

The University Senate's discussion of the report comes as the University System of Maryland, as a whole, works to carry out a [set of policies](#) intended to improve the conditions of adjunct faculty members and graduate assistants. Adopted by the system's Board of Regents in December 2010, the policies call for improvements in adjuncts' pay, job security, and employment rights, and are intended mainly to make the system's campuses more competitive with peer institutions.

The report being considered by the University Senate raises the bar by, for example, calling for the salaries of tenured and tenure-track faculty members to serve as the basis for comparison in determining whether those off the tenure track are adequately paid. "Enacting the recommendations presented here will establish the University of Maryland's leadership in creating a model for how a major research institution fully engages all members of its faculty regardless of

their tenure status," the report says.

Likely to help the prospects that such recommendations will come to fruition is the additional clout non-tenure-track faculty members throughout the system gained as a result of last year's [decision by its board](#) to let them use union or other third-party representatives to voice their concerns to administrators.

Democratic state lawmakers responded by dropping a proposal to give full collective-bargaining rights to the system's adjuncts, graduate-student employees, and tenured and tenure-track faculty members. Such measures could come up again, however, if Gov. Martin O'Malley, a Democrat, and other members of his party see little improvement in the conditions of the system's non-tenure-track faculty members.

Major Players

The report slated for discussion at College Park says that, all told, the institution employs 3,000 non-tenure-track faculty members. Their ranks include more than 700 part-time instructors, about 1,800 research faculty members, and about 200 faculty members who fulfill service roles on or off the campus.

The university employs 1,600 tenured or tenure-track faculty members. They are delivering about the same number of academic credits they did 15 years ago, but the share of academic credits they offer has diminished as the institution turned to non-tenure-track faculty members, staff members, and teaching assistants to handle new course sections.

Among its key findings, the report says that non-tenure-track faculty members bring in nearly \$100-million a year in research funds and play "a major role" in the university's service and outreach efforts. They hold just three designated seats on the University Senate, however, whereas tenured and tenure-track faculty members hold nearly 100.

Based on what part-time instructors earn per hour, nearly half of those working at College Park this semester would make less than \$40,000 annually if employed there full time, the report says.

The task force's survey of faculty members found substantial levels of dissatisfaction over compensation, workload, access to funds for

professional development, and criteria used by their superiors in weighing promotions and merit-pay increases. Many have little knowledge of their department's policies that affect them or of opportunities to participate in the university's shared governance.

The report says the task force's members extensively searched Web sites maintained by the university and its academic departments, and generally had great difficulty finding information that administrators said was available online.

Among its recommendations, the report calls for creating a new career track, with benchmarks for evaluation and promotion, for non-tenure-track faculty members who primarily teach. Noting that many such faculty members do additional work, such as advising students, for which they are not paid, it says administrators should compensate them for tasks beyond those specified in their contracts.



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nowak 2 weeks ago

Finally one university with compassion and common sense!

28 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



missouaredhead 2 weeks ago

Equal pay for equal work? What a concept! (Also, I think it's a great idea)

31 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



magg666666 2 weeks ago in reply to missouaredhead

Maybe more than equal work:

"For example, the report says that the campus's non-tenure-track faculty members are especially highly represented among the instructors in special programs geared toward the campus's best students, and are "significantly more likely to teach courses that require direct contact with students""

In my experience, some of these students are very ill-served by untenured professors who are, by virtue of such contact, the best placed people to speak on behalf of these students when it comes to recommendation for further study, jobs, etc. Those dedicated professors often know the students and their work the best, but lack the clout of tenure-track faculty when it comes to advising and recommendations.

What are the tenure-track faculty doing, if they are not teaching these students? All research I guess. But probably not what these students and their families think they are paying for.

4 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



RandyVT 2 weeks ago in reply to missoularedhead

my current school pays adjuncts based on course credit hours, irrespective of the butts-in-seats count. needless to say, those of us who teach popular courses (30-45 students) spend a lot more time meeting with students and grading papers and tests when our enrollment is high compared to the tenure-track faculty, who may teach classes with 6-12 students. So the pay is not equal for the work done.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



missoularedhead 2 weeks ago in reply to RandyVT

Randy, I hear you. I taught like that for some time. I'm at a per-student job now, so the pay is at least somewhat less arbitrary. I do wish there were a sarcasm font...because my original comment was dripping with it. Of course we adjuncts don't get equal pay for equal work, and that's the problem. But what's happening in Maryland is at least a move in the right direction.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



erictho 2 weeks ago

Well done, U Maryland! Let's hope other institutions follow your lead.

19 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



tejackso 2 weeks ago

i'm wondering if, in the various discussions about this, anybody ever actually says out loud in a public forum something like: if doing this kind of thing for non-tenure track faculty is the right thing to do, then why keep tenure at all? and if anybody does ask this, what are the responses?

tony e jackson

12 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



nowak 2 weeks ago in reply to tejackso

Australia did it many years ago, but North America? In late 1980s one of my colleagues published an article in a Canadian newspaper on a hidden incompetence behind tenure. Soon after he was receiving threatening letters.

5 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



quasihumanist 2 weeks ago in reply to nowak

Comparing the United States to any other developed country is a false comparison, because employment law in every other developed country provides far greater protection to every worker, academic or not.

As one of my colleagues who worked for a while in France put it, professors in France officially don't have tenure, but, by American standards, even the janitor has tenure. Australian employment protections are not nearly as strong as French ones, but they are far stronger than American ones.

4 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



uidaho1 2 weeks ago

Great ideas! Hope they added access to benefits. Problem I see is where is the money going to come from to pay for this and the unintended consequences of where ever they pull the money from? For example: larger class size? PhD students teaching 2 classes with no research assistantship?

7 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



coachhillary 2 weeks ago

Pretty interesting article for what it says about tenure now becoming the "alt-ac" track.

5 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



wilkenslibrary 2 weeks ago

How inspiring to see what others have accomplished! I just sent the link to my bargaining team.

Betsy Smith/Adjunct Professor of ESL/Cape Cod Community College

(I tried to e-mail it using the link at the beginning, but the box appears half off my screen, and I couldn't click on "send.")

5 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



greenb 2 weeks ago

"Contingent" faculty are not the same as "adjunct" faculty. If UMD is taking this approach to adjunct faculty that is revolutionary. If they are talking about bringing regular UMD faculty employees into the governance and promotion structure then what they propose is less revolutionary. Plenty of higher education institutions have regular, non-tenure-track faculty positions, with titles, promotional tracks, professional development opportunities, governance participation, etc. If UMD is just now discovering they have regular faculty employees without access to promotion or governance they are waaaay behind the curve.

5 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



ufenglish 2 weeks ago

One great thing about this is that it will increase full time faculty. Many institutions hire adjunct and non TT faculty to teach because it is cheap. This is unfair to the non- TT faculty, who are underpaid, and unfair to the TT faculty, whose numbers have shrunk to the point that it is impossible for them to keep up with advising and governance tasks (hence, the sneaky attempt to make non TT faculty do it for free). If it isn't cheap, there will be less reason to do it.

14 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



henry_adams 2 weeks ago

Could it be? Could a major university actually treat non-tenure-track employees like human beings?

I hope this catches on.

Henry Adams

15 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



tortorelli 2 weeks ago

This is a terrible idea. Look at where it will lead -- In 50 years, tenured faculty will not teach any courses, and teaching faculty will not do any research.

5 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Aaron M 2 weeks ago

I foresee more colleges taking this route, and tenure either going away or becoming reserved only for certain researchers.

In the future full time professors will be on annual or multi-year contracts like any other white collar worker and there will be a lot more turnover. This are both good and bad aspects to this. Many community colleges already operate on such a system - eventually it will trickle up.

It's inevitable. With administrators that run colleges like businesses it's only a matter of time before they start engaging in employment practices like businesses.

2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



flotsam 2 weeks ago

The reason the report had to include a line like "[these recommendations] should not be seen as an attempt to undermine the tenure system" is because, whether intentionally or not, these recommendations are designed to undermine the tenure system. It is naive, disingenuous, or possibly dishonest to say otherwise.

No one could reasonably oppose better pay and benefits for part-time instructors, but normalizing such positions as "professional faculty" not only undermines full-time faculty, but higher education in general. At a research institution, at least, it is understood that students take their courses with professors who are actively engaged in research or scholarly activity within the field. Your biology professor is not a "teacher" only, but a practicing biologist who is contributing to that scientific body

of knowledge outside the classroom. If, as many universities have been doing, a school hires only non-researchers to teach such classes, the students are not really being educated at the university level. The university has abrogated its pedagogical mission and harmed its students by taking researchers out of the classroom.

We should be militating in favor of getting more of the qualified part-timers (such as those who hold PhD degrees, e.g.) onto the tenure-track, rather than making current part-time positions more attractive to universities.

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

14 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



spinnaker 2 weeks ago in reply to flotsam

Since honesty is on your mind, it is dishonest (and unjustifiably disrespectful) to call a large chunk of your instructors (perhaps half/ even many more than half) "adjunct." "Adjunct" means "something added to the main thing, but not part of it." Which part of a student's learning has he experienced as "learning added to the main learning, but not part of it?" Calling us "professional faculty" could pose a problem for tenure, and while I wouldn't hope so, you still haven't given a solid reason to deny people the standing that they earn. And it is a waste of time to suppose that the decades old posture of "we shouldn't be using adjuncts" will have much of any role in the discussion and planning.

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

4 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



flotsam 2 weeks ago in reply to spinnaker

With respect, I know that an adjunct is "not part of" the university. Having been an adjunct at four universities, I know (and knew) that I was not part of the institution in the same way that I immediately became upon beginning a TT position. It was not disrespectful, but merely the nature of the position. (An outside lawyer brought in to help on a case is not in the same position as an associate or partner in the firm.) I agree that we may not be able to return to an era in which research universities do not have to employ adjunct faculty at all, but we should all strive to make universities less reliant on adjuncts -- better for both adjuncts and TT or tenured faculty, as well as for all students.

7 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Aaron M 2 weeks ago in reply to flotsam

I agree, it makes tenure less valuable and is a subtle way of deskilling the professorate.

Like I said below, community colleges have been leading the way in this. I currently teach at one that has tenure but others I've worked for do not. Quite frankly, at CC class sizes and loads, it is nearly impossible to have a highly productive research career. As a full time tenure-track instructor, I have more than 450 students per year, and they do essay exams. I have no TA. Then I have several dozen advisees and governance responsibilities. So when am I supposed to research?

Even though he/she does not have the governance or advising duties, an adjunct probably takes on a higher load than mine in order to just survive, making even those PhD adjuncts unlikely to contribute to research proactively. When I was an adjunct I needed 6 classes per semester to make a halfway decent living. I cobbled that together from two community colleges and one university.

Since part-timers have been hired on a regular basis and in fact teach the majority of classes, the fight for "quality" as you define it has already been lost. Having a researcher "teach" (present) content to a room of 200+ people while TAs do all the grunt work is not really good pedagogy either.

Unless universities hire MORE teacher-scholars on the tenure track and keep their load and class size down to a manageable level, the idea of active researchers in every class is a fantasy.

10 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



theprofessorisin 2 weeks ago

Why does the Chronicle always put adjunct-related articles behind the paywall?? Come on you guys! I'm trying to share this with my readership of adjuncts and nobody can access the piece.

7 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



RandyVT 2 weeks ago in reply to theprofessorisin

I'm an adjunct and our library grants access by IP address, so I can't read the "behind-paywall" articles at home, but they're easily accessible in the library. Check that out. If your library doesn't do this, push on your chief librarian and the IT department to make the chronicle available to any connection "on-campus" at least.

4 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

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