

# **The State of the Relationship between Tenured and Contingent Faculty**

**by Harold A. Geller**

I hope that from this talk you will see that there has been a changing relationship between tenured and contingent faculty, in this case at a public university with significant corporatization, especially in the past ten years. I myself have been teaching as contingent faculty, first part time, then full time, at my institution for 22 years.

I have to tell you that I went through a lot of different versions of this talk. At one point I had a lot of different vignettes that really didn't address tenured and contingent faculty relations, just one or the other. That didn't seem exactly kosher based upon the title and abstract I had provided the AAUP originally. And since the focus was to be the changes in the relationship between tenured and contingent faculty, I thought I should simplify my approach. So let me start out here by telling you a story from my earlier years as a contingent faculty member.

I can recall having lunch when I first started out as a full time contingent faculty member. At one point almost the entire body of tenured and

contingent faculty of my department would have lunch together, something akin to an impromptu meeting of the department. We all, and I mean all, learned about what was going on in the department this way, a very informal setting, interspersed with talk about the not so great food we were eating. You honestly could not distinguish among the crowd between tenured, tenure-track, full-time contingent faculty and even part-time contingent faculty on occasions. We all kind of looked alike. So, what the fuck happened?

Let's fast forward to today. On occasion I do still have lunch with a couple faculty members. However now it's only one or two of the older tenured professors or even one of our retired professors who still hang out at the university. So social mores have changed, but is that all? I think not. It's not just that tenured and contingent faculty don't socialize as they once did, it is much more. After all, at one point, tenured and contingent faculty both participated in formal faculty meetings where everyone had an equal vote. Truth be told, contingent faculty even participated in the review of new tenure-track faculty, and yes, would vote on their ranking, if they had interviewed them all. So again, I must ask, what the fuck happened?

One thing to notice was the influx of new personnel who were much more cognizant of the different faculty positions. In fact, one new hire,

caused one of our contingent faculty to complain to me, as at that time I was associate chair of the department, that the new tenure-track person would not greet her in the hall, or even acknowledge her existence. In another case, there was a tenure-track faculty who was denied tenure by the tenured faculty, but then found the denial of tenure overturned by the dean. In fact, this was the first time that the vote of the department was overturned by an administrator. Now in the second go around for this faculty member, the tenure-track faculty member made sure that the tenure and promotion committee was chaired by a different tenured faculty member. It should be also noted that the tenure-track faculty member changed his whole persona, based upon what he was told by the chair at that time. You see, he was told that one of the things that hurt him was that he was only socializing with junior tenure-track faculty and contingent faculty. So I guess it shouldn't come as a surprise that this particular tenure-track faculty member went out of his way NOT to talk to contingent faculty, and also mingle less with so-called "junior" tenure-track faculty.

So we see that as time passed, the relationship between tenured and contingent faculty changed. I don't think it was just those who fostered a segregation of faculty that caused this, but also those who stood by and let it happen. After all, as Albert Einstein said, "the world is a

dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.”

I still want to interject here a few stories which don't necessarily show any specific change in attitudes over time, but do highlight the plight of contingent faculty.

One contingent faculty member in my department had been teaching at my institution over five years. She actually worked full time, but she survived, and still does, only on a course by course basis. She typically teaches four to six courses a semester and ekes together a living, adding to her income by teaching in the summer, and tutoring when she can find a student willing to pay for such services. Unfortunately for her, she has recently developed an as yet undiagnosed medical condition, which forced her into the emergency room for medical care.

I also want to offer some examples that illustrate how tenure can be achieved by faculty, especially those looking to put in the least effort they can, while still gaining tenure, and abuse their relationship with contingent faculty.

Recall that one key to tenure and promotion is service. Unfortunately, quantity seems to matter most, so you want as many committees listed as

you can get. Of course, you must sign up for as many committees as you can. In actuality, most of these committees have become impotent over time, with the increase in corporatization, but the administrators still want to give lip service to “shared governance” even if there is a diminishing amount of “shared governance.” For those minimalists, it is easiest to attend a few of the meetings, and then only for the first few minutes of the meeting. It is best to make yourself vocal in those minutes you do attend, but then discreetly disappear and you'll be amazed how people think you participated during the entire meeting. In fact, in some colleges, while “shared governance” has decreased and administrators have multiplied like rabbits, there has been a stark increase in the number of committees and in the number of contingent faculty on committees, even though the contingent faculty cannot vote on the so-called faculty senate. And although contingent faculty may attend more of the meetings and contribute more than the tenure-track faculty, give credit to the tenure-track faculty, after all, you can treat us like shit, we're just contingent faculty.

As another part of service, tenure-track faculty may find it useful for their P&T portfolio to sign up for lots of university workshops, dealing with anything from future construction of buildings to presidential forums on the future of the university. Since corporatization, the number of workshops involving faculty has blossomed. It is easiest to

attend at least the first meeting of any series of workshops and make some cursory comments, loud and clear. Then when you do show up again, only do so for a few minutes. Remember, the workshop organizers will list you as a participant for the entire series and you can use that to impress your P&T committee. Yes, you can always treat us like shit because we're contingent faculty.

Still addressing service issues for P&T, don't forget to attend your department faculty meetings, especially for the first few minutes or at least until the minute-taker notes your attendance. Again, it works best if you make some comments very loud and clear, so everyone recalls your attendance. If the meeting drags on for more than a few minutes, sit near the exit so you can get out quietly. Don't forget about special favors within your department that get you kudos from your chair. Of course in corporatized institutions I shouldn't use the term chair, but director or some such similar term.

Another way you can get service kudos is to offer to be webmaster. Consider turning the web pages into a wiki page. Assign passwords to faculty, and tell them to make whatever changes they like. If anyone makes a comment about how poor the web pages are, tell them it's the others' fault as they should be changing it themselves. In the meantime take your congratulations from the chair for being such a wonderful

webmaster. For more service kudos, look for contingent faculty who have done things and then take credit for their work. It's easy, just treat us like shit because we are contingent faculty.

For teaching kudos you need to get good course evaluations from your students. At least get better course evaluation scores than most of the faculty in the department. One thing you can do is to make your course easier than other faculty teaching similar courses. Don't make students do so many reports, and make the reports easier than the others. If contingent faculty call you out regarding the ease of your class versus others, don't worry, claim academic freedom, which also is disappearing in the corporate model of higher education, and point out to your chair that it is just some pesky contingent faculty and they don't know anything anyway. Just get the best student course evaluations and the chair will just ignore those pesky contingent faculty. Truth be told, in another department I know a tenure-track faculty member who was told by a colleague, just give most people an A, pass everyone, and you can get great student evaluations. But contingent faculty shouldn't do this, after all, just treat us like shit, we are contingent faculty.

Regarding research, there is a hard way and a much easier way. The easier way out is to get as many published papers as you can, regardless of quality or lead author. You see you don't need to lead any efforts,

rather take a small role in many efforts. Then, get a lot more peer-reviewed papers published. Who needs the hassle of leadership anyway, just coast with the work of others, publish as one of the team, and present lots of publications to the P&T committee. Maybe then your chair will say, "we had no choice but to grant him tenure, because of all those publications."

Another change over the years has been regarding office space. Even if a contingent faculty member has been in the same office for 5 years or more, anything they have is fair game. So go ahead and move their furniture without telling them, they don't matter. And if you break something of their own, so what? Fuck them, they are just contingent faculty, and no one will defend their right to personal property on the premises.

To paraphrase Shakespeare, through his Merchant of Venice character, Shylock:

Tenured faculty have disgraced me, and hindered me half a million times. They have laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned me, stolen my achievements, cooled my friends, heated my enemies; and, what is the reason? I am contingent faculty. But hath not contingent faculty eyes? Hath not contingent faculty hands, organs, dimensions,

senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as tenured faculty? If you prick contingent faculty, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? If you wrong us, what shall we do? If we are like you in the rest, shall we resemble you at your worst? Shall we mirror the villainy you show us? That's OK, just treat us like shit, we're contingent faculty.

Now when I first joined the academic ranks, I was welcomed at all faculty meetings. Recently there were separate meetings for tenured and contingent faculty.

You know it was 60 years ago when the Supreme Court made its *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling wherein it was highlighted that separate but equal is inherently unequal. So when you have a separate meeting for contingent faculty and tenured faculty, how are contingent faculty to feel? Perhaps like children of a lesser God.

Another separate but equal issue relates to voting rights. When I joined the academic ranks, I was allowed to vote at meetings on all matters. Now we have department by-laws that not only define what a faculty

member is, but also which faculty members can vote on which matters. Separate but equal reigns anew.

It is also curious to note the changes that have occurred regarding the number of administrative faculty. According to a spreadsheet released by the faculty senate at my institution, there has been a 96% increase in the past 5 years in administrative faculty. Compare that to a 25-28% growth in faculty in 9-month and 12-month positions, tenured track or contingent over the same period of time. Is something wrong here or do you really need that many more administrators for that many new faculty?

Don't even get me started on salaries. I happen to be aware of an administrative assistant who sits next door to me, who earns over \$25,000 a year more than I do. She only handles one administrator. I handle over 400 students a year. How should we feel about that? Hey, tough shit, we are just contingent faculty. Don't forget that woman I mentioned earlier who isn't full time, she is in dire straits because she has no benefits, and she is responsible for the education of hundreds of students nonetheless. It's like the female contingent faculty member who ended up in poverty due to her getting cancer, and no longer being able to teach. She died alone and penniless. So much for a career in academia!

I have another recent example of changes in treatment of contingent faculty. Imagine working for an institution for over a decade, then one day, just a week before Christmas, you come in and are told you are no longer needed. Hell, I'm not a Christian, and I could never imagine laying off an employee in this manner. And by the way, he had a contract that continued through the next semester, so they paid him for that semester anyway. Is this corporatized academia or just Scrooge.

Speaking of administrators, I want to breach a subject that may appear politically incorrect because it examines the culture of some of our newest administrators; nonetheless it contributes to the erosion of academic freedom and shared governance.

I believe the academic culture has changed in part due to the varied cultures that our new administrators bring with them. Many of the new administrative faculty did not grow up in American academia. Some attended academic institutions, even for their terminal degrees, in countries with very different cultures, whether they be fascist or communist dictatorships. These people do not know the meaning of academic freedom nor shared governance. They come from cultures where you do what you are told and no questions are asked. They expect their colleagues to do the same, and often cannot understand why

they are not being obeyed. This is not a good situation for anyone, except for the corporatized administrators who love this to death.

After all is said and done, are contingent faculty really so different from tenured faculty? Do you want me to show you my published papers? Do you want me to show you the books I have written? Do you want me to show you the awards I have won, even Faculty Member of the Year? Do you want me to show you the grants that I have been PI or co-I, amounting to millions of dollars? Do you want me to show you the blood, sweat and tears I have given in service to those who would treat me no better than a slave?

If there is anyone listening who is considering a full-time contingent position, I must counsel you to decline the position. Accepting a full time contingent position in academia was the greatest mistake I ever made in my life. Don't make the same mistake as I did.

Some may recall this verse which reminded me of the battle between contingent and tenured faculty:

“Go ahead and hate your neighbor,  
Go ahead and cheat a friend.  
Do it in the name of heaven,  
You can justify it in the end.”

Who can tell me what movie that was the theme song for, many years ago? [Answer: Billy Jack]

But what does the future hold for tenured faculty? The writing is already on the wall. There are online universities with only contingent faculty. And, a few months ago, I read of a new online university which was trying to get by, at an off-shore location in the Caribbean, with mostly volunteer faculty. That's right, volunteer faculty, mostly retirees with enough money to just want to do something without financial remuneration.

So, when you all hear that bell ring for the next class, remember for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for me AND thee!

Thank you for your time.