

THE REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PART-TIME FACULTY RESPONSE OF THE FURMAN CHAPTER OF THE AAUP

The Furman Chapter of the American Association of University Professors has grave concerns about the recommendations contained in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Part-time Faculty. We face the challenge of how best to improve the working conditions of our colleagues with contingent appointments while simultaneously defending the centrality of tenure to the well-being of the university as a whole.

We assert that the following principles should guide any policies regarding faculty not on the tenure track:

1. **Tenure, shared governance, and academic freedom are interdependent, each one being indispensable to the success of the university in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.**¹ Any diminution of one of these three weakens the others as well. A previous generation of Furman faculty recognized this when they wisely wrote into our policies that we would recognize no full-time appointment which was not de facto on the tenure track: “All full-time faculty members² are on annual probationary appointment until such time as they are either granted tenure or released.”³
2. **Contingent faculty should be employed only for exceptional reasons and under special circumstances.** There are clearly times when the hiring of part-time faculty or faculty with limited appointments is necessitated by the needs of the curriculum. However, in recent years Furman’s reliance on contingent faculty has significantly exceeded the AAUP recommendation that contingent faculty should not be used for more than 15% of total instruction.⁴
3. **Standing faculty committees should hold the central role in the evaluation of faculty performance.** Our constitution states that “the faculty of Furman University shall be responsible for setting academic policy, determining the curriculum, defining requirements for degrees, and conducting academic instruction.”⁵ To be faithful to our responsibility for peer review, all faculty, contingent as well as those tenured and on probationary appointment, should be evaluated by the Faculty Status Committee.
4. **A two-tiered system of instruction is not consistent with the mission of a strong liberal arts program.** The report of the ad hoc committee envisions a Furman faculty divided between those tenured, or on the tenure track, and those in full-time positions without possibility of tenure. The latter faculty would have different performance expectations with separate evaluation procedures and parallel ranks, creating a segment of faculty distinct from the tenured and probationary faculty. This second tier of faculty would inevitably be viewed with less respect and compensated more poorly than the tenured and probationary faculty.
5. **Current contingent faculty deserve greater job and economic security.** The Furman faculty currently includes many contingent faculty who have diligently served the university with little reward in terms of increased compensation or long-term contracts. After their years of contributions to the Furman community, we owe them basic economic justice, both in compensation and job security.
6. **Tenured faculty have an ethical obligation to care for the preservation of tenure, shared governance, and academic freedom, for the well-being of both future generations of faculty and future generations of students.**

Further context

We commend the Ad Hoc Committee on Part-time Faculty for their efforts to improve the conditions of contingent faculty at Furman. This is a task which is long overdue, and we welcome the attempt of the administration and this committee to address these issues. However, we do not think that improving the job

security and compensation for contingent faculty should come at the expense of undermining our current policies on tenure and shared governance at Furman. Earlier generations of faculty, both at Furman and nationwide, saw firsthand the consequences of weak systems of tenure, shared governance, and academic freedom. In particular, at Furman, faculty wisely wove essential AAUP statements into our policies and contracts, ensuring that later generations of faculty would benefit from the lessons they had learned. Implementation of the recommendations of the committee would necessitate the unraveling of many of these policies.

The report of the Ad Hoc Committee recommends creating full-time faculty positions which are not on the tenure track. This would entail, among other things, changing the policy statement of Policy 157.4, which currently declares that “[a]ll full-time faculty members are on annual probationary appointment until such time as they are either granted tenure or released.” Moreover, Policies 157.4 and 158.4 both declare that “[t]he Board of Trustees of Furman University has adopted the 1940 AAUP statement entitled ‘Academic Freedom and Tenure’.” This AAUP statement is the bedrock upon which our system of tenure, faculty governance, and academic freedom rests. What will replace it if we adopt the Ad Hoc Committee’s recommendation?

Seeking fairer compensation for our contingent faculty is a just goal which the AAUP enthusiastically supports. The committee’s recommendations take steps in this direction, yet they fall well short of the goal. In particular, the suggestion that the baseline for a full-time contingent faculty position be four courses, with additional courses taught at overload rates, ensures that such faculty will be under-compensated for their work. Moreover, the report makes no concrete recommendations for increasing the level of compensation for our adjunct faculty. Currently, adjunct faculty, some of whom have taught at Furman for more than a decade, are poorly paid (\$4753 per course, as of the 2013-14 academic year)⁶, with no reward for long-time commitment to teaching at Furman.

The committee recommends that only administrators (including department chairs) evaluate the work of contingent faculty. The primary reason given is the supposed inability of tenured faculty to evaluate the work of a contingent faculty member solely on two (instead of the standard three) criteria. However, we see no reason why a department chair or dean is more capable of considering the reduced set of criteria than are the members of the Faculty Status Committee. Moreover, to be faithful to our constitutional duty to set academic policy, determine the curriculum, and conduct academic instruction, as well as to the principle of peer review, it is the responsibility of standing faculty committees to be involved in the evaluation of all faculty.

The goals of greater job stability through longer term contracts, fairer compensation, and routine evaluation for our contingent faculty are all attainable with only minimal changes to existing policies. Creating full-time faculty positions which exist outside of the tenure track would involve a major revision of many of our most fundamental policies, with serious consequences for the future of tenure, academic freedom, and shared governance at Furman.

Notes

¹See the AAUP 1940 “Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” and Appendix E of the Furman Faculty Policies and Procedure Manual.

²See Comment 5 of the 1970 Interpretive Comments addendum to the AAUP 1940 “Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” for the interpretation of “full-time faculty.”

³Policy 157.4 of the Furman Faculty Policies and Procedure Manual

⁴See the AAUP report “Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession.” Additionally, Furman policies do not specify how department chairs and the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean establish the need for contingent faculty (see Policy 157.9 C.1). Given the constitutional responsibilities of the faculty to the academic program, policies should clarify the role of the faculty as a whole in determining such need.

⁵Preamble to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Faculty of Furman University

⁶See <http://math.furman.edu/~dcs/aaup/contingent-faculty-2014.pdf>.