

Fine Wine at Discount Prices? A Review of the Research on the Part-Time Faculty Workforce

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ABSTRACT

Although part-time faculty have long contributed specialized expertise to colleges and universities, their role has shifted away from specialized expertise as they have shouldered an increasing share of day-to-day teaching operations at colleges and universities. Today, part-time faculty provide higher education institutions a flexible workforce and a less expensive workforce alternative. Despite their significant impact, the research literature lacks an up-to-date integrative synthesis of the part-time faculty workplace on its own terms, an object of study unto itself instead of a less-than version of the full-time faculty workplace. In this paper, we summarize key themes from the existing research literature most relevant to the part-time faculty workplace, with attention to both the technical components of the workplace and the socio-cultural dimensions of part-time faculty members' daily work experiences.

Keywords: Part-Time Faculty, Adjunct Faculty, Contingent Faculty

"Part-time faculty offer us 'fine wine at discount prices.' They are often very fine teachers, and our money goes much farther than when we put it all into full-time faculty. Furthermore, we can 'pour it down the drain' if they have any flaws at all. We have made no big investment in part-time faculty."
anonymous provost - (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 141)

The academic teaching workforce consists of tenure-track and non-tenure-track (or contingent) faculty. Contingent faculty are hired either on a full-time or part-time basis (i.e., on per-course contracts) and are referred to by more than 50 titles across higher education—facilitators, adjuncts, instructors, lecturers,

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professors, and associate faculty, among others—with definitions varying by institution and within departments (Kezar, 2010). This variation in hiring practices and job titles can make it difficult for institutional administrators to understand their teaching workforce (Cross and Goldenberg, 2009).

Part-time faculty have contributed their expertise to higher education institutions for several centuries dating back to the Middle Ages (Jacobs, 1998). Priests, professionals, political figures, and others who specialize or have notoriety in their field have enriched the higher education teaching and learning environment with their specializations, bringing prestige to institutions.

In the United States, particularly since the 1970s, as contingent part-time faculty have increased in numbers, they have become a critical component of the higher education teaching force. Their role has shifted away from specialized expertise as they have shouldered an increasing share of the day-to-day teaching operations within institutions of higher education (IHEs). By 2011, just after the great recession, contingent full and part-time faculty had grown 286% from 1975-76 and part-time faculty made up 51.4% of the academic workforce (Curtis, 2014).

By the end of the decade, that share had declined somewhat; using 2019-20 IPEDS data, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) calculated that 43% of all faculty members held part-time contingent appointments (2021, p. 14). Today, part-time faculty provide higher education institutions a flexible workforce that ebbs and flows with fluctuations in enrollment and changes in course offerings, serving as a less expensive alternative to full-time faculty.

The increasing dependence of IHEs on the labor of part-time contingent faculty has created what some consider a new majority in the higher education teaching workforce. (Kezar & Sam, 2010). Despite teaching the same students as tenured, tenure-track, and full-time faculty, the working lives of part-time faculty members are substantively different from their colleagues. Often called ‘freeway flyers’ and ‘roads scholars,’ part-time faculty experience the academy as a precarious workplace (Kramer et al., 2014, p. 288) and as members of an often-ignored subaltern class.

Despite their significant impact, the research on part-time faculty is incomplete: “given the reliance of higher education institutions on part-time faculty, one would expect a large number of peer-reviewed studies on the experiences of part-time faculty; however, this is not the case” (Hoyt et al., 2008, p. 27). Indeed, even today, the research literature lacks a systematic synthesis of the part-time faculty workplace on its own terms, an object of study unto itself instead of a less-than version of the full-time faculty workplace. Part-time, contingent faculty occupy a unique space in higher education and should be understood apart from the smaller number of full-time, contingent faculty.

In this paper, we summarize key themes from the existing research literature most relevant to the part-time faculty workplace, with attention to both the technical components of the workplace and the socio-cultural dimensions of part-time faculty members’ daily work experiences. We base our summary on an integrative review of peer-reviewed published articles, articles in trade journals, and newspaper reports and other non-refereed publications, cognizant that the structural conditions of part-time faculty work preclude these faculty members from engaging in peer-reviewed research.

Consistent with our goal of characterizing the part-time faculty workplace in the voices of those who inhabit it, we consulted sources including *InsideHigherEd*, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Bulletin, and the like. To identify relevant publications, we used targeted keyword

searches of Google Scholar, ERIC, and ProQuest, with search terms including “part-time faculty”; “adjunct faculty”; and “contingent faculty.”

Perhaps the broadest conclusion from our literature review is the scant and often disconnected body of existing knowledge about part-time faculty. Despite their role in mission-critical university teaching and learning activities, we are unable to find a systematic characterization of the academic workplace for contingent part-time faculty on its own terms, rather than as an analog—a part-time version—of the workplace for full-time faculty. In this review, we underscore the complex and crucial spaces that contingent part-time faculty occupy in American higher education and highlight the inadequacy of the research base that informs our knowledge about their lived experiences at work. Given the important structural differences in both the technical and socio-cultural aspects of the part-time faculty workplace, we argue that the differences between contingent part-time and full-time faculty work experiences are not merely about the number of hours spent on campus or the number of courses taught.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We begin by characterizing the research on part-time faculty by *who they are* and *why they teach part-time*. We then review salient themes about the part-time faculty workplace, dividing our review into a discussion of the technical and administrative aspects of the workplace and its socio-cultural dimensions. We then identify gaps in the literature and avenues for further research and close with a call for the field to develop a systematic data collection apparatus tailored to the idiosyncrasies of the part-time faculty workplace.

A. DESCRIBING THE PART-TIME PROFESSORIATE

Who are part-time faculty?

The decline of the tenure-track in American higher education over the last few decades has been widely documented (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2021; Langen, 2010), a big component of which has been the adjunctification of the academic workforce. Since 1991, as the academic workforce has increased by nearly a quarter of a million faculty members, part-time faculty have accounted for 58% of that growth (Kumar & Benson, 2022, pp. 6-7). Indeed, in the 2019-20 academic year, the AAUP (2021, pp. 13-14) found that 63% of all faculty were contingent, of whom nearly two-thirds (42.9% of all faculty) were employed part-time. Today, part-time faculty teach at a variety of two- and four-year institutions and teach the majority of undergraduate students (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017; Pyram & Roth, 2018).

Within this overall increase, two trends stand out. First, the growth in the part-time faculty ranks has disproportionately occurred at community colleges, where well over two-thirds of faculty are employed part-time (Wagoner, 2019). Second, after steady increases in the proportion of part-time faculty in the higher education workforce between 1975 and 2011 (American Association of University Professors, 2013, p. 1), over the last decade the proportion of part-time faculty members in the professoriate has decreased somewhat (American Association of University Professors, 2021, p. 15). All told, these trends document the substantial impact of part-time faculty on the teaching and learning missions of higher education. Their work impacts not only the students they directly teach, but also to broader institutional cultures and missions (Kezar, 2010).

Beyond documenting the rise of the part-time professoriate, it is important to disaggregate *within* the part-time faculty ranks, as part-time faculty are a heterogeneous group and warrant attention on their own terms (Wagoner, 2019). However, much of the available research tends to combine the non-tenure-track ranks across full-time and part-time in a catch-all “contingent faculty” category. This category

includes, among others, full-time non-tenure-track faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate teaching assistants (Finley, 2008; Yakoboski, 2018). For example, data gathered by the American Federation of Teachers (2020) combines full-time non-tenure-track and part-time faculty in their definition of “contingent” faculty. Moreover, disaggregated data about salary and other lived experiences and working conditions are often provided only for full-time faculty (see, e.g., National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2020). Thus, “as institutions and researchers seek to understand who the typical adjunct instructor is, it must be noted that the profile can only be derived from a patchwork of sources” (Danaei, 2019, p. 22).

Where disaggregated data are available, gender is the most frequently used common demographic identifier across research studies.ⁱ Here, the available research documents that faculty identifying as women have composed an increasing share of the part-time professoriate and currently represent just over 50% of the total adjunct faculty workforce; up from 49% in 2004 to 52% in 2018 (Yakoboski, 2018, p. 4).

Research centering the demographics of part-time faculty has also characterized faculty by their racial and ethnic identification, although the vast majority of this research uses data that are over 20 years old. To some extent, the paucity of recent, comprehensive, disaggregated data can be attributed to the lack of contemporary systematic quantitative data collection about the part-time professoriate. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) discontinued the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) in 2004, and IPEDS data only includes headcount of part-time faculty (additional data is gathered from full-time faculty). Thus, our understanding of the racial and ethnic demographics of part-time faculty is severely outdated.

Based on data from the 2003 NSOPF, 85% of all part-time faculty identified as white, a higher share than compared to full-time faculty, 80% of whom identified as white (NCES, 2020). However, these data likely considerably understate the diversification of the professoriate and the parallel growth of the part-time professoriate, which have likely led to considerable shifts in the racial and ethnic demographics of part-time faculty.

Extant scholarship about the part-time professoriate has also documented systematic differences in socioeconomic status between part-time and full-time faculty, although a variety of studies categorize and define part-time faculty in different ways and thus report often contradictory information on salary and household income. Faculty who come from low or middle socioeconomic backgrounds are dispersed equally among part- and full-time employment, but those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be employed full-time (Valadez & Antony, 2001). Moreover, tenure-track faculty are more likely to come from higher-than-average socioeconomic status backgrounds and are considerably more likely to have at least one parent with a Ph.D. (O’Grady, 2021).

On the contrary, Yakoboski (2018) found that 60% of part-time faculty had a yearly household income of \$50,000 or more, 65% of single part-time faculty had a household income of less than \$50K; and that two-thirds of part-time faculty were married or lived with a partner. Part-time faculty with household incomes greater than \$100,000 were also less likely to concurrently hold outside employment.

Part-time faculty also vary in their levels of educational attainment, although this trend has also shifted as the production of doctorate degrees has increased over time. Two decades ago, nearly three-quarters of part-time faculty held a master’s degree as their highest level of educational attainment (Valadez & Antony, 2001). By 2018, just over half (56%) held a master’s degree and nearly one-third had completed

doctoral degrees (Yakoboski, 2018, p. 12), with those employed at a Bachelors-granting institution more likely to hold doctoral degrees (Conley & Leslie, 2002).

Why do part-time faculty work part-time?

A second consideration for understanding the part-time professoriate is to explore what brings them to work: what is their motivation for taking on their part-time roles? For example, part-time faculty may be motivated by their interest in service, enjoyment of teaching and sharing knowledge, or may view part-time academic employment as a steppingstone to a full-time role. This consideration leads to a potential categorization, as discussed by several scholars (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2016; Kezar & Sam 2010; Maynard & Joseph, 2008; Zitko & Schultz, 2020), of part-time faculty serving in their roles voluntarily or involuntarily.

‘Voluntary’ part-time faculty specifically seek a part-time role, while involuntary part-time faculty are unable to secure a full-time role and work part-time as an alternative. Thus, Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) canonical categories of “career enders,” “specialists,” and “freelancers” may serve in their part-time roles voluntarily, while “aspiring academics” may be considered to work as contingent part-time faculty involuntarily. Pryor (2020) extended this line of reasoning in a tripartite typology of thrivers, strivers, and survivors, with thrivers working part-time out of preference (e.g., “specialists” and “freelancers”), survivors out of financial need (“aspiring academics” and “freelancers”), and strivers lying between those poles, “relying financially on their part-time work but also preferring to teach part-time as a means to some other end” (Pryor, 2020, p. 25).

Collectively, these categorizations stem from the underlying assumptions and prevailing ideologies about the part-time professoriate. Porter and colleagues (2020, p. 677) identified “one focusing on exploitation due to the lack of job security, minimal benefits, and low salaries; the second as allowing career flexibility (particularly for women); and a third...that [acknowledges] ‘the exploitation of some and the choice of others.’”

Yakoboski (2018), summarizing the results of a large-scale survey of part-time faculty, found that 50% of respondents were seeking a tenure-track role, 11% preferred a full-time non-tenure-track role, and 24% were satisfied in their adjunct role (15% were unsure). Other researchers have suggested that involuntary part-time faculty tend to be less satisfied with their part-time roles and are, on average, younger than those working part-time voluntarily (Eagan et al., 2015; Kezar & Sam, 2010; Toutkoushian & Bellas, 2003; Yakoboski, 2018). On the other hand, voluntary part-time faculty tend to be retired, desire a flexible schedule, have other professional full-time jobs (i.e., are professors of practice/clinical professors), or live in a two-income household (Kezar & Sam, 2010).

The relative dissatisfaction of involuntary part-time faculty with their working conditions is particularly prevalent in areas related to job security and advancement, as part-time faculty tend to feel less connected to the administration and less respected by their peers (Eagan et al., 2015). For voluntary part-time faculty, however, scholars have noted a “near-universal altruistic” motivation for teaching, mentoring, and sharing life experiences (Zitko & Schultz, 2020, p. 9). For example, Gappa and Leslie (1993, p. 22) profile a Black part-time faculty member who articulated their motivations as “the love of teaching and working with people from the same kind of background I had, not for the money.” In addition, voluntary part-time faculty may have little or no interest in a full-time faculty role or in the additional academic service responsibilities (Gappa & Leslie, 1993) that are typically associated with professional advancement in the academy. It is not clear from the research whether involuntary part-time faculty choose part-time roles in higher education over full-time or part-time employment in other industries.

Thus, the question of agency in part-time faculty employment is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. Macro-level social and cultural systems can limit the range of options available to faculty members holding socially marginalized identities. For example, because women are subjected to greater responsibility in the home and with respect to childcare (Petts et al., 2021; Thébaud et al., 2021), they may not have the capacity to prepare for or work in full-time faculty roles (Toutkoushian & Bellas, 2003, p. 180). Thus, although female part-time faculty may characterize their participation as voluntary, these macro-structural inequities may force them “to accept less rewarding and secure forms of work” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 24).

B. DESCRIBING THE PART-TIME FACULTY WORKPLACE

Individuals who work as part-time contingent faculty in higher education are an extremely heterogeneous group, and “variability is the rule in almost all aspects of this field” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 10). Here, we limit our discussion to the work environment as experienced by part-time faculty. This environment consists of both technical and administrative considerations including salary, contract length, rank and title, as well as socio-cultural aspects including workplace climate, opportunities for collaboration and advancement, professionalism, and inclusion. Much of the research uncovered during this review paints an inequitable and less than favorable work environment for part-time faculty.

Voluntary part-time faculty tend to have higher overall job satisfaction as opposed to involuntary part-time faculty (Kezar, 2010), and somewhat counter-intuitively, Toutkoushian and Bellas (2003) found that part-time faculty had a higher overall job satisfaction when compared with full-time faculty. Yakoboski (2018, p. 9) found that 66% of adjunct faculty were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ in their jobs, with overall satisfaction rates correlated with higher household income. Average pay per course appeared unrelated to satisfaction levels; however, part-time faculty under the age of 40, those who held an earned doctoral degree, and those who sought tenure-track positions (i.e., were in part-time roles involuntarily) were more likely to be dissatisfied with their career trajectory (Yakoboski, 2018, pp. 11, 19). Where scholarship has explored the reasons for dissatisfaction, most negative feedback has been related to formal policies and procedures relating to their employment such as dissatisfaction with compensation and benefits (Kezar & Sam, 2010; Zitko & Schultz, 2020).

Technical and administrative considerations

Hiring practices for part-time faculty vary both between institutions and between departments within an institution. Part-time faculty typically enter the work through short term, single course contracts. This system of hiring means that part-time faculty typically labor in precarious conditions, lacking the job security of their full-time colleagues; unsurprisingly, part-time faculty express a preference for longer contracts that offer more stable employment (Hoyt, 2012). Moreover, the timing of their hire also has an impact on their job security, personal lives, and ability to successfully prepare for classes, especially because many teach multiple courses per semester across several institutions.

One community college part-time faculty member explained, “I need to be set up for success. So, when I’m getting classes the day before [the semester starts], or when I’m not given any instruction on how to access books, or when the copy machine is down and I have to make 50 copies of the syllabus, then I’m stressed and I’m rushed....” (Bickerstaff & Chavarin, 2018, p. 4).

Although part-time faculty report the highest levels of dissatisfaction about their compensation (Hoyt et al., 2008; Huffman, 2000; Townsend & Hauss, 2002), comparing full-time and part-time compensation on

a per-course basis is problematic because of the non-teaching time full-time faculty spend doing research and service work (Toutkoushian & Bellas, 2003). Part-time faculty pay varies, in the first instance, by the types of institutions at which they work. Public two-year institutions, for example, offer an average of \$2,611 per course, while doctoral institutions offer an average of \$5,760 per course (AAUP, 2021, p. 8). Moreover, part-time faculty members identifying as women earn 19% less per hour than those who identify as men when all forms of compensation are considered (Toutkoushian & Bellas, 2003). Women indicated satisfaction with pay but requested more benefits (Hoyt, 2012). There is also indication that more part-time women were at least partially dependent on their part-time income (Gappa & Leslie, 1993).

In addition, most part-time faculty do not receive the benefits (health insurance, retirement contributions, etc.) that are normally associated with full-time faculty positions (AAUP, 2021, p. 12), and the research literature does not adequately document the availability of other compensation including discounted tuition, childcare support, and vacation and sabbatical leave. This combination of low per-course wages, employment insecurity, and lack of employment benefits consigns a significant proportion of part-time contingent faculty to economic precarity: in 2015, nearly one in four part-time college faculty were dependent on public assistance (Jacobs, Perry, & MacGillvary, 2015). Thus, “by almost all measures—salary, benefits, employment status—part-timers are at the bottom of the higher education faculty hierarchy...the structural conditions for those part-time faculty who depend on their university or college for their livelihood may indeed contribute to [their] expressed marginalization” (Levin & Hernandez, 2014, p. 535).

The extent to which part-time faculty have access to physical office space and technological supports for teaching varies, although in general, it appears to be less than what is accorded to their full-time colleagues (Levin & Hernandez, 2014). Hoyt (2012) proposed that adjunct satisfaction with their work environment would improve if they had offices with name plates and their own desks as opposed to shared space, finding dissatisfaction among part-time faculty with their teaching space. This dissatisfaction included concerns that the classroom configuration was not conducive to their teaching style, the classrooms were small and noisy, and that functional technical equipment was lacking (Hoyt, 2012). Part-time faculty indicated their work environment would also improve if they had access to teaching assistants, better parking, and had choice in course texts (Hoyt, 2012).

Part-time faculty are also less satisfied with their access to develop course content and to work independently (Valadez & Antony, 2001); however, Zitko & Schultz (2020) found that positive attributes associated with part-time teaching to be flexibility, autonomy, lack of requirements to serve on committees, fewer meetings, and student - centeredness.

Once hired, orientation is sometimes the first formal opportunity for part-time faculty to meet colleagues, tour facilities, and inquire about policies and procedures. Research regarding the offering of orientations and whether part-time faculty participate is incomplete; our review suggests that approximately half, and potentially up to two-thirds of part-time faculty may typically attend orientation (Hoyt, 2012; Hoerner et al., 1991; Keim, 1989). Gappa and Leslie (1993) placed a high value on orientations and indicated that inconsistency in the quality of orientation programs could be related to the fact that department chairs are usually responsible for orientation and even if it is encouraged or required, the quality can vary across departments.

Beyond orientation, the amount and quality of ongoing mentorship and professional development provided to part-time faculty also varies considerably across institutions. While most part-time faculty

report adequate training on institutional mission and objectives and other technical aspects of the job including the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and grading and conduct policies, adequate training on student supports were relatively less prevalent (Hoyt, 2012). Less prevalent in the literature, however, is description of any attention to part-time faculty career growth. Mentoring practices for part-time faculty seem to be less likely than technical training, and where they are offered, they can range in quality. For example, Hoyt (2012) reported that 49% of part-time faculty were assigned to a mentor; however, Gappa and Leslie (1993, p. 182) documented a wide range of mentoring programs, from the elaborate and well-functioning to the less supportive and inconsistent.

There is no widely accepted protocol for evaluating adjuncts, and variation in evaluation practices renders “the area of adjunct faculty evaluation...ripe for investigation” (Langen, 2011). When a protocol is in place, student evaluations of teaching are often used as the sole method of evaluation, with little, if any, distinction between formative and summative assessments (Langen, 2011). In one qualitative study, part-time faculty members characterized their evaluations as “cruel” and “gripe sessions,” (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017, p. 59), while in another, a participant noted that given larger class sizes, “[it is] very hard to reach every single one of them [students] in a meaningful way . . . and [to try] to make the students understand the importance of learning and not just trying to get a good grade” (Meixner & Kruck, 2010, p. 145). This single mode of evaluation may render the already-precarious employment of part-time faculty members especially vulnerable to racialized and gendered biases in student evaluations of teaching (Chávez & Mitchell, 2020).

Socio-cultural considerations

In addition to the technical aspects of the part-time faculty workplace, workplace culture and climate have strong impacts on the lived experiences of part-time faculty members and can vary greatly across IHEs and within departments. As Gappa and Leslie note, “departments that care deeply about education, about teaching and learning, seem to foster an atmosphere in which faculty members talk with each other about these issues. Such departments also appear to involve part-timers in their talk and seem open to what the part-timers have to say” (1993, p. 185). Topics such as inclusion, appreciation, acknowledgement, collaboration, respect, and professionalism have surfaced in some of the research of part-time faculty.

Part-time faculty often indicate being dissatisfied with the level of inclusion they experience (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Kezar & Sam, 2010). Gappa and Leslie discussed defining integration of part-time faculty as the effort IHEs make to ensure that part-time faculty “are successful, valued and supported” (1993, p. 180). Recent qualitative studies of part-time faculty member’s lived experiences in their departments have highlighted a “sense of disconnection” from the university (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017, pp. 61-62), a feeling that there is a “prejudice among faculty members towards part-timers,” and a “lack of collegiality” (Zitko & Schultz, 2020, p. 11). These findings support earlier conclusions about the “peripheral” status and outsider identities attributed to part-time faculty members by their departmental colleagues, creating a “two-class system” within the academy (Kezar & Sam, 2010, pp. 62-64).

This lack of collegiality and acknowledgement contributes to part-time faculty feeling like they are “second class” academic citizens (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 43), and “invisible, [lacking] a role on campus, and...unnoticed and undervalued as academic and individual entities on campus” (Jolley et al., 2014, p. 225). In a large-scale survey of part-time faculty, one-third of respondents said they rarely felt appreciated and that a verbal or written thank you by academic and administrative departments as well as appreciation dinners would alleviate this feeling (Hoyt, 2012, pp. 137-138).

The concept of professionalism as explored by some researchers includes both the availability of opportunities for professional development and also references the way in which part-time faculty members interact with their colleagues. Kezar and Sam (2010; 2011) reported that part-time faculty felt more like laborers than professionals and that there were no career paths towards tenure-earning positions. One adjunct reported a duality in the way full-time faculty referred to part-time faculty depending on their audience: “colleagues would say one thing - ‘adjuncts are as good as the full-time faculty’ or ‘you can’t imagine a more talented and conscientious and able group...’ - and behave quite differently” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 190).

Another perspective on professionalism considers the opportunities for collaboration with full-time faculty. Part-time faculty are rarely part of the decision making regarding professional development, curriculum development, or course learning objectives (Kezar, 2012). Levels of collaboration are dependent on culture, attitude of tenured faculty, leadership, and willingness on the behalf of part-time faculty to be involved. One part-time faculty member referred to full-time faculty members’ territorialism, stating “there is a heavy sense that you don’t threaten someone’s territory” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 191).

C. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preceding review identifies several key dimensions of the academic workplace that, while nominally similar for full-time and part-time faculty, are experienced in substantively different ways: hiring practices, compensation, benefits, material resources, evaluation, professionalism, collegiality, and advancement. We know that part-time faculty come to the work through a variety of pipelines, for a variety of reasons, have a variety of backgrounds, and teach at a variety of HEIs across the country. We find that they have varied experiences regarding the technical aspects of their work including hiring, compensation and benefits, workplace needs, training, and professional development. This variability can be explained in part by the fact that almost all of the hiring, onboarding, and management of part-time faculty tends to occur at the departmental level. We also find that part-time faculty members have varied experiences with the socio-cultural dimensions of their workplaces, across inclusion, engagement, and belonging; voice in organizational affairs; and exercising academic freedom in their roles. This suggests that even within a single institution, the lived experiences of part-time faculty members can vary dramatically.

Yet, we are unable to draw broad conclusions about how part-time faculty experience their workplaces given the substantial limitations of the extant body of research. First, comprehensive and timely data collected on part-time faculty is lacking at a national scale, with the last comprehensive survey—the NSOPF—being discontinued in 2004. This gap leaves the task of surveying the part-time faculty workplace to researchers who, in turn, define key terms differently based on the goals of their particular study. For example, part-time faculty members are often combined into a broader group of contingent faculty including, *inter alia*, graduate student assistants, postdoctoral researchers, and full-time non-tenure-track faculty (e.g., Jolley et al., 2014; Kezar & Sam, 2010). Thus, even when large-scale studies of the faculty workplace are conducted, it can be difficult to identify the workplace dimensions and lived experiences particular to part-time faculty.

In part, this conflation is necessary to make tractable the multiplicity of job titles in the academy, which can vary between institutions and can between schools and departments within the same institution. To complicate matters further, the job descriptions and role responsibilities of these different classifications also vary widely across IHEs, schools, and departments. Because IHEs have not systemized data collection, roles/responsibilities for contingent faculty, and standards around division and department hiring

practices, contracts, and role titles (Kezar & Sam, 2010), it can be difficult for them to effectively disaggregate within the contingent faculty ranks. As a result, in both administrative data and published scholarship, contingent faculty positions often (but not universally) combine part- and full-time non-tenure-track status without further disaggregation.

Moreover, how these data are collected, and by whom, also shape our understanding—and lack thereof—of the dimensions of the academic workplace unique to part-time faculty. For example, researchers studying the professoriate often come from the tenure-track ranks; as a result, much of the current research frames part-time faculty work as a part-time version of the full-time, tenure-track faculty workplace. Implicit here is a normative assumption that all faculty should aspire to, and all institutions should employ, tenure-track, full-time academic positions. For example, when Leslie asks if “it [is] in the nation’s interest to convert... a large proportion of academic work to short-term and temporary jobs and thereby to undercut the protections of tenure and perhaps weaken academic freedom” (1998, p. 2), we are cognizant of an implicit assumption that the part-time faculty workplace is bad for higher education *per se*.

Perhaps as a result of this devaluation of part-time faculty work, there is little to no systematic information available about part-time faculty members themselves. The research literature lacks broad representative demographic information about race, ethnicity, expanded gender identifications, or other social categories that have been used to describe full-time faculty members in the United States. We do not know, for example, how many part-time faculty identify as first-generation students or English Language Learners, nor do we understand their formative socio-economic histories. We cannot systematically differentiate the experiences of part-time faculty across specific modalities (online/hybrid/in-person) disciplines, or course levels, nor make claims about the experiences of part-time faculty at different stages of their career. Although one or a few studies may explore these topics, we are not aware of any comprehensive multi-institutional comparative datasets about the part-time faculty workplace.

Additionally, as two of us have noted elsewhere, leadership in the academy is exclusively the privilege of the tenured; if faculty are not hired into tenured or tenurable positions, they are definitionally excluded from the leadership opportunities that rely on tenure as a prerequisite (Kumar & Benson, 2022, p. 16). How then, can academic leaders create the conditions for part-time faculty success, without lived experience of the part-time faculty workplace? Yet, how can part-time faculty engage in sustained institutional leadership and effect structural changes when they do not know where they will be teaching next semester? We wonder whether and how these mindsets and structural conditions may discourage research about part-time faculty, and investment in improving their working conditions, on their own terms.

At a time when many institutions are staking claims about their commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, if institutional efforts to diversify the faculty only result in increases within the part-time ranks but minimal changes in the tenure stream faculty, then the institution has simply added another layer of structural inequality to an already marginalized group. Further complicating these concerns is the inherent power differential between full- and part-time faculty. As we have described above, part-time faculty have relatively little say, and feel an absence of agency, in shaping the conditions in which they must work. Because the voices of part-time faculty are scattered across their respective institutions, without a systematic methodology for hearing their voices, the likelihood of improving their working conditions is diminished. We argue that if institutions are truly committed to creating equitable workplaces, then they must do a better job of understanding—and improving—the experiences of part-time faculty.

Thus, and especially because part-time faculty make up a significant and growing population of the higher education teaching workforce, real-time, comprehensive, and detailed data are desperately needed to understand and better characterize the experiences of part-time faculty and to appropriately theorize the part-time faculty workplace. We cannot change what we do not know, and so collecting data about—and in partnership with—part-time faculty is fundamental to understanding this group of the workforce to improve both employment practice and teaching and learning.

These data need to be gathered intentionally, with instruments specifically designed to capture the particularities of part-time faculty, their motivations for working in this capacity, and their perspectives on their work environments. A broad swathe of institutions should be represented in this study, a key output of which would be the creation of a data dictionary to facilitate shared understanding of part-time faculty appointment types, benefits, workload, and other technical and socio-cultural components of the part-time faculty workplace.

The field lacks a holistic and consistent chronological benchmark against which future data and research can be compared. Since the NCES discontinued its National Study of Postsecondary Faculty in 2004, there has been a dearth of basic information about the compensation, demographics, and workload of contingent faculty members. We, therefore, join the call of several of our colleagues who have identified a need for better data and more research, both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

ⁱ We note here that the extant research does not differentiate between gender identity and biological sex, using the terms “woman” and “female,” and “man” and “male” interchangeably. Although research acknowledging the fluidity of gender identities is beginning to surface in higher education (McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020; Vacarro, 2012) these shifts are not yet commonplace in data collection and published research about part-time faculty.

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