



TOWARDS IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF FACULTY WITH ADJUNCT APPOINTMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Most adjunct-appointed faculty—faculty compensated on a per-course-section or hourly basis—are **dedicated and highly qualified teachers, but their institutional status dramatically complicates their ability to deliver the best education to their students.** They often lack the basic resources—office space, computers, etc.—that other faculty rely on. They're vulnerable to arbitrary dismissal and can be reluctant to engage controversial or challenging material. And because they're classified differently from other faculty, they can be uninformed about institutional guidelines, policies, and resources. (AAUP, [Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession](#).)

In 2023, there were 573,500 “part time” faculty employed in US institutions of higher education in 2023 versus 102,815 tenure-track and 272,603 tenured professors ([IPEDS data](#)). While in 1987 only 33% of US faculty were classified as “part-time,” **in 2023 49% of faculty were part-time.** Numbers of adjunct faculty specifically—both nationally and at South Carolina colleges and universities—are difficult to calculate because adjunct faculty can hold various ranks and are classified differently by different institutions, and of course their numbers fluctuate from semester to semester. What is clear is that **US colleges and universities are increasingly employing adjunct faculty instead of tenured faculty.**

In Fall 2023, AAUP-SC's Committee Z on Equity in the Workplace conducted a survey and follow up Zoom sessions in Spring 2024 to better understand the working conditions of faculty with adjunct appointments. Over 150 individuals responded to the survey from at least 16 institutions across the state. About 25% of the respondents told us that they teach at more than one institution.

Our findings and recommendations are below.



See the AAUP
report on
Contingent
Appointments



Visualize the IPEDS
data at the AAUP
Data website

SURVEY FINDINGS

- a majority of respondents told us that they **do not receive a contract or notice of appointment until the final weeks before the term begins**, with nearly ten percent reporting they either did not receive a contract or letter of appointment until after the term began **or did not receive one at all**.
- Many respondents indicated that their **pay was delayed weeks, or in some cases months**, after the initial pay periods.
- While over 80% of respondents report access to adequate information about course requirements, learning outcomes, and institutional policies, only a 25% of respondents have access to a **dedicated computer** and fewer than 20% reported access to **dedicated office space**.
- Respondents also indicated that they **did not feel adequately trained about a number of student support services**, particularly academic advising, career counseling, other counseling services, financial aid, or student life.
- Nearly half of respondents reported **a lack of clarity about evaluation procedures** for promotion and retention, and a strong majority of respondents indicated that they **did not have job security** from year to year or term to term.
- Most respondents also expressed that they **did not feel they have a voice** in decisions

that affect them or in departmental or university governance.

- An overwhelming majority indicated that they **did not perceive ample opportunities** to obtain full-time, permanent teaching positions.

The Equity Week Committee held follow-up sessions via Zoom in early 2024 and attendees expressed the need for

- **improved communications** about resources and benefits,
- **more inclusion** in shared governance and campus culture, and
- **more transparency** about pay rates and the timelines for receiving pay.

The aspirational practices below are informed by the survey and follow-up sessions with attendees, as well as reports by the USC Aiken Faculty Welfare Committee in 2017, Julia Eichelberger at the College of Charleston in 2019, AAUP and AFT resources, other print sources, and consultations with AAUP-SC membership. These Best Practices were adopted by the AAUP-SC at the Spring Meeting, April 12, 2025. We recommend that chapters consider their unique institutional contexts and consult the guidance provided by the AAUP report on contingent appointments when deliberating the implementation of these best practices at their respective institutions.



ADJUNCT BEST PRACTICES

1 **EQUITABLE COMPENSATION**
Adjunct faculty receive pay, benefits, and respect comparable to that earned by professional and tenure track faculty with similar qualifications for doing similar work.

2 **EQUITABLE HIRING AND EVALUATION PRACTICES**
Hiring and evaluation practices for adjunct faculty are comparable to those used to hire and evaluate tenure-track faculty;

3 **CAREER LADDERS**
Adjunct faculty have access to a clearly articulated career ladder and seniority system, including specified criteria, making them eligible for greater job security and conversion to full-time positions.

4 **EQUITABLE SUPPORT**
Support for adjunct faculty teaching parallels support for TTF: appropriate supplies, equipment, office space, parking, and access to campus resources, professional development, and mentoring. Adjuncts receive training in Learning Management Systems and institutional IT platforms, FERPA, TITLE IX, campus safety, and institutional student support resources.

5 **EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION**
Adjunct faculty are invited but not required without compensation to participate in department meetings and may contribute to curriculum design.

6 **EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION**
Adjunct faculty have the right to vote and serve on committees for which they have the relevant expertise, especially those committees whose decisions affect their work and working conditions.



7 **EQUITABLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
Adjunct faculty have access to professional development opportunities and the opportunity to apply for support for professional development and scholarly research.

8 **TRANSPARENCY**
The institution collects and publishes data that tracks institutional and departmental reliance on adjunct appointments as a proportion of all appointments and of all credit hours taught, as well as the median adjunct salary at the institutional and departmental levels.

9 **EQUITABLE INCLUSION IN POLICY**
Adjunct faculty are formally included in any definition of the institution's faculty and receive explicit protection in the institution's faculty manual or equivalent, as well as in university and academic affairs policies.

10 **ACADEMIC FREEDOM PROTECTIONS**
Adjunct faculty enjoy explicit protection of their academic freedom in the classroom, in scholarship and research, in shared governance, and when speaking or writing as a citizen.

MAPPING YOUR ADJUNCT LANDSCAPE

Are there institution-wide policies pertaining to adjunct faculty at your institution? If so, are they posted and available to faculty?

Who at your institution, and at what levels, creates and/or approves policies pertaining to adjunct faculty?

Does your institution's faculty manual/handbook (or equivalent) outline policies and practices that pertain to adjunct faculty?

Are there faculty committees or bodies at your institution, if any, that have authority or oversight over policies and practices pertaining to adjunct faculty?

What types of adjunct faculty positions does your institution offer and what titles are used to describe them?

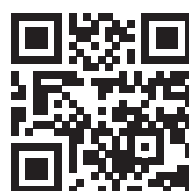
Who at your institution, if anyone, tracks data about adjunct faculty and adjunct salary? Is the information accessible to faculty?

Do adjunct faculty at your institution have the right to participate in shared governance?

On a scale of 1-10, how well do your institution's adjunct policies align with each of the best practices listed above (10=Perfect alignment; 1=Complete divergence)? Analyze how this works at your institution.

PRELIMINARY STEPS FOR ADJUNCT ADVOCACY

- What avenues are available to identify and communicate with adjunct faculty at your campus?
- Can you identify current or potential leaders on adjunct issues at your campus?
- Are adjunct policies and practices a common topic of conversation at your institution? Among what types of faculty and in what parts of your institution?
- Are there conditions or resources that would help your chapter begin to advocate on adjunct issues?
- Are there one-to-three easily implemented solutions that would better align your institution with any of the best practices listed above?
- What are three solutions (regardless of apparent practicality) that would most significantly improve your institution's adjunct practices?



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reach out, join the fight for
the future of higher ed:

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