

# **CFHE** Campaign for the Future of Higher Education

For Release: August 23, 2012, 12 noon EDT

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## **Second in Series of Higher Education Reports Documents Painful Impact of “Contingency Faculty Hiring” on Students and on Faculty’s Ability to Deliver Quality Education**

*Growing Trend to Hire Faculty on Contingent Basis Just Days Before Start of School  
is Hurting Quality of Education for Students; Students Paying More for Less*

Today, the Center for the Future of Higher Education, a think tank associated with the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education, released the second in a series of reports highlighting some of the major challenges in the way of providing students with access to an affordable and quality higher education.

The new report—“Who is Professor ‘Staff,’ and how can this person teach so many classes?”—offers an in-depth analysis of a recent nationwide survey of “contingent” faculty—teachers hired strictly on temporary contracts. The survey was developed and administered by the New Faculty Majority Foundation.

University hiring on a contingent basis is a rapidly growing trend in every category of college and university in the U.S.; contingent faculty now comprise the majority of all college and university faculty members.

The report focuses on the working conditions imposed on contingent faculty and the impact of those conditions on students and the quality of the education they receive.

In contrast to practices for most full-time faculty, contingent faculty often receive their course assignments shortly before the start of an academic term, sometimes two or three weeks or less, just in time for the start of classes and with little time to prepare a high-quality college-level course.

The problem is exacerbated when university managers fail to provide contingent faculty with full and effective access to the resources and technologies that define quality education in today’s colleges and universities.

“College and university administrators are relying more and more on faculty members who are hired on a short-term, so-called ‘temporary’ basis even though these faculty are often rehired term after term. Our study documents ways in which this unnecessary mismanagement of valuable human resources results in inadequate working conditions that shortchange students and quality education,” said Esther Merves, a co-author of the report and Director of Research & Special Programs for the New Faculty Majority Foundation.

Maria Maisto, a report co-author and Executive Director of the New Faculty Majority Foundation, said, “Dedicated faculty members are able to overcome many of the obstacles, but the point is they should not be encountering such obstacles at all. Students and faculty should not be required to compensate for what colleges refuse to provide. That is unfair to students and not in the best interest of America’s future.”

The report, which is available at [http://futureofhighered.org/Research\\_Center.html](http://futureofhighered.org/Research_Center.html), recommends increased transparency regarding the working conditions of contingent faculty. Such transparency could lead to a commitment by higher ed institutions to analyze the impact of contingent hiring on student learning and to reform employment practices.

Gary Rhoades, a report co-author and Director of the Center for the Future of Higher Education, added, “There is no doubt that improving the working conditions of contingent faculty will also improve the educational

experiences and success of college students. There is no financial or managerial justification of this situation, which could be markedly improved at little or no new costs. It is not just the right thing to do, it is the way to secure a strong future for our country."

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The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education is a project supported by 59 local and national organizations, including allies of higher education as well as college and university faculty organizations in states from Massachusetts to Florida to the Midwest and California. Its "virtual" think tank brings together faculty experts from across the nation to speak out on issues challenging our nation's system of post-secondary education. CFHE injects the faculty voice into the national discussion over the country's higher education policies — a discussion that has been dominated by executives and consultants, with far too little participation by the people who are in the classrooms with the millions of students whose success will determine the future of America. For a complete version of CFHE's Principles for Quality Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, see [www.futureofhighered.org/Principles.html](http://www.futureofhighered.org/Principles.html)

*Interviews are available with the report's authors as well as with college and university faculty in many states. Please contact Maria Maisto, 216-262-4375 or Gary Rhoades, 520-258-8684.*

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# **Who is Professor “Staff,” and how can this person teach so many classes?**

Steve Street, Maria Maisto, Esther Merves & Gary Rhoades

Center for the Future of Higher Education  
August 2012

## **Executive Summary**

Most of the faculty on American college and university campuses are contingent employees, working in conditions very different from the image of academic professional life that informs contemporary discussions of higher education policy. This report describes the findings of a recent survey of contingent faculty in the United States, focusing on the working conditions imposed upon contingent faculty and the ways those conditions impact students and the quality of the education they receive.

This report is based on a survey produced, distributed, and analyzed by members of the New Faculty Majority. See the survey at <http://www.nfmfoundation.org/NFMF-Back-to-School-Survey.html>

The report speaks directly to three core principles of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education dealing with investment in faculty, use of technology, and the avoidance of false economies. See the full report at [http://futureofhighered.org/Research\\_Center.html](http://futureofhighered.org/Research_Center.html)

For a complete version of CFHE's Principles for Quality Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, see [www.futureofhighered.org/Principles.html](http://www.futureofhighered.org/Principles.html)

Two particular aspects of the working conditions of contingent faculty emerged as particularly significant: “just-in-time” hiring practices and limited access to pedagogical resources.

Many faculty who are contingent employees (listed in class schedules simply as Professor “Staff”) receive their course assignments only two or three weeks before the start of the academic term. Hired “just-in-time” for the start of classes, these professors have little time to do the preparatory work necessary to teaching a high quality college-level course. As a result, they suffer the “double contingency” of either using their own unpaid time to prepare for classes they may not be assigned or accepting the reality of teaching a course for which they have been unable to adequately prepare.

In addition, most contingent faculty are not given full and effective access to the resources and technologies that define quality education in today’s colleges and universities. They are given, at best, inadequate access to sample course syllabi, curriculum guidelines, library resources, clerical support, and the like. They often have only limited, if any, access to personal offices, telephones, computers and associated software, and technological tools and training.

Perhaps the most important result of these damaging working conditions is that the educational experience of students suffers, both inside and outside of the classroom. It is only the extraordinary effort, personal resources, and professional dedication of contingent faculty that allows them to overcome the obstacles to quality education that derive directly from their employment status.

Existing explanations for the working conditions of contingent faculty do not suffice. Managerial flexibility and budgetary savings cannot justify administrative practices toward contingent faculty. Indeed, current practices amount to administrative inattention; correcting these practices would not

reduce managerial flexibility or increase institutional costs deficits in any significant way.

The report concludes by recommending increased transparency regarding the working conditions of contingent faculty in American higher education. It recommends that institutions of higher education commit themselves to collecting the data necessary to a serious study of the situation of contingent faculty and its impact on student learning. The survey instrument used herein is one possible way for institutions of higher education to begin their own processes of data collection and analysis.

The new understanding produced by this process of description and analysis should then be used by university administrators to reform their employment practices. There can be no doubt that improving the working conditions of contingent faculty will also improve the education experiences of many, many college and university students.

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