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Contingent Faculty and the Global Pandemic

The AAUP's Committee on Contingency and the Profession today issued the following statement and recommendations:

Our world is today engulfed in the global COVID-19 pandemic, with enormous loss of life. The unemployment rate was 10.2 percent in July, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many higher education institutions are preparing to increase that number through hiring freezes, furloughs, staff layoffs, and mass nonrenewals of faculty serving in contingent positions. Removing contingent faculty with expertise and experience undermines student learning conditions in the short term and the institution of higher education in the long term.

The future of the profession is at stake. The austerity measures trustees and presidents are now implementing must not become the new normal. And the current situation will not be sustainable in the next academic year if changes are not made. Faculty advocacy must aim to hold administrations to the highest ideals of equity and justice espoused by their institutions. We hope to help you in that mission.

Principles and Recommendations

1. Contingent faculty are the tiny and invisible lines of connection between institutions and students: [70 percent of the endeavor depends on faculty and graduate student employees on contingent appointments](#). We remain essential to the public good of higher education, whatever our employment status.
2. Faculty, staff, and graduate student employees ought to have paid sick leave during a pandemic.
3. Faculty, staff, and graduate student employees should not have to fight for the unemployment benefits they deserve simply because of their job's classification when they are nonrenewed due to the pandemic's economic impacts.
4. There is a vast difference between online education and teaching in a classroom. Last semester, most faculty were engaged in remote instruction, an act of rough translation between the two modes. Excellent online education this fall would improve student satisfaction and retention, but it requires paid training for all faculty.
5. Some higher education institutions gave tenure-line faculty the option to suspend their tenure clocks for a year. Institutions gave this option for many good reasons: conferences postponed or canceled, limited access to research resources and facilities, and the inability to provide in-class observations. These are all excellent reasons to extend the rehire or promotion process for a year for any contingent faculty member who wishes to make that choice.
6. Administrations should not take advantage of good faith cooperation by faculty during the emergency transition to remote instruction to seize their intellectual property simply because it is now posted to a third-party learning management system. Contingent faculty should not be forced to facilitate their replacement simply because they are dedicated to providing for the educational needs of their students.
7. Sometimes faculty intellectual property is used for political gains by outside actors rather than for economic gains by their administration. We must defend contingent faculty who face harassment from third-party political groups acting in bad faith.

8. Shared governance should be expanded to more faculty, not further eroded in the name of efficiency.

Resources

Impact bargaining: Faculty unions wishing to negotiate their institution's changed working conditions through impact bargaining should consult [our quick guide](#) or our webinar on [bargaining in times of economic uncertainty](#). For example, they might wish to bargain for paid training programs for faculty to learn online pedagogies or bonuses to produce courses designed to take advantage of online platforms. This document specifies [what each college and university received from the CARES Act](#).

Unemployment: Faculty chapters, unions, state conferences, and associations can organize to get administrations to [sign this pledge](#) to support access to unemployment insurance benefits for contingent faculty. They can provide guidance to “nonrenewed” contingent faculty on applying for state unemployment benefits informed by state law and past practice, [our pre-pandemic guidance](#) on navigating the system, and [AFT resources](#) on the process under the CARES Act.

Leaves: For a limited time, public-sector and some small-college contingent faculty have the ability to receive [limited paid sick leave](#). [This AAUP guidebook](#) on the Family and Medical Leave Act can help faculty unions and advocacy chapters navigate the complex process of reforming their institution's policies. At the state level, now may be the time for chapters and state conferences to work in coalition with other groups to expand access to paid sick leave to all workers through legislative advocacy.

Intellectual property: Those faculty groups wishing to fight privatization of online education can find articles to educate colleagues, resolutions for governance structures to adopt, and sample handbook and collective bargaining–agreement language [in this toolkit](#). AAUP members could plan a watch party to view this webinar on [remote teaching's impact on intellectual property](#). The Bowling Green State Faculty Association AAUP's [collective bargaining agreement](#) has language that could be helpful in defining teaching materials, administrative use of materials, how substantial support affects intellectual property ownership, and what is and is not “substantial support.”

Academic freedom: The AAUP has developed [a wealth of materials](#) over more than a century to aid faculty groups in defending academic freedom.

Shared governance: This committee continues to [advocate for expansion of shared governance participation](#).

Connection: One of the most flexible resources we can encourage AAUP members to take advantage of is our collective intelligence and experience. Our Facebook communities for [AAUP chapter leaders](#) and [AAUP members](#) can facilitate such ongoing discussions across chapters.

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