

## Open Letter on Contingent Faculty at DU

The COVID-19 crisis threatens the most vulnerable in every sector of our economy and community. At institutions such as the University of Denver, one particularly vulnerable group is contingent faculty: those on one-year contracts (VAPs and VTAPs) and those paid course to course (adjuncts.) Contingent faculty generally have the highest teaching loads, are paid less than other faculty, receive little to no research support, and have little to no job security. Contingent faculty taught 62% of the total credit hours at DU in 2018-19.

The exploitation of contingent faculty is a broad and growing problem nationally, and has been increasingly prioritized by groups such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). At some institutions across the country, the position of contingent faculty is being worsened further as they are targeted first with budget cuts related to COVID-19.

DU lists “inclusiveness” as one of its core values and strives to “create a diverse, ethical, and intellectually vibrant campus” in order to provide a “challenging and liberating learning environment.” (<https://www.du.edu/about/mission-vision-values>) Contingent faculty are more likely to be women, people of color, or members of other traditionally marginalized communities, making them an especially important constituency for building a diverse institution and creating the desired learning environment. Contingent faculty at DU have weathered the storm of the move to online teaching and continue to devote their time and energy over this summer to designing engaging courses for students this fall. It is therefore not ethical or respectful to respond to their efforts by further disadvantaging this already disadvantaged class of faculty. Finally, because the inequities and job insecurity experienced by contingent faculty constrain their intellectual freedom, ameliorating these inequities is crucial for creating an intellectually vibrant campus.

In order to live up to its core values and goals, DU should therefore set a positive example for other institutions by ensuring that the conditions of contingent faculty are not further worsened by the COVID-19 crisis. Unfortunately, in many cases, the opposite has happened. Although DU is an institution of learning, it has targeted the employees who teach the most DU students first for cuts.

### *What has happened*

- Some VTAP and VAP lines at DU have been terminated altogether due to budget restrictions stemming from COVID-19. This has rendered some faculty unemployed during a health crisis and at a time when other educational institutions are hiring few new faculty members.
- Some VAP and VTAP lines have been turned into adjunct lines. This means that former VTAPs will be teaching the same heavy teaching load in 2020-21 as they did in 2019-20, but for half the salary and with no benefits. This denies loyal DU faculty adequate income and healthcare during a health crisis.

- DU has invited tenure-line faculty to delay sabbaticals and has stated that this will result in the termination of adjunct contracts already signed.

- Most VTAPs and VAPs for 2020-21 have a new clause in their contracts that reduces job security to zero. The clause warns that the contracts may be terminated at any time with no warning or severance pay:

“Please note that the term on this offer is contingent upon enrollment levels continuing at their current level through the end of your contract. If enrollment levels drop unexpectedly, the University may cancel courses or reassign courses to tenured faculty, and this could result in eliminating visiting teaching positions. This could require the university to cancel or end your contract earlier than anticipated and pay you in proportion to time worked.”

- International VTAPs and VAPs are particularly threatened by the new clause in their contracts. International scholars depend on a full-time contract to maintain their visa status. If their contracts were terminated as the above clause threatens, their visas would also be terminated and they would have to leave the country within 30 days. For all international scholars, this would mean significant life disruption and financial loss. In the case of some faculty, this would also mean being forced to return to countries in which they face political and safety risks due to their research.

- DU has not disclosed any of the above in its “Financial Update for Fiscal Year 2020-21” circulated on June 9th 2020, which lists other financial cuts and layoffs occurring at the institution.

### *What we believe*

a) COVID-19 should not be used as a reason to further worsen the position of contingent faculty.

b) Delayed sabbaticals are never a legitimate reason for discontinuing VTAP or VAP lines, turning VTAP/VAP lines into adjunct lines, or terminating contracts with VTAPs/VAPs or adjuncts.

c) DU should only consider discontinuing VTAP/VAP lines, turning VTAP/VAP lines into adjunct lines, or terminating contracts with VTAPs/VAPs or adjuncts if enrollment drops in a given division by 20% or more.

d) Even in the case of a drastic enrollment drop, DU should consider a range of other options before resorting to actions such as discontinuing VTAP/VAP lines, turning VTAP/VAP lines into adjunct lines, or terminating contracts with VTAPs/VAPs or adjuncts. These options include:

- Reduce class sizes
- Reduce salaries for all employees who earn significantly more than a VTAP salary
- Cut the number of high level administrative posts (DU went from 16 to 30 Assistant, Associate and Vice Chancellor/Provost positions between 2014 and 2020.)
- Use unrestricted endowment
- Take a loan
- Temporarily lift the prohibition on already hired adjunct faculty teaching Common Curriculum
- Redeploy contingent faculty in other (e.g. administrative) duties rather than discontinue them
- Grant tenure line faculty teaching releases for program development and other academic reasons, freeing up teaching for contingents
- Redeploy tenure line faculty in exercises like "reputation building," freeing up teaching for contingents

*What we request*

1. We call on DU immediately to amend unsigned VTAP/VAP contracts for 2020-21, replacing the clause quoted above with a statement that guarantees a 30-day notice period in the event of early termination as well as severance pay in the amount of half the time remaining on the contract. VTAPs and VAPs who have already signed contracts should be offered replacement contracts that guarantee a 30-day notice period in the event of early termination as well as severance pay in the amount of half the time remaining on the contract.
2. We call on DU to pledge in writing that in the future VTAP/VAP lines will not be cut or turned into adjunct lines unless enrollment drops by more than 20% in the relevant division.
3. We call on DU to pledge in writing that the measures enumerated under (d) above will be considered and deliberated upon in faculty senate before VTAP/VAP lines are cut or turned into adjunct lines.
4. We call on DU to disclose figures of how many VTAP/VAP lines have been terminated or turned into adjunct lines for COVID-related reasons this spring/summer. We call on DU to offer explanations of why these measures were necessary that are more specific than “financial exigency” and consider reversing these decisions.
5. We call on DU to pledge in writing that delayed sabbaticals will not result in the termination of contracts with contingent faculty.
6. We call on DU to pledge in writing that the tuition waiver will be ensured for 2020-21 VTAPs/VAPs throughout the academic year, even if their contracts are terminated early.

7. We call on DU to pledge in writing that VTAPs/VAPs who have been terminated or reduced to adjunct status in Spring 2020 for COVID-related reasons will automatically be shortlisted for new VTAP/VAP positions that open up in their departments for the next three years.

Signed,

### **Contingent Faculty**

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William Akoto, JK SIS	Christine A. DeVore, GSPP
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Russell Brakefield, Writing	Christina Foust, Communication Studies
Lisa Brownstone, Counseling Psychology	Michael Furry, Music
Joshua Burg, Counseling Psychology	Rebecca Gaines, Counseling Psychology
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Noah Phillips, Emergent Digital Practices  
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Anna Sihon, GSSW  
Grant Simmons, Communications Management  
James Spensley, Management  
Melissa Streno, GSPP  
Timothy Sumerlin, Counseling Psychology  
Vicky Tomlin, Counseling Psychology  
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Rachel Elizabeth Willis, French and Francophone Studies

### **Faculty in Solidarity**

Jesse Acevedo, Political Science  
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 Libby Catchings, Writing  
 Ruth Chao, Counseling Psychology  
 Frederique Chevillot, Language, Literatures & Cultures  
 Kimberley Chiew, Psychology  
 Alejandro Cerón, Anthropology  
 Sara Chatfield, Political Science  
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 Paula Cole, Economics  
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 Lisa Conant, Political Science  
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 Natasha Dobrinen, Mathematics  
 Laurel Eckhouse, Political Science  
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 Esteban Gomez, Anthropology  
 Hava Gordon, Sociology and Criminology  
 Kim Gorgens, GSPP  
 Kathleen Guerra, Spanish Language, Literary & Cultural Studies  
 César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, Law  
 Matt Hill, Writing  
 Jennifer Hoffman, Physics & Astrology  
 Lynn Holland, JKISIS  
 Jason Jeffries, Religious Studies  
 Shashank Kanade, Mathematics  
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Cecilia M. Orphan, Higher Education  
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Ronnie Pavlov, Mathematics  
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