American Academy of Religion
Recommended Best Practices for Contingent Faculty

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Introduction
Colleges and Universities, like all sectors of society, are constantly changing and adapting to intellectual, cultural, social, and economic trends. Sometimes these shifts strengthen the goals of higher education as well as our institutions, other times these shifts pose certain challenges to academic freedom, to the intellectual well-being of students, to the health of our institutions, or to the professoriate. The shift in recent years toward increasing dependence on contingent labor among college and university faculty is the rare occasion where all four of these foundational pillars of higher education are threatened by trends in the field. While the threat that increasing dependence on higher education poses to these areas ought to be of deep concern to members of the American Academy of Religion, the question of fair treatment of contingent faculty in the interim remains of primary concern for AAR members. With this document, the American Academy of Religion proposes a set of best practices to help guide Department Chairs and institutions as they contract with contingent faculty to support the task of educating students in the study of religion.

The term “contingent faculty” calls attention to the tenuous relationship between academic institutions and certain faculty members who teach in them. For the purposes of this document, we use the term “contingent” to refer to full- and part-time instructors who serve under limited contracts off the tenure track and whose livelihood is dependent upon the income derived from this arrangement. We are not referring to graduate students whose teaching duties are related to their programs of academic study, or retired faculty, for example, who teach on occasion after long periods of well-compensated service to their institutions.

Our concern in advancing this document is two-fold. First, the deployment of contingent faculty has expanded significantly during the 21st century without sufficient care devoted to the status of contingent faculty members within the profession. While some institutions have developed policies that extend generous benefits and protections to contingent faculty members, many have not. Fairness demands that they do, hence this effort to delineate best practices in relation to contingent faculty members.

Second, the significant increase in the contingent faculty labor force in institutions of higher learning signals a threat to the integrity of the academic profession itself, founded on the interaction of research, teaching and service and dedicated to the protection of academic freedom, to paraphrase the position of the American Association of University Professors. As members of the American Academy of Religion we feel that the need to address this concern is
urgent. Tenure was developed, in large part, to safeguard the academic freedom of teachers and scholars. Contingent faculty do not have tenure. So departments and colleges have a PARTICULAR obligation to see that contingent faculty have true academic freedom. Departments and colleges should adopt policies and procedures that ensure the academic freedom of all contingent faculty.

We gratefully acknowledge colleagues in other professional associations whose work has guided us in the preparation of this document. These include the American Historical Association, the American Anthropological Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the American Studies Association, the College Art Association, the Linguistic Society of America, the Modern Language Association, and the American Association of University Professors (all members of the Coalition on the Academic Workforce).

I. Terms of Employment

1. Initial Hiring
Notices for open positions should be circulated as widely as possible for any contingent position. Applications should be required and reviewed carefully and a formal interview should be conducted. Contingent faculty members should be fully informed of their terms of employment and fully aware of the possibilities and consequences of departmental review.

2. Contract
A written contract for contingent employees should explicitly state the following:
   A. Compensation including salary, benefits, and any other compensation
   B. Duties and responsibilities
   C. Duration of employment
   D. Process and timing of evaluation
   E. Availability and timing of contract renewal

3. Evaluation
All contingent faculty should be formally reviewed (including teaching observation) in accordance with a clear set of departmental/institutional guidelines. A written review should be provided to the faculty member in a timely fashion (before the end of the semester for one semester employees, before the end of the year for year-long contracts). Evaluation criteria, standards and procedures, commensurate with the professional obligations of the position, should be comparable to those of full-time faculty included in the Contingent Employee handbook (or the section of the faculty handbook on contingent employment), and be provided to the contingent employee upon hiring.
4. Appointment Renewal
Contingent faculty with favorable formal reviews should have priority consideration to teach comparable courses when and if they become available again.

5. Course Development
Contingent faculty should be permitted to order their own texts and design their own courses unless these are departmental decisions, in which case contingent faculty should be adequately briefed on the course expectations, learning goals, and any related texts and required assignments.

6. Eligibility for Full-time Positions
Contingent faculty members should be considered for tenure-track positions alongside new PhDs whenever plausible and practicable.

7. Course cancellation
If a course is canceled due to under-enrollment or for another reason, the faculty member should be notified in a timely manner; if it is canceled at the last minute, the faculty member should be compensated on a pro-rated basis for course preparation.

8. Compensation
   a. Salary
      1. Full-time contingent appointments should be paid comparably to permanent full-time faculty members in the department with the same experience.

      2. Part-time appointments should be paid on a per-course or per-hour basis based on the applicable fraction of the compensation (including benefits) for a comparable full-time position. Formulas for pro-rating compensation for teaching individual courses should take into account the variety of activities required of permanent faculty (teaching, research, service) compared with the activities required of contingent faculty.

   b. Compensation for extra tasks
      Any additional required professional activities (student conferences, advising, committee work) beyond those delineated in the contract should be compensated over and above the compensation offered for teaching.

   c. Benefits
      All full-time contingent faculty should be provided with basic benefits (such as health and life insurance, sick leave, and retirement plans) as part of their standard contract.
Part-time and temporary teaching staff should be allowed access to basic benefits (such as health and life insurance, sick leave, and retirement plans).

Mechanisms should be developed to allow faculty members serving in contingent positions who are not employed during one or more academic terms (for example, for reasons of childbirth, illness, or other exigencies) to maintain benefits and leave accrual until their return to the institution.

II. Institutional support of contingent faculty

1. Orientation
Upon initial appointment, contingent faculty members should be oriented to the institution and to the department, to opportunities for mentoring and professional development, to the curriculum and support services, to the institution’s governance and structure, and to the department’s expectations regarding the successful performance of their duties.

2. Class Assignments
To ensure adequate preparation time, class assignments should be made, whenever possible, using the same calendar and timeline accorded full-time faculty.

3. Office
Contingent faculty should be provided suitable office space (including phone, access to computers, parking and other support regularly available to full-time faculty). Any required office hours should be included in the compensation calculation.

4. Service to the Department
Full-time contingent faculty (*not in a tenured or tenurable line*) are expected to participate in departmental meetings and other departmental activities and committees with voting privileges.

Part-time contingent faculty should be invited to participate in departmental meetings and activities as a measure of hospitality and mentoring on the part of the department but this must be entirely voluntary (unless it is part of the compensation calculation).

5. Clerical Support
Contingent faculty should have access to secretarial and technological support services necessary to the fulfillment of their responsibilities as well as to adequate supplies, to the library and to other campus privileges.
6. Professional Development  
Full time contingent faculty should have opportunities and financial support to participate in conferences and workshops for their professional development, to apply for grants and to participate in the institution’s tuition support program.

7. Grievance Procedures  
Institutions should provide a grievance procedure for contingent faculty, to deal with cases of alleged discrimination, violation of contract, or denial of academic freedom.

8. Contingent Employee Handbook  
The following written information, constituting a Contingent Employee Handbook, should be provided by the institution or department at the time of employment:
   a. Statement on the institutional or departmental mission or philosophy  
   b. Full description of the contingent position, including a definition of the role and duties (to include course title and description, enrollment caps, contact hours, advising, and any other responsibilities)  
   c. Description of teaching facilities, office facilities, and support services  
   d. Description of financial support and resources available for professional development  
   e. Information on evaluation and promotion procedures  
   f. Information of institutional grievance policies  
   g. Information on employment security  
   h. Information on institutional governance and opportunities to participate in it  
   i. Information on any and all institutional expectations  
   j. Affirmation of the contingent faculty members’ right to self-organize to improve their working conditions and pay, and to address other workplace matters.

III. Institutional policies pertaining to contingent faculty

1. Standardization of Hiring and Evaluation Practices  
Hiring and evaluation practices should be standardized, transparent, and fair, with institutions prioritizing the creation of long-term, regularized positions that create a stable faculty that is committed to the institution.

2. Opportunities for professional advancement should be made available to long-term contingent faculty including the possibility for salary increases for service

3. Contingent faculty should be included in published or posted rosters of departmental, divisional or institutional members
4. Full-time contingent faculty should be eligible for programs or awards rewarding excellence in teaching.

5. The rights and responsibilities of faculty in contingent positions should be identified in relevant department, college, and university governing codes.

6. Contingent faculty should be included in the collegial relations and communications of the university and the department.

7. Contingent faculty members have the right to self-organize to improve their working conditions and pay, and to address other workplace matters with no fear of retaliation or retribution for organizing

8. Departments should provide an accurate statistical report to the AAR, to accrediting organizations, and to the public, showing the number of contingent faculty. This includes:

   a. the actual number of full-time and part-time contingent faculty;
   b. the number and percentage of courses taught by full-time and by part-time contingent faculty respectively;
   c. the length of employment of contingent faculty.

For the purpose of statistical reporting, graduate students teaching independent courses, where they are the instructors and are responsible for lectures and running the course, are to be counted as part-time contingent faculty.