

FFA

BARGAINING ISSUES

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Part-Time Instruction

Sep 30, 2010

The administration team proposes to increase the cap on part-time instruction from the 19% allowed in the final year of the previous contract up to 21%. Your FFA bargaining team opposes any increase.

Since the administration hasn't provided accurate current numbers of part-time faculty, it's hard to pinpoint how many more part-time or fewer full-time faculty members would result from a 2% increase. The administration claims it currently uses about 17% part-time to ensure it doesn't exceed the 19% cap and face the "serious penalty" the contract would impose: hiring more full-time faculty. Their team also claims that a 2% increase in part-time would save about \$130,000 and that the deans are clamoring for more part-time to ease tight budgets.

If we accept the 17-19% claim solely for purposes of discussion, then increasing the amount of part-time instruction by 2% would result in 40-55 more sections per semester in Big Rapids taught by part-time rather than full-time faculty.

These would not necessarily be **additional** sections but might include full-time members' teaching loads being shifted to part-time instruction. If some of the 40-55 sections were new, many might be online since that's where Ferris is expanding most rapidly.

Those 40-55 sections might be covered by anywhere from 10 to 55 separate part-time instructors. Online sections could easily be assigned to faculty who never set foot in Michigan, meet their colleagues, or participate in campus life – a situation already occurring in some departments.

Is it any surprise that local community leaders are increasingly concerned about the "outsourcing" of Ferris?

On the next page, FFA member Jonathan Taylor explores the problematic implications of the administration's proposal. Having taught as a part-time Ferris instructor for 4 years before securing a tenure-track position, Jon brings special perspective and insight to this issue.

Dear Colleagues:

One sticking point in our negotiations is that the administration wants to raise the cap on part-time instruction from 19% to 21%. However, many part-time faculty are excluded from this count, such as clinical faculty and, according to the contract, part-time faculty "at any location other than the FSU campus located in Big Rapids," so the actual ratio would be much higher.

While this increase may not seem like a lot, consider that during the just-expired contract, that cap rose from 16% to 19%. What is the motivation for the administration's proposal, and what would be the impact on the quality of education at FSU of increased part-time numbers? Where would this trend end? Since the administration won't discuss its reasoning with our bargaining team, we can only speculate.

One answer is that it costs less to pay part-time faculty to teach classes. Part-time faculty have lower salaries, fewer benefits, and fewer professional development options such as faculty development funding and sabbatical leave. These short-term savings, though, are outweighed by serious concerns about quality education. This is not to say our part-time colleagues are ineffective teachers. It is instead to recognize, as the national organization in my field, the NCTE, states, "the terms and conditions of these [part-time] appointments, in many cases, weaken our capacity to provide essential educational experiences and resources. Too often the terms and conditions of such appointments are inadequate to support responsible teaching or, by extension, a career." This view of the negative effects of ever-rising part-time faculty numbers is shared by many national organizations such as the AFT and AAUP.

With an increased part-time cap, the incentive under the current budget-cutting narrative would be to steadily replace retiring or departing tenure-line faculty with part-time faculty, and grow faculty numbers with part-time positions to meet rising enrollments, especially online. Doing so will increase the burden of service for tenure-line faculty. Spreading service and advising duties across fewer unit members would increase workload and could reduce the quality of the service.

Another issue is that our non-tenured adjunct colleagues have unionized and are preparing to negotiate a contract. One thing they are fighting for is recognition that teaching a full load, especially for many years, is not "part-time" work and should come with some status and benefits. A larger pool of part-time faculty would allow the administration to spread out their teaching loads to decrease full-time loads and avoid granting those benefits and status.

When considering the impact on our students, there are many questions. What is the effect of the erosion of academic freedom and due process? What is the effect of having fewer full-time faculty available for advising a record-high number of students? What is the effect on programs of the burden of maintaining quality being shouldered by fewer full-time faculty? What is the effect on the quality of education of a lower-paid, less secure workforce with fewer workplace protections, fewer opportunities for professional development, higher turnover, and less oversight? What is the effect of adding a record-high enrollment to the mix?

A lot of the answers were presented by Fred Heck in a previous newsletter: erosion of shared governance, lack of faculty oversight of quality, fewer faculty going through the tenure process, rapid increase of online courses with little oversight, inability to attract high-quality new faculty, reduced status, less voice, lower-quality education.

While on the face of it, the administration's push for greater part-time numbers may seem to be a money-saving measure, the inevitable effect will be further erosion of FFA members' ability to help steer the university's course and maintain quality. Assigning a financial motivation, though, gives the administration the benefit of the doubt. Its real intent may very well be to reduce the faculty's voice and to erode the protections afforded by tenure. Again, without clear communication from the administration team, we can only speculate.

When I first arrived at Ferris in 1996 as a part-time faculty member, I saw firsthand the dismal state of affairs of working under an imposed contract. If you were not here during those years, ask your colleagues who were here if the administration's motivation then was merely financial.

Given the chance, the administration would be more than willing to take the opportunity to run Ferris on its own terms.

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