Book Review

Off-Track Profs: Nontenured Teachers in Higher Education

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Faculty vehemently protect tenure as a defense of academic freedom, while others view it as unwarranted job security that is non-existent in the private sector. While this philosophical battle rages, faculty within academia perceive that tenure track positions are disappearing in favor of hiring non-tenure track (NTT) faculty. The reasons ascribed to the hypothetical transition away from hiring tenured faculty vary, but most believe it is a direct result of the administration's desire to preserve scarce resources. Cross and Goldenberg's book, *Off-Track Profs: Nontenured Teachers in Higher Education*, sets out to critically examine the data and provide empirical evidence for the debate on the value of tenure and its current vigor, but quickly realize the barriers to any significant findings.

Analysis of the entire higher education system was not feasible, so Cross and Goldenberg identified a small sample of elite public and private Research I institutions from across the country; University of California-Berkley, University of

Illinois, University of Michigan, University of Virginia, University of Washington, Duke University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, Washington University and Cornell University. While not representative of the entire higher education system, the sample is informative owing to the propensity for mimetic isomorphism in the field.

Institutional individualities presented difficulties for the researchers in data collection. At the institutions surveyed, over 21 various definitions to categorize NTT faculty existed. Compounding the issue of data variability is the fact that most institutions lack the ability to accurately report institutional data regarding the use of NTT faculty, or present it in a format that is possible to aggregate nationally. Not only are most institutions unable to compile data on who is employed, but they also experience some difficulty compiling information on who is performing the classroom instruction. Information management is lacking on

even the most highly regarded research campuses. As a result, campus visits and interviews provide the anecdotal evidence that the hiring of NTT faculty is increasing.

The conspicuous reasons given by university administrators for hiring NTT faculty instead of tenure track (TT) faculty are representative of some of the most significant debates in higher education; gradual shift from liberal arts to career-centered education, flexibility in light of erratic enrollment trends, encouragement of research to improve national rankings, response to demographic changes and the necessity of attending to insufficiently prepared undergraduates. Unfortunately, the structure of the hiring process for TT and NTT faculty is often ignored as a contributor.

In a loosely coupled bureaucratic system a fusion of factors influence the hiring process often more directly than administrative policy. Tenure track faculty positions utilize in-depth national searches and involve many individuals and offices, while individual departments typically hire NTT faculty without much oversight. Increasing the complexity of this process is the role ambiguity experienced by the deans and chairs in attempting to balance their administrative responsibilities for budgeting with the academic expectations of their peers to find the best individual to fill the line. When facing budget and enrollment uncertainty, the addition of a TT line adds rigidity to the system. If an NTT faculty enters the available or new line because of an unexpected departure or rapidly increased need for a specific discipline, the lowered compensation cost allows for a reallocation of unspent resources to meet other needs,

realigning the budget, and making it difficult to return the line to a TT position without the dedication of additional funds. Financial pressures may not be the sole reason a department hires an NTT faculty member, but it is the foremost reason the department preserves NTT faculty positions.

Cross and Goldenberg supply a well-structured and informative look into elite institutions. They ask the right questions about tenure and its challenges in the future related to market competition from peers, as well as for profit institutions, and the likelihood of further constricted public resources. This book is, in reality, the introduction to an unwritten set of research around the institutional balance of TT and NTT faculty. Too much is still unknown to debate the correct proportion of TT to NTT faculty lines at a given institution for a particular set of priorities and constraints.

The most disturbing aspect of TT and NTT faculty debate is the lack of collective concern over the educational quality, not only at the institutions examined, but all colleges and universities. Not only are institutions unable to provide data on who is teaching what percentage of the undergraduate catalogue, there is the inability industry-wide to demonstrate differentiated learning outcomes by faculty track. Although student satisfaction scores for all faculty ranks are readily available and consistently suggest that NTT faculty score higher than TT faculty in both upper and lower divisions, these data are not sufficient to imply whether students learned more or less. The inability of higher education institutions to

statistically demonstrate a change in an individual upon graduation is a glaring absence in the academic literature. If accountability for outcomes in the nation's colleges and universities is not demanded legislatively, as in K-12, there exists a sufficient need for the evaluation to begin. In order to evaluate learning, significant investment in information and data management at the institution level is necessary, as well as the creation of standard definitions much like the generally accepted definitions for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System or Carnegie

Classifications. While practitioners will disagree with any developed measure, it will be the starting point of the debate for improvement. The investment in information management, data collection and accountability measures, while substantial, will provide valuable information for administrators to intentionally and strategically lead their respective institutions down the appropriate track.

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