Tenure in 2017: A Per Institution View

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As is by now common knowledge, faculty members with tenure or who are on the tenure track account for under a third of the academic workforce, while those with part-time appointments form by far the largest of faculty’s three segments (the tenured and tenure-track, the part-time non-tenure-track, and the full-time non-tenure-track). The painful road PhD recipients have long had to travel to establish stable academic careers and the emergence of an immiserated class of contingent academic workers are trends that advocacy efforts have tracked, publicized, and deplored for decades. This paper asks whether the information resources on which those advocacy efforts have relied have been adequate to advocacy’s needs.

To begin, let’s review what analysis generally knows—and makes generally available for its audiences to know.¹ IPEDS human resources data from the U. S. Department of Education show that “peak part-time” was (for the moment) reached in 2011, at 51.5% of the entire faculty workforce when both two- and four-year institutions are included. Between 2011 and 2017 the part-time non-tenure-track faculty contracted from 51.5% to 48.6% of the total, while the full-time non-tenure-track segment expanded from 18.4% of the total to 20.7%, and the tenured and

¹ All data derive from the specified years’ data files for the Employees by Assigned Position (EAP) survey component of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), as downloaded from the IPEDS Data Center. Throughout this discussion the faculty is defined as institutional employees with instruction as their primary responsibility in degree-granting Title IV-participating institutions in the fifty states and the District of Columbia. In some cases, U. S. Department of Education sources define the faculty more broadly, as employees whose primary responsibility is instruction, research, and public service. See Table 314.40 in the 2018 Digest of Education Statistics.
tenure-track segment remained close to unchanged in its percentage share, at 30.6% in 2017 compared to 30.2% in 2011. In absolute number, the portion of the faculty in tenured or tenure-track positions increased in size by 5,681 (1.3%), from 431,025 in 2011 to 436,706 in 2017. But not since 2005, and then only in four-year institutions, have the tenured and tenure-track outnumbered the part-time non-tenure-track group by head count—348,790 to 343,613. By 2011, in four-year institutions, the part-time non-tenure-track segment had ballooned by 32.8%, to 456,207 or 44.6% of the entire faculty workforce in the four-year sector. By contrast, between 2005 and 2011, the tenured and tenure-track segment grew only 6.2%, to 370,540, and contracted from 41.5% to 36.2% of the faculty in four-year institutions. Figure 1 and figure 2 summarize the subsequent numerical and percentage shifts from 2011 to 2017.

For each year, the figures show the number and the percentage share of the faculty population in part-time non-tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, and tenured and tenure-track positions, broken out by institutional control—that is, whether institutions are public, private nonprofit, or private for-profit. Especially notable are the overall 5.7% drop in the number of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members (from 734,706 to 692,918) and the 12.8% increase in the number of full-time non-tenure-track faculty members (from 262,000 to 295,434).

Even more worth attending, however, may be the 8.4% decline in the size of the institutional base, from 4,669 institutions in 2011 to 4,279 in 2017, driven almost entirely by the subtraction of 392 (28.6%) of the 1,373 for-profit institutions that reported faculty members in 2011. The contraction in the for-profit sector accounts for 64.9% of an overall decline of 64,598 in the part-time non-tenure-track segment; a 22,697 (5.2%) drop in part-time non-tenure-track faculty members in public institutions accounts for the remaining 35.1%. That overall 64,598 decline was offset by a 22,810 (12.3%) increase in part-time non-tenure-track faculty members.
Fig. 1

Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Faculty Members, by Employment Status and Control of Institution, Fall 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public (n=1,656)</th>
<th>Private Nonprofit (n=1,640)</th>
<th>Private For-Profit (n=1,373)</th>
<th>All Institutions (n=4,669)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Faculty Members</td>
<td>Percentage of Faculty Members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>891,022</td>
<td>399,165</td>
<td>137,544</td>
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<td>438,618</td>
<td>185,394</td>
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<td>49.2</td>
<td>46.4</td>
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<td>33.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>153,760</td>
<td>81,813</td>
<td>262,000</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110,694</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26,427</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2

Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Faculty Members, by Employment Status and Control of Institution, Fall 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public (n=1,620)</th>
<th>Private Nonprofit (n=1,678)</th>
<th>Private For-Profit (n=981)</th>
<th>All Institutions (n=4,279)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Faculty Members</td>
<td>Percentage of Faculty Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>896,737</td>
<td>442,256</td>
<td>86,065</td>
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<tr>
<td>415,921</td>
<td>208,204</td>
<td>692,918</td>
<td>46.4</td>
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<td>44.7</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
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<td>177,572</td>
<td>100,714</td>
<td>295,434</td>
<td>79.9</td>
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<td>17,148</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
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</table>
in private nonprofit institutions, resulting in the net decrease of 41,788 (5.7%). The drop in the percentage share of the faculty in part-time non-tenure-track positions was largest in public institutions (49.2% in 2011 to 46.4% in 2017), where faculty members with full-time non-tenure-track positions increased correspondingly, from 17.3% of the total in 2011 to 19.8% in 2017. Despite the substantial decline in the number of for-profit institutions and of part-time faculty members teaching off the tenure track in those institutions, the share of the total that the part-time non-tenure-track segment claimed in the for-profit sector was almost unchanged from what it had been in 2011 (80.5% of the faculty in 1,373 for-profit institutions in 2011 compared to 79.9% in 981 institutions in 2017).

Overall, then, in 2017 the IPEDS EAP survey counted 1,425,058 faculty members in an institutional universe defined as 4,279 degree-granting, Title IV-participating, two- and four-year institutions located in the fifty states and the District of Columbia. Of the 1,425,058 total, 692,918 (48.6%) held part-time non-tenure-track appointments; 295,434 (20.7%) held full-time positions off the tenure track; and, as noted above, 436,706 (30.6%) had tenure or were on the tenure track.

Calling attention to the changing number of institutions that employ faculty members along with the changing number of faculty members and changing mix of faculty appointments inside those institutions ought to remind us that higher education in the United States is a decentralized and diverse array of colleges and universities that operate with considerable autonomy. To make this reality and its consequence visible, figure 3 uses a scatter chart to plot tenure on a per institution basis. The figure maps the percentage of faculty members employed in tenured or tenure-track positions for each of the 4,279 degree-granting institutions covered in the 2017 EAP survey data file. The 4,279 institutions are divided into two- and four-year segments
along the x-axis, with the 2,800 four-year institutions represented by dots 1 to 2,800 and the 1,479 two-year institutions by dots 2,801 to 4,279. Each segment is arranged in descending ZIP code order, with the west coast to the left and the east coast to the right. Each dot’s position on the y-axis records the percentage of an institution’s faculty that holds a tenured or tenure-track position.

Fig. 3

Even some experienced observers may be unprepared to see how widely institutional practice varies in the use of tenured and tenure-track positions. That there exists a scattering of institutions with 70% to 100% of their faculty members holding tenure or on the tenure-track may come as a surprise. Even more startling, perhaps, is the dark blue line at the bottom of the scale, the unbroken density of institutions—four-year and two-year, from west coast to east—that reported having no tenured or tenure-track faculty members in 2017. Figure 4 clarifies the picture, rearranging the 4,279 institutions according to the percentage of faculty members with
tenure or on the tenure-track, from 0% to 100%. The minor gridlines mark numerical increments of 100 institutions (the x-axis) and percentage increments of 2% in the percentage of tenured or tenure-track faculty members (the y-axis). The dots representing tenure in each institution now line up in two curves that range largely unbroken across almost the entire scale of the y-axis. All told in 2017, 1,221 four-year institutions and 967 two-year institutions had no tenured or tenure-track faculty members. Put the other way, the entire segment of the faculty that holds tenure or is on the tenure track is located in 1,579 four-year institutions and 512 two-year institutions, or 48.9% of the universe of United States degree-granting postsecondary institutions.

Fig. 4

The next two figures show how tenure is embedded, and absent, in that universe according to the cumulative number (figure 5) and cumulative percentage (figure 6) of institutions, arranged in sequence from institutions where 0% of faculty members held tenure or were on the tenure track in fall 2017 to institutions where 100% did or were. In figure 6 minor
Fig. 5

Percentage of Faculty Members with Tenure or on the Tenure Track, per Institution, Fall 2017
4,279 Two- and Four-Year Degree-Granting Title IV Institutions in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia

Fig. 6

Percentage of Faculty Members with Tenure or on the Tenure Track, per Institution, Fall 2017
4,279 Two- and Four-Year Degree-Granting Title IV Institutions in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia
gridlines mark percentage increments of 2% in both the percentage of institutions (the x-axis) and the percentage of faculty members that have tenure or are on the tenure track (the y-axis).

More than 50%, or 2,188 institutions, deep in the universe of United States degree-granting colleges and universities and one has yet to encounter a tenured or tenure-track faculty member. From there, institutional practice across the 2,091 institutions that have tenured or tenure-track faculty members varies by increments that span the entire percentage scale of the y-axis with scarcely a gap. At the 77% threshold along the x-axis (institution 3,288 in the sequence) one reaches institutions where 40% or more of the faculty is tenured or on the tenure-track. Institutions where 70% or more of the faculty is tenured or on the tenure track are reached at the 97% threshold, the last 136 (3.2%) of the 4,279 degree-granting institutions.

On the other hand, when the zeroes are bracketed out and the view is confined to the subset of 2,091 institutions that reported having faculty members with tenure or on the tenure track in 2017, the portion of the faculty that, in the aggregate, has tenure or is on the tenure track rises, to 39.6% (from 30.6%) across all 2,091 institutions and to 41.8% (from 35.2%) across 1,579 four-year institutions. Even so, in more than 70% of the subset of 2,091 institutions that employed tenured or tenure-track faculty members in 2017, under 50% of the faculty workforce had tenure or was on the tenure track. In only 15% of these institutions did more than 60% of faculty members have a tenured or tenure-track appointment. In the 50% of institutions that fall between the 25% and 75% thresholds in the cumulative count of institutions, from just under 30% to just over 50% of faculty members held tenure or had a tenure-track appointment (figure 7). In the subset of 1,579 four-year institutions, 65% of the institutions had under 50% of their faculty members either tenured or on the tenure track; in only 18% were more than 60% of faculty members tenured or on the tenure track. The 50% of four-year institutions between the
Fig. 7

Percentage of Faculty Members with Tenure or on the Tenure Track, per Institution, Fall 2017
2,091 Two- and Four-Year Institutions that Reported Having Tenured or Tenure-Track Faculty Members

Cumulative Percentage of 2,091 Two- and Four-Year Institutions

Fig. 8

Percentage of Faculty Members with Tenure or on the Tenure Track, per Institution, Fall 2017
1,579 Four-Year Institutions that Reported Having Tenured or Tenure-Track Faculty Members

Cumulative Percentage of 1,579 Four-Year Institutions
25% and 75% thresholds in the cumulative count of institutions had from 30% to 55% of their faculty members in tenured or tenure-track appointments (figure 8).

The data reviewed above illuminate the range of practice in the presence (and absence) of tenured and tenure-track faculty members within each of the 4,279 separate institutions that, in 2017, comprised the universe of degree-granting two- and four-year colleges and universities in the United States. The next figures address a different but related question: how tenured and tenure-track positions are distributed across the different sectors and institution types described within that universe—two-year and four-year institutions; and the research universities, master’s institutions, baccalaureate colleges, and specialized institutions and tribal colleges characterized in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. As shown in figure 9, the 1,579 four-year institutions, representing 36.9% of the postsecondary education institutional universe, employ close to 90% (specifically, 88.0%) of the entire population of tenured and tenure-track faculty members. And half (49.7%) of all tenured and tenure-track faculty members are employed in just 7.0% of the institutional universe—300 of the 327 universities classified as Research Doctoral institutions in the 2015 Carnegie Classification. The next 22.8% of tenured and tenure-track faculty members reside in 562 of the 731 Carnegie Master’s institutions—13.1% of the institutional universe; 14.6% are located in 597 of the 1,469 Carnegie Associate’s institutions—14.0% of the institutional universe; 8.8% are in 431 of 668 Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges—10.1% of the institutional universe. The remaining 4.1% of the tenured and tenure-track segment of the faculty teaches in 201 of the 1,084 institutions classified as Specialized or Tribal or as institutions not covered in the Carnegie Classification (4.7% of the institutional universe). (Figure 10.)
1,579 four-year institutions with tenured or tenure-track positions

1,221 four-year institutions with no tenured or tenure-track positions

512 two-year institutions with tenured or tenure-track positions

967 two-year institutions with no tenured or tenure-track positions

Distribution of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty Positions across the Universe of 4,279 Degree-Granting Title IV Institutions in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia, Fall 2017

by Two- or Four-Year Level of Institution

Cumulative Percentage of 4,279 Two- and Four-Year Institutions

Percentage Share of Tenured and Tenure-Track Positions

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Distribution of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty Positions by 2015 Carnegie Classification, Fall 2017

4,279 Two- and Four-Year Degree-Granting Title IV Institutions in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia

Cumulative Percentage of 4,279 Two- and Four-Year Institutions

Percentage Share of Tenured and Tenure-Track Positions

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
For comparison, figure 11 maps the distribution of all faculty positions, full-time and part-time, tenured or tenure-track and non-tenure-track, in relation to the percentage of the postsecondary education universe the institutions collected in each Carnegie sector claimed. The Carnegie Research or Doctoral Universities, which make up only 7.6% of the institutional universe, house 35.0% of all faculty positions (exclusive of graduate student teaching and research assistants). Associate’s colleges represent 34.3% of the institutional universe and employ 26.6% of all faculty members. Carnegie Master’s institutions claim 17.1% of the institutional universe and 22.6% of all faculty members. Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges, 15.6% of the institutional universe, employ only 7.6% of all faculty members. Specialized institutions and tribal colleges (19.6% of all 4,279 institutions) and unclassified institutions (5.8% of institutions) together house 8.2% of the faculty.

Fig. 11
Because the percentage of faculty members with tenure or on the tenure track varies so widely across the universe of degree-granting postsecondary institutions, it follows that institutions must vary correspondingly in the fractions of full- and part-time non-tenure-track appointments that form part of each institution’s faculty mix alongside any cohort of tenured and tenure-track faculty members that may be present. Figure 12 shows these varying mixtures. As in figure 6, the curve of blue dots shows the percentage of each institution’s faculty that is tenured or on the tenure track. Aligned with each blue dot are red and green dots that show the percentages of each institution’s faculty in part- and full-time non-tenure-track positions, respectively. That is, for each of the 4,279 institutions the figure uses three dots to plot the three types of faculty position in order to make visible how the distribution of full- and part-time non-tenure-track positions varies against tenure-track positions across the institutional universe. The point is not to indicate the specific three dots that represent any one of the 4,279 institutions. Rather, what’s revealing are the cloud-like formations that the distribution of red and green dots collectively creates. The way the dispersion of red and green dots fills the grid makes apparent how, as one advances along the blue curve and across the universe of institutions, percentage combinations vary so widely as to leave few mathematically possible vertical positions on the grid unoccupied, even as faculty members holding part-time non-tenure-track appointments clearly tend predominate as a percentage of all faculty members at every point along the x-axis. That is, across the sequence of 4,279 institutions, institutional cohorts of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members (the red dots) prevail in the area above the 50% gridline on the y-axis, while cohorts of full-time non-tenure-track faculty members (the green dots) prevail in the area below 50%—and below 30% under the blue curve representing the portion of the institutional universe where the percentage of the tenured and tenure-track rises above zero. Across the 51.1%
of institutions that have no tenured or tenure-track faculty members, red and green dots appear across a wider range of the y-axis, although the red dots still predominate above the 50% gridline on the y-axis and green dots below that line—excepting the cases where either the full- or part-time non-tenure-track position is the sole alternative to the tenured or tenure-track position and percentage values therefore cluster along the upper bound defined by a curve that varies directly against the curve for the tenured and tenure-track faculty presence. The part-time non-tenure-track presence (the cloud of red dots) becomes especially dominant above the 50% gridline of the y-axis across the portion of the institutional universe (the x-axis) where tenured and tenure-track faculty members are present but represent under 50% of all faculty members. The figure also makes pictorially vivid the 87% threshold of the institutional universe beyond which tenured and tenure-track faculty members cross the 50% gridline on the y-axis and emerge as a majority of each further institution’s faculty population.

Fig. 12
Figure 12 sequences the 4,279 institutions according to the percentage of each institution’s faculty population that is tenured or on the tenure track. The institutional universe can be reordered to sequence institutions according to the percentage of their faculty members that hold part-time non-tenure-track positions or full-time non-tenure-track positions (from 0% to 100%). Figure 13 shows the mix of tenured or tenure-track and full-time non-tenure-track positions as it varies against the percentage of faculty members with part-time non-tenure-track positions (the curve of red dots). Figure 14 shows the faculty mix as it varies against the percentage of full-time non-tenure-track positions (the curve of green dots—very dark because of the density of dots). Once again, the way the dots fill the grid in each figure makes evident the way institutions vary to realize virtually every possible percentage combination, from 0% to 100%, in the mix of faculty positions—tenured or tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, and part-time non-tenure-track. At the same time, in figure 13 we see how, relative to the varying percentage of faculty members with part-time non-tenure-track positions, faculty members with tenured or tenure-track positions predominate over those with full-time non-tenure-track positions at every point along the sequence of institutions—excepting the cases clustered at the limit and curve delineating percentage splits where the full-time non-tenure-track position (or in rarer cases the tenured or tenure-track position) is the sole alternative to the part-time non-tenure-track position and the percentage of tenured or tenure-track or full-time non-tenure-track faculty members therefore varies directly against the percentage of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members. The red curve, representing the percentage of faculty members with part-time non-tenure-track appointments per institution, indicates that part-time non-tenure-track faculty members become the majority at the 40% threshold of the institutional universe (institution 1,715 in the sequence of 4,279 institutions). That is, faculty members teaching part time and off the
tenure track make up 50% or more of the faculty population in 2,564 degree-granting institutions, 60% of the postsecondary education universe.

Fig. 13

Figure 14 maps the faculty mix in the obverse way: as the percentages of each institution’s faculty population in tenured or tenure-track and part-time non-tenure-track positions as they vary against the percentage in full-time non-tenure-track positions. The figure makes clear how low, in percentage terms, the full-time non-tenure-track portion of each institution’s faculty population remains across the bulk of the institutional universe, exceeding 30% of all faculty members only at the 70% threshold in the cumulative count of institutions. The predominance of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members in the faculty mix is particularly pronounced across the 20% of the institutional universe (the x-axis) where full-time non-tenure-track faculty members make up 6% or less of the faculty population (the y-axis). Obverse to figure 13, percentage splits in institutions where either part-time non-tenure-track positions or (more rarely)
tenured or tenure-track positions are the only alternative to the full-time non-tenure-track position define a curve that varies directly against the curve for the percentage of full-time non-tenure-track positions.

Fig. 14

The wide variation in the way part-time non-tenure-track faculty members are locally embedded in the universe of U. S. higher education warrants further elucidation. As figure 15 shows, 80% of the population of part-time faculty members is located in 30% of the universe of degree-granting institutions. Half the population is located in just 10.5% of the universe. And, dividing the universe into its two- and four-year segments, we see that half the population is located in 666 four-year institutions that employ between 18% and 68% of the entire population of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members—the subset of the universe between institution 2,134 in the sequence and institution 2,800 or about 15% of the institutional universe (figure 16).
Fig. 15

Distribution of Part-Time Non-Tenure-Track Positions across the Universe of 4,279 Two- and Four-Year Degree-Granting Title IV Institutions in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia, Fall 2017

Cumulative Percentage of 4,279 Two- and Four-Year Institutions

Percentage Share of Part-Time Non-Tenure-Track Positions

Fig. 16

Distribution of Part-Time Non-Tenure-Track Positions across the Universe of 4,279 Degree-Granting Title IV Institutions in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia, Fall 2017 by Two- or Four-Year Level of Institution

Cumulative Count of 4,279 Two- and Four-Year Institutions

Percentage Share of Part-Time Non-Tenure-Track Positions

2,800 four-year institutions

1,479 two-year institutions

68%

18%
Recast in absolute numbers, the segment of each institution’s faculty population in part-time non-tenure-track positions varied from 0 to 7,211 in 2017 (figure 17). A quarter of the institutions (25.3%) had fewer than 20 part-time non-tenure-track faculty members; almost half (48.6%) had fewer than 60; 60.5% had under 100. Just under a quarter of all 4,279 institutions (24.1%) employed more than 200 faculty members in part-time non-tenure-track positions; 10.3% had more than 400.

Fig. 17

The variance in absolute numbers per institution raises the question of just how large or small a quantitative change would be required, across substantial portions of the institutional universe, to move the per institution percentage values significantly. The question can be given local specificity by mapping the number of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members each institution employed in 2017 as that number varies against the percentage of each institution’s faculty population in part-time non-tenure-track positions. Figure 18 does this. The blue curve...
represents the percentage of each institution’s faculty population that is part-time and non-tenure-track, with the percentage values on the primary (left-hand) y-axis. Each institution’s population of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members is represented by a red dot whose numerical value appears on the secondary (right-hand) y-axis.

Fig. 18

The chart becomes more legible when it excludes the small number of outliers with more than 1,000 part-time faculty members—73 institutions that vary in the percentage of their faculty members who are part-time and non-tenure-track from 15.8% to 99.7%, with an average of 62.4%. Figure 19 displays the remaining 4,206 institutions with 1,000 or fewer part-time non-tenure-track faculty members. With all 4,279 institutions as the basis, the first 4.9% of the universe (210 institutions) reported having no part-time non-tenure-track faculty members in 2017; the last 3.2% (137 institutions) had 100% of the faculty in part-time non-tenure-track positions. Between the two extremes, 15.1% of the 4,279 degree-granting institutions (646
The 646 institutions that had from 0.5% to 29.9% of their faculty members in part-time non-tenure-track positions; 20.1% (858 institutions) occupied the range from 30% to 49.9%; 28.1% (1,204 institutions) had a faculty that ranged from 50.0% to 69.9% part-time non-tenure-track; and 28.6% (1,224 institutions) had a faculty that was 70.0% to 99.9% part-time non-tenure-track. Again, most institutions—70.9% to be exact—have 200 or fewer part-time non-tenure-track faculty members; 55.8% have 100 or fewer; 39.2% have 50 or fewer; 21.2% have between 1 and 20. It follows that in a good many cases relatively modest numerical adjustments could move the per institution percentage values significantly.

Fig. 19

At the same time, it is important to recognize how widely institutions vary in the size of their part-time non-tenure-track cohorts across the entire percentage scale (the primary y-axis). The 646 institutions that had from 0.5% to 29.9% of their faculty members in part-time non-tenure-track positions employed from 1 to 1,478 part-time non-tenure-track faculty members,
with an average of 117.0. The 858 institutions that had from 30.0% to 49.9% of their faculty members in part-time non-tenure-track positions employed from 1 to 4,005 part-time faculty members, with an average of 147.1. The 1,204 institutions that had from 50.0% to 69.9% of their faculty members in part-time positions employed from 1 to 1,774 part-time faculty members, with an average of 175.8. And the 1,361 institutions that had from 70.0% to 100.0% of their faculty members in part-time positions employed from 1 to 7,211 part-time faculty members, with an average of 205.3.

Readers may find it revealing to see the percentage of part-time faculty members as it exists across the institutional universe in a more direct way, as a mapping of the percentage of each institution’s faculty population that is part-time and non-tenure-track against the size of each institution’s total faculty population. In figure 20 the blue curve records the total number of faculty members each institution reported in 2017 (the primary y-axis); the red dots record the percentage of the institution’s faculty that is part-time non-tenure-track (the secondary y-axis). Within every 10% segment of institutions along the x-axis and blue curve that tracks faculty size (the primary y-axis) across the universe of 4,279 degree-granting institutions, the percentage of faculty members teaching part-time off the tenure track varies across the entire scale from 0% to 100% (the secondary y-axis), with the exception of the last 10.0% of institutions, those with more than 800 faculty members, where the percentage values vary from just above 0% to 100%.
The portrait of the varying place part-time faculty members occupy within their local institutions can be elaborated further, and for some readers perhaps more intelligibly, by mapping the two numerical factors on which the percentage values are based—that is, the numerator (the number of part-time faculty members) as it varies against the denominator (the total number of faculty members). Figure 21 does this. Each red dot represents the number of part-time faculty members employed by institutions along the curve of blue dots that sequences the 4,279 institutions according to the size of their faculty populations, from smallest to largest. The percentage of each institution’s faculty employed part-time and off the tenure track is higher where the red dots (the numerator) rise closer to the blue curve (the denominator) and lower where the red dots fall farther below. The way the red dots disperse to fill the grid at every point below the blue curve that tracks faculty size reveals how widely institutions vary in the number
and percentage of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members they employ across the entire spectrum of institutions and faculty size, large and small.

Fig. 21

As before, eliminating the outliers makes the chart more legible. Figure 22 displays the ratio of part-time non-tenure-track faculty members to all faculty members for the subset of 3,940 institutions with fewer than 1,000 faculty members in total (92.1% of the entire universe of 4,279 institutions).
At least three implications for advocacy follow from a differentiated, institution-by-institution accounting like the one attempted here, which maps the way the academic workforce in its three component segments is distributed across the universe of United States higher education.

1. Indispensable as summary data are for understanding trends affecting the academic workforce as a whole, they can be misleading for advocacy insofar as they mask the actual range of institutional practice and prompt interventions that are bound to be either too broad to suit the variety of local situations or too narrow to be generalizable to more than one situation at a time. Institutionally differentiated data create the possibility for statements and interventions formed and targeted to deliberately
chosen segments of the institutional universe. For example, would advocacy to increase the fraction of the faculty that is tenured or eligible for tenure have improved chances for success if designed to address the roughly 1,500 institutions that already have between 25% and 60% of their faculty members tenured or on the tenure track? Another way to state this might be to note the difference between formulating, say, a 60% minimum tenure standard that advocacy announces as the standard all institutions should strive to meet and advocating for an increase over time of five or ten percentage points in tenured and tenure-track positions, from whatever point along the scale of practice any given institution may currently be located. Knowing the scale of practice provides advocacy information it can use to work productively in the light of local practice—and use also to avoid flailing blindly against that practice.

2. Recognizing the reality of the very large number of institutions with zero tenured or tenure-track faculty members raises the question of how variously the full-time non-tenure-track faculty position may function in different institutional contexts. Where tenured and tenure-track faculty members do not exist, the border separating contingent from stable faculty positions may not be the tenure line; but it may very well be the tenure line where the tenured and tenure-track faculty remains quantitatively larger and qualitatively stronger. In some institutional contexts, the divide separating part-time from full-time positions may be decisive; in others, the divide separating non-tenure-track from tenured and tenure-track positions.

Institutionally differentiated data like those presented in this paper are not sufficient to determine which criterion applies in any specific case. Such data may, however, provide guidance toward identifying cases that warrant closer, more localized study.
As figure 13 shows, on a per institution basis part-time non-tenure-track faculty members emerge as a numerical majority at the 40% threshold of the institutional universe, corresponding to institution number 1,715 in the series of 4,279 when institutions are arranged according to the percentage of their faculty members in part-time non-tenure-track positions. That is, in 2017, part-time non-tenure-track faculty members were 50% or more of the faculty in 2,565 of all 4,279 degree-granting postsecondary institutions, or 60% of the institutional universe. In more than 30% of institutions part-time non-tenure-track faculty members were 70% or more of the faculty by head count. Advocacy needs to find ways to understand and address the varying needs, preferences, and local situations of these individuals, who collectively make up so numerically predominant a segment of the faculty workforce across such a large swath of the institutional universe. In the light of the enormous range in the absolute numbers and percentage presence of faculty members teaching part-time off the tenure track, and the corresponding complexity of local numerical and percentage combinations, it is perhaps only to be expected that advocacy on behalf of the members of the contingent academic workforce will find itself having to negotiate difficult pragmatic dilemmas when those quantitative data points take the form of human individuals and interest groups on actual campuses. Obvious in the general, the need to advocate for professional compensation, in the form of both salaries and benefits, for part-time non-tenure-track faculty members may in some local contexts come into conflict problematically with other goals advocacy has in view. In some local settings advocacy on behalf of the members of the contingent academic
workforce may be compatible with advocacy for increases in the shares of the faculty eligible for tenure or in full-time positions; in others, it may be less so.

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This discussion attempts to demonstrate some possibilities of an institution-by-institution analysis of the academic workforce that nonetheless keeps the entire universe of institutions and range of institutional practice in view while simultaneously locating each institution’s relative position within that range. More broadly, it advances the proposition that variance may be more telling than average as a quantitative indicator through which advocacy can gain purchase on problems that have beset the academic workforce and the academic career path. To facilitate the data manipulations that lie behind the charts developed for this discussion, institutions have been reduced to dots representing the intersection of quantities like the numerical and percentage values that specify their faculty mix; or they have been plotted according to broad defining categories like level, control, and Carnegie classification. Institution names, set to one side here, are part of the public record and can be brought back into the picture as further analysis or future advocacy may deem useful. The immediate question is whether those engaged in either analysis or advocacy see promise in the kind of data modeling this discussion has pursued.

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Work Cited