

White Paper on Non-tenure-track faculty

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Introduction

While the traditional profile of the teacher-scholar is and remains the basis of the tenure system, in American higher education generally, and in particularly in large research universities such as USC, researchers, teachers, and clinical faculty who do not fit that traditional profile are valued and important contributors to the university's basic mission. These non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty, full-time and part-time, serve in a wide variety of roles in research and teaching (including teaching in clinical settings), and indeed many of the University's most important endeavors would be impossible without the contributions of such faculty. There is wide variation across schools and departments in the ways these faculty members are employed in research and teaching, as each school's faculty must be responsive to the standards and needs of their particular discipline as well as to the institutional conditions and initiatives proper to USC. In spite of these variations, all who serve as non-tenure-track faculty are to be regarded as full members of the faculty of USC and are thus expected to contribute to the excellence demanded of the faculty, to share in governance, and to enjoy academic freedom. In return, they are entitled to the respect of the University community, acceptance as full colleagues in our academic community and, to the extent feasible and appropriate, support in their research and teaching.

The Faculty Profile at USC

There are 2500+ full-time faculty, of whom 1300+ are tenured or tenure-track, and 1200+ are non-tenure-track (the largest concentration is in the Keck School of Medicine.) There are also 1300+ part-time faculty (with the largest concentration again in Medicine.) The faculty also includes librarians, retired faculty recalled to duty, faculty on early retirement plans which may include continued teaching, and visiting faculty. It is difficult to determine how many of the NTT faculty have teaching as their primary or only duty, as current NTT titles may not differentiate those who have primarily teaching duties, except for the Lecturer and Senior Lecturer titles used largely in the College. For those titles, the numbers are 200+ full-time and about 700 part-time. For NTT research faculty, under the Handbook only minimal teaching is permitted, where this is defined as no more than one course per year. (These are rough numbers designed to give an impression of the order of magnitude of the NTT faculty numbers; they may to be double-checked, or refined.)

It is not clear that there is any marked overall trend at USC regarding the proportion and use of NTT faculty that is out of step with national trends at research universities. (This

may be a worthy subject of further and careful study.) Several USC units are currently moving to reduce the number of NTT faculty and increase TT appointments, and also to consolidate part-time NTT appointments into fewer, but full-time, ones. On the other hand, the prospect of a reduction in the total population of graduate students in the College by a factor of about one-third, together with the increasing pressure to increase the balance of fellowship year support versus Teaching Assistantship years, means that there may be a need for a number of NTT faculty to carry out the course support duties, including the teaching of discussion and lab sections, now performed by graduate student Teaching Assistants. In general, the College administration hopes to staff these positions with full-time NTT faculty.

It is difficult in a research university as large as USC, especially given its large number of professional schools and their disparate practices and academic cultures, to legislate appropriate proportions of TT to NTT faculty, or even in a general way to establish generally applicable profiles of duties or activities which distinguish TT and NTT faculty. The Senate has endorsed three general categories of NTT faculty: teaching, research, and clinical, and in addition combined roles to meet special needs in the College and in various professional schools. All such NTT categories share in responsibilities of governance (except for tenure matters.) There are significant variations among NTT faculty. The Senate has endorsed a general equality of benefits between tenured and NTT faculty (with certain exceptions), participation by NTT faculty in governance (except for issues involving the tenure system), and a service role for NTT faculty (though more limited than that of the tenured faculty and without an obligation for service by Lecturers). There is general recognition that NTT faculty should have as much job security as possible consonant with the protection of the tenure system, which means that departments must have discretion in non-reappointing NTT faculty. This is an especially pressing issue, as lack of job security can easily bring about and perpetuate exploitative treatment.

In addition to the wide variations in responsibilities and disciplines which characterize NTT faculty, there are variations in career trajectory. Some NTT faculty in the early stages of their careers see their current positions as stepping-stones to different positions elsewhere, including tenure-track positions. Others consider their current position to be their career choice, and a number of these have been at USC for many years. Some, especially in the clinical tracks, are volunteers

Non-tenure track faculty and the tenure system

The Academic Senate and President Sample have endorsed the principle that the tenure system is the basic form of faculty appointment. Issues about the proportion of TT and NTT faculty have mainly to do with primarily-teaching NTT faculty, as externally-funded research and clinical-care NTT faculty, full or part-time, do not pose difficulties for the tenure system. The faculty and administration remain alert to see that use of NTT faculty does not threaten to undermine the integrity of the tenure system. The most effective support of the integrity of the tenure system is the tenure-track faculty in the relevant academic units. If there is concern about the development of a pattern of appointments of NTT faculty in the unit which is suspected of threatening the academic

integrity of the unit in connection with the principle of tenure, the faculty should remedy this in their department, raise it with their elected school council or dean, or if necessary take it to the Vice-Provost for Faculty or to the joint Senate-deans committee that has a mandate to respond to such issues: the Special Committee on Promotion and Tenure Policy. It is the faculty in the unit who are most conversant with national standards and practices in their discipline, and who have a vested interest in the maintenance of the tenure system in their unit. At the same time, deans, high-level academic administrators, and the Academic Senate must remain alert to any structural shifts in appointment and/or use of NTT faculty which may constitute a threat to the tenure system.

Working conditions and environment for NTT faculty

There are a number of issues concerning the working conditions of NTT faculty; many of these were voiced at an Academic Leadership Development Workshop held April 24, 2002. These issues are set out below, together with an indication of some ways these issues are currently being addressed and with some suggestions for further study:

a.) a feeling of isolation and relative lack of mentoring experienced by some NTT faculty, particularly junior faculty who have not been at USC for very long and/or research faculty whose work on their individual project does not bring them into contact with faculty or graduate students in the relevant units. At the ALD Workshop one person used the phrase 'second-class citizen' to sum up the perceived inequities in status and treatment between TT and NTT faculty. Many departments will have colloquia in which faculty can present their research to the department, but in some units NTT faculty may not be invited to be presenters. As regards mentoring, NTT faculty who need and would like this may in some units find themselves at the end of a queue headed up by junior TT faculty, postdocs, and graduate students. Problems of isolation and lack of mentoring contribute to a more general feeling of inferiority which some NTT faculty in certain units may have as a result of their treatment by TT faculty, department chairs and deans, in which by subtle and not-so-subtle means the impression is conveyed that NTT faculty are not regarded as full-fledged faculty.

Response to a.) . The recent Academic Leadership Development program for research NTT faculty should be followed-up with inclusion in the new mentoring initiatives and expanded to include other categories of NTT faculty. USC expects to receive a mentoring initiative grant, which should include NTT faculty in its scope. The Center for Excellence in Teaching will be an important part of the mentoring initiative. In addition, the Academic Leadership Development Committee has held the first workshop for NTT faculty, dealing with matters of concern to research NTT faculty. In a number of units (including Law and Medicine) NTT faculty participate in faculty workshops, colloquia, or presentations. This is the sort of 'best practice' that other units at USC should be made aware of, and encouraged to adopt.

b. lack of defined standards and regular practices concerning appointment and promotion of NTT faculty. Such appointments and promotions may be made without outside letters (even for research faculty), though such external evaluations are required for tenure-

track appointments and promotions, and the criteria for such appointments and promotions are more variable and undefined than are comparable criteria for TT appointments and promotions.

Response to b.) If schools have a ranked set of titles for NTT faculty (assistant, associate, full, or special designations appropriate to the discipline) they can have regularized processes and criteria for promotion through these ranks. The Law School has long had written criteria, and regularized committees, for promotion through ranked assistant/associate/professor titles for NTT faculty. The Keck School, with the endorsement of the Senate Executive Board and approval of the Provost, has instituted recognition of a NTT “Professor of Medicine (Clinical Scholar)” in addition to the two different series of assistant/associate/professor NTT ranks. The Keck School uses full departmental, school, and University evaluations, including outside referees, for clinical appointments and promotions. In addition, faculty from several other schools – including Engineering, Business, Cinema-TV, Social work, and Dentistry—have proposed to add either supplemental designations appropriate to their discipline (e.g., Professor of Dentistry (Clinical Scholar) , Artist in Residence) or ranked assistant/associate/professor titles, not just Lecturer/Senior Lecturer, for appropriate NTT faculty. The Senate Handbook Committee studied the topic of NTT nomenclature in response to these faculty requests, and has put forward a recommended Handbook amendment to recognize these additional titles meeting the needs of different professional disciplines. A survey of ‘good practice’ models, among USC academic units and at peer universities, would be useful to provide models which may be adapted by other USC units if appropriate. What is needed is a system of titles which are transparent to the university community and the outside community as regards the faculty status of the holder of the title, and one which balances the need for uniformity and consistency across the university with the special practices of the individual disciplines.

c. lack of security in their positions. Some NTT faculty feel that it is easier to terminate even longstanding NTT faculty than it is to terminate staff. It is recognized that NTT faculty will by definition not have the security provided by tenure, and the Academic Senate has endorsed the principle that departmental discretion to non-reappoint NTT faculty is an important protection of tenured faculty and the tenure system.

Response to c.) Under the Faculty Handbook any non-appointment (except for a temporary position) is to be reviewed by a faculty committee. In recent years, a NTT faculty member who was non-reappointed successfully convinced a grievance panel that the action was procedurally improper, and the panel’s recommendation was affirmed. It would also be possible to consider whether a phased notice system may be a possibility (e.g. after so many years at USC, six months notice of termination would be required, etc.) The Law School authorizes multi-year contracts for NTT faculty upon promotion.

d. differences in benefits treatment. NTT faculty must be full-time to receive benefits, whereas staff may receive benefits at less than full-time. In some schools, there is a difference in the ways in which 'full-time' is defined for research NTT faculty vs. teaching NTT faculty: research NTT faculty must be employed for twelve months to count as full-time, whereas teaching faculty need only be employed nine months. There are a number of issues related to this full-time twelve-month requirement for research faculty, including salary support for grant proposal writing, jury duty, general 'gap' funding, the possibility of retaining faculty appointment even through unpaid gaps. Two additional issues concern eligibility for tuition remission, and the question of overhead for fringe benefits charged against grants when the investigator is less than full-time, or is for some other reason not drawing benefits.

Response to d.) There are three areas in which benefits differ between NTT faculty and TT faculty. First, as regards health benefits, NTT faculty must be full-time to receive the university contribution to premiums. At half-time or above (but less than full-time) NTT faculty will not receive the university contribution to premiums, but can buy insurance at the group rate; at less than half-time, there is no health benefit. The administration is studying the feasibility of a proposal that instead of tying health benefits profiles to full-time vs. part-time NTT status, individual part-time NTT faculty could be designated 'benefits-eligible.' For clinical faculty and some research faculty, it may also be possible to introduce a category such as 'full-time at USC and affiliated institutions.' Second, as regards sabbatical leave, the current policy applies the same principle to both TT and NTT faculty: teacher-scholars, who have both full teaching and research responsibilities, periodically receive relief from teaching in order to focus on the research aspect of their responsibilities. Most NTT faculty don't have this profile, but those who do (such as some in the Keck School) can qualify for sabbatical leave, and tenured individuals who do not do both teaching and research also would not qualify for sabbatical. Third, as regards paid family leave policy, one difficulty in extending this provision to NTT faculty includes the problems either for the research project on which that person is engaged or the clinical or teaching assignment for which that person was hired. Family leave has been approved for some NTT faculty on a case-by-case basis. Professor Martin Levine, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, has raised with the administration the suggestion of exploring ways to pay for expanding this benefit to NTT faculty. He also pointed out that academic freedom must and does protect both NTT and tenure-track faculty.

e.) In some units there may be some part-time non-tenure-track faculty who are 'freeway flyers' combining several such positions. These persons generally receive low per-course pay and no benefits.

Response to e.) In general, it is both academically desirable and more humane, to use one full-time NTT faculty member, paid appropriately and with benefits, with time to work with students, combining several part-time NTT positions. Where it is feasible, it is better still to use a tenure-track faculty member instead, but some proportion of NTT teachers may be academically desirable in a given unit,

whether to bring an admixture of practical orientation to students in a professional school, or to do skills teaching in the College. Part-time NTT appointment, while generally to be avoided, is appropriate for an individual who holds some other primary full-time position and is asked to teach a course because of special expertise, and graduate students participate in a non-faculty role as TAs as part of their apprenticeship. As a rule, schools have been asked to phase out use of “freeway flyers” in favor of use of TT faculty, NTT full-time faculty, or individuals with special expertise who have other full-time positions, as the school faculty find appropriate in particular cases.

Recommendations for action

The White Paper committee considered suggesting to the Academic Senate that it assign various of the issues concerning NTT faculty to relevant standing committees. After deliberation, however, it is of the opinion that these issues are so intertwined, and bound up closely to the basic missions of the university, that a Task Force should be appointed to study them more fully and to work with the appropriate committees to craft solutions when these can be found. In addition to exploring the issues set out above, the Task Force should address the issue of compliance between the School Policy concerning NTT faculty and actual practice. One suggestion is that the deans, chairs, or directors of units in which NTT faculty serve should periodically (every three years?) file with the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and the Academic Senate (or a relevant designated Senate committee) a general statement concerning the use of NTT faculty in that unit and a certification that practice is in conformity with the written school policy.

Submitted by Edwin McCann, committee chair