



One Faculty: A Path to One-Tier
FACCC Policy Committee
September 2023

Community colleges have a long history as agents of social equality, lifting those at the margins to meaningful community engagement and unleashing the full expression of their vision and gifts. However, these features of equality are absent in the two-tier faculty structure of California Community Colleges. It is past time to rethink the structures of faculty labor, redefine collegiality and professionalism, and create pathways for community college faculty to work toward a vision of excellence that *all* can share (Frontczak, 2021). This means eliminating the inequitable two-tier system so all faculty and students can achieve their professional and educational goals, expanding individual and institutional potential.

Wages, benefits, job security, academic freedom, and tenure protection are grossly unequal despite the likeness between faculty members in the two tiers. The only substantive difference between both groups is in the number of permitted and assigned work hours. Yet the working conditions for faculty members in the second tier -- the part-time or contingent faculty -- are brutal in terms of huge disparities in wages, benefits, retirement resources, job security, the chronic stress from the instability of employment, the corrosive effects of outsider status, and the absence of professional recognition. Former Santa Monica Community College tenured instructor Lantz Simpson (2014) observed: “Non-tenure-track positions of all types now account for about 75 percent of all faculty appointments in American higher education. One result of this policy is that a person can be employed as faculty by a college or university for five, ten, fifteen, twenty years or more and still be classified as contingent and therefore ‘temporary,’ which is an absurd legal fiction.” Non-tenure-track “temporary” instructors in California Community Colleges currently comprise about 70% of the teaching labor force. These inequities have persisted for far too long, and it is time for a change.

The Faculty Association for California Community Colleges has long supported equitable treatment for part-time faculty. For example, FACCC’s policy paper “Why Faculty Matter” states that “In the spirit of its current emphasis on student success, it is time for the community college system to implement a strategy for fully supporting its part-time faculty.” Along the same lines, FACCC’s policy paper “FACCC Statement on Part-Time Faculty Equity” (2021) advocated for pay parity, a lift of the 67% teaching load cap, health benefits, access to resources to serve students and professional development. However, despite vocal and persistent advocacy between these two tiers a vast gap – in wages, benefits, job security, retirement options, and professional recognition, advancement, and growth -- remains.

It is crystal clear that the two-tier system has been consistently reproducing faculty inequality. This was highlighted several years ago by Simpson (2014): “My proposal is simply this: the current, two-tiered system, mired in contingency, should be replaced with the systematic regularization of faculty — that is, contingent faculty routinely moving onto the tenure track and thereby achieving full-time tenured status throughout the country.” A one-tier system means that all faculty would go through the tenure process, which means tenure would be *strengthened*, not weakened.

A bold new approach is needed to end contingency and establish a one-tier structure for faculty equality. Such a structure, with proportional compensation and benefits, together with job security based on a tenure-for-all principle, would provide faculty equality, which, in turn, promises a number of benefits for students, the faculty body, our colleges, and social well-being in the state. Until now, FACCC’s advocacy on behalf of part-time faculty has been an incremental approach to an equitable system – but a two-tier system has proven to be, by definition, inequitable. For this reason, FACCC now declares its support for a one-tier system: a natural progression from previous policy positions and one designed to provide the justice and equity to which California education aspires.

In a one-tier system, students will be better served. Adrianna Kezar (2019) underscores the critical importance of student-faculty interactions for student development and success: “Interactions between faculty members and students have long been shown to improve the quality of students’ learning and their educational experiences. The host of positive outcomes includes increased persistence and completion rates, better grades and standardized test scores, and the development of leadership, critical thinking, sense of worth, career and graduate school aspiration, and self-confidence.” Also important, research findings noted by Kezar focus on first-generation college students and students of color show decreases in dropout rates and persistence in completing degrees. As many educators are fond of saying, faculty working conditions are student learning conditions. Equity for faculty, therefore, is a student equity issue.

For faculty, the one-tier structure would enable the re-professionalization of higher education in community colleges, ending the high dependency of colleges on gig academic work (Kezar, 2019), re-establishing faculty unity for shaping a strong workplace for faculty security and student learning, and very importantly, fulfilling the high moral standard of equality. A single tier means that all faculty members can truly experience a collegial relationship. In the two-tier system, with the tenured faculty in the dominant position, the non-tenured are often regarded as para-professionals. With one faculty working equally as full professionals, there will be a true community of interests and genuine solidarity as opposed to the contrived “solidarity” that is inevitable with the current structural inequality. When all instructors are treated the same, students, faculty, and colleges thrive. Furthermore, as the two-tier system is eliminated, we can expect that faculty who were once in the lower tier would become empowered to be more involved in shared governance at their colleges and districts, as well as statewide advocacy. This is why a crucial step toward a one-tier system is a path to tenure for all faculty.

An example of an institutionalized one-tier system is the Vancouver Community College faculty structure, which is frequently referred to as the “Vancouver Model.” Its three key characteristics are a single salary schedule for all faculty, a pathway to permanent status via regularization, and job security protected by seniority. Notably, this is simply one possible path to faculty equality in California Community Colleges. We do not propose to set forth all the details on how this endeavor should be achieved. The California Federation of Teachers, in its resolution “Develop a Strategic Plan to End the Two-Tier System in Community College,” has established a task force “to develop a strategic plan for transitioning to a one-tier system.” FACCC applauds this resolution and the establishment of the task force and is ready to work toward this common goal.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines equality as “the right of all human beings to be equal in dignity, to be treated with respect and consideration and to participate on an equal basis with others in any area of economic, social, political, cultural or civil life.” It is necessary and strategically wise to move towards a single-tier faculty system, leading to full equality and solidarity and therefore fortifying the foundation of the California Community College system.

References

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