



## **NON-TENURE TRACK FACULTY**

An Introduction for Students

### **Who's teaching my classes?**

The faculty who teach your classes are in a variety of employment categories. You are probably learning from tenured professors, professors on their way to earning tenure, postdoctoral visitors, and other academics. "Other academics" or non-tenure track faculty may refer to instructors and lecturers with limited employment contracts, usually lasting no more than a year.

### **How many faculty at the U of Illinois are non-tenure-track (NTT) on limited contracts?**

NTT faculty make up approximately 41% of the people teaching your classes at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, according to the Division of Management Information. The number of non-tenure track faculty is growing. Over the past six years, tenure-track positions on our campus have declined by 10%, while NTT faculty numbers have increased by 20%. Since NTT faculty responsibilities typically do not include research and service, the number of classes they teach per semester is usually higher, thus increasing the chance that you'll find yourself in one of their classes.

### **Are non-tenure track faculty less qualified?**

Not necessarily. It's difficult to assess differences in qualifications because evaluation for NTTs is not standardized.

Non-tenure track faculty are supposed to teach more classes, instead of conducting research, advising students, running departmental events, or serving on committees. Yet some non-tenured faculty end up filling these roles anyway. And since they teach many more classes, NTT faculty members have less time and opportunity to develop their teaching and research skills and move toward a tenure-track job. Essentially, many do the same work as they would in a tenure-track position, for much less pay.

### **Then what is the difference?**

A consistent difference between non-tenure track and tenure-track faculty is contract length, which determines options for consistent employment, and availability of benefits such as health care and retirement plan.

This isn't true everywhere. Faculty members, on both the tenure and non-tenure track who have arrived from other countries are often shocked when they start work at a U.S. university. They notice that the way that faculty are treated changes drastically depending which side of the tenure line they fall on. It makes the difference between being welcomed as a voice in the Senate. It makes a difference in whether feedback is available for improving their teaching. It means the difference between being welcomed as a colleague or treated as part of a separate, lower class.

### **Why does the U of Illinois do this?**

Non-tenure track faculty are hired to give the university more "flexibility" in choosing its labor force, and to save the university money.

But that's good, right? If the university saves money, then tuition can come down, can't it? That's not what is happening. Nationwide, and at the U of Illinois, the trend is for tuition to keep rising, while a growing number of NTT faculty are hired.

### **How does this affect me?**

#### **What's really happening is that you, as students, are paying more for less.**

When NTT faculty are exploited (as many of them are at the U of Illinois), you get teachers who may find out they are teaching your course only two weeks before the semester starts, so that they don't have enough time to prepare a thoughtful syllabus. Your teacher might not have an office, and so they cannot hold office hours. They may be so woefully underpaid that they are "freeway flyers," commuting to teach additional courses at Parkland College or Illinois State. They must constantly face the challenge of patching together enough money to live on and support their families. Of course, this leaves them with less time to keep up with the latest research in the field, prepare for classes, grade your papers, or write you a letter of recommendation.

Most NTT faculty are highly skilled and dedicated instructors. NTT faculty consistently win teaching awards. However, the extra money you pay in tuition increases does not go to developing the skills of this cheaper, more vulnerable group of faculty who are increasingly taking core responsibility for your educational needs.

College is where you learn to take responsibility for your own education and embrace the idea that education leads to a better life in both tangible and intangible ways. Yet when faculty you encounter in your college career earn less per hour than your high school friends working summer jobs at the grocery store, you are right to ask hard questions of the institution in which you've put your trust and to whom you pay ever-increasing tuition and fees.

**Faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.**

**Ask questions. Demand answers.**