Among the many pressing challenges facing higher education institutions today is how to support a new and different academic workforce. The growing reliance on contingent faculty throughout higher ed has resulted in such faculty members accounting for approximately 70 percent of the faculty providing instruction at colleges and universities nationwide. As these faculty have been hired in greater numbers, institutions often have not considered how their faculty policies and practices and the working conditions encountered by contingents may carry troubling implications for student learning, equal employment opportunities and non-discrimination, talent development and risk management.

For the past five years, the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California, in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities, has been studying this shift to contingent faculty — how we got here, the impact it's having on teaching and learning, and potential strategies for addressing issues and challenges related to this change in the academic workforce. Dubbed The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, the work is driven by two overarching strategies — creating a vision for future faculty models for improving student success, and building a broad base of stakeholder support for improving conditions facing faculty working off the tenure track.
Adrianna Kezar heads up The Delphi Project. As a faculty member in USC’s Rossier School of Education and co-director of the Pullias Center, she saw firsthand the impact that the lack of support for contingents was having on teaching and learning on her own campus. Recognizing that this was an issue across all of academe, she made it her work to bring the issues to light, make a case for change, and find solutions.

**Identifying the Issues and Creating a Blueprint for Change**

The Delphi Project began when, over the course of a year (from early 2011 to early 2012), Kezar convened more than 40 experts representing a broad array of stakeholders from across the academy. Participants — including academic leaders and system heads; leaders from higher education professional associations, academic unions, disciplinary associations and accrediting agencies; education researchers; economists; and organizations representing contingent faculty — completed surveys addressing the current status of the academic workforce, internal and external pressures shaping changes, organizational issues such as faculty morale and preserving academic freedom, and implications of an overreliance on contingent faculty for student learning.

Then in May 2012, Kezar and the working group met in person to discuss the issues that surfaced through the surveys and to formulate strategies to respond to these challenges. The surveys and the group discussion uncovered several challenges contingents are facing in the current higher education climate. According to Kezar, most of these issues emanate from a lack of policies and practices to support this group. For example, she explains that on many campuses, evaluation processes, advancement processes, orientation processes and professional development opportunities are geared only toward tenure-track faculty, meaning that some 70 percent of today’s faculty workforce aren’t being provided with the support they need to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

From the working group’s meeting and subsequent discussions came a report highlighting some of the challenges contingent faculty face on campuses around the country and the impact this may have on student learning:

1) **Hiring and contract renewal.** The Delphi Project report states that because, in many cases, contingent faculty are hired to teach at the last minute, they have little time to prepare for the semester by doing things such as updating course readings, defining learning goals and developing a course plan, if they are even allowed the autonomy to make such decisions. Job stability is also a source of stress for contingents. Says Kezar, “The lack of job security makes it more difficult for these faculty members to invest in the curriculum and learning goals of a department because they know they may not be there next semester.”

Kezar notes the impact this approach to hiring and contract renewal can have on student learning:

- Last-minute scheduling and hiring of instructional faculty impedes preparation for teaching and diminishes the quality of instruction a faculty member is able to provide to students.

- The lack of multiyear contracts or any commitment to hire back lecturers results in contingent faculty cycling in and out of academic programs, impacting preparation and faculty development, quality of teaching, and the ongoing placement of teachers who have experience on a campus and knowledge of students, the institution and/or the department.

2) **Insufficient orientation and access to professional development.** According to the report, various studies have found that “contingent faculty … are often excluded from orientation programs and workshops that are made available to other faculty and staff to provide important human resources information, training for work roles and a review of policies.”

Some examples Kezar notes of orientation and professional development policies’ connection to student learning include:

- A lack of access to professional development impacts faculty adoption and use of pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies that inform the development of course and learning goals and the sequencing of concepts. The use of ineffective or outdated pedagogies creates an obstacle for the intellectual stimulation of students, which affects their enthusiasm for learning and making connections to course materials and topics.

- Faculty who do not receive professional development or mentoring may not receive useful feedback on their teaching practices, with
feedback limited only to responses to student evaluations. They may also be poorly prepared to advise students and help them address problems and challenges.

3) **Exclusion from curriculum design and decisions.** In addition, the working group's report states that "contingent faculty are often excluded from participating in essential dialogue and decision making over the content they teach. Many are not included in department communication and faculty meetings, where information about broader curricular goals and plans to work toward them are shared and discussed. As a result, these faculty members are limited in their ability to make contributions to academic and curricular planning."

How might this impact student learning? Kezar identified the following:

- By excluding contingent faculty from curriculum design or by forcing rigid course guidelines, department chairs and others may not recognize the expertise and talents of these faculty members, creating scenarios where courses are created without consideration of students' capabilities and interests, textbooks do not match objectives, learning goals and courses are misaligned, problems with a course or the curriculum broadly are not addressed, and opportunities for capturing faculty expertise are missed.

- Since contingents are not always privy to department communications such as emails or meetings, they may have little or no contact with the tenured faculty, which limits participation in professional dialogue. The absence of a shared dialogue about courses and the curriculum creates the opportunity for course instruction and teaching materials to be misaligned with curricular objectives and academic policies that are set by the department or institution.

4) **A lack of access to office space, instructional resources and staff support.** According to the report, contingent faculty often are not provided office space, and therefore have no place to meet with students and colleagues, prepare for teaching, and meet other job responsibilities. They also aren't typically offered clerical support for their teaching, service and research demands and don't have appropriate access to office and technology equipment.

Through her research, Kezar has identified several ways in which a lack of support and resources for contingents can impact student learning:

- Contingent faculty, particularly those on part-time contracts, may not have space where they can meet with students for advising or to discuss confidential matters. A lack of office space also impacts faculty members' ability to brainstorm with colleagues about curricula and teaching and learning practices and prevents them from building networks and social capital for improving courses and instructional quality.

- Since part-time faculty in particular may not be able to be on campus when they're not teaching, and because many teach evening classes, they may not be able to utilize support services provided by university or department personnel who only work during regular business hours. This limits their ability to improve upon practices and skills, as well as their knowledge of resources that may be of help to students.

- When they do not receive adequate support from administrative personnel, new faculty may not receive necessary information. If access to resources and staff is not ensured, contingent faculty may have to procure their own resources, go without them or find alternatives. This seemingly unnecessary exercise takes time away from teaching preparation and students.

- Unlike their tenure-track counterparts, contingent faculty do not usually receive teaching assistants to help with workload. They are expected to take on the burden of a course without any assistance, regardless of the number of students enrolled.

Out of The Delphi Project group's initial meeting and subsequent report emerged two areas of focus that would drive its work moving forward — to engage higher education organizations and stakeholders in re-conceptualizing the professoriate (including redefined faculty roles, the tenure model, rewards, learning and professional development opportunities, and professional standards) and to gather data and create resources for use
by campus stakeholders for facilitating greater awareness of contingent faculty issues and supporting policy development and implementation.

**The Work of The Delphi Project**
Kezar and her colleagues at The Delphi Project have created several papers, reports, resources and toolkits based on their research in order to help institutional stakeholders guide conversations around the changing faculty workforce and its impact on academe. They’ve also studied several different faculty models and compiled case studies of institutions that are innovating in this area.

**The Imperative for Change**
This report makes the case for making changes in policies and practices related to contingent faculty and examines the implications of not doing so for student learning, equity and risk management. As Kezar points out, “This document is intended for a broad audience — all campus stakeholders, really — and can help to build an understanding of the implications of the current faculty model and policies affecting non-tenure-track faculty, as well as to facilitate a conversation about change that begins with a shared appreciation of the potential risks of inaction or inattention to these problems.”

**Adapting by Design**
This report outlines why new faculty models are needed and offers critiques of current adjunct and tenure-track models. It posits the need to design faculty roles intentionally based on student success and building a rich teaching and learning environment. The report also identifies some models that exist that might be used by campuses as a point of departure for new models, and the accompanying toolkit proposes a process by which campuses can lead discussions around creating new faculty models.

**The Path to Change**
A collection of documents describing how several campuses have initiated a dialogue about contingent faculty practices and how different groups on each campus worked together to implement changes to support faculty off the tenure track.

**The Professoriate Reconsidered**
In this survey, Kezar and her colleagues asked stakeholders across higher education what they thought would be the best characteristics of a future faculty model(s), specifically as it relates to contingents. “There was uniform agreement among all respondents related to restoring professionalism to the faculty role; protecting academic freedom; equitable compensation and access to benefits; involvement in shared governance; access to resources; opportunities for promotion; clearly defined expectations and evaluation criteria; clear notification of contract renewal; and continuous professional development,” says Kezar. Other areas of consensus included increasing the number of full-time faculty (but not necessarily tenure-track faculty); creating teaching-only tenure-track positions; reducing reliance on part-time faculty; ensuring some sort of scholarly component in all faculty roles; fostering more collaboration among faculty; revising incentives and reward structures; developing a broader view of scholarship; and allowing more flexibility to stop the tenure-track clock for family or personal needs.

**New Faculty Models**
The tenure-track faculty model aligned strongly with research productivity has been on trial for some time now, with many educators, lawmakers and college and university stakeholders calling for change. Agreeing with that sentiment, Kezar contends that faculty roles have never been intentionally designed, particularly with student success in mind. “Faculty roles have shifted over the years, but not thoughtfully, strategically, or in ways that are aligned with the changing nature of the higher ed enterprise,” she says. “We need new faculty models — models that promote equity among academic appointments, protect academic freedom, ensure flexibility in appointments, foster professional growth, and promote collegiality and a greater sense of community.”

In championing the need for new faculty models, Kezar points out the flaws in the two models found in most institutions today: the traditional tenure-track design and the adjunct faculty model. The tenure-track model, she says, places a disproportionate emphasis on conducting research and publishing and can downplay the importance of teaching. She also contends that this approach creates a lack of flexibility to hire in new fields or to account for market fluctuations; does not incentivize innovation; and neglects the roles faculty can play in service, civic engagement and local leadership.

The adjunct model that has emerged over the past couple of decades, she says, is also fundamentally flawed. “On most campuses, adjuncts are inequitably compensated, typically have no access to benefits, have little to no involvement in the life of the department and the campus, and aren’t provided with opportunities for professional development,” she says.
“They may not possess important information about academic policies, practices and programs or the curriculum or overall learning goals for their departments and institutions. A lack of job security contributes to higher rates of turnover, creating a lack of stability for departments.” In short, Kezar explains, dependence on the adjunct model makes it more difficult for institutions to meet their broader goals related to student success, service, community engagement, leadership and public good.

So what’s the answer? The Delphi Project has identified several different faculty models that could be adapted across higher ed (all of which have been experimented with to varying degrees at many colleges and universities):

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<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Teaching-Only Tenure-Track Model</td>
<td>Faculty are hired full-time to focus on teaching, with no expectation of research responsibilities, but with some expectation of service. Faculty are eligible for tenure after a certain number of years, with tenure eligibility based on evaluation of teaching effectiveness. All faculty members are allowed to participate in governance activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Full-Time, Non-Tenure-Track Model</td>
<td>Full-time, non-tenure-track faculty are typically focused only on teaching, research or service (but not all three, like traditional tenure-track faculty). According to Kezar, full-time, non-tenure-track faculty members</td>
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What Is HR’s Role in This Work?

Human resources at Villanova University partnered with academic affairs to improve support in several areas for contingent faculty at the institution. As highlighted on The Delphi Project’s Example Practices web page, here’s an overview of the outcomes of this collaboration:

1) The risks of last-minute hiring have been mitigated and the institution now maintains a pool of diverse candidates. With the implementation of a digital hiring platform, HR and academic affairs were able to streamline what had been a complicated and onerous faculty hiring process. Most departments now maintain an open job posting for adjunct faculty, which allows them to collect and maintain a pool of qualified applicants for positions as they become available. This has helped to eliminate last-minute hiring of adjunct faculty and has allowed HR to capture demographic information about the institution’s adjuncts. HR has also helped to ensure the diversity of these applicant pools by extending the reach of advertising for open faculty positions to a wide variety of online job listing boards and listservs targeting diverse populations.

2) Information and orientation provided to adjunct faculty has improved. HR and academic affairs have worked together to improve the quality of information provided to newly hired adjunct faculty. All new hires receive a welcome letter from the institution with their contract, a copy of the adjunct faculty handbook, a manual listing pertinent information about campus services available for faculty and students, and a copy of the academic calendar and pay schedule. Adjunct faculty also have the option to attend a three-hour orientation session prior to the start of the semester. All orientation materials are also made available online for those unable to attend in person.

3) Contracts and promotion opportunities for non-tenure-track faculty have improved. While they are initially hired on one-year contracts, full-time, non-tenure-track faculty at Villanova are eligible after their second successful year of teaching for a three- or five-year contract. These faculty receive annual teaching evaluations, but also a more in-depth evaluation of teaching effectiveness in their third year. They are also eligible for promotion opportunities if they meet the requirements for scholarly research and publications. To help them to pursue these opportunities, Villanova provides access to funding at the department level to support travel to and participation in professional conferences and other development opportunities.

4) Greater stability and increased compensation for effective adjunct faculty. The majority of the adjunct instructors at Villanova teach only one course, often continuing each semester or year. HR and academic affairs have worked together to minimize turnover among adjunct faculty who are performing well. As these individuals continue to teach at the institution, they also receive increasing levels of compensation.

5) Inclusion in faculty governance and decision making. Villanova policy allows contingent faculty to attend their academic department meetings and vote on most matters (with a few exceptions, such as rank and tenure decisions). This faculty contingent also has representatives serving on the Faculty Congress.
typically are hired on an annual basis, but some have multi-year contracts, often for three to five years. Such longer contracts, she says, provide some job security, offer stability for planning courses and curricula, and allow more time for carrying out the service and leadership work traditionally done by tenure-track faculty. Kezar also notes that this model allows for better pay and access to benefits for these faculty members, enables them to participate in governance and decision making, and ensures that they receive access to professional development and are more meaningfully engaged in the life of the campus community.

3) **Medical School Model** – While many medical schools already have this model in place, Kezar notes that this approach, or a variation of it, could hold promise for other types of institutions, as well. In this model, faculty positions are organized into three main tracks: research, education and clinical. Faculty in all three tracks are typically ensured equitable working conditions, with similar salaries, benefits and support. Faculty members holding appointments in any of these three tracks have primary responsibilities for that particular area of practice, but may still spend some of their time attending to the others. In the medical school model, faculty members are included in the governance process and have voting rights, regardless of track, position or rank.

4) **Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered Model** – Ernest Boyer’s vision for the faculty workforce, as laid out in his landmark work, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, is organized around four key aspects of faculty roles — discovery, integration, application and teaching — and encourages and rewards faculty for engaging in a broad range of scholarly activities.

5) **Shared Faculty Consortium Arrangements** – In this model, multiple neighboring institutions jointly hire full-time faculty members to provide instruction at multiple institutions. Each professor has a home institution, where he or she teaches several courses, has office hours and receives evaluations for contract renewal or tenure. But these faculty also teach one course per semester at other consortium institutions and have access to all resources and facilities on all campuses at which they teach. This model provides greater job security for faculty and more flexibility for institutions.

6) **Interdisciplinary Faculty Collaboration Model** – This model, says Kezar, promotes greater collegiality and collaboration across units by utilizing team teaching approaches that expose faculty and students alike to different perspectives inside and outside the classroom. It engages faculty members in extensive professional development and offers opportunities to work with colleagues on other campuses in order to share effective practices and learn from different approaches. The Evergreen State College in Washington has used this approach for decades.

**What’s Next for The Delphi Project?**
After five years of work with The Delphi Project, Kezar and her colleagues have no intention of slowing down and are, in fact, looking ahead to what the next five years will hold. The project recently received grant funding from the Teagle Foundation that will enable it to reward institutions that are employing new faculty models and better supporting contingent faculty, which, says Kezar, will help make this work more visible. “We’re excited to be able to recognize and reward institutions that are innovating and experimenting,” she says. Kezar also says she and her colleagues plan to keep doing what they’ve been doing — highlighting best practices, conducting research into different faculty models and support systems, and spreading the word and making the case for change. “We’re intent on turning the tide,” she says.

To learn more about The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success and to access the resources, reports and case studies of best practices mentioned in this article, visit [www.thechangingfaculty.org](http://www.thechangingfaculty.org). You can also follow The Delphi Project on Twitter [@DelphiEdu](https://twitter.com/DelphiEdu).