

Making Progress Toward Part-Time Faculty Equity

by Debbie Klein

The California Community College system's over-reliance upon part-time faculty is the most chronic and systemic inequity of teaching in the California community colleges. Although the Education Code deems part-time faculty temporary, part-time faculty are not only permanent but have comprised 70 percent of all California community college faculty for over two decades (figure 1). Furthermore, California law does not require part-time faculty be paid for anything beyond the classroom hour, and current law limits a part-time workload to 67 percent of an equivalent full-time load in a single district.



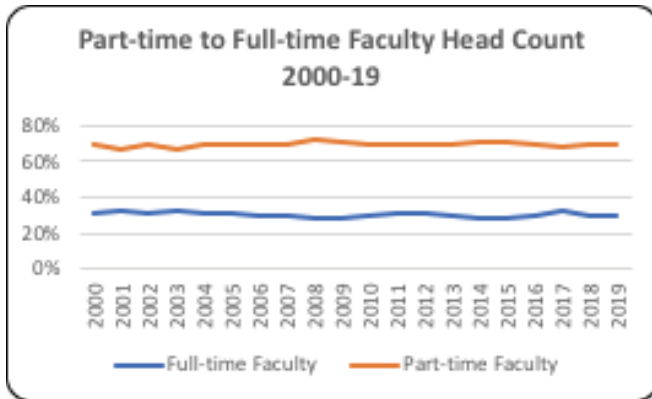


Figure 1: Data retrieved from the Chancellor's Office

Making progress toward part-time faculty equity will allow colleges to better serve students, achieve success goals, and transform into equitable workplaces for the majority of their employees. In order to make progress, the California Community College system will need to invest in the following changes:

- » Make measurable and incremental progress toward part-time faculty workplace equity—compensation parity, paid health benefits, paid office hours, personal leave, and access to full workload.
- » Fully integrate part-time faculty within community college policy and programs, including Guided Pathways, Student Equity and Achievement (SEA), Strong Workforce, Student Success initiatives, and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Task Force Recommendations.
- » Meaningfully address the two-tiered system in which the majority of faculty must function under unjust and physically exhausting conditions.
- » Support the elimination of practices that marginalize part-time faculty so that student outcomes improve and colleges become more equitable learning environments.

How Did We Get Here?

While the origins of the current two-tier system between full- and part-time faculty date back to the

1960s, it was not too long afterward that the system began proposing partial solutions. Dating back to the 1970s, the system recognized that this two-tier structure had a corrosive effect on students but never exercised leadership to eliminate it altogether.

In 1978, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors (CCCBOG) approved the principle of limiting part-time faculty for credit instruction to 25 percent. A decade later, the state enshrined the system's goal of 75 percent credit instruction taught by full-time faculty into the Education Code. Over the subsequent 10 years, the Legislature approved measures establishing state funds to incentivize districts to offer paid office hours and health benefits to part-timers, which was followed in the early 2000s by a line-item in the state budget (meant to be the first of five) to achieve pay equity between full- and part-timers.

These efforts continued in more recent history, including a 2012 legislative affirmation in the Student Success Act linking student success to access to faculty, along with a call for more full-time faculty and increased support of part-time faculty. In 2016, AB 1690 (Medina) and SB 1379 (Mendoza) successfully connected negotiation for part-time faculty seniority to student success. In 2017, FACCC-sponsored ACR 32 (Medina) called upon the community college system to prioritize achievement of both 75/25 and part-time equity.

Despite these legislative efforts, the basic inequities between the two classes of faculty have intensified with the system claiming powerlessness under the guides of the Legislature's failing to direct specific money for this purpose. Over the past 10 years, there has been no real progress in the percent of instruction taught by full-time faculty, which today hovers just over 56.

Part-time faculty, with identical academic qualifications as their full-time colleagues, are hired to prepare, teach, and assess their classes. Most part-time faculty offer office hours

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even though many colleges do not provide compensation or appropriate office space.

FACCC and the faculty unions have a long history of advocating for part-time faculty rights and continue to push for compensation parity (equal pay for equal work), job security, and medical and other benefits. Faculty groups are also leading conversations about creating a statewide system and culture that fosters respect, inclusion, collegiality, and equity among all faculty.

Making Progress: Lifting the Part-time Workload Limit

AB 897 (Medina), a bill currently before the Legislature, would raise the part-time workload cap from 67 percent to 80 to 85 percent. This is something our faculty, students, other stakeholders, and community members can advocate for right now.

The long-standing practice of limiting the load taught by individual part-time faculty, currently set at 67 percent of a full-time load, is a sacred cow for many. It's universally recognized that we need more full-time faculty to serve our students. In 1988, the system's vision that full-time faculty teach at least 75 percent credit classroom instruction was memorialized as a goal in the California Education Code. However, over 30 years since, the funding required to make progress has been sporadic at best. Over the past 20 years, the percentage of credit instruction by part-time faculty has increased rather than decreased, currently around 44 percent. It is significant that over the same period, the faculty head count has stayed remarkably steady at around 70 percent part-time to around 30 percent full-time (figure 1).

In addition to the 30-year failure to reach the 75 percent full-time faculty goal, the system has also failed to make progress on part-time faculty workplace equity, an issue the Legislature embraced when it initiated, nearly 20 years ago, three community college budget line items funding

office hours, health benefits, and compensation parity (equal pay for equal work). These funding sources have been subject to severe reductions whenever state revenues falter and have only rarely been restored when the overall revenue picture improved.

Why would a state so concerned about student success and so reliant on a part-time workforce be so reluctant to provide essential budgetary support for its faculty? It is surprising that system leaders have been willing partners in the state's exploitation of part-time faculty and unwilling to do all they can to address the needs of our students.

The literature concludes that student access to and contact with faculty is the most significant factor in determining student success. For a compilation of research on the importance of faculty to student success, please see FACCC's literature review, *Why Faculty Matter: The Role of Faculty in the Success of Community College Students*. Full-time faculty are under contract and compensated for maintaining such contact, but part-time faculty, who teach almost half of the courses are not required by state law to be compensated for student access outside the classroom. When part-time faculty do make themselves accessible, they rarely have office space in which to meet with students. In this era of attention to student success, it should be shocking to see that many colleges have turned their backs on the state funding, however meager, provided for part-time faculty office hours.

Limited to 67 percent of a full-time load, frequently paid at a rate much less than the full-time equivalent, and with little or no support in terms of health care, professional development activities, and personal leave allowances, many part-time faculty are forced into a frenetic work life of constantly traveling from one college to another. This leaves only a minimal amount of time and energy for consultation with students, which is so important to their success.

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How can the system remain complacent under this current two-tier system in which the majority of faculty must function under such stressful conditions? In addition to the negative impact on the faculty, what is the consequence of this daily strain on service to students and the colleges? Are we comfortable with this situation?

Lifting the 67 percent workload cap would move the system closer to part-time equity and increase student success. If part-time faculty were able to teach a larger load at one college, these could all occur:

- » Increased student success due to more part-time faculty availability;
- » Faculty travel less everyday (good for the environment);
- » Faculty are physically and mentally healthier;
- » More faculty participation in shared governance;
- » Greater faculty integration into the life of the college;
- » Part-time positions would become more appealing and would attract more talent;
- » Part-time positions and faculty would be more stable;
- » Being a part-time faculty member could become a more viable career choice;
- » Increased part-time faculty equity;
- » Part-time faculty would be professionally supported and could support themselves;
- » Fewer part-time faculty would have to share the same office space;
- » Scheduling fewer part-time faculty would save districts time and money;
- » Colleges would have less trouble finding part-time faculty to teach courses

What Can You Do Now?

This bill needs your support. Please advocate for the support of AB 897 to allow us to make progress toward part-time faculty equity:

- » AB 897 (Medina) raises the part-time workload cap from 67 percent to 85 percent.

FACCC will keep you posted as opportunities to advocate for this bill in Sacramento arise. Meanwhile, contact your local representatives in their district offices to educate them about this bill. During a moment in which the California community colleges are attempting to become more equitable institutions, how can our colleges remain complacent under this permanent two-tier structure? While studies affirm the negative impact on our students, the corporatized model of education finds it too convenient to eliminate a non-benefitted underpaid workforce.

Community college faculty and their representative organizations are re-envisioning community college education through the lens of equity and social justice. As the system implements best practices for student learning, engagement, growth, and success, it should also lead the way in implementing best practices for part-time faculty inclusion and equity. ■

Some of the ideas presented in this article have been published in previous FACCC venues. I want to thank Rich Hansen, Mary Ellen Goodwin, and Deirdre Frontczak for collaborating on previous pieces focusing on part-time faculty equity.