

AFT Resolutions

ENDING THE EXPLOITATION OF AND THE RELIANCE ON A CONTINGENT ACADEMIC LABOR SYSTEM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

WHEREAS, American colleges and universities have long been recognized as world leaders in higher education, both in instruction and in research; and

WHEREAS, access to and success in higher education are more important than ever to ensure that students reach their fullest potential and that the United States continues to develop as a just society, a vibrant democracy and an engine of opportunity; and

WHEREAS, frontline academic workers—college faculty—are central to the mission of providing a high-quality education to students; and

WHEREAS, this promise demands that students be taught and mentored by faculty and staff who are well-prepared, professionally supported and guaranteed a voice in academic decisions; and

WHEREAS, this reputation is being undermined by the systematic dismantling of the structures that contributed to the system's efficacy and quality; and

WHEREAS, the promise of higher education is under attack by those who demand and pursue austerity, polarization, privatization and deprofessionalization; and

WHEREAS, state appropriations for higher education per full-time enrollment have been cut to their lowest level in 25 years, an ongoing disinvestment that disproportionately impacts institutions serving those who have traditionally been excluded from higher education; and

WHEREAS, state disinvestment has also led to an instructional workforce in which more than 75 percent of available jobs are contingent; and

WHEREAS, the exclusion of three-quarters of faculty from permanence, shared governance and the full protection of academic freedom weakens the entire college or university, and the weakening of shared governance has contributed to the undermining of academic quality as administrators attempt to seize control of the curriculum from faculty; and

WHEREAS, contingent faculty face precarious employment situations from term to term; uncertainty about their prospects for being rehired, despite rehiring being a repetitive process that occurs every term; uncertainty or late notifications about what courses they will be teaching when they are rehired, which affect their ability to prepare for these courses; and

WHEREAS, while contingent faculty are among the most talented and dedicated of educators, their working conditions affect student learning conditions: Contingent faculty's lack of access to equitable pay and benefits, lack of job security, lack of access to professional supports, and lack of access to a voice in their workplace and profession place constraints on the quality of the education they are providing; and

WHEREAS, polling data show that almost half of contingent faculty would prefer full-time, tenure-track positions; and

WHEREAS, the institutional practice of relying on a system of labor that exploits a large number of precarious faculty undermines the educational and civic missions of our colleges and universities; and

WHEREAS, if we are to reclaim the promise of higher education and provide a high-quality college experience for all students, we must begin with a fundamental reinvestment in the higher education instructional staff, and we must demand an end to the reliance on an underpaid and undersupported contingent workforce:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers reaffirm its commitment to ending the practice of contingent employment as the normalized state of employment for faculty, as well as to improving the lives of contingent faculty by ending the rank exploitation of the majority of the higher education instructional workforce; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will work with contingent faculty to organize local unions for the purpose of collective bargaining in order to improve their lives and working conditions; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will conduct research on the impact of contingency on the lives of faculty, on academic institutions, on students and on the economy—where low wages not only prevent workers from contributing to economic growth, but also promote taxpayer subsidization for services that are accessible to those employed in stable jobs; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to work with its affiliates and promote their successes in collective bargaining to bring about the elimination of contingency within the instructional workforce by advocating for faculty currently in contingent positions and all new faculty entering the workforce to achieve:

- **Pay equity, including compensation for class preparation time and office hours;**
- **Equitable access to employee benefits;**
- **Access to and compensation for opportunities for professional development;**
- **Meaningful job security, including job security comparable to tenure, long-term academic appointment contracts or certificates of continuing employment, which guarantee the presumption of rehiring;**
- **Opportunities for career advancement, including conversion opportunities to full-time, tenure-track positions;**
- **Enforceable standards for the timely notification of teaching appointments;**
- **Protections for academic freedom, regardless of tenure status; and**
- **Full inclusion in and compensation for participation in all institutional work, including service, research and governance; and**

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to work with and mobilize its affiliates to increase funding for instruction and student support services and ensure that these funds are used to build a stable and professional faculty corps and expand access for contingent faculty to healthcare, retirement and unemployment insurance; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to engage in collective action with our affiliates, our members, our students and our communities to build a movement that educates people about the impact of contingency on the lives of teachers and their students and on the quality of education and effectively advocates for high-quality, student-centered public colleges and universities that are grounded by a stable, professional instructional workforce; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will work toward these ends in unity with students, parents, faculty, staff and the community to reclaim the promise of higher education.

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