

NOT JUST A PART-TIME TEACHER:
HOW WILL THE STATUS OF NON-TENURE TRACK FACULTY
CHANGE AT BYU-IDAHO?

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For part-time faculty, status is a problem. This lesser status appears in different ways. A student's innocent, even complimentary comment to me illustrated the lower financial status of part-time faculty, "For a part-time teacher, you don't get paid enough to work so hard." More disturbing than being relegated to a lower financial status is the attitude reflected in another, more critical student comment, "For a part-time teacher, you work us too hard." Undeniably, the title *part-time* or *adjunct* suggests lower status. I've perpetuated this myth of lower status myself. When people comment, "Oh you teach at Ricks. Wow! That's great." I frequently respond, "Oh, but I just work part-time."

An article in a Conference of College Composition and Communications publication warns of the danger of this lower status. It explains that the limited status of part-time faculty (limits in salary, benefits, inclusion, job-security, promotion opportunities) limits the effectiveness of part-time faculty members (Hendrix). In one of several proposals to improve the status of part-time faculty, the Modern Language Association declared, "The compensation of NTT [non-tenure track] faculty members must be substantial enough to ensure that they are supported in, and can be held accountable for, course preparation, student involvement, and professional development appropriate to their responsibilities" (MLA Committee). In 1998, 40% of all faculty at four-year colleges and universities were non-tenure track faculty as were 65% of the faculty in community colleges (Kirby-Werner). Thus, the status of part-time faculty greatly influences the quality of education for significant numbers of students. Based on these concerns, many national organizations—such as the Two-Year College Association, National Council of Teachers of English, American Association of University Professors, Modern Language Association, National Education Association—have championed part-time faculty in their search for status, "rallying NTT faculty and the profession as a whole behind the cause to improve NTT working conditions and overall integration in the professional life of the academy" (Kirby-Werner).

In fact, many two-year college teachers battle similar problems with status in the academic community. During the last several years, as I have participated in the Two-Year College Association, I have often heard the

battle cry, “Two-year colleges should not have a lesser status.” Instead of accepting a lesser status in the educational hierarchy, two-year colleges explain, “We do something different from research universities, but we do it well. We *teach*.” Likewise, for decades Ricks College has fought the attitude that Ricks is the little-brother school, trying to grow up to be like the big brother. The administration, faculty, and staff at Ricks have preached and practiced the philosophy that we set a high standard for what we do: teach students. Ricks College has built upon that distinction as its primary strength without denying a difference. So the part-time faculty here have shared a bond, a sort of common quest for recognition and appreciation—for status.

However, as Ricks College’s status changes, I have wondered, even worried, about my status as a part-time faculty member. A part-time friend voiced my thoughts when she questioned, “When my colleagues become university professors will the status-gulf between me and them grow?”

I hope it won’t. Two facts address this concern.

First, although the lesser status of part-time faculty poses a real problem, it is based on a myth. Part-time teachers are not lesser teachers. They are not less committed, less qualified, less professional, and they often don’t even put in less time. For example, Ricks teachers claim the distinction of spending a great deal of one-on-one time with students. This distinction isn’t dependent on the status of being part-time or full-time. My office is Grand Central Station, but I mean this as a compliment not a complaint. I have a beautiful, large office, with plenty of space and equipment for the five part-time faculty who share it. I love and learn from my interaction with these women, and I love our office. For the greater part of most days, one or more students join us in it. “Is Sister Peterson in?” “When will Sister Wood be back from class?” “Will Sister Anderson come in today?” These women bend over backwards to meet with students and help them with not only class-related questions, but also with broader academics issues and even personal problems, as do the full-time faculty. I admire these teachers for their commitment to their students.

Here’s another poignant example of the commitment of part-time faculty. A Ricks teacher (another friend of mine who happens to be part-time) received a call late one night from the mother of a student she had taught several semesters earlier. This teacher had maintained a friendship with the girl, and the mother knew she could count on that. She also knew that this teacher understood the struggles this girl faced. The mother was calling because the girl’s boyfriend at home had commit-

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ted suicide, “I’m afraid she’ll go to pieces. Can you help?” The teacher’s immediate response, “Of course.” Despite this teacher’s part-time status, despite her not being paid for this kind of stuff, despite the long commute to reach her student, she left immediately to give guidance and support. Such dedication is common to most teachers—full-time or part-time—at Ricks. I’m proud of it.

There is another reason part-time teachers should have valued status at BYU-Idaho. When President Hinckley announced the transition, he stressed that our primary focus remains teaching students. “Effective teaching and advising will be the primary responsibilities of this faculty—both full-time and part-time—who are committed to academic excellence” (News Release). President Bednar reiterated the Prophet’s announcement that BYU-Idaho will continue to stress teaching students over university status:

Ricks College has long been recognized as a school where students receive personal, individualized attention. Some prospective students are wondering if that tradition will continue. At the press conference last week, Elder Eyring indicated that ‘...the character of the school will remain very much the teaching-oriented, student-oriented institution it has always been.’ I, too, want to assure you that as this transition takes place, one of our top priorities will be to preserve and enhance the caring environment that has always existed on this campus. (Letter from President Bednar)

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In summary, the following two facts should lead to part-time faculty having valued status at BYU-Idaho. First, the part-time faculty at Ricks College teach well and deserve recognition as excellent teachers. Second, BYU-Idaho will continue the reputation Ricks has earned as a teaching institution. This focus is further enhanced by the decision to not incorporate rank among faculty, which also speaks to concerns about a status gulf between part-time faculty and their colleagues.

Though status poses a problem for part-time teachers, it should not define who I am. I should not define myself by any status: part-time teacher, full-time teacher, junior college teacher, or university professor. My status at BYU-Idaho should be based on the quality of my teaching, not how many credits I teach. ☺

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