

Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: 2020 Supplement
INVITED ESSAY



**Undoing Years of Affirmative Action:
The Growth of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty**

Adrianna Kezar

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By Morgan Taylor, Jonathan M. Turk, Hollie M. Chessman, and Lorelle L. Espinosa

This chapter is part of a larger report by the American Council on Education (ACE) titled *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: 2020 Supplement*, which follows ACE's 2019 release of *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*. These reports, along with their accompanying microsite, provide a data-informed foundation for those working to close persistent equity gaps by providing a comprehensive review of the educational pathways of today's college students and the educators who serve them.

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Visit www.equityinhighered.org to learn more about the project and to download the full report, figures, detailed data tables, and other resources on race and ethnicity in higher education.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the ACE website. At the top left is the ACE logo with the text 'American Council on Education' and 'RACE AND ETHNICITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION'. To the right is a navigation menu with links for HOME, ABOUT, INDICATORS, DATA SOURCES, DATA TABLES, and RESOURCES. Below the navigation is a large hero section with a background image of a smiling woman. The main heading is 'RACE AND ETHNICITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION'. Below the heading is a welcome message: 'Welcome! Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education provides a data-informed foundation for those working to close persistent equity gaps by providing a glimpse into the educational pathways of today's college students and the educators who serve them.' To the right of the welcome message are two featured findings: '40.1% of Associate Degrees were Earned by Students of Color' and '31.5% of Bachelor's Degrees were Earned by Students of Color'. Below the welcome message are two buttons: 'EXPLORE THE FINDINGS' and 'DOWNLOAD THE REPORT'. At the bottom left is a section titled 'Explore the Findings' with a paragraph of text and a 'Download Reports >' link. At the bottom right is a blue box with the text 'NEW: IDEAS AND INSIGHTS' and 'View essays, videos, podcasts, and more >' next to a play button icon.

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Undoing Years of Affirmative Action: The Growth of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

Adrianna Kezar, Wilbur-Kieffer Endowed Professor, Rossier Dean's Professor in Higher Education Leadership, Director, Pullias Center for Higher Education and Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California

When thinking about equity gaps in faculty hiring and promotion, campus leaders tend to think exclusively about tenure-track faculty. Yet, tenured or tenure-track faculty make up only 30 percent of the faculty nationally. As a result, efforts at increasing faculty diversity are being directed at the smaller category of the professoriate. The other 70 percent are non-tenure-track or contingent faculty—those generally on semester-to-semester or one-year appointments—and their ranks are only increasing. But as non-tenure-track faculty have increased in number, virtually no one has researched their racial diversity.¹

Efforts to diversify the faculty must expand beyond the tenure track, and research that supports this effort is needed. In 2002, the American Council on Education (ACE) was one of the first organizations to examine the racial composition of non-tenure-track faculty, finding less racial diversity among part-time faculty than among full-time faculty at all institution types (Anderson 2002). Only vocational fields, natural sciences, and engineering demonstrated more racial diversity among part-timers than among full-timers. In other words, even early data suggested a dearth of racial diversity among part-time faculty, but few studies were done in the next decade.

More recently, Finkelstein, Conley, and Schuster (2016) reported a “mushrooming” of hiring faculty of color on part-time lines compared with the past. Keep in mind that the numbers of faculty of color are still quite small: 9 percent in 1993 compared with only 14 percent in 2013 when they conducted their latest study. (During that same time period, White faculty went from 83 percent in 1993 to 72 percent of part-time faculty in 2013.²)

While non-tenure-track positions are the new faculty majority, scholars of color are not being hired in these positions as often—thus, the professoriate will continue to be predominantly White. And since many non-tenure-track positions are hired outside traditional processes, they often undergo no affirmative-action oversight. Just as one example: department chairs often do much of the non-tenure-track hiring, and they are often White men who may unconsciously hire from their own peer groups and networks.

In her co-authored book *Off-Track Profs*, Edie Goldenberg (2011), a dean at the University of Michigan, traced how the faculty at her institution had become over 50 percent non-tenure track without her knowing it, exploring how this transformation within her colleagues occurred without notice or oversight. She realized that resource-strapped departments had moved to hiring non-tenure-track faculty, with no knowledge at higher levels. She also identified poor data systems both within institutional research offices and within schools and colleges, where data about hiring was not systematic for all employee types.

How might this same dynamic play out across the country—not just with hiring more non-tenure-track faculty but, by extension, hiring more White non-tenure-track faculty? When previous data showed that faculty of color were not overrepresented or even equally represented in non-tenure-track positions, I began to wonder if subtle biases and lack of affirmative-action oversight might be creating a renewed “Whitening” of the faculty. If the majority of faculty are being hired off the tenure track, then the implications of hiring few scholars of color into these positions signals additional concerns around underrepresentation.

If the majority of faculty are being hired off the tenure track, then the implications of hiring few scholars of color into these positions signals additional concerns around underrepresentation.

1 It is important to point out that over the last few decades, the overall number of faculty nationally has risen. While tenure-track faculty make up a smaller percentage of total faculty, they are still a significant number. The hiring of racially diverse individuals into the tenure-track ranks—given the prestige and long-term nature of these positions—should continue to be a focus (National Center for Education Statistics 2016).

2 Unknown race increased from 2 to 7 percent.

So what do the latest data about non-tenure-track faculty show us? First, the majority remain White, accounting for about 70 percent of non-tenure-track faculty. Of part-time, non-tenure-track faculty, only 8.5 percent are African American, 5.3 percent are Hispanic, and American Indians and Pacific Islanders represent less than 1 percent.³ Full-time, non-tenure-track faculty have similar numbers: African Americans and Hispanics are at 6.4 percent and 4.8 percent, respectively, and American Indians and Pacific Islanders are at less than 1 percent. Indeed, when we compare between part-time and full-time faculty (whether tenure track or non-tenure track), for most racial groups the percentages in full-time positions are relatively close to the percentages in part-time ones, with two exceptions. Black faculty are underrepresented in both categories (full time and part time), but find themselves more often in part-time positions. Conversely, Asian American faculty are less likely to be in part-time positions compared with full time.

In addition to underrepresentation, faculty of color tend to be located at lower-resourced or two-year institutions. For part-time, non-tenure-track faculty, American Indian and Hispanic faculty are slightly more likely to be at two-year institutions than other racial groups. Faculty of color are much more likely than White faculty to be at for-profit institutions. This tendency could be because of bias in hiring at four-year schools, and it could also be that faculty of color are opting to be at diverse institutions in order to mentor and support students from their own background. Some qualitative data suggests that faculty sometimes chose to help their communities and return to particular types of institutions (Baez 2000; Stanley 2006).

In short, while more scholars of color gained their PhDs in higher education than any other time, the number of faculty of color remains low—especially when you consider that students of color make up 45.2 percent of undergraduates and 32 percent of graduate students. And the few scholars who attain faculty positions tend to be in the least resourced and most precarious institutions—two-year and for-profit institutions. Both of these trends suggest a problem in terms of racial diversity in the professoriate for the future.

Why these patterns exist has been explained by two major phenomena: bias in hiring and, with regards to non-tenure track, lack of attractiveness of positions. Bias in hiring has been discussed extensively in other research, so I will focus on the current jobs being unattractive to candidates of color. Studies have shown that scholars of color are abandoning higher education, especially those in STEM, for more stable jobs in industry (Griffin 2019; York and Griffin 2017). This same trend can be seen among other professional areas where scholars of color are opting out of higher education given the poor job security and low wages. The trend to hire contingent positions is likely scaring off scholars of color who feel they can ill afford to take these positions, especially if they come from low-income families where that type of risk is challenging to take on.

Implications for Campus Leaders

This national data about faculty racial composition suggests that campus leaders need to diversify their faculty among all groups—tenure track and non-tenure track, part time and full time. No matter the category, the current faculty is largely White. The data also suggest some disturbing trends that need added attention, such as the larger number of African Americans compared with other racial and ethnic groups within part-time positions and the concentration of various racial groups in the two-year and for-profit sectors.

³ In this essay, Black and African American are used interchangeably.

In addition, the lack of systematic hiring of non-tenure-track faculty should be examined. Any strategies developed for diversifying the non-tenure-track faculty will need to look different from those for the tenure track, as strategies like cluster hiring are not possible for non-tenure track. Some possible approaches that would be more appropriate for non-tenure-track hiring include:

- Develop a task force to examine hiring processes for non-tenure-track positions, evaluating the processes for bias and alignment with affirmative-action policies and goals.
- Take more of a pipeline approach to faculty hiring. The large number of African American faculty on part-time faculty lines could be converted to full-time tenure or non-tenure-track lines.
- Be vigilant to identify the common practices that override well-intended policies, consciously or unconsciously. Administrators may want to craft accountability mechanisms for part-time hiring since the majority of faculty are hired into part-time positions.

In addition to efforts at the campus level, we need more research to understand how institutions are hiring faculty for non-tenure-track positions. Studies need to look at different sectors and explore promising practices from those who have had success hiring diverse faculty, such as community colleges. Virtually no studies exist on hiring processes on non-tenure-track lines, especially compared with tenure-track roles where hundreds of studies exist.

What is important is that groups such as ACE and projects like Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education are beginning to track the growth of contingent faculty to better understand the many implications of this trend. If we only concentrate on the shrinking pool of tenure-track faculty, we miss a significant and growing area of importance in faculty diversity and inclusion. This stubborn challenge deserves more research and attention.

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