

The Devil's Advocate:

The two-tier system as meritocracy? The arguments against part-time pay parity with a response from Lantz Simpson

Despite the existence for over five years of an earmarked state budget item to achieve pay parity between full-time and part-time faculty pay scales, some full-time faculty members, and even Senate bodies, continue to state their “philosophical opposition” to the concept of pay parity between full and part-time faculty.

While these views may seem extreme to some of us, they are a significant stumbling block in obtaining equity, given that the more vocal, present, and tenured FT’s almost always win at the table over the more passive, scattered, ‘at will’ part-timers in a wall to wall unit.”

Here are some of their stated arguments, as related by an anonymous source, followed by commentary from Lantz Simpson, full-time faculty member, president of the Santa Monica Faculty Association, and former chair of CPFA.

Part-timers are always calling for equal pay for equal work, but part-timers and full-timers are NOT EQUAL. In order to obtain tenure, the FT often must move across the country and go through several second interviews to be the 1 out of 400 applicants that lands a job in the same college where PT’s teach. The FT must go through four years of a rigorous and extensive evaluation process, and must often make several pedagogical changes in order to fit into a particular college’s ‘culture.’ The PT, on the other hand, is hired upon a single call from a department chair and is not seriously evaluated.

Lantz replies:

Clearly, this argument asserts that hiring procedures, evaluation procedures, and tenure rights should be an additional element in calculating compensation. This argument attempts to shift the issue of compensation for the work itself to some intrinsic value of the worker who performs it.

Take me, for example. I moved across the country—eighteen years ago. I am one of those “1 out of 400”— after seven tries. I’ve just gone through the rigorous tenure evaluation process. Now I’m tenured and better paid, but have I been thereby transformed into a person with greater intrinsic value? The truth is, I’m the same old dog I always was.

It does not necessarily follow as a matter of logic that persons with tenure protections should also receive greater monetary compensation. In fact, one could argue that tenure protection itself has a value and is an additional part of a full timer’s compensation package already.

An equal pay for equal work argument demands a focus on the work itself, as it should, and not on some red herring about individual worthiness.

The FT makes teaching an earnestly pursued career, not a ‘job.’ An instructor who chooses to teach in the K-12 system will work towards that goal with the understanding that tenure, good benefits, and a living wage will be the end goal; these are not ‘entitlements,’ but reasonable expectations every teaching professional should expect. A PT who chooses to keep on teaching for humiliatingly abysmal wages makes it much easier for the state and districts to load up on pseudo-professionals who see teaching as more of a job than a career and in the end cheapens the profession. PT’ who choose to settle for such unprofessional wages may deserve something more, but they are NOT EQUAL and should stop saying they are.

Lantz replies:

I agree that having a large pool of persons who will work for lower salaries only encourages and perpetuates the practice of hiring a large pool of persons who will work for lower salaries. However, this argument omits another group who also perpetuate the practice—full time faculty who have overloads. Taking this argument to its logical end, one must further conclude that overload work is also pseudo-professional. Once overloads are acknowledged, this argument has the additional defect of being hypocritical. And it raises even more questions about the first argument, e.g., if a full-timer has more intrinsic worth, does he lose it when he teaches an overload?

You don't understand our philosophical differences towards the profession and the professoriate; all you can see is better hourly pay and teaching broken down into hourly components. FT's do a huge amount of uncompensated work behind the scenes so that all the PT has to worry about are duties directly linked to each classroom assignment.

Lantz replies:

Being paid by the hour is not necessarily unprofessional—look at lawyers. More importantly, this argument actually contradicts earlier arguments regarding better compensation for full time faculty. How can a self-respecting professional even be doing uncompensated work? Anyone who does uncompensated work behind the scenes is a damned fool and a sucker, and is not really behaving professionally. And this unprofessional behavior in no way benefits part-time faculty.

The 75/25 goal of fulltime/part-time instruction reflects a goal to have a “full-time” academic culture. Therefore the concerns of the “real” professoriate should be primary, and this priority of interest should be reflected in the power balance within the local union leadership.

Lantz replies:

Dividing the faculty into “real” (full time) professors and “pseudo” (part-time) professors is ultimately self defeating for all faculty. Full time faculty may think they're getting the best end of the stick in a divided union, but in the long run, they're not because the union is weaker when it is divided.

What if one takes the priority argument to its logical conclusion? One could argue that teaching faculty should have more priority than counselors (or vice versa) or that department chairs should have more priority than other faculty, or that lecture faculty should have more priority than lab faculty. One could go on and on in conceiving ways to prioritize among faculty and divide them.

Commonality of interest is a more powerful union position than prioritizing the needs of one group over another. At Santa Monica, faculty unity has worked. In union affairs, full time and part-time faculty work together on a daily basis. In negotiations, we have a firm rule. Our negotiators never trade off the interests of one group over another at the bargaining table. That kind of strategic unity has been our priority. As a result, we rank high in the state in terms of both full time pay and part-time pay. And we remain committed to the goal of 100% pay parity.