



# How might faculty roles & engagements evolve in light of the global pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic will alter the landscape of faculty roles, as have upheavals of the past. Yet changes in faculty roles often have not been intentional or thoughtful—nor have they had positive impacts on institutions achieving their missions.

My predictions for the faculty, based on historical trends and empirical patterns from recent data, are sketched out here. In addition to this sobering picture, I also offer recommendations for setting a new course for faculty roles and the future of higher education.



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## 1. Intensified adjunctification

Over the past several decades, when financial hardships impacted higher education (i.e., retrenchment in public funding in the 1980s, financial struggles that continued into the 1990s, and the 2008-09 recession), campus leaders responded by increasing the numbers of adjunct faculty. Adjuncts offer workforce flexibility, given that they typically have semester-to-semester appointments. Further, they are the most cost-effective option, given their low pay and lack of benefits (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). In light of this decades-long pattern, it is conceivable that the response to the pandemic will be to amplify this trend.

My recommendation: Resist the urge to hire more adjuncts and instead invest in faculty. In prior eras, disinvestment in faculty has been at the cost of student success, persistence and graduation (Kezar & Maxey, 2014).

## 2. Halt to the growth of full-time nontenure track (NTTF)

In response to disconcerting research about the relationship between students taking courses with adjuncts and poor persistence and graduation, campuses were beginning to hire more full-time NTTF, according to national data (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Indeed, some campuses were announcing large-scale hiring of this class of faculty. Research has shown that individuals in full-time NTTF are able to provide effective teaching for students and support their overall development (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Unfortunately, given that full-time NTTF salaries are higher than adjuncts, and they receive benefits as well, campuses are likely to stop hiring individuals on these tracks.

My recommendation: Continue to hire more full-time NTTF and tenure track faculty to support students and institutional mission.

## 3. End of experiments to create more effective faculty roles

Dozens (perhaps hundreds, as there is no national data) of campuses have begun creating task forces and engaging in discussions about new faculty roles. Some were experimenting with implementing Boyer's 1990 recommendations on reconsidering scholarship and/or his creativity contracts; others were looking at experiments such as those at Evergreen State College or Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to rethink their faculty (Kezar & Maxey, 2015). In the current climate, these important groups and discussions may be put on hold, and perhaps permanently left on hiatus. When priorities change, leaders typically do not go back to earlier initiatives.

My recommendation: Place any faculty planning committees on a short-term hiatus for 2020, with a start-up date in 2021 so as to not lose momentum on this important thinking.

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### 4. Campuses will pull back on support for faculty development for teaching

One positive emerging trend is that campuses are offering high quality professional development on how to teach well in the online environment to all their faculty, regardless of contract type, including adjuncts. In the past, NTTF were generally not provided access to professional development, nor supported in their teaching. Many NTTF across the country are reporting that they are now receiving access to professional development on par with their tenure-track colleagues. I predict that this support for teaching will dissipate with the pandemic: professional development for faculty across contracts will revert to being a low priority.

My recommendation: Make ongoing professional development for all faculty the new normal. Increase levels of funding for centers for teaching and learning. Find new ways to invest in professional development.

Clearly, most of these recommendations require that institutions resist making up for budgetary shortfalls by gutting the faculty and its professional development. If my recommendations are ignored, I predict continued growth of unionization, ongoing decline of shared governance, and a lack of progress on advancing student success initiatives (Kezar & DePaola, 2018).

**Make ongoing professional development for all faculty the new normal.**

### Read more:

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*.

Kezar, A., & Maxey, D. (2016). *Recognizing the need for a new faculty model*. In A. Kezar & D. Maxey (Eds.), *Envisioning the faculty for the twenty-first century: Moving to a mission-oriented and learner-centered model*.

Kezar, A., & Maxey, D. (2015). *Adapting by Design: Creating Faculty Roles and Defining Faculty Work to Ensure an Intentional Future for Colleges and Universities*.

Kezar, A., & Maxey, D. (2014). *Faculty matter: So why doesn't everyone think so?*

Kezar, A., & DePaola, T. (2018). *Understanding the need for unions: Contingent faculty working conditions and the relationship to student learning*. In K. Tolley (Ed.), *Professors in the gig economy: The unionization of adjunct faculty in America*.

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