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Dr. Smitter  
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National Communication Association  
1765 N. Street, NW  
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22 December 2005

Dear Dr. Smitter:

The AAUP has developed statistics indicating that some 46% of college level academic faculty members work on a temporary or contingent basis. While there are no hard statistics for the field of communication, there is no reason to believe that the field of communication has a lower percentage of faculty members who work on a contingent basis. This issue has been raised several times over the last several years in CRTnet and has been the subject of increasing discussion at conventions. Davis Foulger, John Price, and Kerry Egdorf opened a web site and discussion list in support of the objective of creating a Temporary Faculty Unit of NCA during the spring of 2005. We were soon joined by others, including Paul Turpin and John Arnold. The membership of that list, even with only modest publicity and some dropouts, has risen to over 50 since that time. An open forum discussing the possibility of starting a Temporary Faculty Caucus in NCA was held at the NCA convention in Boston on Saturday, November 19. Six NCA members, all of whom currently hold temporary faculty positions, attended the meeting. A decision was made to seek caucus status.

The decision to seek caucus, rather than division or section status, is based on a reading of the constitution and bylaws of NCA. Specifically, we regard the needs of temporary faculty, and the needs of the field, suggest the need for advocacy on the part of temporary and contingent faculty as a group that is subject to a persistent and self-reinforcing pattern of discrimination that makes it difficult for faculty members in contingent positions to compete for full-time tenure track positions. This pattern differs from the patterns associated with other NCA caucuses only in that the basis for the discrimination is not necessarily rooted in such classic sources of discrimination as gender, race, or national origin. For many temporary faculty, the only way out of the self-reinforcing cycle that begins when temporary faculty status is initially accepted is to leave the academy. Details of this discriminatory cycle will be explored below.

Please accept this letter as an official request for NCA's support of a Temporary Faculty Caucus and advocacy of contingent faculty members as an under-represented minority. We will, in the following paragraphs, discuss the reasons why NCA should establish and

support this unit; why it is important for NCA members and the field; how the needs of an important population of NCA members will be uniquely served by this caucus; the kinds of activities we expect the caucus to engage in, and the kinds of advocacy we hope NCA will consider on behalf of temporary faculty members.

First, there is a clear need for a Temporary Faculty Caucus within NCA. While there are no statistics specific to the field of communication, it is easy to identify a large number of departments in which the temporary faculty outnumbers the permanent faculty by a large percentage. Not all temporary faculty members are ill-served by such service. Many people who work as communication professionals enjoy teaching an occasional course and students are often enriched by the experience of encountering working professionals teaching what they do. For many temporary faculty members, however, contingent status is simply a “do it yourself” full time job that is cobbled together by teaching courses at multiple institutions, usually without any prospect of health, retirement, or other benefits or any assurance of future employment. Even contracted positions can usually be withdrawn right up to the day classes start. Given the traditionally low pay scales associated with these positions it is common for temporary faculty members to teach four to six classes at a time, often without benefit of overlapping preps, with schedule divergences and differences in curricular expectations that ensure that overlapping preps at different institutions require additional preparation, and with additional time expenditures for commutes between multiple institutions.

Contingent faculty members who have active research programs face challenges not only from the inevitable time and financial pressures that follow from these conditions, but from reduced ability to obtain the support and approvals they need to do and publish research. Government grants are all but impossible to get without a stable institutional affiliation. Private grants are also challenging. The lead time associated with, and process variations between, campus Institutional Review Boards combine with these conditions to make it all but impossible to get clearances for research with any assurance that it can be conducted. It is not uncommon, in our field, to seek IRB approvals in one semester with the expectation that the research will be conducted in another semester. Contingent faculty can have no reliable expectation that this strategy will work. Worse, there are situations where contingent faculty may need to have IRB approval for all the campuses they work on before they can conduct research on any.

This sets up a persistent cycle in which the thing contingent faculty need most in order to advance to full time positions, a research program, is almost impossible to maintain. Too many courses with associated prep on too many different campuses with no assurance that research proposals can be approved in time to actually do the research and no reasonable approach to obtaining the grant funds that might enable a break in the cycle. The time pressures are such that it is difficult for contingent faculty members to establish ongoing scholarly discussions or relationships with the full time faculty on which they work, to enter the life of the campus as a community of scholarship, or to engage in service to the departments, colleges, or field with which they are associated. The time and

financial pressures are such that contingent faculty members are often unable to participate in scholarly associations like NCA or benefit from the continuing education of conventions. Temporary faculty members rarely receive any form of financial support for membership in professional organizations or attendance at conventions. It is usually up to the temporary faculty member, already short on funds, to finance such participation.

Even if none of these factors were in play there is a natural tendency, widely observed in the field, to treat temporary faculty status as an attribute of the individual rather than an attribute of the situation. Full time faculty members are often sympathetic to the conditions under which contingent faculty work (the most common descriptive term is "slave labor"), but are unsympathetic to the conditions such employment engenders when hiring for full time positions. There is a perception, widespread in the field, that temporary positions are an indication of a weakness in scholarship. The longer one works as a temporary faculty member, the harder it is to break out of this perception or the cycle that feeds it.

This is (and here we reach our second argument) not just a problem for the temporary faculty member. It is a problem for NCA and the discipline of communication. Contingent faculty members who are teaching above average loads at multiple institutions cannot give the same level of attention to students that they would if they were working in stable positions. This inevitably diminishes the perception of our field by these students. In departments that have large contingent faculty pools, moreover, it is not unusual for at least some contingent faculty members to have borderline qualifications. Again, this inevitably diminishes perception of our discipline. Departments of communication are diminished when temporary faculty members cannot respond to students' questions about majoring in the discipline. Contingent faculty members who are unable to pursue active research programs and cannot afford to attend conventions do not renew their expertise in the field. Again, this inevitably diminishes the perception of our field. Finally, a large pool of good scholars are impeded from advancing scholarship because they lack resources (support, time, and continuity) to do their best work.

While several units of NCA are devoted to resolving discrimination based on demographic characteristics, no unit of NCA is currently oriented to resolving the kinds of problems that result from temporary employment.

We started work on this proposal based on the belief that there are things that temporary faculty can do together to help each other overcome the problems associated with contingent faculty status, including providing encouragement in the form of success stories (some do graduate from long term contingent employment to full time tenure track faculty status), mutual education, research collaboration, and other means. We see this caucus as a way to enable such mutually beneficial activities that will enhance the discipline and the Association.

There are, however, things NCA can do that may be effective in helping to reduce the

cycle of discrimination associated with temporary faculty status and to reduce the incidence of temporary faculty appointments. The proposed undergraduate program accreditation process provides one such opportunity through standards setting for ratios of full to part time faculty, review of the qualifications of contingent faculty, and the encouragement of improved working conditions for contingent faculty (office space, secure storage, support for research initiatives, assurance of continuity of employment, etc). Cooperation with the AAUP and other organizations that are working to address these issues is another avenue. Collection of accurate statistics on contingent employment would be a step forward all by itself. The most important advocacy NCA can make, however, is in providing and supporting means by which contingent faculty can break out of the cycle of oppression, including encouragement and support of contingent faculty fellowships and conferences and provided a centralized mechanism that can lend a persistent institutional affiliation to grant writing and research proposals. It is our expectation that an Temporary Faculty Caucus will provide a focal point for prioritizing and coordinating such activities.

For the reasons above we would like you to process our request to establish a Temporary Faculty Caucus of the National Communication Association.

Enclosed is a petition by more than 50 communication scholars to support this request. Please do not hesitate to ask for more information as needed.

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Encl.: Petition signatures