

UR's Obligation to Ensure the Well-being of Non-Tenure Track Faculty

UR Chapter of the AAUP

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On August 11, 2020, the AAUP's Committee on Contingency and the Profession released a public statement on "[Contingent Faculty and Global Pandemic](#)." At a time when many colleges and universities were proposing various measures to combat the pandemic's financial toll on institutions, the committee cautioned that "removing contingent faculty with expertise and experience undermines student learning in the short term and the institution of higher education in the long term." The University of Rochester AAUP chapter affirms the committee's statement and endorses its recommendation "to extend the rehire or promotion process for a year for any contingent faculty member who wishes to make that choice."

With respect to affording tenure-track faculty pandemic-related support, UR's actions have been rightfully swift. On May 27, 2020, Provost Clark called for tenure clocks to be extended for one year due to the "disruption in teaching, research and scholarship activities stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic." The following week the University Committee on Tenure and Privileges began a study of this issue, reporting to the Faculty Senate in September 2020 and recommending that the faculty of each school create a plan for tenure-clock extensions. To date, however, no comparable measures have been proposed for non-tenure faculty. The seeming disparity between the ethos of care for tenure-track faculty and the relative paucity of care for non-tenure eligible faculty is deeply troubling, and should be remedied immediately. If tenure-stream faculty merit special accommodation due to the unprecedented pressures of this moment, by what justifiable principle ought non-tenure-stream faculty, who already earn less and enjoy fewer protections, be entitled to anything less?

Non-tenure track faculty are essential to UR's educational mission. Their titles and terms of employment vary enormously across the institution, so much so that their exact number is difficult to establish. Their teaching loads vary by department, program, division, and school, as do their extra-curricular and administrative responsibilities: the whole question of who the non-tenure track faculty are and what work they do across the various schools of the university is one that needs careful study. But clearly their contribution to the curriculum is substantial in sum and disproportionate to their numbers. Indeed in some departments, non-tenure track faculty teach the majority of enrolled students. Across the university, therefore, the herculean task of adapting

curriculum and pedagogy to the pandemic has often fallen to the least supported faculty members. Without question, UR's decision to acknowledge and meaningfully alleviate the Covid-era struggles and anxieties of tenure-track faculty is the correct course of action. But the relevant hardships and pressures are only exacerbated in contingency.

We recognize the extraordinary and essential labor furnished by non-tenure-track UR faculty. And while we also recognize the budgetary challenges of this moment, we reject the purported logic of financial necessity that would relegate our already overworked and undercompensated colleagues to ever more anxiety and precarity. The contingent members of our ranks deserve more than this.

In her remarks to the Faculty Senate on December 8, President Sarah Mangelsdorf spoke firmly of the university's obligation as the largest employer in a region of racialized and concentrated poverty to ensure a fair standard of living for staff members. We applaud these sentiments and suggest that they extend to all those contingently employed instructors, who are mostly women, and who too often are treated as exchangeable placeholders to be picked up as needed and then discarded in times of budgetary constraint. Together with persistent patterns of gendered salary inequity, this standing precarity puts an enormous strain on the well-being of too many of us. UR should act swiftly to alleviate these pressures.

The University of Rochester AAUP chapter therefore calls on the university immediately to renew or extend the current contracts of all contingent faculty members. While we commend UR for the care it has exhibited to tenure-track faculty, this ethos of care must be extended to the faculty as a whole. This statement is not a request for symbolic gestures. It is a demand for meaningful action pursuant to the situation: to wit, in a country where health insurance is tethered to employment, employment security--during a pandemic especially--is literally a matter of life and death. Preemptively guaranteeing contracts for AY 21-22 would make a real, material difference in the lives of those of us who are not on the tenure track, and it would speak volumes to how UR values its faculty, and, by extension, our students.