

# ABOLISH TENURE

## notes from the Ivory Tower basement

*That last sentence is a sentiment I've seen in other articles too. Getting tenure is about meeting metrics and getting on well with the people who make that big decision about your future in academia. "Protecting controversial opinions" is pure twaddle – you don't get tenure by rocking a boat.*

*Abolishing tenure and hiring all faculty on a full-time basis would address Higher Education's vaunted ideals of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in meaningful ways by breaking apart an outdated, ossified system and replacing it with a far more flexible mode of hiring and retaining good teachers. It would eliminate the cavernous pay gaps by replacing the "symbolic economy" with a real one that works for everybody.*

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"It's Time for Tenure to Lose  
 Tenure"  
 Harvard Business Review 3/13/2013

"...full professors could enjoy rolling contracts that provide reasonable amounts of job security. As in business, the contract can be bought out if the professor does not perform."  
 Let's make ALL professors full time, with the same contracts and performance expectations.

"Why Tenure is Unsustainable and Indefensible"  
 New York Times 9/2/2010

"If you were the C.E.O. of a company and the board of directors said: "We want this to be the best company of its kind in the world. Hire the best people you can find and pay them whatever is required." "Would you offer anybody a contract with these terms: lifetime employment, no possibility of dismissal, regardless of performance? If you did, your company would fail and you would be looking for a new job. Why should academia be any different from every other profession? ...In fact nothing represses the free expression of ideas more than the long and usually fruitless quest for tenure."

Tenure: "a permanent post, especially as a teacher or professor."

The value of tenure in higher education has been under some scrutiny for several years. Now, as we (hopefully) move toward post-pandemic status, the conversation around the use and value of tenure is once again gaining traction.

As an Adjunct Professor, I'm approaching this primarily from a pay equity and equal protection for free speech point of view. The argument for keeping the tenure system always centers on protecting professors' rights to unpopular and controversial research and speech. Fine, but where is the argument for extending these same rights and protections to ALL faculty, not just a special minority class of teachers?

"Tenure is Dying"  
 Forbes.com 4/13/2020

This article addresses some of the financial ramifications of tying large sums of money to a tenured position. "...making a commitment with a lifetime present value of several million dollars—a huge unfunded liability. Few schools can afford to do this anymore. This has led to the development of two classes of teachers: the academic aristocrats, well paid tenured professors with relatively light teaching loads; and the academic underclass, the contingent faculty with very high teaching loads and modest pay."

"Modest pay" – something of an understatement when there are adjunct professors on food stamps.

"The Future of Tenure: Rethinking a Beleaguered Institution"  
 The Chronicle of Higher Education 4/7/21

"At public universities, tenure is part of the armor protecting faculty members for controversial political speech, even when that speech is unconnected to their teaching or research. **And it is a professional prize, a badge of authority, in the university's hyper-hierarchical symbolic economy.**" (emphasis mine)

Again, extend these protections to ALL faculty, not just the shrinking exclusive set.

In the 1960's and 70's, the vast majority of college professors were full time, as in around 80 percent. That number began to shrink in the 80's and 90's as higher ed hired more contingent faculty. Now, contingent faculty are the majority, with estimates of 55 percent to 75 percent of college and university teachers relegated to permanent part time status.

Meanwhile, the full-time tenured club members get annual pay raises, benefits, faculty development grants, paid sabbaticals and more. My pay as an adjunct has remained unchanged since 2013. I am paid about 85 percent LESS per class, the same classes the Tenured Class teach.

What follows are excerpts from publications addressing the problem of tenure and ideas on correcting this issue.