



CSU hurts students by hiring too many part-time lecturers

BY LILLIAN TAIZ - SPECIAL TO THE BEE
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Sarah Strand, shown teaching at Sacramento State last year, is among a growing force of part-time lecturers at California State University campuses. BRIAN NGUYEN / SACRAMENTO BEE FILE

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It’s bad enough that the California State University is using [more part-time than full-time professors](#).

Dig a little deeper and you’ll find that CSU has been choosing, decade after decade, to follow a corporate model that builds its part-time workforce at the expense of recruiting and retaining permanent faculty. That model is bad for the employees, but it also has serious implications for the 447,000 students who rely on CSU for quality public higher education.

The system’s decision to rely heavily on part-time faculty goes back further than the recent recession and this past academic year. From 1985 to 1997, CSU had more tenured and tenure-track faculty than lecturers with temporary contracts teaching statewide. From 1998 on, however, the rate of part-time and full-time lecturer hiring rose steadily and outpaced that of tenure-line professors, with spikes in the early 2000s and during the last recession. Even pre-recession, during 2005 and 2006, lecturers made up more than 12,000 of CSU faculty, while tenure-track faculty hovered around 10,000.

That hiring pattern is a long-term policy that the CSU has been advancing regardless of the state of the economy. Moreover, in recent years despite greater investment in the CSU at the state level (though not as much as the system needs), these hiring practices have continued.

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Lillian Taiz is president of the California Faculty Association. | California Faculty Association

Even the CSU administration admits that the recent small increase in hiring tenure-track faculty barely moves the needle. According to a report released Nov. 4, while the system’s 23 campuses reported some 750 new tenure-track faculty for the 2014-15 academic year, due to resignations and retirements, the net gain was only 124. The lecturer head count, on the other hand, increased by more than 1,100, the report states.

In 2001, the Legislature made its position on this issue clear by passing ACR 73, a resolution recommending that the university increase the number of tenure-track faculty to at least 75 percent. Nevertheless, for more than a decade, lecturers have constituted more than 50 percent of the CSU faculty.

Our students would call that an epic fail.

In fact, however, it is the students of California who are at risk of failing. Turnover among lecturer faculty is high as they search for long-term, stable teaching positions. Each year on average, the CSU loses 10 percent of its lecturers. Over the course of five years, about half of the lecturers leave. For a student, that means about half the professors they had their freshmen year are gone by the time they graduate.

Building a relationship with a professor enriches a student’s experience; for underserved students and students of color, that connection is even more critical. Faculty members aren’t just educators; they are mentors and trusted confidants who seek to model the value of a good education.

Gov. Jerry Brown and University of California President Janet Napolitano have formed the “Committee of Two” to examine the priorities of the UC system.

What about the nearly half-million students of the CSU? Surely they deserve equal attention. Our students deserve a chance to make those lasting connections with faculty. Faculty members deserve to feel appreciated and be compensated fairly.

It’s time for Californians to start considering all sides of the CSU story, including its hiring practices and the long-term effects of those practices on students and the system. It’s also time for CSU to begin investing in its faculty and moving toward hiring practices that foster student success. If not now, when?

Lillian Taiz, a professor of history at California State University, Los Angeles, is president of the California Faculty Association.

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