

On Academic Freedom, Contingency, and the Tragedy of the Commons

Aaron Plasek
New York University

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Abstract

While in no way backing away from the claim that wage parity for both tenured and non-tenure track faculty should continue to be a goal, I will argue that attempts to achieve this will ultimately fail if our efforts do not first establish parity of academic freedom for all members of the professoriate. The idea of a contingent faculty member having academic freedom may strike the reader as an oxymoron, and this paper will explore in what manner, if any, parity of academic freedom might be achieved. However, the bulk of our attention will be devoted to (1) identifying specific changes in working conditions for adjunct faculty over the past century using available data; (2) suggesting a correlation between the aforementioned data and how the professorate, adopting an attitude of self-interest best exemplified by “tragedy of the commons” arguments, ceded important academic freedoms; (3) and how this erosion of academic freedom has had direct effects on contemporary pedagogy and classroom practice, especially in “first-year” undergraduate courses. Perhaps most importantly, using the critical framework developed throughout this paper, we will conclude by identifying specific short-term and long-term practices that have potential to reclaim lost freedoms.