



Part-Time on the Tenure Track, AEHE Volume 40 Number 5

Herbers, Joan M., ed.
Wiley, 2014

Book Review

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At many institutions of higher education, tenure-track faculty positions are exclusively full-time positions, while part-time appointments are for contingent faculty only. Some schools, however, use job-sharing, joint appointments, phased retirement, and other modes to make part-time positions available for tenured and tenure-track faculty members. In *Part-Time on the Tenure Track*, Joan M. Herbers argues that part-time tenure-track models can benefit both faculty members and the institution.

Through the first half of the book, Herbers gathers and analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data on existing part-time tenure-track (PTTT) faculty. These data show that PTTT faculty report higher levels of job satisfaction than their full-time counterparts. PTTT appointments are most common in medical schools, but there are currently eight thousand PTTT faculty across all institutions with tenure systems (5, 22). While flexibility for child-rearing and other family commitments is a common reason faculty seek out PTTT work, it is by no means the only one. Mid-career faculty may pursue consulting or other interests, late-career faculty may step down job obligations in preparation for retirement, and faculty at any stage can face medical crises or other temporary conditions that make PTTT work especially attractive. Most of the junior faculty in Herbers' analysis eventually receive tenure and hold full-time appointments.

In the second half of the book, Herbers advocates for the wider implementation of PTTT positions by addressing their benefits and challenges, providing policy recommendations, and proposing best practices. Herbers asserts that academia has long been driven by an "ideal worker" model that assumes faculty serious about their careers will work only full-time. Thus,

along with the technical considerations of salary and benefits, teaching and research obligations, involvement in shared governance, and access to faculty development opportunities, faculty considering PTTT work must also reckon with cultural assumptions that privilege the full-time worker. Yet PTTT work provides welcome flexibility to faculty at various stages of life, including those who might otherwise resign their positions (91). Institutions receive the benefits of satisfied and often extraordinarily dedicated workers (91-92).

The most vexing and still-unresolved problem acknowledged in the book is just what constitutes “part-time” work. Telling the story of her own job-sharing arrangement, Herbers recounts that she and her spouse each worked forty hours per week – the standard American full-time work week – in their half-time positions and received together 1.4 salaries (2). She found that schedule to be consistent with the other PTTT faculty she interviewed (100). To be sure, faculty work can be difficult to quantify, since faculty productivity is not usually measured in hours worked. Even so, PTTT positions may reduce compensation for faculty more than they reduce institutional obligations, a pitfall for workers that is both policy- and culture-driven.

Part-Time on the Tenure Track is a succinct yet comprehensive look at a little-known model for faculty work. The book will be an especially helpful resource to administrators who write policies and negotiate contracts, as well as to faculty members who may be considering part-time appointments.

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