

Facilitating Institutional Improvement through Enhanced Benchmarking

BY JOHN BARNSHAW

The key to any longitudinal benchmarking survey is consistency. Generally, consistency in definitions used and data requested from respondents ensures that researchers can effectively track changes over time. For this reason, the AAUP Research Office has been committed for decades to maintaining the same definitions and requesting the same items in the Faculty Compensation Survey.

The higher education landscape, however, has changed. In an effort to better understand the current usefulness of the Faculty Compensation Survey and to assess how proposed changes might more effectively capture the academic labor force, the AAUP Research Office conducted a survey of faculty, administrators, and higher education professionals in summer and fall 2015. Based on the thousands of responses received, and after consultation with diverse constituencies within higher education, we decided that the survey could be improved by (1) providing greater clarity about which faculty members to include and exclude, (2) providing better guidance on reporting categories, (3) including part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants, and (4) eliminating faculty salary distribution data.

GREATER CLARITY ABOUT INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

When the AAUP's Faculty Compensation Survey began, the majority of full-time faculty dedicated most of their time to instructional activity. For decades, the survey reflected this reality by defining the "instructional faculty" as "all those members of the instructional-research staff who are employed full time, regardless of whether they are formally designated 'faculty.' It includes all those whose major regular assignment (at least 50 percent) is instruction, including release time for research."

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While it is still the norm for full-time faculty at two- and four-year teaching-intensive institutions to devote most of their time to instruction, this is not the case for all full-time faculty at master's and doctoral degree-granting institutions. It is not uncommon for faculty at such institutions to spend 40 percent of their time on instruction, 40 percent on research, and 20 percent on public service, service to the discipline, or service to the institution. Although research and public service duties may differ from institution to institution, if full-time faculty do not have a regular assignment of 50 percent instruction, they would not, under the long-standing Faculty Compensation Survey definition, be reported in the survey.

In an attempt to adjust its data collection to account for the complexity of full-time faculty duties, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2012 revised faculty reporting to include an “instructional/research/public service” category, noting that a faculty member would fall into this category

when “it is not possible to differentiate between instruction or teaching, research, and public service because each of these functions is an integral component of his/her regular assignment.” Figure 1 presents the most recent data from the NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for all 4,291 Title-IV-eligible, degree-granting institutions that have first-time, full-time undergraduates. The stacked bar chart on the left provides the percentage breakdown of “primarily instructional” faculty, the segment of the academic labor force that most closely aligns with the historic conceptualization of the faculty long used in the AAUP Faculty Compensation Survey. These data show that 26 percent of primarily instructional faculty are tenured or on the tenure track, a percentage that closely aligns to that in the “instructional/research/public service” category (the right stacked bar chart).

At the institutional level, “primarily instructional” and “instructional/research/public service” are not mutually

exclusive categories: some institutions have some faculty members who are in the former category and others who are in the latter, so simply shifting to the latter would not guarantee that the Faculty Compensation Survey would more accurately capture the total academic labor force. Moreover, representatives of some institutions that should report faculty as “instructional/research/public service” told the AAUP Research Office that they do not do so because they have historically reported faculty under “primarily instructional,” and that changing the categories would cause “primarily instructional” to appear as a zero in their dataset and thus would lead to questions about the accuracy of their reporting. Representatives at other institutions said that they “probably could” break out “primarily instructional” faculty from “instructional/research/public service” faculty but

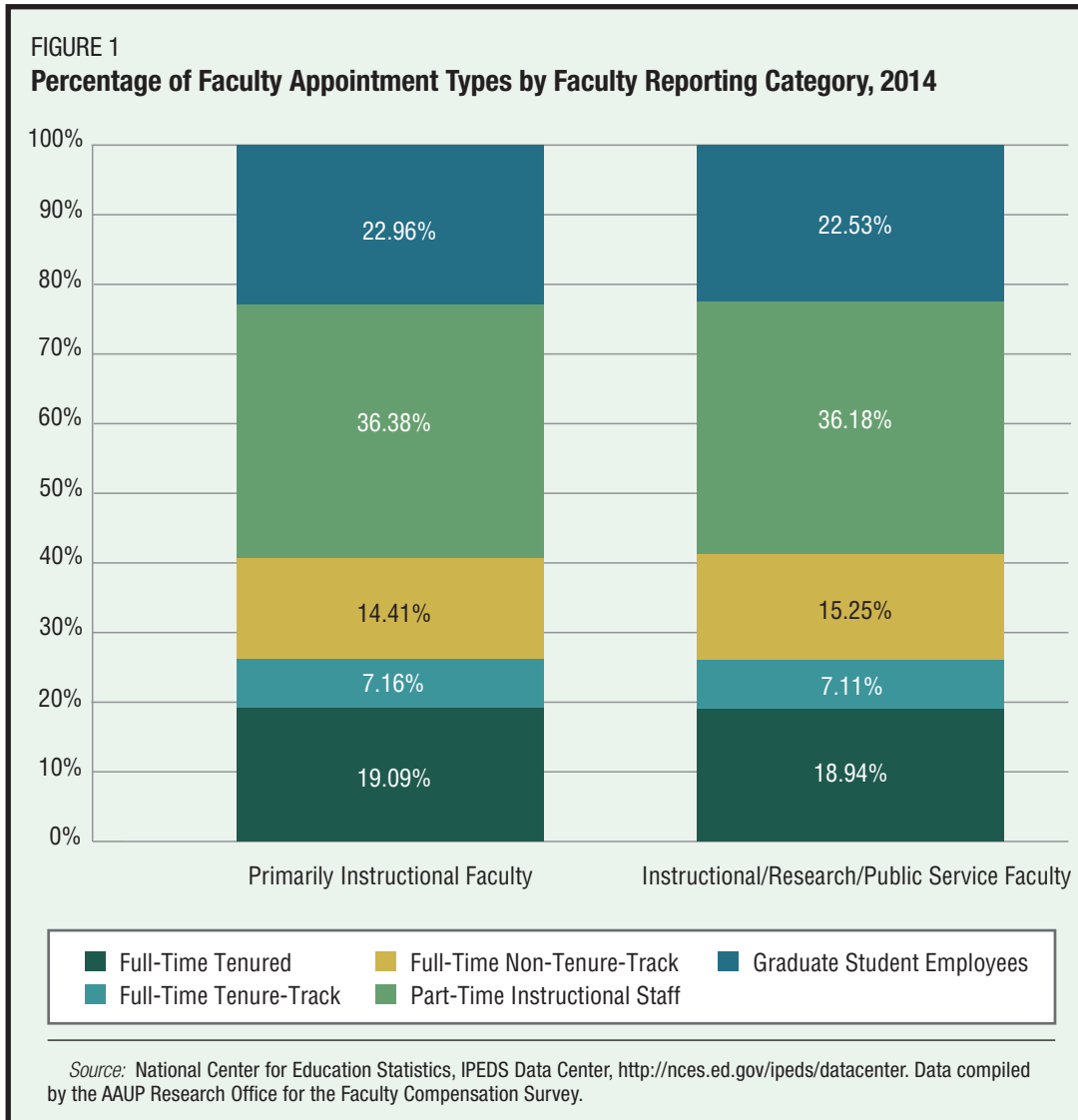
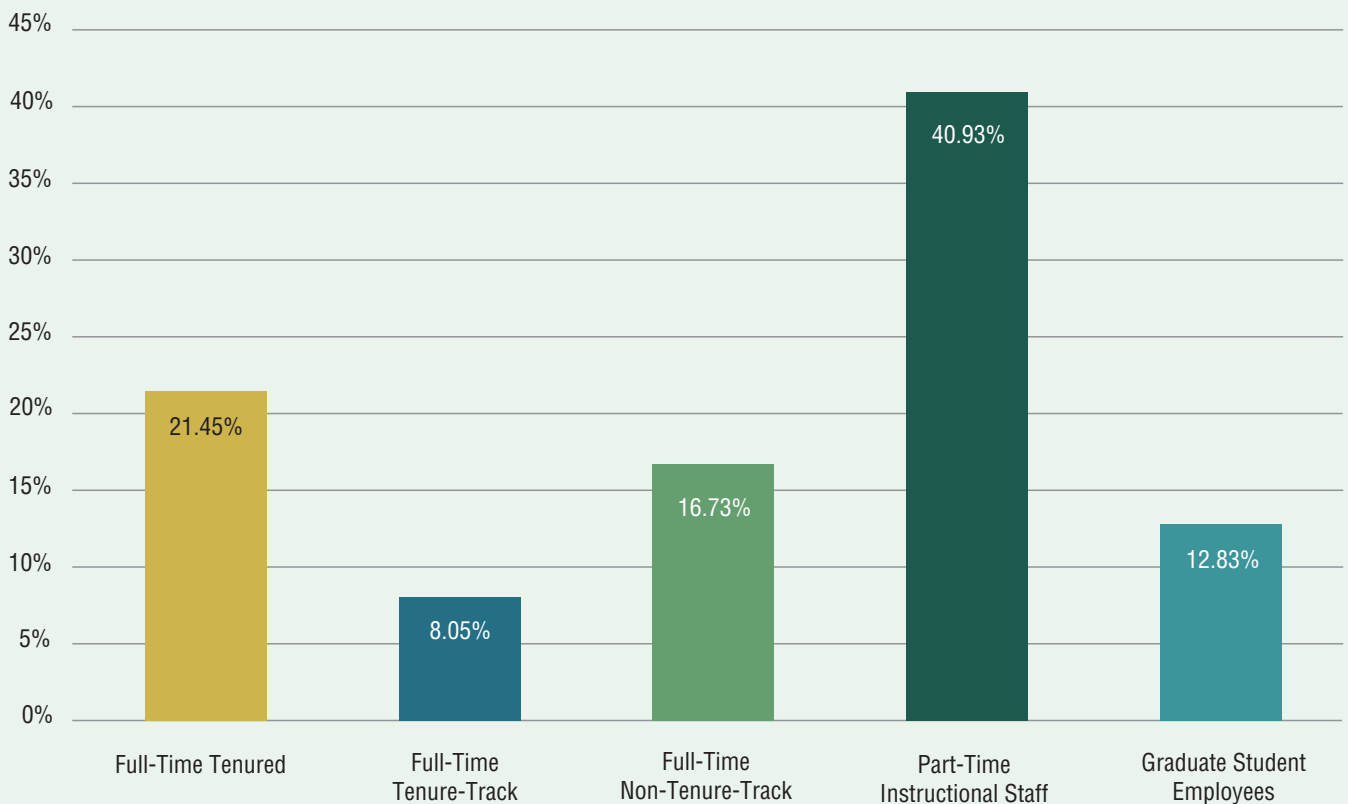


FIGURE 2

Percentage of Faculty Appointment Types, Primarily Instructional and Instructional/Research/Public Service Faculty Reporting Categories Combined, 2014



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Data Center, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter>. Data compiled by the AAUP Research Office for the Faculty Compensation Survey.

choose not to do so for either ease of reporting or consistency (because aggregating data over time can “smooth” any annual variation in reporting).

For these reasons, and after speaking with hundreds of faculty members, human resources officers, institutional research professionals, and current and past representatives of the National Center for Education Statistics, the AAUP Research Office decided to realign the definitions of faculty for the 2015–16 Faculty Compensation Survey by including the unduplicated combined total of “primarily instructional” and “instructional/research/public service.” Clinical or basic science faculty, medical faculty in schools of medicine, and military faculty are excluded from the total, as has long been the case in the survey.

Figure 2 provides the IPEDS combined percentage total of “primarily instructional” and “instructional/research/public service” faculty. The figure represents the best estimate of the academic labor force without undercounting faculty, resulting in a combined total of 30 percent of faculty with tenure or on

the tenure track. The decline in the percentage of graduate student employees from figure 1 results from overlap between the “primarily instructional” and “instructional/research/public service” categories that prevents us from fully disaggregating data on graduate student employees. When combined totals are presented, the graduate student employee total remains constant and undercounts of part-time and full-time faculty are adjusted to provide a more comprehensive depiction of the academic labor force.

BETTER GUIDANCE ON REPORTING CATEGORIES

In an effort to improve overall survey quality, the AAUP Research Office also realigned some of the reporting categories in the Faculty Compensation Survey. Previously, the visiting assistant, visiting associate, and visiting professor categories were applied differently by different institutions. This practice resulted in ambiguity, because some institutions reported visiting faculty along with ranked faculty, some reported visiting faculty under the category of “instructor,” and others did not report

visiting faculty at all. After surveying faculty, human resources officers, and institutional research professionals, we decided to request that visiting faculty be reported under the broader, more general “instructor” category. The one exception was visiting lecturers, who are still reported under “lecturer.”

This decision may result in an apparent decrease in ranked positions and in pay. This decrease is likely attributable to the exclusion of visiting faculty, who sometimes earn more than ranked faculty. Related results of this change in reporting are greater ambiguity in the faculty category of “instructor” and improved accuracy in the three ranked categories. Additionally, postdoctoral faculty whose positions include an instructional or instructional/research/public service component were moved to the “instructor” category, as were full-time continuing non-tenure-track faculty.

A detailed description of all full-time faculty reporting categories may be found online at <http://www.aaup.org/file/FCS-categories>.

INCLUSION OF PART-TIME FACULTY AND GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

No description of the academic labor force would be complete without a serious attempt to capture part-time faculty and graduate student employees. Currently, part-time faculty make up approximately 41 percent of the academic labor force, with graduate student employees making up another 13 percent.

Since its inception, the Faculty Compensation Survey has collected data only on full-time faculty. However, over the past four decades, the ranks of tenured faculty have declined by 26 percent and those of tenure-track faculty have declined by 50 percent; meanwhile, the number of part-time faculty has increased by 70 percent. This year, for the first time, we have expanded data collection to include part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants, who together now represent the majority of the academic labor force.

The AAUP Research Office sought to use the broadest conceptualization of part-time faculty while attempting to limit the reporting burden among participating institutions in order to encourage the highest possible response rate. To this end, part-time faculty have been defined as individuals working less than full time whose regular assignment has an instructional component, regardless of whether the faculty member is formally designated as “part-time faculty.” Like the definition of full-time faculty, the definition of part-time faculty excludes clinical or basic-science faculty, medical faculty in schools of medicine, and military faculty. Also excluded are casual employees appointed on an ad hoc basis, such as those hired mid-semester to replace full-time faculty members on medical leave.

While every effort was made to capture as many part-time faculty as possible by having broad inclusion criteria, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this first effort at part-time faculty data collection. We asked institutional

respondents to provide the unduplicated total number (headcount) of part-time faculty and the total contracted salaries for these faculty. As a result, part-time tenured and part-time tenure-track faculty—who constitute about 1 percent of part-time faculty—are included with non-tenure-track part-time faculty. There is a great deal of variation among part-time non-tenure-track faculty. Some are on recurring contracts whereby they are employed by an institution for multiple years, others are employed every year with the expectation of renewal, and others are employed on a semester-by-semester basis. Given this variation and other issues with data collection, we opted to report only the total contracted salaries, which means that reporting granularity was lost when data were aggregated.

Furthermore, part-time faculty—whether on recurring or nonrecurring contracts—are often employed on a per-course basis. At some institutions the majority of part-time faculty teach only one course per semester, while at other institutions the majority teach two or more courses per semester. The number of part-time faculty employed by any given institution may not reflect an institution’s use of part-time faculty as a measure of total instruction or student credit-hour production. For example, imagine a discipline that has twelve course sections assigned to part-time faculty who each have thirty students. The institution could employ twelve part-time faculty members teaching one section each, or it could employ four part-time faculty members teaching the same twelve sections at three sections each. If the contracts are paid on a per-course basis, the total contracted salary might be identical, but in the former situation the institution would employ three times the number of part-time faculty and the average total contracted salary would be three times lower. Without the ability to benchmark on a per-course basis, determining meaningful average salaries is impossible. For this reason, the AAUP will report part-time faculty data at a level of aggregation above the institution (by AAUP category and institutional control).

One final limitation of part-time faculty data is related to seasonality. Since the due date for receipt of data was January 29, 2016, it was not possible for any institution to have final part-time faculty numbers for the conclusion of the 2015–16 academic year. In the absence of final data, institutional respondents were instructed to report fall data and spring projections, fall data and data from the prior spring, or fall data and a smoothed estimate based on the prior spring and current spring projections. This guidance acknowledges the limitations of these data. Despite these limitations, the inclusion of data on part-time faculty is an important first step toward better capturing the full dimensions of the academic labor force, and we will explore the feasibility of improved benchmarking of part-time faculty in the future.

This is also the first year that graduate teaching assistant data were captured in the Faculty Compensation Survey. The graduate teaching assistant category includes all individuals enrolled in graduate school programs who teach or perform

teaching-related duties. Graduate teaching assistants may be engaged in activities such as teaching courses, developing teaching materials, preparing and giving examinations, and grading examinations or papers. In an effort to align it with full- and part-time faculty, the category of graduate teaching assistants includes the unduplicated combined total of “primarily instructional” and “instructional/research/public service” and excludes clinical or basic science, medical, and military graduate teaching assistants. Institutional respondents were asked to include graduate teaching assistants who are the instructors of record for a class section, a laboratory section, or individualized instruction sessions as well as those who assist faculty and are not the instructor of record and “floating” graduate teaching assistants who have a role that primarily supports instruction but are not directly associated with one section or a faculty member.

ELIMINATION OF FACULTY SALARY DISTRIBUTION DATA

A final change to the 2015–16 AAUP Faculty Compensation Survey was the elimination of data collection on the basis of salary distribution by faculty rank, which for many years has been presented in survey report table 8. The collection of these data was time consuming for institutions, and a data-usage survey recently conducted by the AAUP Research Office found that salary distributions were among the least useful types of

data collected in the Faculty Compensation Survey. Faculty and administrators reported that benchmarked salary data sorted by category (sector, control, and region) or peer group is more useful than a national distribution of the percentage of faculty who earn a salary within an ordinal range. For these reasons, faculty salary distribution data will no longer be published in the *Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession*.

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We hope that the result of these changes is a more useful Faculty Compensation Survey that better reflects the changing higher education landscape. Although we have made progress toward broader inclusion and better conceptualization of reporting categories, more work remains to be done. The AAUP Research Office welcomes comments and critiques, which can be sent to aaupfcs@aaup.org.

Please check the appendices to this report at <http://www.aaup.org/ares> to see whether your institution is included in the Faculty Compensation Survey. If it is, please take a moment to contact your director of human resources or director of institutional research and thank him or her for participating in the survey. We are very grateful for the time professional staff at your institution put into verifying, validating, and completing our survey, and this publication would not be possible without their assistance. If your institution does not participate, please encourage the human resources department or institutional research office to do so and remind them that there is no charge to participate in this survey. Many institutions use these data to address gender and salary disparity among ranks. The survey is also an excellent resource for recruitment of new faculty, who would likely not have accurate information about the average salary and compensation at your institution without these data.

For decades, the AAUP Faculty Compensation Survey has served higher education as the premier tool for benchmarking faculty salaries and benefits. We hope that the broader inclusion of the academic labor force in this year’s report will enhance benchmarking, better secure the economic status of the faculty, and facilitate institutional improvement across the higher education landscape.

STATEMENT ON DATA QUALITY

The AAUP Faculty Compensation Survey collects data from two- and four-year institutions across the United States through an online submission portal. These data are reviewed through our internal verification process, and, wherever the AAUP believes a possible error may have occurred, institutional representatives are contacted with a request to review those areas. Nearly all institutions comply with our requests for additional review. If resubmitted data meet our internal standard, they are approved for inclusion in the Faculty Compensation Survey. Questionable data without an institutional response are not included in the Faculty Compensation Survey.

While the AAUP makes every effort to provide the most accurate data, the Faculty Compensation Survey may include inaccuracies and errors or omissions. Users assume the sole risk of making use of these data; under no circumstances will the AAUP be liable to any user for damages arising from use of these data. The AAUP publishes additions and corrections to the *Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession* in the July–August issue of *Academe* (the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*) and may make modifications to the content at any time.

Should there be an error in the Faculty Compensation Survey, the AAUP will also notify *Inside Higher Ed*, which publishes data from the survey on its website.