

A Floor and Not a Ceiling: Introducing the Minimum Standards Developed by APSA's Committee on the Status of Contingent Faculty in the Profession

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The past several years have witnessed a profound “adjunctification” of the professoriate, within the discipline of Political Science and across the profession. While higher education has always included gross disparities in terms of employment status and institutional support for teaching and research, these inequalities have only intensified in recent decades. According to data compiled by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) more than two-thirds of faculty in the United State now work in non-tenure track positions (<https://www.aaup.org/article/data-snapshot-tenure-and-contingency-us-higher-education>). This number is up from 47% in 1987. Furthermore, women and scholars from underrepresented backgrounds are disproportionately more likely to hold contingent contracts, and therefore more likely to receive substantially lower pay, fewer benefits, and less job security than their tenured and tenure-track colleagues (Curtis and Jacobe 2006; Kezar et al. 2019). In a [2018 survey of contingent faculty in political science](#), 54.5% of the 329 respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their salary, 59.7% were dissatisfied with per-course pay, 61.6% had concerns about a lack of job security, and 52.6% expressed dissatisfaction with the levels of research support they received. The most [recent annual APSA eJobs](#) report showed that more than half of jobs posted with APSA were junior, non-tenure track.

In response to this disturbing trend, APSA's Committee on the Status of Contingent Faculty in the Profession has developed a set of minimum standards outlining how political science departments should treat contingent faculty. In February 2022, the APSA Council formally approved a revision to its Ethics Guide, and included one detailed section on contingent faculty; in April 2023, the Council approved adding the full minimum standards as an appendix in the “[Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science](#)” (30, 49-51). These standards offer a tool that contingent faculty, and their allies, can use to advocate for greater fairness, voice, and respect, including for greater transparency during the hiring process, more equitable pay and benefits, access to professional support and mentoring in teaching and research, as well as more robust protections of academic freedom.

This article provides a background and overview of the minimum standards and offers some ideas about how they might be used to advocate on behalf of contingent faculty.

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The Committee on the Status of Contingent Faculty in the Profession was created in 2016, with the recognition that working as a contingent faculty member is increasingly becoming a normalized condition of academic employment within the discipline of political science, and American higher education more generally. In the years since, we have worked to highlight issues pertaining to academic contingency within the political science profession (<https://apsanet.org/contingentfaculty>). In their introductory piece to a *PS: Political Science and Politics Spotlight symposium on contingent faculty* (Vol. 52, issue 3), editors Susan Orr and Veronica M. Czastkiewicz observed that “to be ‘contingent’ is to be subject to chance, something that exists only if certain circumstances prevail...contingent faculty often are slighted by poor working conditions and a lack of consideration and respect from tenured colleagues” (2019).

To find practical solutions to these challenges, the status committee members hosted a “hackathon” at the 2018 Annual Meeting in Boston, in conjunction with a well-attended panel on contingent faculty. One outcome from this event was the idea of developing a “minimum standards” document that could be used to educate political scientists, including department chairs, about the prevalence of contingency and to provide detailed guidelines for the kinds of resources, support, and opportunities that contingent faculty should expect from their institutions. The document developed over the next few years has ten points, each “designed with the assumption that every institution, regardless of material or administrative constraints, can work toward improving the status of contingent faculty under the umbrella of three normative values: fairness, voice, and respect.” In terms of fairness, the guidelines spell out the importance of making sure that decisions about hiring and non-renewal are done in a timely manner, and that pay and benefits are commensurate with tenured and tenure-track appointments. It also requires that contingent faculty be treated as equal members of the professional community, which includes access to the resources needed to teach, conduct research, and attend conferences. In addition to material resources, contingent faculty should also be incorporated as full members of their departments, colleges, and universities. This includes contingent faculty being able to participate in faculty governance, be included in campus events and programming, and have equal access to orientation, mentorship, and professional support. And, finally,

because contingent faculty lack the protections of tenure, it is important that departments and institutions engage in a robust protection of academic freedom.

During the development of these minimum standards the committee received considerable input from various sources. In 2021, two representatives from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Shawn Gilmore and Mark Criley, attended our panel at the Annual Meeting, offering many thoughtful suggestions, including emphasizing the need to pay special attention to the ways in which contingency threatens academic freedom. The guidelines also went through several rounds of review by various APSA committees. The revised version was finally approved by the status committee in November 2022 and by the APSA Council in April 2023. The minimum standards are now part of APSA's official policies, added as an appendix to the [APSA Ethics Guide](#) (49-51).

HOW TO USE THE MINIMUM STANDARDS

Contingent faculty often work under highly heterogeneous, and often unclear, job classifications with different titles, full/part time status, at a wide range of institutional types, and with various degrees of job security. Yet, regardless of the specifics, we believe that every contingent faculty member would benefit from the minimum standards. These guidelines are designed as a tool for you as you navigate your academic career. They can be turned to at key points in your employment, including prior to the interview and hiring process, performance evaluation, and contract renewal. And we suggest contingent faculty share the minimum standards with their department chairs and colleagues. They can serve as a framework during contract negotiations or to shed light on policies or departmental norms that deviate from the standards. Tenured and tenure-track faculty can also use the minimum standards for guidance into what all faculty should expect from their institutions. And please remember these standards spell out the minimum of what faculty should expect. They are, in other words, a floor and not a ceiling.

More specifically, contingent faculty can draw upon these guidelines during negotiations prior to the signing of a contract, or as a starting point for discussions about compensation, job duties, office space, and access to campus resources. They can also be used to empower contingent faculty to make claims about full membership within the department and establish clear expectations about what one can expect from your department.

They can also be used to create awareness amongst your colleagues. That being said, we recognize that considerable discrepancies often exist between contingent faculty positions, and many contingent faculty may be reticent to share the minimum standards or draw attention to unfair conditions or practices, worrying that doing so may jeopardize their employment. In these cases, outspoken and tenured allies can use the minimum standards to advocate on behalf of those who feel unable to do so. In either case, the minimum standards make it possible to frame demands in terms of a third-party, neutral, and professional source.

Directors of Graduate Studies, Directors of Placement, and PhD advisors can also use the minimum standards to advise graduate students as they enter the job market or as part of professional development courses. Doing so will help prepare graduate students for the profession, which includes having a

realistic understanding of the labor market and an awareness of the available tools for effectively navigating the various employment scenarios one is likely to encounter.

Likewise, department chairs can use these guidelines to assess whether their departments are, or are not, adequately supporting contingent faculty. Department chairs and program heads can even use these standards when advocating for more resources from their institution during negotiations with the administration.

Faculty can also use the guidelines in efforts to raise the issue of contingency at the university level. Given the huge variation among departments concerning the coverage of teaching needs (especially in departments offering service and general education requirements), it can be helpful to have a baseline for evaluating how well (or how poorly) different departments across the university are treating contingent faculty. If a large disjuncture exists between the standards and realities on the ground, these guidelines can also be used to initiate conversations among colleagues about whether to pursue unionization.

Likewise, as members of APSA, we have a duty to uphold the ethical standards of the profession, which now includes fair treatment of contingent faculty. These standards, therefore, can be used to start conversations among our peers and to help build a professional culture where everyone enjoys dignified employment and full inclusion within the profession. These guidelines can be used as a model for other professional associations to pass similar statements. For example, in December 2019, the American Historical Association passed a resolution calling on the association to better support contingent faculty (<https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/aha-resolution-supporting-scholars-off-the-higher-education-tenure-track>). The following month the AHA adopted a similarly detailed set of guidelines about steps departments and chairs can take to support non-tenure track faculty (<https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/improving-the-status-of-non-tenure-track-faculty-recommendations-for-history-departments>).

Finally, the release of these guidelines comes in the midst of the “[summer of strikes](#)” and the increase in labor activity, particularly as it relates to contingent faculty (<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2023-06-16-why-colleges-should-pay-attention-to-strikes-by-their-most-precarious-teachers>). These guidelines can assist this movement and function as an organizing tool and framework for unions when negotiating with employers. To this end, the committee would like to note some, but by no means all, of the organizing activity surrounding contingent faculty. At the national level, organizations include the [American Federation of Teachers - Adjunct-Contingency Faculty Caucus](#) (AFT-ACC), which includes locals in 23 states plus Washington DC, [Faculty Forward](#) housed with the [Service Employees International Union](#) (SEIU) comprised of 54,000 faculty on more than 60 public and private campuses, and the [American Association of University Professors \(AAUP\)'s One Faculty](#) campaign created to signify the need of all faculty to speak with one voice and stand in solidarity with part time and contingent faculty. At the state level, the [California Federation of Teachers](#) (CFT-AFT) which includes 147 local CA unions chartered by the AFT organizes within the state of California. These standards can also aid organized con-

tingent faculty to advocate for fair treatment and respect.

In conclusion, we are excited that the APSA Council has formally endorsed these minimum standards and included them within the Ethics Guide. We see these guidelines as a valuable tool in advocating for better working, teaching, and scholarly conditions for contingent faculty. Because our discipline would not exist without the considerable labor done by contingent faculty, demanding greater fairness, voice, and respect for contingent faculty is necessary to ensure that the discipline thrives in a way that ethically includes all political scientists, regardless of contract status. In order to continue to raise awareness about, and advocate for, contingent faculty, the status committee welcomes all faculty to join, regardless of contract status. We hope all faculty concerned with equity in the workplace, not just contingent faculty, will seek advice from and/or volunteer to serve on the committee. Visit the contingent faculty page for the activities and membership of the status committee, 2016-2023 at <https://www.apsanet.org/contingentfaculty>. Contact Jon Ring (jring7@utk.edu) and Michelle Allendoerfer (mallendoerfer@apsanet.org) for more information.

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