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## ENCOURAGING ACCOUNTABILITY IN INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF SELECTION: EXPERIENCE OF ONE UNIVERSITY'S JOURNEY TO CREATING A SIMPLIFIED STAFFING MODEL

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### ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Appointment systems in today's universities must now accommodate not only traditional tenured/tenure track faculty (TTTF) but a broad array of other professionals who collectively, are often labeled "contingent faculty" and who share the university's teaching responsibilities for both undergraduate and graduate courses.
Background	Regardless of appointment type, providing institutional clarity on available appointment choices and their preferred use was meant to promote consistently across units and reduce confusion and misunderstanding.
Methodology	This paper used a case study approach.
Contribution	This paper detailed the process used to arrive at a system for classifying teaching personnel in a complex, multi campus system. It demonstrated how faculty and administration closely partnered to bring about this new system.
Findings	A new classification system was implemented that brought more clarity to important roles that were formerly less well defined.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Establish strong rationale for beginning this work on classification and then create a partnership between the administration and the faculty to work out the details of the new approach.
Recommendation for Researchers	Once a system is created, follow up on the implementation of that new system from the perspective of the faculty incumbents in the system but also those who administer the system.
Impact on Society	Higher education systems prepare our future scientists, educators, writers, medical personnel, along with many other professionals. Creating systems that adequately attract, retain and reward the individuals who teach in these systems, regardless of their titles, will be essential to sustaining that future workforce.

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Future Research	Examine the trends in staffing structures across major universities to discern similarities and differences.
Keywords	tenured faculty, tenure track faculty, contingent faculty, instructional staff appointment systems

## INTRODUCTION

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In a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article titled “Innovation in Higher Education? HAH!” author Ann Kirschner (2012) asserts that the pace of change in higher education is “stuck somewhere between sluggish and glacial.” She cites recent book and book chapters, articles, and monographs about higher education that make extensive use of “transformation” language. How real transformation occurs in complex universities, however, might evoke the proverbial sausage-making metaphor: the end product may be tasty but it’s best not to watch it being made.

This article addresses how one large, midwestern research university approached the transformation of its long-standing system for appointing instructional personnel. Its existing system had failed to adopt to a growing trend in large, complex research institutions to employ a range of instructional staff, from traditional tenured faculty with research programs and teaching loads to professional practitioners primarily hired to teach within a particular discipline, to part-time instructors teaching only an occasional course. Over time, this diverse mix of appointment types used across multiple colleges had contributed to confusion in the workplace, weakening morale, and lack of perceived organizational support. For these reasons, this university mobilized to restructure its appointment system to optimize the use of this broad range of instructional talent. One goal of the revamped appointment system was to provide more uniformity in the use of particular titles. This, in turn, would facilitate regular reporting on the use of different categories of instructional staff. Monitoring and reporting on how appointments are used within colleges and campus-wide would become feasible. A second goal was to encourage accountability within the colleges to avoid overreliance on hiring non-permanent, less costly personnel in place of tenure track/tenured faculty which impact the institution’s overall research productivity. Finally, a third goal was to more fully understand and then focus on addressing specific needs of each category of instructional personnel in order to more fully engage each person in the overall work of the institution. Clarifying the roles, responsibilities and benefits of each appointment type would build a stronger, more transparent instructional infrastructure. If achieved, these outcomes would benefit the tenure system faculty as well as heighten the engagement of the range of contingent faculty, now employed by this university.

## BACKGROUND

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Increasingly, universities are choosing to recruit and hire a proportion of instructional personnel using appointments that offer greater flexibility than traditional tenured/tenure track faculty (TTTF). “Contingent faculty” is the generic label for these non-tenure-eligible employees with instructional duties. Between 1975 and 2007, the percentage of full time, non-tenure track faculty has doubled nationwide from 18.6 percent to 37.5 percent (Ehrenberg, 2010). On the American Association of University Professors (2013) (AAUP) website, statistics from AAUP’s research office are reported that show in 2011, 76% of all instructional appointments in degree granting college and universities are now contingent appointments, up from 55% in 1975. Nearly 60 percent of new full-time faculty appointments are now under temporary contracts. More than half of all professionals delivering instruction in higher education are non-tenure track contingent professionals (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006), most often involved in undergraduate instruction (Baldwin & Wawrznski, 2011). For a variety of legitimate reasons, universities have adjusted their staffing models for instructional work to include a higher percentage of individuals who perform teaching and advising duties but are not required or expected to produce research or scholarship. Such appointments may be part or full time but their common characteristic is ineligibility for long-term tenure.

There is no single, agreed-upon taxonomy across institutions for individuals who perform instructional duties. Cross and Goldenberg (2009) report that numerous position titles, often unique to each institution, have proliferated. According to Cha and Carrier (2016), the reasons for this trend in staffing with “contingent faculty” usually fall under four categories: (1) managerial flexibility and cost efficiency, (2) needs for diverse field experience and knowledge, (3) more potential employees seeking flexible work arrangements, and (4) more instructional work necessitated by technological advancement in university courses.

Many universities face the challenge of how best to carry out their teaching or instructional mission in light of changing fiscal and social conditions. Who should be employed and how should responsibilities be deployed to address the ever-changing demographics of students and their expectations and capabilities? What is the optimal balance of traditional tenured/tenure track faculty (TTTF) with other types of academic personnel? How have instructional staffing patterns evolved incrementally over time or by deliberate and more dramatic transformations? What has been the impact of such changes on the atmosphere of the institution, including the attitudes and satisfaction levels of its faculty and staff?

### ***THE CONTEXT***

The authors chose as their focus for this discussion a Midwestern public, research university. The public research university that served as the venue for this work is a large, land grant, multi-campus system with one urban flagship campus and four additional campuses located in five different geographic regions, serving as the home for approximately 90,000 students, faculty, and staff. It is this State’s sole research university, sharing the public higher education mission with the state’s two and four-year college and university system. Because of its special status, this university’s actions are highly visible to its many constituents, be they students, parents, citizens, taxpayers, legislators, members of the business community, or donors. This university’s governing body carries out its work in the public eye with its governance authority being constitutionally autonomous from the state. Formats for teaching and learning within its campuses vary widely and include the following: traditional instructor-centered classrooms; online or blended courses and programs; educational and outreach workshops to groups throughout the state, national and internationally; one-on-one mentoring of medical and allied health professionals in hospitals and clinics; and international seminars delivered to audiences across the world. Each of these formats demands talented instructional personnel who are expected to engage with their respective learner populations and make contributions to the institution, their state, and beyond.

## **CREATING AN INSTRUCTIONAL STAFFING MODEL THAT ACCOMMODATES MULTIPLE NEEDS**

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Core to delivering high quality education in higher education is the amassing of highly capable, innovative instructional personnel who are experts in their chosen fields and equipped with up-to-date pedagogical skills. In today’s environment, most large universities recognize the need to explore instructional personnel models that allow for flexibility while maintaining the TTTF system of appointment as the gold standard for the majority of their faculty. At the same time, the desire to ratchet up flexibility for staffing escalates as state budgets plummet for many public, state-supported universities; as funding from outside agencies becomes more competitive and less reliable; and as governing boards voice concerns over rising tuition rates that lead to greater student debt loads upon graduation. Response to these pressures is evidenced by the increase in hiring of non-tenure track faculty. Nation-wide, the number of full time, non-tenure track faculty more than doubled from nearly 19% in 1975 to nearly 38% in 2007 (Ehrenberg, 2010). Nearly 60% of new, full time faculty appointments are now hired through the use of temporary or time-limited contracts (Schuster & Finkelstein 2006) versus on tenure track or tenured lines. Clearly, as this trend illustrates, further escalation of the proportion of contingent faculty is anticipated as higher education budgets tighten.

One common response to these realities has been to further explore differentiated staffing approaches for the instructional function. Universities seek solutions that allow for more nimble modification of both the nature and size of their workforces to better accommodate the realities of eleventh-hour enrollment changes, sudden, unplanned-for reductions or eliminations of grant/contract-funded program budgets or emergencies at the state or federal level leading to unplanned reductions in university budgets. The urgency for greater flexibility was one compelling reason this Midwestern university made the decision to explore options for an institution-wide model of differentiated personnel for those with instructional roles. In addition, growing suspicion voiced largely by faculty governance groups was that certain colleges, primarily some within the academic health fields, were exhibiting trends towards unbridled, unmonitored growth of non-regular faculty. This emerging trend, critics feared, would, over time, undermine the core mission. Further, these temporary appointment holders did not enjoy the same status, or all of the same benefits or employment perks common to regular faculty, even though their temporary terms often stretched to multiple years. In addition, others argued that the perception of a second-class citizenship of faculty was also emerging, fueled by documented differences in major policies and some benefits. Similarly, some feared that colleges would, in a short-sighted and reactionary way, begin to reduce their complement of TTTF, thus impacting not only the overall research and scholarship enterprises but also the quality of instruction provided to undergraduate and graduate students.

Following discussions of appointment systems used by other major universities similar in mission and complexity to ours, it became clear that a single, best practice model for organizing instructional personnel does not exist across such institutions. Faculty, instructional staff, and administrators at this university came to believe that, collectively, they could forge a model that would accommodate the diversity of needs of this multiple college/campus entity and also provide a pathway to better monitor the use of personnel appointments across the entire system (a total of five campuses). Out of this process, it was expected that those hired into various “contingent faculty” roles would benefit from the more thoughtful attention to their roles and responsibilities as well as to any special needs they encounter.

### ***THE PROCESS***

To address this set of issues at both policy and practical levels, a faculty/instructional staff/administrator working group (hereafter called the Administrative Working Group or AWG) was established by the then Provost in collaboration with the university’s faculty senate, charged with (1) formally exploring this looming trend of differentiated instructional staffing and (2) providing recommendations regarding the most prudent course of action for this institution. The Administrative Working Group was comprised of about a dozen members, with faculty and instructional personnel from a number of colleges as well as several deans and Central Administration officers.

### ***LIMITATIONS WITH FORMER INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL APPOINTMENT SYSTEM***

Prior to the work of this AWG, non-tenure system faculty and others hired primarily to teach were lumped together, for purposes of most human resource policies and procedures, with other types of professional and administrative staff in an employment category created by the institution’s governing board in 1980. This employment category was formally labeled “the academic professional and administrative staff employee group” but its occupants soon became better known informally as “P&As”. Individuals hired within this employment group for instructional roles would teach in one or more of our colleges or campuses and, formerly, were appointed into one of many possible titles, and their titles were selected from a broad array of available titles whose list had been added to over the years. The sheer number of titles proliferated over time, contributing to the lack of consistency of use. Referring to specific instructional personnel by a specific job title provided little insight into that individual’s actual job responsibilities and roles, as titles were varied. That is, College A might hire someone to teach undergraduates using the title of “educational specialist” while College B would select the “lecturer” title and College C would select the “teaching specialist” title, despite that

all of these individuals were hired to teach undergraduates. In the parlance of this university, the employees within this employment group who were primarily involved in instructional roles informally came to be labeled the “faculty-like” P&As to distinguish them from other academic professionals with other University roles (e.g., lawyers, HR consultants, cartographers, administrators). One unforeseen consequence of this system was the impracticality of accurately monitoring the use of academic professionals with instructional roles.

### ***CHARGE TO THE AWG***

The charge to the AWG urged striking a balance between the hiring and retaining of TTTF and that of other categories of instructional personnel whose roles might be more exclusively focused on delivery of instruction. Simplifying the system so that it could be understood and implemented by all colleges would be a sign of progress. The AWG was also charged with recommending strategies to monitor the results of collegiate patterns of hiring/retention both annually and over time, once a new instructional personnel model was implemented. One of the earliest voiced concerns from AWG members about the new system was the need to be consistent with, and not violate, the existing tenure policies, as there was no appetite to modify the long-standing tenure policy. Instead, the group was challenged to identify reasonable practices compatible with the tenure policy's existing framework but which also introduced more flexibility. The AWG met over the period of one year, about once every two weeks. Its primary recommendation was the establishment of a more explicit academic personnel appointment policy and system that defined a finite set of University appointment categories with instructional responsibilities, but also allowed for some degree of customization by each college. This customization would come in the form of permission for each college to adopt the use of only those categories most compatible with their needs but also the option to prepare and submit a “supplemental plan”, described below.

### ***NARROWING THE OPTIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS***

From their work, five categories of personnel with designated appointment titles are now allowed for instructional roles within our colleges/campuses including (1) regular faculty – tenured and tenure track faculty, (2) term faculty – contract (annual renewable or multiyear contract; temporary {max of 1 to 2 years} and visiting faculty), (3) term faculty who are adjunct or clinical and are very part time, (4) four instructional staff titles, including teaching specialists, senior teaching specialists, lecturers, and senior lecturers, and (5) graduate teaching assistants (not considered contingent faculty. Prior to the implementation of this new academic personnel structure, highly inconsistent use of categories and titles for instructional personnel was rampant within our system and even within individual colleges.

### ***THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLEGIATE PERSONNEL PLANS***

As mandated by the policy, each college/campus is now required to submit for provostal approval its overall plan for the use of the various employment categories and instructional titles. Subsequent modifications to this initial “collegiate personnel plan” also required approval. These plans are monitored annually, with a reporting mechanism to the Provost's office as well as to one of the major governance committees. The institutional intent was to provide a vehicle by which the personnel patterns of our respective colleges/campuses could be observed, with trends noted and opportunities for course correction provided when the plan's parameters were not adhered to. Incorporating certain limitations on the use of non-tenure system faculty for instructional roles grew out of initial expressed concerns that this university was moving in an uncontrolled manner to undermine the TTTF system, allowing units to bypass TTTF appointments in favor of creating flexibility but with no accountability and no motivation to seek an appropriate balance between types of appointments. Fears that without some constraints, unmonitored growth would ultimately reduce scholarly productivity in a college and perhaps even reduce the perceptions of academic freedom.

The AWG saw wisdom in narrowing the range of titles that could be legitimately selected for academic professionals in instructional roles to “teaching specialists” and “lecturers” with promotional criteria to move to a senior rank (e.g., “senior teaching specialist”) for both. Determining which title would be offered at time of hire was to be based primarily on entry credentials of the candidate. Those with PhDs or other appropriate terminal degrees were appointed as lecturers while those with the master’s degree or equivalent credential were appointed with the “teaching specialist” title. Assessment of a record of meritorious performance could lead to promotion to the senior rank in both job titles. On occasion, depending upon experience and degree credentials at time of hire, units could propose to offer to recruit a desired candidate into the “senior” lecturer or “senior” teaching specialist title.

### ***CREATING AN EXPANDED UMBRELLA FOR “TERM” FACULTY***

It is important to note, however, that even with this refinement in academic professional titling, permission to hire using faculty appointments with rank remained an option for units who hired contract faculty for instructional roles. For a variety of reasons, some colleges, most notably the health science-related colleges, preferred to retain their practice of appointing instructional personnel on annual or multiple year appointments with professorial rank—assistant, associate, or full professor. As a whole, this group of professionals was labeled “contract faculty” to distinguish them both from TTTF and from academic professionals. The primary reason that colleges prefer this title option is the perception that potential recruits prefer to have the greater status associated with a professorial appointment, even when those positions are not tenure-eligible. To heighten a college’s capacity to recruit highly qualified personnel, it was decided the option to offer the title of assistant professor, associate professor or professor to a contract faculty member would remain an option.

But this decision left some TTTF still seeking a way to distinguish TTTF from contract faculty. For this reason, colleges could elect to use “qualified titles” for these contract faculty, such as “teaching assistant professor” or “research associate professor” or “clinical assistant professor” to differentiate them from TTTF. Permitting use of these qualified titles was important to units which sought a more visible differentiation of TTTF from contract faculty. If a college chooses to use qualified titles, they are required to use them consistently across all of their academic departments.

### ***PARAMETERS IMPACTING THE USE OF CONTRACT FACULTY OR INSTRUCTIONAL ACADEMIC PROFESSIONALS WITH “FACULTY-LIKE” ROLES***

In conceptualizing this system, a major parameter was that in no case would the full time equivalent (FTE) combination of these different options for contingent hires within a department exceed 25% of the number of FTE tenure track/tenured appointments. Should there arise a special circumstance where that 25% FTE limit was anticipated to be exceeded, a college must submit to the Provost’s Office for review and approval a “Supplemental Plan” presenting a business case for exceeding that established ratio. Rationales given for exceeding the ratio include reasons such as (1) lack of capacity to teach certain large enrollment courses, (2) the lateness of budget decisions that necessitate quick hires, (3) lack of capacity to fund ongoing positions, and (4) where the expertise of a professional in practice was needed because it was highly relevant to the credibility of the course content. The new system required that if an instructional academic professional staff title was to be used when filling an instructional role, only four core title choices would be allowed—teaching specialist, senior teaching specialist, lecturer, or senior lecturer. Criteria were prepared for each of these four to define required minimal credentials and typical job responsibilities. Units could use faculty classifications for those not in tenure track or tenured roles but, now, holders of these “contract” appointments on terms could be given a prefix to their title, such as “teaching assistant professor” or “research associate professor”. Under this system, such personnel would receive annual or multiple year contracts (up to five years) versus tenure track or tenured appointments and would receive the same health care and retirement benefits as regular faculty.

## INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS ACCRUING FROM A DECADE OF USE OF THE NEW APPOINTMENT SYSTEM

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This academic appointment system, now in place has had largely positive outcomes for the University in several ways.

First, the University is now better equipped to identify and monitor its use of personnel who carry instructional responsibilities. Annual reports illuminate patterns of employment categories used by individual colleges and campuses, as well as allow for an aggregated view at the system level. Appropriate Senate committees review these annual reports with Central Administration and frank discussions ensue about the data, their patterns, and any apparent trends. With this regular reporting, a failure to follow collegiate guidelines becomes more obvious and the responsible deans are more accountable to remedy these situations, when they arise.

Second, inappropriate and unexplained variability regarding use of non-regular faculty appointments for instructional purposes has been greatly reduced. Colleges are no longer permitted to use temporary faculty appointments for those whose work will persist indefinitely. Terms of employment and benefits for non-regular faculty have become more regularized. Further, the attitudes towards workplace culture and job satisfaction are now captured in a survey administered every two years (the PULSE survey of faculty and staff) where the entire employee population is invited to participate and where the data is analyzed by disaggregating TTTF and other instructional personnel.

Third, by aligning appointment practices and more clearly articulating the different definitions, provisions and processes associated with the various categories of appointments whose members deliver credit-bearing coursework, the entire body of instructional personnel is strengthened. Valuable contributions provided by both non-regular faculty and instructional academic professionals, both full and part time, are recognized, regularized, and given appropriate stature. The result of the Administrative Working Group charge also led to (1) more deliberate practices of colleagues' involvement in the selection, appointment, and review of the various appointments and the approvals required for various actions, (2) an examination of and selected modifications to benefits being provided, and (3) a guide for membership and involvement in appropriate unit and university-wide governance bodies.

Fourth, the policy has created more cross-college collaboration and discussion about best practices for these various employment categories. Colleges articulate and defend their own best practices with colleagues from other colleges, forcing each to sharpen their own arguments and practices.

Fifth, salary analyses can now be conducted using these job titles so internal comparisons are carried out with more confidence. Prior to this new approach, there was always suspicion about the lack of "apples to apples" comparisons of jobs. In the same vein, it is now easier to perform external market comparisons because the credentials and roles have become more articulated.

### ***LESSONS LEARNED, AND FURTHER REFINEMENTS, RESULTING FROM THIS PROCESS***

1. As this system evolved, it became clear that the Provost's office would play a major role in monitoring the use of the system for the university. It was crucial that an officer of stature in that office who knew the policy's provisions and actively oversaw their implementation was essential to the consistent use of the academic appointments policy. As the office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs evolved and gained strength and visibility across a ten-year period, the holder of this position became the person who fielded questions, disputes, and clarifications regarding the use of titles landed and had to be responded to. Initially, the human resource function was more heavily involved in policy formation for these personnel but over time that changed as the vice provost's office gained more definition and played a stronger oversight role over faculty affairs matters.
2. Not only must Central office oversight be diligent to maintain a classification system for instructional personnel, so too must oversight at the individual college level be diligent. Those colleges with

a strong assistant or associate dean and/or a strong lead human resource officer who is engaged with faculty matters, use the personnel system in more routine and deliberate ways. The person in this role assists their colleges in becoming more consistent in how they orient and educate their faculty, administrators and staff about the system.

3. Allowing colleges to use the optional qualified title system in official titling has proven too complex and confusing. It has reduced simplification because too much variation is possible. But because the option of the qualified titles has been used very infrequently by colleges, it has not been a pressing issue and thus not removed from the policy.
4. The single standard proportion feature of no more than a total of 25% of non-regular faculty FTE to regular faculty FTE may not be an adequate solution. At this university, it has become evident that professional schools are likely to use more non-regular faculty to bring important forms of expertise to their schools, and such instructional personnel are perceived to offer strong benefits to their students. Our personnel plans allow for exceeding the 25% limit through approval of a “supplemental plan” that proposes a convincing case for a different ratio. Gaining approval to employ a larger proportion of non-regular faculty in the mix of college instructional personnel recognizes that colleges have very different needs.
5. University committees and governance structures are to be involved in monitoring or modifying the college personnel plans and the various categories of instructional personnel. As time has passed, routine reports have been produced to inform one major faculty committee about the performance of the system. When failure to comply with the provisions of the policy occurs, deans and other administrators of that college are questioned by this oversight body.

## DISCUSSION

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This evolving approach to an instructional personnel appointment system certainly does not address every concern raised by faculty, staff, or administrators regarding how this university will appoint and manage its instructional personnel. For example, some fear that long-term contract faculty will not contribute as fully to the unit’s scholarly or research mission as regular faculty. If so, the argument goes, do the appointments represent a lower payoff on a university investment? Traditionalists may continue to argue that regular TTTF faculty positions are always superior as an investment due to their greater potential for bringing in outside funding or raising the institution’s reputational bar or gaining more respect from students in the classroom. Similarly, opinions about the extent to which non-tenure system faculty should be involved in key governance decisions within a unit also vary. Should, for example, potentially shorter-term employees have as much input as longer term TTTF? Might a policy like this one help reduce the sense of “second-class citizenship” often perceived to plague earlier generations of non-tenure system or contingent instructional personnel at large universities? In the end, does the policy better serve our student populations by providing more carefully monitored personnel in these roles?

Close scrutiny of personnel staffing models for instructional personnel may relate to broader implications for the institution. As a group, contingent faculty as instructional personnel, regardless of the specific titles used at different institutions, deserve additional attention within our universities because their well-being may have many positive and negative ramifications for an institution. Cha & Carrier (2016) found that feeling supported at work was crucial to academic employees’ workplace attitudes, regardless of whether they are TTTF or contingent. But for contingent faculty, being supported at work was the strongest predictor for explaining overall satisfaction and affective commitment. While not much is yet known how contingent professionals rate their employer in terms of traditional workplace values such as job security, loyalty and commitment or how they perform in specific areas such as Student Rating of Teaching scores (SRTs), these future inquiries will surely be forthcoming.



The preliminary step of establishing a rational appointment system will ease the closer examination of an institution's different subgroups of instructional personnel. A personnel group will be able to be characterized so that one employee group can be differentiated from another employee group. This will make it easier to study the attitudes and performance of one group in comparison to other groups.

In conclusion, to sum up the aspirations of the instructional personnel appointment policy is the following quotation from the major governing committee most involved with the oversight of the guidelines for the instructional personnel plan described in this piece:

*"The University asserts the importance of ensuring that our students are taught by individuals who have appropriate qualifications and who are recognized as teachers and enjoy the privilege of academic freedom. The University also affirms that an appropriate complement of regular faculty will direct the University's ongoing intellectual programs, accompanied by term (non-tenure track) faculty, academic professional and administrative employees (P&As), and graduate teaching assistants. The University will strive to ensure that all such faculty and P&A employees be appropriately selected, reviewed and fairly treated."*

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## BIOGRAPHIES

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