

# The changing academic workforce

## Composition of the faculty

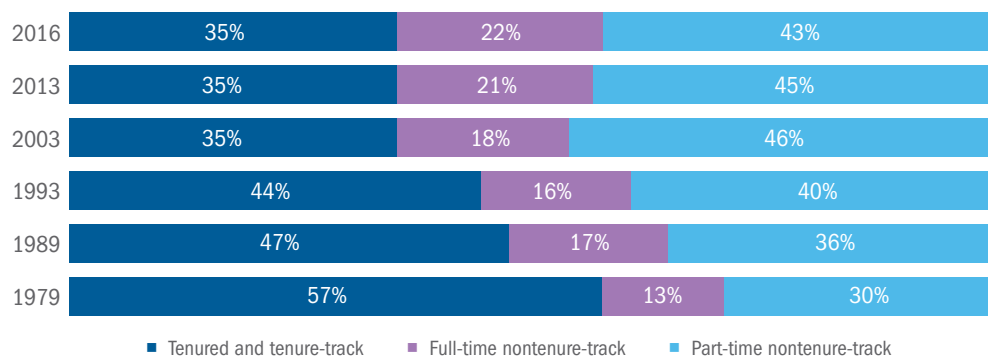
The prototypical faculty member—a full-time tenured or tenure-track professor—is no longer the norm in higher education. TIAA Institute research documents the dramatic shifts in the academic workforce over the past several decades.

The percentage of faculty at U.S. two- and four-year colleges and universities holding tenured or tenure-track positions has remained steady at 35% since 2003, down from 57% in 1979. From 1979 through 2016, the share of faculty in full-time nontenure-track positions increased to 22%, and the share in part-time nontenure-track positions increased to 43%—for a total of 65% of faculty in nontenure-track positions in 2016.

**In 2016, nontenure-track positions comprised 65% of all faculty positions.**

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2016, Human Resources.

### Faculty tenure and employment status at U.S. institutions 1979-2016<sup>1</sup>



Note: IPEDS faculty and instructional staff categories changed in 2014. To maintain comparability across years, data shown here include only instructional staff with faculty status, and exclude instructors without faculty status, such as graduate teaching assistants, post-docs, and staff who teach a class. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

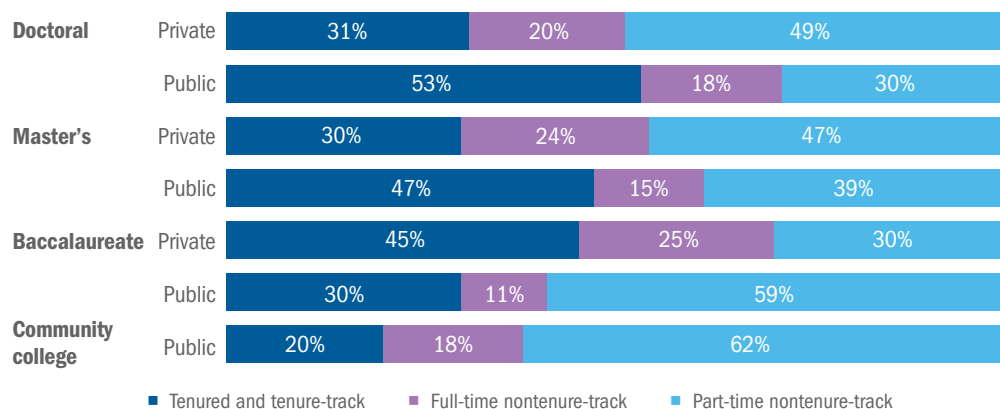
Nontenure-track faculty are nearly twice as likely to be teaching part-time as full-time.

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### Faculty across sectors

The composition of the faculty varies across higher ed sectors:

#### Faculty tenure and employment status by type of institution (2016)<sup>2</sup>



Note: Data shown here include only instructional staff with faculty status, and exclude instructors without faculty status, such as graduate teaching assistants, post-docs, and staff who teach a class. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

- Part-time nontenure-track instructors comprise approximately 42% of the faculty at all four-year colleges and universities, with the largest percentage found at public Baccalaureate institutions (59%).
- At public community colleges, 62% of the faculty is comprised of part-time nontenure-track instructors.



#### Who are the nontenure-track faculty?

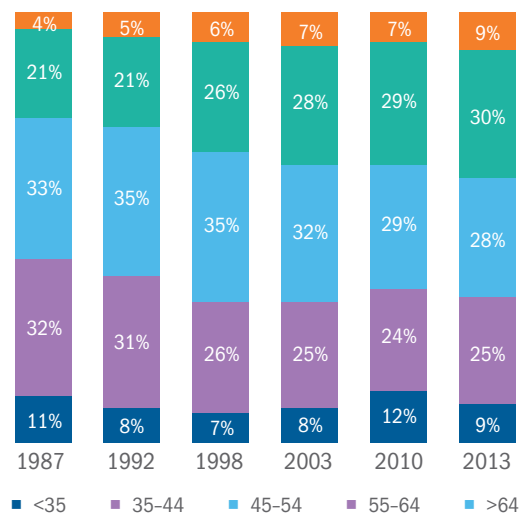
- *Part-time nontenure-track faculty.* Includes professional academics employed part time, commonly known as adjuncts (66%); non-academics who bring professional experience into the classroom, i.e., professors of practice (23%); and retired tenured professors (11%).
- *Full-time nontenure-track faculty.* These instructors generally specialize in one of the traditional faculty roles of teaching or research, with the vast majority focused on teaching.

To learn more about the demographics and job experiences of adjuncts, see: [\*Adjunct Faculty: Who they are and what is their experience?\*](#)

### Aging faculty

#### Age distribution of full-time faculty at four-year institutions<sup>3</sup>

Full-time faculty at four-year institutions. Age distribution 1987-2013



Note: Data includes tenured, tenure-track, and full-time nontenure-track faculty. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

From 1987 through 2013:

- The percentage of faculty over age 64 more than doubled, from 4% to 9% of the full-time faculty at four-year institutions.
- The percentage of faculty younger than age 35 declined, such that in 2013, the percentages of full-time faculty younger than 35 and older than 64 were equal, at 9% for each age category.
- The faculty group age 55 to 64 grew nearly 50% to comprise the largest age group, at 30% of the faculty in 2013.
- Similar patterns exist among part-time faculty (not shown): age 55-64 is the largest age group, at 29% of all faculty; that age group has tripled in size since 1987.

### Read more

about the changing composition of the academic workforce:

[\*\*Taking the Measure of Faculty Diversity\*\*](#)

[\*\*The Shifting Academic Workforce: Where are the Contingent Faculty?\*\*](#)



<sup>1</sup> Finklestein, Martin, Valerie M. Conley, and Jack H. Schuster. 2016. *The Faculty Factor: Reassessing the American Academy in a Turbulent Era*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Research supported by the TIAA Institute, and updated with data from IPEDS (2016) with the assistance of Martin Finkelstein, Professor of Higher Education at Seton Hall University, and Wendiann Sethi, Senior Faculty Associate at Seton Hall University, and member of the Seton Hall research team for The Faculty Factor.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2016, Human Resources.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF), 1988, 1993, 1999, and 2004 editions; and Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) HERI Faculty Survey, 2011 and 2014 editions. The HERI survey is the most recent data on faculty age available.

TIAA Institute is a division of Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA), New York, NY.

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