

## TIPS FOR ALLIES

# How to Be an Ally

All faculty and students must work together for equity on campuses

BY JUDY OLSON AND ANNE WEIGARD

**THE ALARMING INCREASE** in contingent academic positions has reached crisis proportions in higher education, at 75 percent of the nation's classroom faculty and climbing. This crisis is undermining the quality of higher education, eroding faculty members' rights, increasing workload, and harming students and community members far more than most realize. (See "Who is 'Professor Staff?": <http://futureofhighered.org/policy-report-2/>). The threat to union power posed by the impending *Friedrichs* Supreme Court decision around union fair-share fees represents another crisis. Most fee payers in academic unions are contingent faculty, partly because many members are still learning how to demonstrate solidarity. The best response to the *Friedrichs* threat is also best for higher education generally: an internal organizing drive to enfranchise all faculty fully and to support organizing where unions don't exist.

New Faculty Majority ([www.newfacultymajority.info](http://www.newfacultymajority.info)), along with NEA and other unions, has done much to raise awareness of this crisis among the general public and policymakers, but we all urgently need to step up our game. For 2015, let's commit to expanding Campus Equity Week ([www.campusequityweek.org](http://www.campusequityweek.org)), from a biannual week of attention to the inequitable working lives of the majority of the faculty, into an ongoing, continuous campaign of awareness, mobilization, and solidarity.

Reversing the trend toward inequality will require an enormous concerted effort. It will require solidarity: focusing on what we have in common rather than on our differences. We all have to learn how to be allies.



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## For Contingent Faculty

**DON'T** resent those who make just a little more money than you. Focus on raising, not lowering, the bar for everyone.

**DON'T** say, "I make less than a fast-food worker or janitor." Avoid arguing that higher education entitles you to more.

**DON'T** use metaphors like apartheid, slavery, abused women.

**DON'T** complain about teaching introductory courses. Don't contribute to status competition among contingent faculty members.

**Do** take time to research what has been done and is being done in the decades-old equity movement before reinventing the wheel or doing things that may be counterproductive to what other activists have underway.

**Do** give credit where credit is due.

**Do** channel anger into strategic action. Vent when necessary, and then move forward.

**DON'T** boast that you would teach for free. (Your work is worthless?) Don't boast that you're "not in it for the money." (Nobody is).

**Do** reach out to contingent faculty colleagues who seem to be or say that they are "satisfied." This may not be how they really feel, and there is common ground to be found.

**Do** find allies. If someone is determined to oppose your work, find other allies. It is powerful to have even one supporter in the room. Find that person. As soon as you get any power, use that power to help others become empowered and organize.

## FOR TENURE-LINE FACULTY

**BARGAIN WITH AN EYE** to equalizing conditions among all ranks as much as possible. Keep in mind that percentage increases represent far less in dollars for people with low incomes. Don't buy into zero-sum-game thinking that says a win for one segment must come with a sacrifice for another. A united faculty makes a stronger university, higher quality education for our students, and strength in organizing and at the bargaining table.

**TRY TO REMEMBER** that in many ways both large and small, contingent faculty encounter constant reminders of their secondary status, and that this damages people over time. Forgive us for having chips on our shoulder, for being slow to trust, for not believing in your own good intentions as fiercely as you do yourself. Try not to let your feelings get hurt by people who are reacting to subtle slights that you might not be able to perceive.

**AVOID "TENUREPLAINING":** attempting to "teach" contingent faculty, which usually comes across as condescending rather than helpful. Don't assume you know more about any subject. Ask us about our work, about what we think, without automatically assuming a position of authority in the conversation. Don't just give advice; ask for it, too.

**RESIST THE TEMPTATION** to regard non-tenure-track faculty as junior colleagues or teaching assistants in need of "mentoring," especially if you are in reality less experienced than they are. Consider being

mentored by such people, instead. If you once taught off the tenure track before landing your tenure-line job, don't assume that you know what it means to be contingent for years on end.

**STRIVE TO PUT** experienced non-tenure-line faculty, including part-time faculty, in positions of authority and responsibility. Incorporate contingent faculty members throughout your union's, program's or department's power structure, not just in positions designated for non-tenure-line faculty members.

**REMEMBER THAT FIGHTING** to make contingent positions as equal as possible with non-contingent positions is not an act of charity. It is in tenure-line faculty members' best interest to strengthen the whole faculty. Degraded working conditions and status for part-time and full-time contingent faculty members result in degraded working conditions and status for the faculty as a whole. If the academic freedom of non-tenure-line faculty members is eroded, everyone's academic freedom is eroded. Keep your eye on the big picture and the long term. Fighting for contingent faculty is an act of self-interest and crucial to the health of the institution.

## FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

**DON'T ASSUME THAT** contingent colleagues who have been out of graduate school for some time are less capable. They may be unfamiliar with the most recent work in your field, but remember that this may be because they have been focused on their teaching and on

their economic survival.

**DO REMEMBER THAT** many contingent faculty colleagues are first-rate teachers. Ask to observe some of these colleagues in their classrooms, and ask them to observe you. Talk about what you're learning from one another.

**DON'T ASSUME THAT** your contingent faculty colleagues simply weren't good enough to secure a tenure-track-position. The reality is that after a few years of not being at the right place at the right time, one must either leave academia or settle for cobbling together enough part-time work to pay the bills, often including student loans. Don't allow others to disparage contingent faculty in your presence.

## FOR STUDENTS

**ASK YOUR CAMPUS** administration questions about faculty working conditions. Do all part-time faculty members have offices, phones, computers, access to campus resources? How much are they paid? What kind of job security do they have? You will want that favorite professor to be around later when you need a letter of recommendation.

## FOR EVERYONE

**REMEMBER THAT WE** are all being squeezed by stressful conditions. We are all overworked and underpaid. Our hearts are all breaking as we witness the promise of higher education perverted into a cynical and ever-more-stratified worker training program for jobs that are disappearing.

(See "Dude, Where's My Job?" at <http://nonsite.org/editorial/dude-wheres-my-job>.)

**DON'T BUY INTO** a logic of scarce resources (including leadership positions) that separates people into the elect and the rest. Spread responsibility and recognition around.

**RESIST THE PRESSURE** to present a "picture of perfection" created by the status anxiety permeating academia. Show your vulnerability and allow others to do so without trying to one-up them.

**REMEMBER THAT WORKING** for a more just system will require many people, not just a select few who are better, more "pure," or more "radical" than the rest. Try to avoid imposing your particular brand of virtue (including "activism" (see "Action Will Be Taken" at [www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Action.html](http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Action.html))), which can undermine worker solidarity. Let's prioritize increasing, not decreasing, the number of workers fighting together for workers.

**HELP YOUR STUDENTS** understand what is happening to higher education, and the conditions under which their professors must operate. Enlist your students in any efforts to pressure the administration to improve the terms and conditions of employment of the contingent faculty at your institution.

**REMEMBER THAT EVERYONE** will violate most or all of these principles sometimes. Forgive.

**FINALLY, LET'S ALL** keep our eyes on the prize: a more just workplace community that embodies academic freedom and humanism.