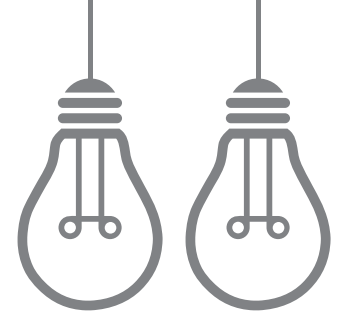# "Waze" to Support Non-Tenure Track Faculty as a Student Activist

By Jordan Harper and Adrianna Kezar

A guide created by The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success

USC Rossier

Pullias Center for Higher Education

Introduction and Background

Thank you for your interest in supporting and advocating for non-tenure track faculty (NTTF). You are part of a national movement – neoactivists – who are working against trends that are dismantling higher education as a public good that stands for access, inclusion, justice, and equity (for more see – The New Student Activists, by Jerusha Conner). As student activists, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, you can make a difference in the lives of faculty who are now experiencing terrible inequalities and working conditions.

Where do you start? It may seem like there are several different directions to take. This guide serves as a roadmap to a pathway from where you are to a place where NTTF have the support they need to help you succeed as a student.

We do not imagine that you will be doing this work in isolation. Student activists on other campuses, often teaming up with faculty and staff, are marshalling support and making notable changes. Therefore, we encourage you reflect in groups on the questions we outline in this guide. Before beginning, let's explore who non-tenure track faculty are and why you should be advocating for better supports.

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Defining Non-Tenure Track Faculty (NTTF)

Commonly known as adjunct faculty, contingent faculty, lecturers, or "instructors," non-tenure track faculty are defined as faculty with fixed appointments or contracts and can either teach on a part-time or full-time basis. Most tenure track or tenured faculty have titles such as assistant professor, associate professor, or professor. Traditionally, non-tenure track faculty, especially part-time faculty, hold positions at a number of colleges and universities in the surrounding area or may work full time in their respective industry. Full-time non-tenure track faculty are likely to have higher course loads than their tenure-line and tenured peers.

What is tenure, you may ask? Tenure is a permanent job contract awarded to faculty after a six-year probationary period. Tenure-line and tenured faculty must participate in teaching, research, and service (e.g., serving on university committees) in order to be promoted or to gain tenure. Once a faculty member receives tenure, they are protected by academic freedom, have access to substantial benefits, stable work, and job security. Thus, it is important to note that non-tenure track faculty are in no way guaranteed any of the same rights, privileges, or protections that their tenured counterparts are assured. Research suggests that non-tenure track faculty feel left out and removed from their respective higher education institutions due to a lack of support (Webb, 2007). The work they do is tremendously important to the student success missions on various campuses. They are still faculty.

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The Current State of Non-Tenure Track Faculty

Non-tenure track faculty are the new majority. In other words, there are more non-tenure track faculty on campuses across the country than tenure-track faculty. Why should you care about these changes? Research shows that non-tenure track faculty are less able to support students in persisting, graduating, and learning in large part due to their unsatisfactory working conditions. For example, many non-tenure track faculty live on poverty wages and receive little to no benefits, job security, or even an office to plan lessons or meet students in private. The working conditions that non-tenure track faculty have to endure severely limits their abilities to be available to students for interaction both in and out of class. Put more simply, no office hours, time to answer questions, time to write letters of recommendation, or mentorship.

The current landscape for non-tenure-track faculty is important to know if you want to appropriately advocate for and support this group on your campus. In your position as students, you can have a significant impact in pushing your campus to put better supports in place for faculty off the tenure track. They, too, are important to your learning and success. To learn more visit: pullias.usc.edu/delphi/
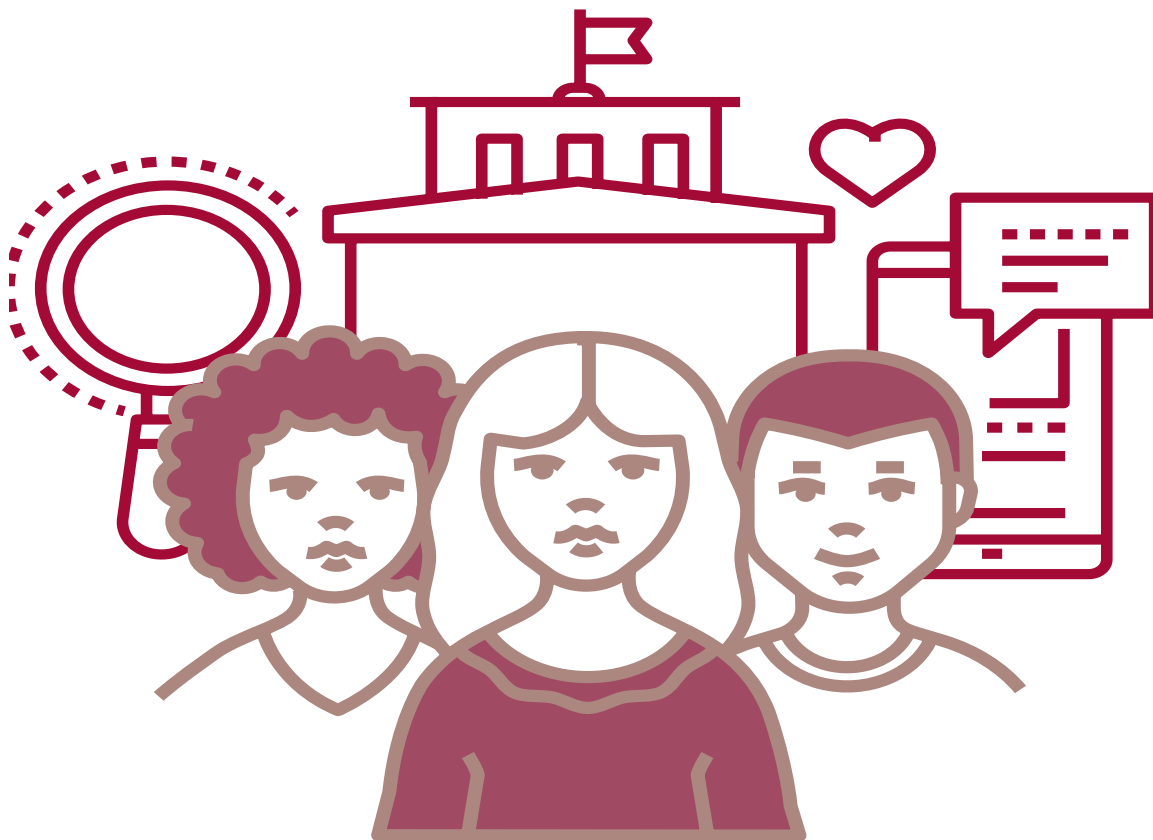
Important Stops Along the Way

On your way to supporting and advocating for non-tenure track faculty it is necessary to make some necessary "stops" to ask and answer important questions relating to yourself, contingent faculty, and your institution at large.

Stop 1: Driver Reflection

As you read about the conditions and current state of non-tenure track faculty, it is clear they experience significant marginalization and inequality. It is also important to note that women are overrepresented in the non-tenure track faculty ranks, as are faculty of color, at some institutions. How might this also relate to your own experiences or identity?

Stop 2: What Has Your Experience Been with Non-Tenure Track Faculty?

Now that you have an understanding as to who non-tenure-track faculty are, it is your turn to think about your experiences with non-tenure track faculty. If this question is applicable to you, take some time to write down your reflection in the space provided below. If this question is not applicable to you or you struggle to answer some of the guiding questions, perhaps think about why and the potential effects of not knowing the academic rank of the faculty that teach you. You may also want to collectively think about this with several students as some of you may be aware of whether your faculty were non-tenure track and others may not.

We have offered up some guiding questions to help your writing:

- ◊ Are you aware of the academic rank/status of your faculty (e.g., tenured, lecturer, part-time adjunct)?
- ◊ How many non-tenure track faculty have you had in your undergraduate and/or graduate experience?
- ◊ Did you ever notice a faculty member who felt stressed, like they had limited time or were hurrying to another obligation which is common for NTTF?
- ◊ Did any of the non-tenure track faculty share with you or the class about any additional jobs they held?
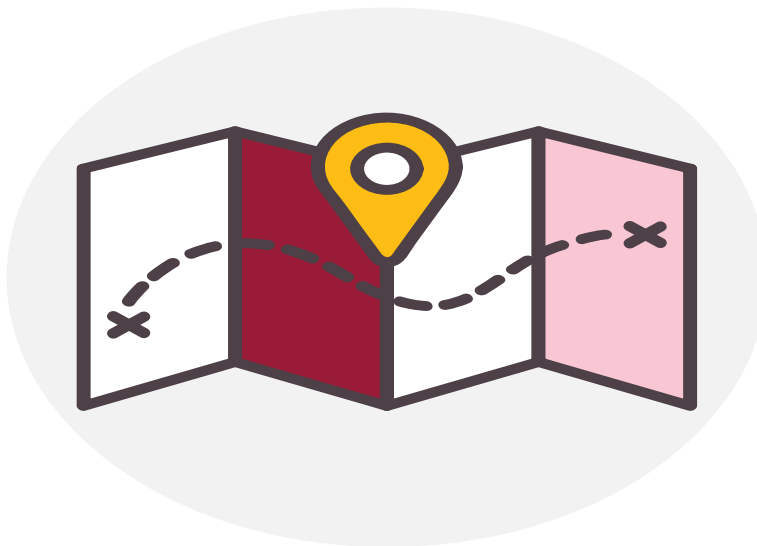
Stop 3: How, if at All, Does Your Campus Support Faculty Off the Tenure Track?

The support for non-tenure-track faculty varies depending on the institution. For this part of the guide, you will need to click around your respective institutional website and talk to non-tenure-track faculty to figure out what supports are put in place to help non-tenure-track faculty both navigate the institution and develop in their roles. In addition, you must consider what supports are out there for all faculty, but for whatever reason, non-tenure-track faculty experience barriers to participation. The answers in this section will serve as an institutional fact sheet for which you will use in advocating for NTTF on your campus.

◊ What percentage of the faculty on your campus are off the tenure track? What percentage of non-tenure track faculty are faculty of color? (Note: For this question, try a Google search "[Name of the institution] faculty fact sheet" This information should be accessible.)

◊ How many non-tenure track faculty exist in your major department?

◊ What supports (e.g., programs, initiatives, policies) exist on your campus for non-tenure track faculty?

◊ Do most non-tenure track faculty have office spaces? Are they shared with other faculty? If not, where do they meet students for out of class help or office hours?

◊ Speak to a handful of non-tenure track faculty on your campus or in your major department and ask the following questions:

» What drew them to the institution and what keeps them there?

» How do they experience non-tenure track life at your institution?

» If any, what additional positions, whether on or off-campus, do non-tenure track faculty on your campus hold?

» Do they feel supported? Why or why not?

» How many classes do they teach?

» Do they feel overwhelmed?

» What are some suggestions for better programs or policies they can exclusively utilize and benefit from?

Note: Make sure to share with them that their names will remain confidential in any sharing of the information you are collecting.

📍 Stop 4: What facts, backed by research, can I bring to the table to advocate for non-tenure track faculty?

The facts outlined below are facts that directly speak to how poor working conditions and treatment of non-tenure track faculty can have negative implications on student success:

◊ Students and faculty influence one another bidirectionally. While it is the professor who bears the responsibility for creating an engaging learning environment, it is the interactions with students within and out of the classroom environment that results in learning (Einarson & Clarkberg, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

◊ NTTF working conditions may significantly affect time on campus, classroom performance, and subsequently the students they serve (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Jacoby, 2006; Kezar & Sam, 2010).

◊ Students of color note that faculty interactions, regardless of rank, encourage them to engage with learning, try harder, and meet high academic expectations (Kezar & Maxey, 2014).

◊ Faculty off the tenure-track are less likely to use student-centered and active teaching approaches, presumably due to their lack of access to professional development (Kezar & Maxey, 2014).

◊ Colleges depend on part-time faculty to educate their students and step in 'just in the nick of time' but do very little to prepare them before they begin teaching or embrace them while they are in their teaching roles.

◊ NTTF-exclusive programs and policies help contingent faculty feel more connected to the university, and its students (Harper, Scott & Kezar, 2019; For more information see: https://pullias.usc.edu/delphi/).

Stop 5: As a student activist, what can I do to best support and advocate for non-tenure track faculty?

Be in conversation with non-tenure track faculty: The key to best supporting and advocating for non-tenure track faculty is to be in conversation with them, learning their wants and needs in order to be successful and feel a part of the larger campus environment. Make it a point to learn from the non-tenure track faculty who teach you. You might also encourage your institution to create a survey to better understand the NTTF faculty experience on campus. Example surveys include: https://pullias.usc.edu/download/2013-public-sociology-contingent-faculty-working-conditions-survey/

Create a student advocacy group: Gather students who have similar interests in supporting and advocating for non-tenure track faculty and create a student advocacy group. In this group, you all would be able to collaborate on ways to support non-tenure track faculty on your campus and stay up to date on the issues and state of non-tenure track faculty both on your campus and in higher education at large. If you can, it would be beneficial to register your group as a student organization so you all can receive funding and support. The following link provides some tools for student advocates: http://www.newfacultymajority.info/students/

Collaborate with institutional actors, groups, and committees: There are a number of groups, committees, and actors that you can work with to put forth better supports and working conditions for non-tenure track faculty. Faculty senates would be a great place to start as some senates have subcommittees dedicated specifically to adjunct faculty. There may also be an opportunity to collaborate with the disciplinary society in your major (for an examples see - https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Staffing-Salaries-and-Other-Professional-Issues/MLA-Statement-on-the-Use-of-Part-Time-and-Full-Time-Adjunct-Faculty-Members). Perhaps, even bringing the information gathered in this guide to the Faculty Development Office/Center for Teaching and Learning on your campus would help them to think through offering specific programs and initiatives for non-tenure track faculty.

Become familiar with faculty unions (if applicable): Some institutions are unionized and therefore faculty are protected by a union. If this is applicable to your campus, it would be beneficial to get in touch with that local union. They will most likely be pleased to hear that there are students on campus interested in advocating for faculty off the tenure track. Visit aaup.org for more information. Other unions you might identify are NEA, AFT, and SEIU.

Connect with state legislators: One of the ways to ensure better pay and working conditions for non-tenure track faculty is to connect with state legislators to better fund higher education. Using data collected and presented from this guide, you can send emails, letters, or phone calls about the current state of non-tenure track faculty on a national level and at your institution. Perhaps state legislators are not privy to the fact that adjunct faculty are the new majority. You can be the one to bring this information to the forefront. Some advice about advocacy at the state level can be found at: https://www.adjunctnation.com/

Collect information on the supports for non-tenure track faculty on neighboring campuses: Developing effective working conditions, programs and policies for non-tenure track faculty is not impossible or out of reach. In fact, a number of institutions have won Delphi Awards for their policies and programs that aimed to improve the state of non-tenure track faculty on their campuses. Thus, it would be beneficial to bring this information to the appropriate stakeholders and administrators so they can see the tangibility of such a change. Visit https://pullias.usc.edu/delphi/all-resources/#Case-Studies to read about pathways taken the winners of the Delphi Award to support NTTF.

Present your ideas to senior-level administrators and other higher education professionals: By simply asking questions, sharing information from this guide and the Delphi Project and the Changing Faculty and Student Success website, and encouraging data collection and climate surveys in interactions with senior-level administrators and trusted personnel on your campus, you are taking steps towards supporting and advocating for non-tenure track faculty. Furthermore, using this guide can help you gain access to the right people to hopefully enact change in the working conditions and state of non-tenure track faculty on your campus.

This list is by no means exhaustive and is here to give you a few ideas of ways to support and advocate for non-tenure track faculty on your campus.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that student leaders and activists perform the emotional, physical, and social labor to address oppression on your respective campuses--sometimes, more than other faculty or staff. We also acknowledge that student leaders and activists often suffer from exhaustion, burnout, and compassion fatigue when dealing with and trying to actively fight oppressive campus environments. Hence, we thank you in advance for the time and dedication to this topic and hope you take a pause in your journey if and when you feel the journey becoming overwhelming.

Arriving at the final destination in this journey may take longer than expected, but your work does not and cannot go unnoticed. Not only will the work you do help create better visibility and conditions for non-tenure track faculty, but it will also show you the strength of student voice, collaboration, and speaking up for groups in marginalized positions. Students can be change agents.

Recommended Reading List

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Webb, D. (2007). Adjunct faculty: A boon or burden? (Publication No. 3273952) [Doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University]. Retrieved March 2020 from ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis. http://search.proquest.com/docview/304839727/

Key Resources from the Delphi Project

The Imperative for Change: Fostering Understanding of the Necessity of Changing Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Policies and Practices (2014)

This publication aims to facilitate a conversation about changing faculty trends that begins with a shared appreciation of the potential risks of inaction or inattention to these problems.

Non-Tenure-Track Faculty on our Campus: Supplemental Focus Guide for Centers for Teaching and Learning (2013)

This guide is designed for use by centers for teaching and learning to explore how services and programming could be made more readily available and accessible to non-tenure-track faculty, a segment of the faculty that has become a majority nationwide and on many campuses.

Non-Tenure-Track Faculty on our Campus: Supplemental Focus Guide for Institutional Researchers (2013)

This focus guide is designed for use by specific campus constituencies to support a better understanding of how non-tenure-track faculty are supported by programs and services on campus or included in institutional data that are collected and maintained.

These and more resources can be found at

pullias.usc.edu/delphi

The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success

The Delphi Project is dedicated to enhancing awareness about the changing faculty trends using research and data to better support faculty off the tenure track and to help create new faculty models to support higher education institutions in the future.

An initiative of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California, the Delphi Project works in partnership with the Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U), the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. The Delphi Project has received generous funding from The Spencer Foundation, The Teagle Foundation, The Carnegie Corporation of New York and TIAA Institute.

Project Team

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Jordan Harper is a first-year Ph.D. student in the Urban Education Policy program at Rossier. His research interests include non-tenure track faculty, student leadership development, and graduate admissions and transition. Jordan approaches all of his research with an equity and inclusion lens.
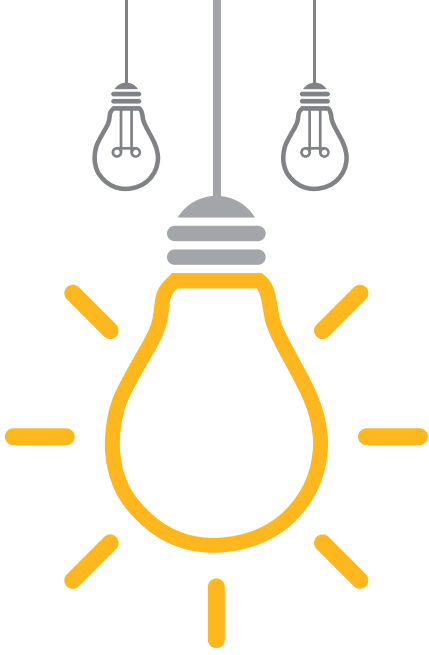
About the Pullias Center for Higher Education

One of the world's leading research centers on higher education, the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the USC Rossier School of Education advances innovative, scalable solutions to improve college outcomes for underserved students and to enhance the performance of postsecondary institutions.

Since 1995, the mission of the Pullias Center for Higher Education is to bring a multidisciplinary perspective to complex social, political, and economic issues in higher education. Our work is devoted to the key issues of college access, retention, and accountability for underserved students—and the effectiveness of the colleges and universities that serve them. Both directly and through our research, we engage with institutional leaders, policymakers and the community at large to address the major challenges in educational equity today.

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