

## Recommendations made by LAWCHA's contingent faculty committee

Posted on August 31, 2016 by Eric Fure-Slocum

In March of 2015, LAWCHA's recently formed ad hoc committee on contingent faculty issued its first report and set of recommendations. This was the result of the committee's discussions about ways to foster the full participation of adjunct and contingent faculty in LAWCHA. The committee also talked about how LAWCHA might respond to the rapidly changing contemporary academic workplace, in which contingent faculty play an ever larger role.

The committee members are: Steve Beda, Eric Fure-Slocum (convener), Claire Goldstene, Trevor Griffey, Joseph Hower, Ruth Needleman, Linda Upham-Bornstein, Naomi Williams, James Young, and Jennie Woodard.

The LAWCHA board and membership received these recommendations with enthusiasm at their April 2016 meetings and have begun to take action on a number of items. See the attached report. Over the next weeks, we look forward to reporting on ways in which LAWCHA is taking action on these and other proposals.

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### **LAWCHA ad hoc committee on adjuncts and contingent faculty Report and Proposal, March 1, 2016**

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Eric Fure-Slocum (convener), Steve Beda, Claire Goldstene, Trevor Griffey, Joseph Hower, Ruth Needleman, Linda Upham-Bornstein, Naomi Williams, James Young, Jennie Woodard

#### **INTRODUCTION**

LAWCHA president Nancy MacLean and convener Eric Fure-Slocum put out a call in October 2015 for adjuncts and contingent faculty who would serve on an ad hoc committee

to draw up and discuss proposals to foster the full participation of adjunct and contingent faculty in the organization. This committee also would consider the role LAWCHA might play in responding to the rapidly changing academic workplace.

As the initial call stated, “All of us would agree that LAWCHA needs to continue making itself into an organization that fosters full participation by adjuncts and contingent faculty. Moving along these lines will make LAWCHA a stronger organization. And as an organization attentive to work and working conditions, LAWCHA has an opportunity become a model for other professional organizations, all of which are confronting this new landscape of colleges and universities being staffed by more and more contingent faculty.”

The ten members of the ad hoc committee began their work in November 2015, looking at LAWCHA policies (especially the membership policy), conference practices, and the organization’s culture. After dozens of email and document exchanges, as well as an early February 2016 conference call, the group agreed on the following discussion points and recommendations. The LAWCHA executive committee reviewed these proposals during their February 26, 2016 conference call. **The ad hoc committee’s recommendations/motions are in bold.**

We look forward to the next steps, including a discussion of these recommendations at the upcoming LAWCHA meetings in April. We also thank LAWCHA for this opportunity to begin an important conversation.

## **MEMBERSHIP POLICIES**

The ad-hoc committee discussed three options regarding membership dues: i) keeping the status quo; ii) establishing an adjunct rate; and iii) establishing an income-based rate.

### **Recommendations & discussion:**

- **The committee recommends that LAWCHA establish a tiered, income-based membership rate, based on after-tax income.** (Note: We recommend using after-tax income because the manner in which adjuncts are paid can be misleading in regard to gross income.)

**The committee also recommends that the new rate structure be administered on the honor system** to avoid placing an onerous burden on individuals and the organization if proof was required.

Though the committee has not specified a range of membership rates as part of its recommendation, it is cognizant that the current \$25 rate for graduate students covers only the cost of the journal and Duke University Press's administration on membership. With this in mind, **the committee recommends that LAWCHA consider increasing the top dues rate to off-set potential financial losses from the lower-tiered rates.**

The committee noted that a tiered, income-based rate structure may increase membership by addressing the very real obstacle of cost for many in joining and sustaining a membership in LAWCHA.

- **The committee recommends that the Executive Committee work with Duke University Press to gather more detailed information about LAWCHA members as they join and renew by including, for example, a check-box inquiring about employment type, faculty status, ranks, income level, etc.** This, maybe along with a survey of members, will provide LAWCHA a better sense of the employment demographics and diversity of its membership.

## CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION & PRACTICES

The ad hoc committee structured this conversation around the question of how to increase the number of adjunct/contingent faculty on the program and therefore sense of ownership in LAWCHA. The ad hoc committee's discussions were animated by a few main considerations:

- Comments from some non-R1 faculty, that a conference program dominated by R1 faculty leads to an outsider status. The aim is to increase adjuncts' participation, inclusion and ownership of the conferences.
- What are the barriers to attending, considering both costs (registration fees, travel, lodging) and concerns about being intellectually marginalized?

### Recommendations & discussion:

- **We recommend that the program committee openly encourage further diversity in panels by including people of different rank and employment status, while continuing to pursue other important inclusive policies.** For instance, the program committee might look favorably upon proposed panels that include not only R1 faculty, but a mixture of contingent faculty, graduate students, and

faculty from teaching colleges and universities. Likewise, the program could signal their receptivity to joint authorship, an option that could help to include adjuncts and other scholars with limited time for research.

- While many colleges and universities offer funds to faculty who present research at conferences, others that view adjuncts as primarily a teaching faculty (e.g. University of Maine) offer travel grants if adjuncts present on teaching and pedagogy. **The ad hoc committee recommends that the program committee encourage sessions focused on teaching topics and pedagogy, as one way to help adjuncts tap into funding. Likewise, LAWCHA and the program committee should solicit information about other college and university funding guidelines and adjust accordingly.**
- Another way to increase participation is to **open up travel grants directly from LAWCHA to support contingent faculty, as is done for graduate students.** Once panel are accepted, then open up the opportunity to apply for travel funding. LAWCHA might also consider making funds available for purposes other than presenting, including committee assignments.
- **We encourage LAWCHA and conference arrangements committees to continue seeking out less expensive conference sites, including seeking out cheaper lodging options (dorm rooms, roommate arrangements, etc.) that are union-shop facilities.** Conferences held at universities or colleges during breaks, when dorm lodging is available for all conference participants, can be especially welcoming.

## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES & CULTURE

The ad hoc committee discussed steps that LAWCHA might take to work against academia's two-tiered structure and to reverse the effects of these trends within LAWCHA and beyond. We also began exploring the measures that other associations have adopted in order to increase adjuncts' participation and sense of inclusion within the organization.

### Recommendations and discussion:

- **We recommend that LAWCHA's ad hoc committee on adjunct and contingent faculty should become a standing committee.**
  - This committee should be composed of contingent faculty, as well as tenured or tenure track faculty. But the committee should be led by a contingent faculty member and should aim for a contingent faculty majority.
  - In addition to helping LAWCHA to implement the proposals offered in this

document, the standing committee might take on the following tasks: 1) advise the LAWCHA conference program committee on ways to address adjuncts' concerns and focus part of the conference on the changing academic workplace (see suggestions forwarded by the ad hoc committee); 2) work with the LAWCHA leadership to develop a plan for advocacy around contingent faculty issues, including an endorsement of collective bargaining initiatives, participation in organizations such as the Coalition on the Academic Workforce or New Faculty Majority, and strategic use of LAWCHA's web site; 3) Help connect LAWCHA adjuncts with one another, as well as with support faculty in more secure positions. LAWCHA's web site would be a useful resource to facilitate collaboration (e.g. digital bulletin board for conference planning).

- The committee should explore the range of ways that adjuncts and institutions have sought to improve workplace conditions and the terms of employment for contingent faculty. LAWCHA then could offer adjuncts and allied faculty ideas about best practices and effective strategies.

- **We recommend creating a dedicated contingent faculty position on LAWCHA board. This person might serve as the chair of the standing committee on adjunct and contingent faculty.**
- We encourage leaders of LAWCHA and leaders in the field to begin seeking out adjuncts and simply ask them to participate, encouraging a greater role in organizational activities and scholarly projects.
- In efforts to increase adjunct's participation in the organization, consider creative solutions that will allow adjuncts to work around resource and time constraints. For instance, if positions for adjuncts are created on committees but no adjunct are available because of schedule limitations or uncertainties about future employment, consider allowing two adjuncts to share the position.
- Most importantly, we encourage LAWCHA to commit itself as an organization to be out front on this issue by reshaping organizational practices and culture and by playing a great advocacy role.
- **We recommend that LAWCHA encourage the journal *Labor* to consider seeking out contingent faculty to serve as "Contributing Editors."** Adjuncts need to see the journal *Labor* as an outlet for publishing, at the same time that journals such as *Labor* need to recognize adjuncts as full members of the scholarly community.
- **The committee recommends that the LAWCHA endorse the "[OAH Statement](#)**

**on Collective Bargaining and Part-Time, Adjunct, and Contingent History faculty,”** or begin with this OAH statement to develop a parallel LAWCHA statement that includes stronger language endorsing union organizing and collective bargaining, as well as a clear opposition to the growth of precarious labor in higher education. This could be one of the first items on the agenda of the new standing committee on adjuncts and contingent faculty.

## Author



• Eric Fure-Slocum