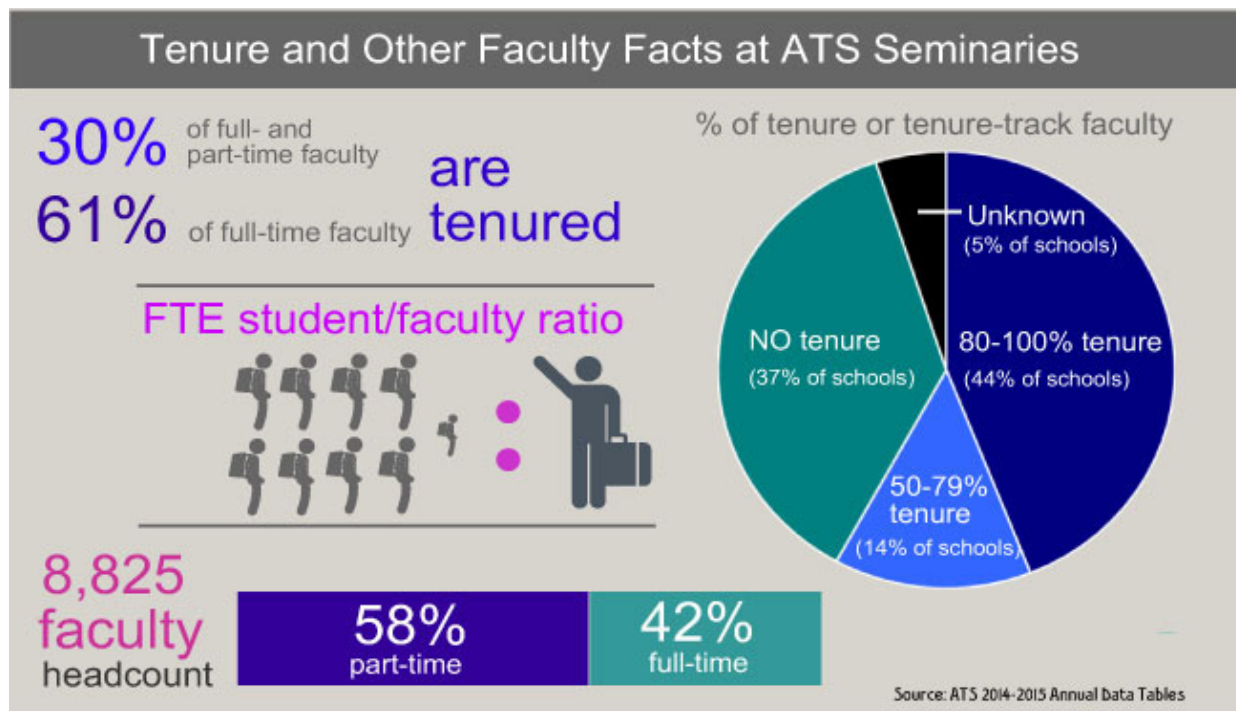


Tenure and other faculty facts at ATS member schools

By TOM TANNER



Faculty are central to theological education. The ATS Commission Standards reinforce that centrality, referencing faculty more than any other topic—except students and theological schools. The most recent data reported by member schools in the ATS Annual Report Forms reveal two significant statistics regarding tenure and part-time faculty. Overall, these statistics show remarkable similarities to the rest of higher education. The implications of the data will vary from school to school, but ATS members can engage in discussion around the issues using a few simple questions.

FACULTY TENURE

Three-fifths (61%) of the 3,727 member school *full-time* faculty whose status was reported are tenured or tenure track. And another one-fifth (19%) are considered “permanent,” a status akin to tenure in schools that do not have a formal tenure policy. Less than one-eighth (13%) of full-time faculty

are on contract, which may range from a single year to multiple years. The status of the remaining 7 percent is not known. These figures, however, are all based on *full-time* faculty. If part-time faculty were included, the percentage of tenured or tenure-track faculty would drop from 61 percent to 30 percent. That is about the same percentage for all of higher education (see sidebar on next page).

Among all 273 ATS member schools in 2014

- More than two-fifths (44%) have at least 80 percent of their full-time faculty who are tenured or tenure track (22% have 100% of their faculty who are tenured or tenure track)
- One-seventh (14%) have 50 percent–79 percent of their full-time faculty who are tenured or tenure track
- More than one-third (37%) have no faculty who are tenured or tenure track, though two-thirds of those list the majority of their faculty as “permanent”
- For the remaining 5 percent, the status of their faculty was not reported.

Among the three major ecclesial families, full-time faculty tenure distribution looks like this:

Full-time faculty status by ecclesial group among ATS member schools							
	% of All Schools	% of All Faculty	% Tenured/Tenure Track	% Permanent	% Contractual	% Unknown	TOTAL
Evangelical	43%	46%	57%	22%	14%	7%	100%
Mainline	33%	33%	81%	3%	10%	6%	100%
Catholic/Orth.	22%	21%	38%	36%	15%	11%	100%

*Totals in the first two columns may not all equal 100 percent due to uncategorized schools and unknown status of some faculty

This table indicates that among evangelical seminaries, which employ the most ATS faculty, almost 80 percent of their full-time faculty are either tenured/tenure-track or “permanent.” These seminaries also have the second highest percentage of contract faculty (14%), surpassed only by Roman Catholic/Orthodox seminaries (15%). Seminaries associated with mainline Protestant denominations have the highest percentage of tenured/tenure-track full-time faculty at 81% and the lowest percentage of contract faculty (10%).

QUESTIONS

Where do your school’s tenure statistics fall on the spectrum of ATS member schools?

What role does faculty tenure play in your institution and the fulfillment of its mission?

FACULTY TENURE: THE BIG PICTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The issue of faculty tenure has generated considerable press in recent years, especially following the economic recession of 2008. A quick Google search under “faculty tenure trends” yields 8.5 million hits.

Many governing boards struggling with economic challenges are also wrestling with tenure. Some boards have even chosen to eliminate the practice, including at least one ATS member school, though not retroactively (see [2013 news release](#) from Southwestern Seminary).

As recently as 1969, more than three-fourths (78%) of all faculty positions (full-time and part-time) in the United States were either tenured or tenure-track positions. By 2009, that percentage had declined to a third, according to the Association of Governing Board’s [The Changing Academic Workforce](#). Among Canadian universities, one [recent report](#) suggests that fewer than 30 percent of the full-time faculty are tenured or on tenure track, though most university faculty in Canada participate in some form of collective bargaining.

PART-TIME FACULTY

Part-time faculty compose 29 percent of the total faculty FTE (full-time equivalency) among current ATS member schools. However, they constitute 58 percent of the total head count of faculty and are at their highest numbers ever. The 29 percent of faculty FTE is up only slightly from the 27 percent reported just 10 years ago, but this year's percentage is still the highest ever recorded. The percentage of part-time faculty FTE is slightly higher for evangelical seminaries at 32 percent—also the highest ever recorded. Roman Catholic/Orthodox seminaries are lower at 25 percent, while mainline schools are at 27 percent. The greatest gap in the percentage of part-time faculty (in terms of FTE) is between freestanding and embedded schools, with the former employing 32 percent of their faculty part time, while the latter employ only 23 percent part time.

QUESTIONS

What is the character and role of part-time faculty at your school?

What would be the implications for your school if the ratio of part- to full-time faculty were to change up or down?

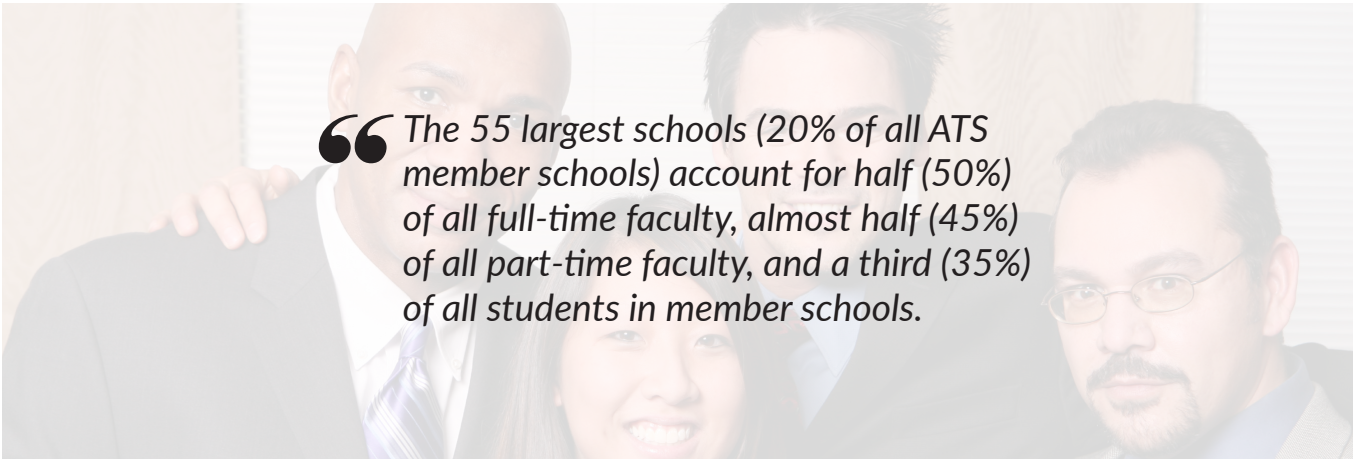
Part-time or adjunct faculty are mentioned in the current Standards fewer than a dozen times, compared to 200+ times for faculty (generally assumed to be full time). What might the next iteration of ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation say about part-time faculty?

PART-TIME FACULTY: THE BIG PICTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Among all postsecondary faculty in the United States, about half are part-time, according to [A Portrait of Part-Time Faculty Members](#). In 1975, less than a third of all US faculty were part time (see [2014 AAUP Report](#)).

Canadian universities do not typically report on part-time (sessional) faculty (see [Could We Eliminate Sessionals If We Wanted to?](#)), but some estimate they may account for one fourth of faculty (see [Sessionals, Up Close](#)).

The rise in the ratio of part-time faculty in the United States is often attributed to public institutions, especially community colleges. And while two-year public institutions do have the highest proportion of part-time faculty (69%), according to one [report](#), private, nonprofit comprehensive institutions have the second highest percentage at 58 percent. That would be the category that most embedded ATS member schools would fit. Public research institutions, not too surprisingly, employ the lowest percentage of part-time faculty at 27 percent.



“ *The 55 largest schools (20% of all ATS member schools) account for half (50%) of all full-time faculty, almost half (45%) of all part-time faculty, and a third (35%) of all students in member schools.*

ATS FACULTY FACTS

3,727 full-time faculty head count—40 fewer than peak in 2008–2009, but 30 higher than last year

5,098 part-time faculty head count—the highest ever (in head count and FTE), and 15% more than the low of 4,488 in 2009–2010

8,825 total faculty head count (42% full time and 58% part time)

5,209 total faculty FTE (71% full time and 29% part time)

255 new full-time faculty hires—95 (26%) fewer than the 360 peak hires in 2008

8.4:1 student–faculty ratio—compared to 9.2:1 in 2008–2009 (using FTE for students and faculty)

Median 10 full-time faculty per school, with a per-school average of 14 full-time faculty

Ten schools have 50+ full-time faculty members:

- Southwestern (96)
- Fuller (83)
- New Orleans (65)
- Talbot (62)
- Southern (60)
- Southeastern (60)
- Dallas (57)
- University of Notre Dame Department of Theology (52)
- Asbury (50)
- Candler (50)¹

¹ [ATS Annual Data Tables for 2014–2015](#), Table 1.2. According to the instructions for the ATS Annual Report Form, “full-time” includes faculty with a teaching load of 50 percent or more. “Part-time” includes those who teach on a part-time basis or those who teach full-time for only part of the year. It does not include full-time faculty on sabbatical who may teach part of the year nor on-site field supervisors.

QUESTIONS

How do your “faculty facts” differ significantly from those at other ATS member schools?

Is your student–faculty ratio higher or lower than before the 2008–2009 recession? What does this mean for your program?



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