



How to Fix Community College



(Hint: Continuing to simply call for more full-time hires won't do it)

The Problem

Over two-thirds of the California community college faculty, teaching slightly less than half of all classes, are part-time, temporary employees, hired and then laid off each semester. Even though these teachers do essentially the same work as their full-time colleagues, they are paid much less, have no job security, and are generally treated like second-class citizens of the academic community. And despite the official system goal of “75/25” (that 75% of instruction should be taught by full-time faculty) this situation has persisted for decades. Countless attempts at change by unions and faculty organizations, including surveys, studies, resolutions, and legislative lobbying have failed at moving the needle.

But the important question is not “Why we are not making any progress on the 75/25 goal?” The real question should be “Why is the goal 75/25 in the first place?”

The goal of 75/25 made its way into the landmark Vasconcellos bill (AB 1725, the 1988 legislation that established much of the community college system framework) from a goal statement of the system’s board of governors 10 years earlier. And, if this round figure sounds like it was plucked from thin air, it’s because, well, it was. There is no research on why this is an optimum ratio; it is completely arbitrary. Why not 50/50, or 90/10, or, better yet, 100/0?

We know it is wrong to run the system on the backs of contingent faculty. Reducing the number of those exploited is a step in the right direction, but the goal of simply having a smaller underclass is neither ethical nor visionary. This is why the idea of transitioning to a one-tier system is gaining traction in California.

The Solution

For those of us looking for an alternative to the current rigid system of academic apartheid, the “Vancouver Model” has become a rallying cry. Under the terms of the faculty contract at Vancouver Community College in Canada, all faculty are paid on the same salary schedule, with the same duties proportional to load. But we don’t have to look that far away to see other models of a one-tier system; think of a typical K-12 system.

In March of 2022, the California Federation of Teachers voted to form a task force to develop a strategic plan to transition the CA community colleges to a one-tier system. Other education organizations in California are also having these discussions. It’s time to rethink the goal of 75/25 in California, and look at alternatives to a broken system that shortchanges students and faculty alike.

It's Time for a **One-Tier** System