

Chairs and faculty alike voice weariness and frustration over a seemingly never-ending list of new demands on their time and effort. Fitting them in to their own research, teaching, and service agendas is difficult. With a hard limit on time, they often wish for more faculty colleagues to share the workload.

To some extent, the wish has been granted. Between 1999 and 2017 the number of postsecondary faculty increased from 1.0 million to 1.5 million—a 49 percent increase (NCES, May 2019). Some may argue this number represents a healthy gain given institutional budget constraints.

As impressive as the increase is, however, the rate of increase in the number of part-time faculty has been greater than that for fulltime faculty. This uptick in the use of contingent faculty has concerned some who see it as a threat to the existence of the traditional professoriate. AAUP (July 2019) suggests the trend is shrinking the tenure system and leaving a growing portion of faculty unprotected from the “whims of administrators, legislators, and donors”.

A 2018 AAUP data snapshot on contingent faculty referred to the trend as the “casualization of faculty labor” and linked it to the “unbundling” of the traditional tripartite faculty role. The AAC&U links this trend of “adjunctification” to the disruptive entry of for-profit institutions into higher education. In an ACE white paper (2014), its Presidential Innovation Lab suggests there is a cycle to bundling and unbundling tasks within the faculty role and that specialization according function is a driver for the current “transformation” of academics and their work. Meanwhile, academic service providers claim that unbundling advising, tutoring, and other academic supports are welcomed by faculty because they “free up” faculty time and effort. Still others see the use of integrated accountability and learning management systems as subtly but substantively altering curricula and instructional decisions—areas traditionally under the purview of tenure-line faculty. The complexity and pervasiveness of these innovations, especially at a time when colleges are struggling to meet enrollment, fiscal, accreditation, and reputational challenges, demand that we are aware of what’s driving the changes so we can make informed decisions about their costs and benefits.

This session has two goals. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon of unbundling faculty roles and be better prepared to discuss and make informed decisions at their home campuses.

These goals will be accomplished in four steps:

1. Defining the *unbundling* of faculty roles and linking it to examples and competing perspectives on its value. (7 min.)
2. Identifying risk of unbundling at participants’ institutions by reviewing trend data on the drivers of unbundling including hiring practices, technology, and innovations (7 min.)
3. Engaging in table talks with structured questions about changes to faculty roles taking place on participants’ campuses (15 min.)

4. Sharing and discussing the outcomes of the table talks and personal views with the whole group (15 min.)

Handouts with data set, example worksheets, structured questions, and opportunity to write a take-away statement will be provided.