NWSA Contingent Faculty Solidarity Statement

As the largest feminist academic organization in North America, the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) is dedicated to leading the transformative and critical field of Women’s Studies. Our members recognize that systems of oppression are interlaced and take seriously the material conditions of knowledge production, labor commodification, workforce stratification, and structural inequities in educational practices.

The NWSA urgently calls for wider recognition of growing inequality in academic labor practices, and, in particular, the rising number of contingent faculty.[1] Contingent faculty colleagues often face heavy teaching loads, commute between multiple positions, and lack basic support in the academy. Such disparities have adverse effects on higher education more broadly. Given their critical role in higher education, contingent faculty need fair wages and benefits, professional development opportunities, structural and contractual protections for academic freedom, and due process protections.

The NWSA also underscores that the devaluation of academic labor, wage inequities, and disparities in hiring practices has been longstanding in the academy and connects to wider material and political contexts. Race, sexuality, social class, age, disability, gender, and citizenship are all factors that impact contingent employment. Comprehensive data on contingent faculty in the U.S. is unfortunately limited as the Department of Education’s National Study of Postsecondary Faculty ceased in 2003, and nothing comparable has replaced it. Thus the NWSA calls on the Department of Education to reinstate this critical survey in order to make the issues surrounding contingency more transparent.

As feminist scholars, educators, and activists, our members actively pursue a just world in which all persons can develop to their fullest potential. Given our deep commitments to an inclusive feminist vision and to contesting and dismantling multiple systems of domination, the NWSA is in solidarity with contingent faculty colleagues and issues this call for wider recognition of labor stratification and structural inequities in higher education employment practices. We are steadfast in our commitment to eradicating injustice and to fostering educational opportunities for all.

[1] The AAUP reports that more than 50% of today's total professoriate (across institutional types) is contingent and non-tenure-track positions account for 75% of instructional appointments in U.S. Higher Education. The MLA Academic Workforce Data Center reports that the number of part-time faculty went from 379,700 in 1995 to 757,700 in 2011; in comparison, there were 393,500 tenured and tenure-track faculty in 1995 and 430,600 of the same in 2011. In addition, a June 2012 survey by the Coalition on the
Academic Workforce [CAW] found that more than 60 percent of respondents who provided information about their gender were women, compared with 51.6 percent of faculty nationally. While nearly 90 percent of contingent faculty who responded to the CAW survey were white, the survey found that respondents who identified as black earned 25 percent less per course than those who identified as white.

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