

The Disappearing Profession

One fast-food chain requires its new employees to sign an agreement stating, “I understand and agree that if employed, the employment will be ‘at will.’ That is either I or [the company] may end the employment relationship at any time, for any reason, or for no reason.”

Those last four words – “or for no reason” are chilling. For members of the academic profession, the ability to reason, and to mentor students on how to reason, is what distinguishes us from all other professions. Yet our profession is increasingly being transmogrified into one more akin to fast-food restaurants. A majority of faculty have become at-will employees, expected to suspend reason for the sake of short-term employment, often at low pay, with poor working conditions, and fewer and fewer benefits.

Contingent faculty (part- and full-time non-tenure-track instructors) in degree granting institutions now account for 65 percent of all faculty compared to 58 percent in 1995 and 43 percent in 1975.

This sad development cannot be allowed to continue unchallenged. Mounting an appropriate challenge is the single most important task facing the AAUP today. We need your support. — Roger Bowen, AAUP General Secretary; adapted from “AAUP footnotes”, Fall 2005

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