Adjunct Faculty Senate Votes

The background and meaning of the current proposed constitutional change
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Executive Summary

Adjunct faculty make up a significant proportion of the academic workforce across the nation and at Weber State. Despite making up nearly half of the academic working force, they do not typically have the same rights, protections, or self-governance that other faculty have. This proposal would allow adjuncts at Weber State University to have two adjunct faculty representatives, elected by adjunct faculty, with the ability to vote, make motions, and second motions. The proposal is modeled after student representation on faculty senate and would not affect apportionment. The following document addresses some common questions and concerns that have been raised to CRAO in the course of preparing this proposal.
Adjunct Faculty Senate Outline

The Charge:
The Constitutional Review, Apportionment, and Organization (CRAO) Committee was tasked with revising the Faculty Senate Constitution to make a recommendation on the issue of adjunct faculty senators. This charge has been ongoing for several years.

General Background
In the past few years, there has been increased attention to the role of adjunct faculty in higher education. Forty-six percent of higher education instructors are part-time. The national conversation concerning the increasing casualization of the work force -- the academy’s gig economy -- and the erosion of tenure lines and the protection of tenure are linked to this discussion.

Adjunct faculty are traditionally excluded from the power structure of the university and nearly a quarter depend on some form of social welfare. At some institutions, adjuncts have unionized to advocate for their interests.

Adjuncts at Weber State
Weber State employs 584 full-time faculty and 485 adjuncts (AY2021). Adjuncts fall into two rough categories. Some have full-time employment outside of teaching and have relevant professional experience that they can bring to the classroom. Some instead are teaching just shy of a full load (11 credits) in a role that fifty years ago would have been a tenure-track line.

At Weber State University, adjunct faculty teach around a quarter of all SCHs and a third of our general education courses, making some of them a student’s first impression of Weber State. Adjunct faculty are hired for the course and have no tenure protections. The case for including them in faculty governance is supported first by their contribution to the university and second by their characteristically vulnerable position. It is also recognized as best practice for adjuncts by the American Federation of Teachers.

Background on CRAO’s Charge
Several years ago, CRAO conducted a poll of adjunct faculty in which it was clear that most adjunct faculty wanted Senate representation, and moreover, they wanted their representative to be an adjunct. Three years ago, the Executive Committee invited two adjunct faculty to participate in the Faculty Senate as non-voting guests. These guests were elected by the general body of adjuncts to represent all

2 For example: [https://www.chronicle.com/article/this-is-how-you-kill-a-profession](https://www.chronicle.com/article/this-is-how-you-kill-a-profession)
4 See [http://seiufacultyforward.org/faculty/our-impact/](http://seiufacultyforward.org/faculty/our-impact/)
5 See [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/standardsptadjunct02.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/standardsptadjunct02.pdf)
adjuncts; they are not tied to any college and do not represent the college. The Faculty Senate’s Executive Committee coordinated the elections. Currently, the Executive Committee has arranged for adjunct faculty senators to be paid a small stipend from the Provost’s office for their service.

**Current Charge**

Building on the work of the past few years, CRAO was asked to figure out how to amend PPM 1-13 to allow for the election of voting adjunct Senators. The challenges were how to do so without affecting apportionment or the ratio of administrators to full-time faculty, and to do so in a manner that did not provide the expectation of a permanent contract.

**Current Proposal:**

The current proposal provides for the annual election of two adjunct senators who would represent all adjuncts. All adjunct faculty would be eligible to stand for election. An adjunct faculty member would be permitted to serve as a senator for at most six consecutive one-year terms, after which they would have to step aside for a year before running again.

While eligibility is construed broadly in the proposal, in practice, the non-voting representatives on Faculty Senate have been experienced teachers with a deep commitment to Weber State and our students. For example, here is the text of the call for nominations for adjunct representation in the Spring of 2021. “The expectations for adjunct instructor representatives to Faculty Senate are:

- Must have taught at least one course in the previous academic year
- Are scheduled or expected to teach again in the coming year
- Able to attend monthly faculty senate meetings on Thursday afternoons, 3:00 – 5:00 pm at the Ogden campus for the 2021-2022 academic year (virtual link will likely be available)
- Able to attend a faculty senate retreat (from 3:00 to 5:00pm)
- Interested and conversant in adjunct instructor issues at Weber State University”

The call for nominations also directed those doing a self-nomination or nominating another to: “Please write a short statement of interest, including your work history at Weber State University that we may share in case a ballot among all adjunct instructors becomes necessary.” We did not include such restrictions in the CRAO proposal, reasoning that the Constitution should be concerned primarily with eligibility, not qualifications. This mirrors the language for existing Senators and student representatives.

The current CRAO-driven proposal would give adjunct faculty senators the right to vote, make motions, and second motions, as opposed to ‘non-voting guest status.” The proposal is modeled on the language that provides for student representatives on the Faculty Senate and, as such, does not affect apportionment or the ratio of administrators to full-time faculty.
Policy Wording

PPM 1-13, C-2, Section 3 Membership

- The Faculty Senate shall consist of designated administrative members, elected members of the general faculty, elected adjunct faculty members, and appointed student members chosen in ratios proportionate to the number of members in each organizational unit as hereinafter provided in the Bylaws. The number of elected members shall be determined by maintaining not less than a one (1) to three (3) ratio between administrative and general faculty members. The total number of administrative and general faculty members shall not exceed 52.

PPM 1-13, C-2, Section 3.4 Adjunct Faculty Members

- Adjunct faculty members shall consist of two (2) designated adjunct faculty duly elected by the adjunct faculty (as defined in PPM 3-2), as directed by the Executive Committee of Faculty Senate. The adjunct faculty members may not be in the same organizational unit. All adjunct faculty who have taught in the academic year immediately preceding the election, with the exception of those who concurrently hold administrative appointments, are eligible to be elected to Faculty Senate.

- The term of an adjunct member is one year, but serving as adjunct senator does not guarantee ongoing University employment. Adjunct senators may serve, presuming successful re-election, up to six consecutive terms, and will not be eligible to serve again until an academic year has passed. Adjunct faculty members shall have the right to discuss, make motions, second motions, and to vote.
Frequently asked questions

How are adjunct faculty defined?

PPM 3.2 Article II D.1 defines them as “an individual having professional or specialized training, employed on a temporary or part-time basis, to provide instruction or instructionally related services for one or more credit bearing courses. An adjunct faculty must be appointed by an academic dean for a specific period of time and may be given a title containing an academic rank provided the additional title of "adjunct" precedes the designation of rank. Such appointment has no significance for the achieving or holding of tenure.”

The PPM definition could include individuals employed by Weber State as staff or administration as adjuncts, so we specified that adjuncts who are administrators are not eligible to be adjunct senators, as administrators already have representation on Senate. Adjuncts who are staff at Weber State, however, are eligible to stand for election as adjunct senators, as they are not currently represented in the Senate.

What is an organizational unit?

PPM 1-13 Article B-II 2.2 defines organizational unit as “the various academic colleges and the Library.”

Does election to faculty senate imply the adjunct faculty will continue to be employed if not contracted the two semesters they are serving?

No. This is expressly stated in the policy (and cleared with HR and Legal).

How will the two adjunct faculty senators represent the hundreds of adjuncts employed by Weber State?

Currently, adjunct faculty at Weber State have limited options to meet, with the Teaching and Learning Forum’s annual adjunct faculty retreat being the key adjunct-focused event. Adjunct representatives can reach all adjuncts using a listserv where they can email all current adjuncts directly.

Shouldn’t departments just hire adjuncts as instructors if they are teaching more than three classes?

Adjuncts are not permitted to teach more than 11 credits. But to the larger point, it would indeed be optimal, in cases where adjuncts are teaching nearly the equivalent of a full load, for there to be
instructor or tenure-stream lines created. Faculty Senate, however, has little control over those financial decisions, but we can ensure that those who do adjunct for us can fully participate in shared governance.

Do adjunct faculty representatives really have Weber State’s interests at heart?

Faculty Senate represents the interests of the faculty (as part of shared governance), not always the university as a whole. That said, the guest representatives who have served for the past three years have typically been teaching at Weber State for a long time and have a deep commitment to the university and our students. Given what we’ve seen, we find it reasonable to suppose that those who are interested in taking on the burden of running, attending meetings, voting, and so forth, are more likely than not to have the best interest of the faculty and students in mind.

Are adjunct faculty qualified to participate in the strategic, planning, and decision-making process given their lack of requirement to participate in research and service?

The proposal concerns eligibility, not qualifications; the ultimate decision as to who is qualified lies with the voters. But to the broader concern: the same question could be asked of any faculty member, as our academic training does not typically give us any special insight into governance. And the answer there is the same: deciding who is qualified, as opposed to eligible, lies in the hands of the voters.

Is this proposal a way to placate a few adjunct faculty who are threatening to unionize?

The motive force behind this proposal comes from Executive Committee, and this ongoing charge has been a perennial concern given the national conversation. It was not prompted by a threat of unionization (Utah is a right-to-work state, so such a threat would be unlikely in any case.) Support for this measure has largely been driven by the desire to see those that teach 25% of Weber State students have “a seat at the table” and be able to advocate for adjuncts’ particular interests and concerns.

Won’t adjunct faculty favor the organizational unit that employs them?

The policy explicitly states they are to represent adjunct faculty and not their organizational unit. This concern is also one reason that there are two CRAO representatives rather than one from each organizational unit. In practice, the guest representatives have not favored their home organizational units, nor have they come from the largest adjunct-employing departments on campus.
Adjuncts don’t have service requirements in their contracts. For those that serve on faculty senate, that would be a lot of extra work with no compensation. How is that fair?

Adjuncts elected to faculty senate have been provided with a small stipend for their service. The provost has indicated those adjuncts who are not also staff will continue to qualify for the stipend. Staff who are also adjuncts will not qualify for the stipend since their jobs include service components.

Could Adjunct Faculty Senators be used as tools of the state to move universities towards removing tenure?

The conditions that would make such a move feasible at Weber State are difficult to imagine given the current policy proposal. Currently, the adjunct faculty have two senators representing them. If they had the vote, it would add two votes to the senatorial processes. If those two votes were enough to persuade Weber State to remove tenure, that would mean the idea had already achieved broad support among university faculty.

Has this approach to representing faculty been tried elsewhere? What have the results been?

The majority of institutions do not offer any adjunct faculty representation in faculty governance, but there is some precedent at Boise State, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Stephen F. Austin State University, Berkeley College, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Maryland, among others. Typically, at these schools’ adjuncts are elected and serve a one-year term, although the precise logistical details vary between institutions. Weber State would be among the trailblazers in recognizing adjuncts, but we would not be an outlier. It’s worth pointing out also that at many institutions adjuncts’ interests are represented through a union, which one might speculate reduces the drive for representation.

Is giving adjunct faculty senators a vote just another power move that reinforces neo-liberal power structures? Just another way to keep from addressing the real issues that keep the institution from fixing ways to let adjunct faculty join the university?

A good big picture concern! Let me rephrase your question slightly: if we pass this proposal, will we hinder efforts to address the general problem of the increasing casualization/adjunctification of the workforce in higher education? This is a good philosophical question and one without an easy or obvious answer. But we do have the evidence of the past two decades that show that not having representation hasn’t contributed to an increase in tenure lines, and we think that it’s certainly compatible, if one wanted, to think both that adjuncts should be fairly represented and that we should continue to advocate for more tenure-stream and instructor lines.
Won’t giving adjunct faculty a vote dilute the power structure of Faculty Senate?

There will only be two voting members of the adjunct faculty senate, representing around 450 adjunct faculty. On the other hand, there are 39 senators representing regular faculty and four students representing the many thousands of students on campus. It would be difficult to consider this a significant dilution of power, especially given that most Faculty Senate decisions are unanimous or very close to it.

Where can I ask more questions about this policy?

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