



LEO Overview

Lecturers at the University of Michigan

The Lecturers' Employee Organization (LEO) was formed in 2002-2003 to promote the workplace interests of non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty on all three campuses of the University of Michigan. LEO represents teaching faculty who are not graduate students, tenured professors, or those whose appointments may lead to tenure. Most of these NTT faculty are now called "Lecturers" in an attempt to clarify job duties, which generally do not include an expectation to conduct scholarly research and publish results. Lecturers, unlike their tenured colleagues, are sometimes considered to be "contingent," "adjunct," "part-time," or "temporary" faculty, although in actuality they may have part-time or full-time appointments, as well as guarantees of appointment for seven years or more, with open-ended potential for renewal.

At the three campuses of the University of Michigan, there are approximately 1,400 such faculty in any given year, with considerable but not complete carry-over from year to year. Lecturers are found in large numbers in nearly every school, department, and program. On the Dearborn and Flint campuses, Lecturers teach the majority of classes for lower-level (first and second-year) undergraduates, and a sizeable percentage of upper-level classes. On the Ann Arbor campus, Lecturers have recently crossed an important threshold: they teach a plurality of undergraduate hours, slightly edging out the tenured and tenure-track faculty for the first time. Adding the Lecturers' collective teaching load

to the teaching hours contributed by Graduate Student Instructors, it is now true that most instruction of undergraduates—nearly two-thirds of all student contact hours—is provided by NTT faculty. This situation has given rise to LEO’s slogan, “We do the lion’s share [of teaching at U-M]!”

The University of Michigan is not alone in its reliance on NTT faculty to provide undergraduate instruction. Large, public research universities like this one have seen a marked decline in both the absolute numbers of tenure-track faculty and in the percentage of undergraduate teaching that is done by them, at the same time that undergraduate enrollment—and undergraduate tuition—continue to rise. “From 1997 to 2007, the proportion of full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty members declined from approximately one-third of the instructional staff to slightly more than one-quarter,” reports the 2009 study by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), “American Academic: The State of the Higher Education Workforce.” The study analyzed the most recent ten years and found “a reduction in the proportion of full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty, and an increased reliance on employing ‘contingent’ faculty and instructors such as part-time faculty, full-time nontenure track faculty and graduate employees.”

The growing dependency of the University of Michigan and its sister institutions on NTT faculty is sometimes claimed to be a cost-containment strategy, but that is misleading and inaccurate: the portion of the University’s budget that is devoted to instructional faculty has been steadily decreasing, and the share that Lecturers receive has been dwindling as well.

Why LEO Matters

In colleges and universities across the country, NTT faculty do not get tenure and are usually hired on a short-term, temporary basis for little money and few benefits. They have limited institutional agency and legitimacy: they usually cannot vote in faculty meetings, often are not listed as faculty in directories or websites, and have little opportunity for promotion, professional development, or added responsibility. They often have poor workplace conditions, needing to share office space with several others, (if any is allotted at all), and receiving little if any staff support.

As a consequence, NTT faculty regularly find that their work conditions hinder rather than help them fulfill their primary responsibility: teaching undergraduates. To earn a living wage, many NTT faculty must teach several classes at different schools in a given area. The epithets “freeway flyer” or “gypsy scholar” are sometimes used to refer to NTT faculty, labels which belie the years of education, experience, and proficiency that NTT faculty have to offer. Many NTT faculty have credentials that equal their tenured counterparts, and many veteran observers of academia have concluded that faith in a meritocratic process that guarantees the “best” candidates will secure tenured positions is misguided at best and self-serving at worst.

Some Lecturers at the University of Michigan have always had relatively secure and professionally supportive working conditions. Others, however, have seen marked improvement in their situation thanks, in large part, to LEO. Baseline pay has increased at all campuses, so that a Lecturer I with a full-time appointment for an entire academic year is now guaranteed to earn at least \$32,000 at Ann Arbor, \$26,000 at Dearborn,

or \$25,000 at Flint. Year-round health insurance coverage (analogous to the year-round coverage that K-12 teachers can rely upon) is now guaranteed to those with an academic year's teaching appointment. And each contract has seen incremental improvement in job security for Lecturers through the requirement of more transparent, less arbitrary review processes. For all Lecturers at the University of Michigan, the existence of LEO means that an individual Lecturer is not alone in seeking to improve his or her working conditions—and, therefore, in improving the quality of education that she or he can provide to undergraduates on the University's behalf.

LEO Membership, Structure, and Affiliations

LEO membership is open to nearly all teaching faculty with NTT appointments at any of the three University of Michigan campuses; certain exclusions do exist. LEO members determine the goals and priorities of the Union, delegating day-to-day operations to a small paid staff and to an elected Union Council (campus chairpersons plus union officers). The Union holds regular membership meetings on each campus and has an annual convention each fall that rotates among the three campuses. Officers and other members represent the Union at national conventions and on the national AFT Committee on Higher Education.

An affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, Michigan Local #6244, AFL-CIO, LEO was one of the first unions for NTT faculty at a major research university in the Midwest. With the support of AFT-Michigan, LEO's efforts to organize, negotiate, and implement two contracts have become useful models for other NTT faculty in Michigan and around the country. LEO now has sister affiliates within the AFT for

NTT faculty at Michigan State University, Wayne State University, Eastern Michigan University, Western Michigan University, Henry Ford Community College, and Wayne County Community College.

For further information, please see LEO's home page: www.leounion.org/.

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