



THE TRANSFORMATION OF ACADEMIC LABOR

PAST AS PROLOGUE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

UCLA *Luskin Center for
History and Policy*

BY SAMMY FELDBLUM, JOHN SCHMIDT,
AND FARIHA KHAN

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¹ Cover image (left) by Lauren Man/Daily Bruin. Image of Caroline Luce, a history lecturer and member of the University Council-American Federation of Teachers. Cover image (right) courtesy of UCLA Library Special Collections, University Archives. Image of Ronald Reagan at Hitch Inauguration.

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Key Findings

1. The University of California has experienced a long-term decline in state funding over the last forty years and persistent enrollment growth in the same period. Per-student spending has been allowed to substantially decline as a result.
2. State funding of higher education is historically subject to high levels of volatility. This volatility has been exacerbated by recurrent political and economic crises and competition for increasingly scarce state resources.
3. Successive policy decisions at the state and university level have created a situation in which an increasing proportion of the UC's core revenues come from student tuition, fees, and private philanthropy, which are themselves subject to political pressures.
4. Though the Master Plan for Higher Education was premised on the assumption that both the teaching and research missions of the university were essential for it to function as a public good, the two have become decoupled. An increasing proportion of the teaching conducted by the university is performed by contingent and non-tenured faculty ("lecturers") with limited job security and little or no role in faculty governance.
5. The growth of lecturers has outpaced the growth of tenure-track faculty at the UC in 9 of the last 10 years, and the growth of part-time positions among these lecturers has likewise outpaced the growth of full-time positions in the same period.
6. Compared to tenure-line faculty, this workforce is cheap and flexible, and has come to occupy a position of structural importance to the university's core functions – but evidence suggests this flexibility hurts student retention and performance.

The Transformation of Academic Labor

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Instruction amid COVID

The 2021-22 school year at the University of California marked the return to campus after a year and a half online. Lecturers across the UC system worked the duration of that difficult chapter without a union contract. Some five thousand lecturers teach for the university in a given year, offering nearly half of undergraduate courses across the state system. With little job security, the apparent fiscal crisis as the pandemic worsened in 2020 loomed as an urgent threat. “Even though the UC signed a no-layoff pledge,” said Caroline Luce, communications director of UC-AFT, the union that represents the university’s lecturers, “they can effectively lay lecturers off without actually laying them off because they just don’t renew their classes.” That makes lecturers an easily fungible workforce, especially vulnerable in times of crisis.

In California, state appropriations for public colleges and universities declined by 2.9% in 2020-21 relative to the year prior (AAUP 2021). This is consistent with the historically volatile nature of the state’s funding of higher education. AFT representatives noted an uptick in the turnover of lecturers after the onset of COVID. During negotiations, the union prioritized job security, in particular rehiring preference—the stipulation that lecturers who taught satisfactorily the prior year would be given first consideration over replacement hires. This became the sticking point of negotiations, and led, after two and a half years of bargaining, to a declaration of impasse between the university and union over the summer of 2021. Luce suggested in the spring that the university had not budged because it thinks “we won’t be able to pull it off, that we can’t do a strike. And we are just busting our butts trying to be able to make a credible strike threat.”

In fall of 2021, these conditions came to a head. With the UC’s lecturers planning a systemwide two-day strike, threatening massive disruptions to instruction, UC-AFT finally secured a last-minute deal with the school to avoid shutdown. Lecturers received a 30% raise in wages over the six-year life of the contract; as importantly, they received the rehiring preferences they had sought. Union representatives hailed the agreement as

the “best contract in its history.” Yet the tense and prolonged negotiations that preceded it offer an illustration of the ambiguous relationship between contingent lecturers and the university, one marked simultaneously by dependence and exclusion. Who is this workforce? And why is the university prepared to risk interruptions to instruction to maintain flexibility in its hiring and firing?

Over the last 40 years, academia nationwide has seen a transition from nearly three tenured or tenure-track faculty for every non-tenure track to the opposite proportion (AAUP 2021). For approximately 50 years, the pool of tenured and tenure-eligible faculty has hardly changed, even as the number of people employed to teach at universities has grown by nearly a million. The result is that roughly the same number of tenured faculty (400,000 nationwide) comprise just 27% of the professoriate (with an additional 10% on track to receive tenure), down from 78% in 1969 (Wisman and Duroy 2020). Nearly half of professors in the United States, moreover, are now part-time. The UC has itself seen such a transition. Thus, while at the UC the starting salary for a full-time non-tenure-track instructor is \$57,000 per year, the median salary is estimated to be between \$19,900 (McIver 2020) and \$32,000 (Zinshteyn 2021), as 70% of lecturers are hired part-time. The average length of time spent at the UC for instructors is just two years.

Like American universities generally, the UC has changed a great deal over the last half-century. Cutbacks in state funding, tuition hikes, and the expansion of precarious and lower-cost instructional ranks represent a university increasingly run as a business, and thus a turn away from the UC’s ideal of serving a public good. The crisis conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic threaten to quicken ongoing trends at the UC, including the reliance on low-paid precarious workers—graduate students as well as contingent faculty—to fulfill the university’s core mission of teaching its students. In what follows, this report examines the history of the UC’s drift toward this model of knowledge production and dissemination, considering particular moments of transition and of crisis and the transformations they have wrought. An eye toward this history will help to inform how the university, and the workers who teach and research there, can best proceed.

Review of the Literature

A voluminous secondary literature on the “privatization” of the American university has emerged in the last thirty years. To help contextualize ongoing transformations within the University of California’s academic workforce and its connection to historical, political, and economic trends beyond the academy, we begin this report with an overview of some salient concepts and empirical findings from this body of scholarly work, commonly referred to as “critical university studies.” Two core concepts will anchor our historical narrative in the forthcoming sections: the “gig academy” (Kezar et al. 2019) and the “devolutionary cycle” (Newfield 2016). The former helps to illustrate how the new landscape of academic employment reflects broader shifts in America’s labor markets, and usefully identifies the tensions that exist between the traditional faculty role and the demand for a more “flexible” workforce. The latter provides an explanation for how university privatization has historically unfolded through the mutually reinforcing decisions of lawmakers and university administrators. In addition, we review in this section existing empirical studies on the relationship between contingent instructional faculty and student educational outcomes to assess whether UC’s changing approach to its academic workforce is an abdication of its historic teaching mission. Finally, we conclude our review of the literature by surveying how widespread contingentization has produced its own countervailing force—unionization—and with what material effects. This discussion will help to situate ongoing tensions between the UC and its increasingly contingent workforce that have intensified amid the budgetary shortfalls and the roiling uncertainties of the COVID pandemic.

The Gig Academy

Scholars working across a variety of disciplines have long documented the epochal transformations that have taken place in the American economy over the twentieth century and their effects on workforce composition, employment contracts, industrial location, and national and global patterns of income inequality. Some of these transformations include the relative decline of American manufacturing employment and growth of a post-industrial service economy; the reorientation of firms toward perceived “core competencies” and consequently the increasing use of contracting and

outsourcing; the importance of “just-in-time” production principles across global commodity supply chains; and the “casualization” of the American workforce and shrinking importance of long-term employment relationships structured around collectively bargained contracts. Taken together, these transformations represent some of the most salient structural components of a broader “neoliberal” turn in American political, cultural, and economic life, the features of which have been extensively identified by scholars working across the humanities and social sciences.

Within this context, the emergence in the last decade in particular of digital platform technologies that rely on contingent, part-time, or precarious independent contractors in the so-called “gig” or “sharing” economy represents an intensification of pre-existing corporate trends that have fundamentally reshaped the contours of American employment. Higher education has not been immune to these tectonic shifts, and Kezar et al. (2019) suggest that the “gig academy” is a useful metaphor for capturing the changing patterns of both academic and non-academic staff employment at colleges and universities in the 21st century. In particular, they argue that the modern university shares with the gig economy a tendency to misclassify employees, through outsourcing, contingent labor arrangements, or the designation of workers as independent contractors. Additionally, the “gig academy,” like the gig economy firm, has an outsized “managerial influence on labor supply and demand” (Kezar et al. 2019: 26), which it uses to keep labor prices low and instill an “entrepreneurial” ethos in its workforce—while simultaneously shifting risks and costs from employer to employee. Lastly, the analogy of the “gig academy” highlights the way the university workforce has been deprofessionalized and the scope of work narrowed within given positions. In the case of academic staff, this deprofessionalization takes the form of “unbundling” the traditional faculty responsibilities into discrete teaching, research, and mentorship roles—each of which is increasingly taken up by an armada of contingent instructional staff, graduate students and postdocs, and administrators.

The “gig academy,” then, helps to identify certain dimensions of a labor landscape at American universities that has been restructuring since long before the emergence of the technology platforms that provide the analogy. This restructuring has affected both faculty and non-faculty staff, but because it is the former that perform the university’s core functions of teaching and research, they have tended to attract the most

attention. Among faculty, the most obvious manifestation of such a change has been the erosion of tenure and the increasing proportion of contingent and adjunct contracts among instructional staff. Of course, tenure itself is a relatively recent phenomenon: American higher education instruction was in its early period largely conducted by temporary “tutors” preparing for careers elsewhere, most often the clergy (Finkelstein et al. 2016a). But the career substantially professionalized over the second half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, culminating in the “Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure” by the American Association of University Professors in 1940, which laid out the framework and expectations for achieving tenure. The result was that at four-year universities especially the first era of higher education “massification” (from 1945 to roughly 1969) following passage of the GI Bill was accommodated through a dramatic expansion of tenured faculty ranks. During this period, the number of university professors nationwide grew by 375%, from 120,000 to 450,000 (ibid.: 44-45), while student enrollment ballooned in roughly the same period (from 1945 to 1975) by 500% (Thedwall 2008). Most of this expansion of the teaching workforce took place on the newly institutionalized tenure track.

At the same time, new kinds of institutions rose to prominence to meet the exploding demand for postsecondary education. A growing number of community colleges were among these, offering vocational training, associate degrees, and transfer credits for those students looking to advance to four-year colleges and universities. It is within these two-year institutions that the model of the adjunct faculty initially developed (Maxey and Kezar 2016). Many of these were “adjuncts” in the true sense of the word: often working practitioners in a particular field, supplementing their professional income with part-time teaching assignments at community colleges, whose vocational offerings could be flexibly adjusted to the demands of the broader labor market.

In the last forty years, the teaching-intensive, part-time and flexible academic labor model, pioneered at community colleges, has proven irresistible to academia writ large. The result is a “just-in-time” professoriate of contingent and non-tenure track faculty (House Committee on Education and the Workforce 2014) that both dwarfs the stagnant tenured labor pool in absolute numbers and is increasingly responsible for teaching America’s students at every major type of higher education institution (two-

year, four-year, private nonprofit, public, and for-profit). While granular data on the composition of this workforce remains understudied, several important aggregate themes have emerged. The first is the growth of part-time (largely teaching intensive) positions relative to their full-time counterparts. From 1979 to 2013, part-time faculty grew at nearly twice the rate of full-time faculty, from 34% (230,000) to 48% (765,700) of the total workforce (Finkelstein et al. 2016a). Since that time, the number of full-time hires has ticked upward, but not enough to reverse the broader trend. As of Fall 2019, part-time contingent faculty represent approximately 43% of the national professoriate, while full-time contingent faculty represent 20% and tenured and tenure-track faculty just 37% (AAUP 2021). Second, among the contingent population, annual and less-than-annual contracts are common, with approximately three quarters of contingent faculty reporting term-to-term employment in a recent American Federation of Teachers poll (AFT 2020). Moreover, hiring for these roles often occurs “just-in-time” in a literal sense, taking place immediately prior to the beginning of an academic term to flexibly meet student demand for particular course offerings. In a 2012 report from the Center for the Future of Higher Education, 35% of respondents indicated that notice of three weeks or less for an upcoming teaching assignment represented a “best case” practice, and 63% reported that their worst experiences of the contingent labor market involved this amount of lead time (Street et al. 2012). Third, while a percentage of these contingent faculty remain working professionals or retirees supplementing their income through teaching positions —the classic image of the “adjunct” in a community college setting—this no longer adequately describes the majority of the part-time workforce. A survey of over 20,000 contingent faculty conducted by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce in 2012 found that 73.3% of respondents considered “teaching in higher education to be their primary employment,” while 76.1% indicated that they were seeking or planning to seek a full-time tenured position, or had done so in the past (CAW 2012: 9). Finally, the diversification of faculty ranks as contingent positions became more common means that this segment of the professoriate includes proportionally more women and instructors from underrepresented racial backgrounds compared to those with tenure, with women now an outright majority of non-tenure track professors (Finkelstein et al 2016b, Colby & Fowler 2020). The difficulties of

contingent and precarious academic work as such disproportionately fall onto these populations.

The Devolutionary Cycle

Tenure, and its attendant stability and pay, remain a holy grail of academic employment. Writing in 2001, tenured sociologist Stanley Aronowitz took stock of his luck as “one of a shrinking minority of the professoriate who have what may be the last good job in America” (2001: 32). Though he worked long hours over the course of the week, that work—his own research and writing, teaching duties, and mentorship—was largely self-directed, and control of work time mostly his own. This experience was, however, increasingly rare amid a “cultural corporatization of higher education” (ibid: 39), involving a transfer of power from faculty to an expanding administration; proliferating ranks of poorly paid and precarious adjunct instructors; and budget cuts hamstringing public universities, both tightening academic labor markets and increasing teaching workloads. Despite a recent uptick of labor activism in the university, particularly among graduate students, “academic unionism [had], in general, not yet addressed the very core of the crisis: the restructuring of universities and colleges along the line of global capitalism” (ibid: 44). In other words, the American university system had begun to internalize the attributes of a broader neoliberal transition.

The deterioration of the conditions of academic labor amid university restructuring was by then a crisis three decades in the making. In their influential early diagnosis of other concurrent changes taking place at the university, Slaughter and Rhoades theorize an emerging knowledge-production regime of “academic capitalism,” which “values knowledge privatization and profit taking in which institutions, inventor faculty, and corporations have claims that come before those of the public” (2004: 40). This reorientation of universities amid changing political-economic circumstances resulted from a suite of federal policy changes. In 1972, Congress amended 1965’s Higher Education Act, which originally distributed federal funding directly to institutions, to disburse federal funding to students through Basic Educational Opportunity Grants, later to become known as Pell grants—a change that recast students as consumers for which universities competed. In 1980, the passage of the

Bayh-Dole Act granted universities patent rights to knowledge produced with federal funding. Universities' burgeoning pursuit of patents and copyrights to generate profits would drive new sorts of university-government-industry collaborations and reorient university knowledge production according to market incentives.

Reliance on private funding streams and an increasingly stratified, underpaid, and overmanaged labor force represent for Newfield a broader “privatization” of public schools (2016). State rollbacks have undercut the public good model of higher education, famously enshrined in California’s 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education and later widely emulated. As universities have shifted the costs of education from society to students through an increasing reliance on tuition dollars and simultaneously turned their attention to industry partnerships for research funding, the benefits and purpose of ostensibly “public” education have shifted. In a still-unfolding “devolutionary cycle,” state budget cuts and the turn to private revenue sources continually reinforce one another (Newfield 2016). The more a university relies on tuition and other non-state funds to operate, the more justified state lawmakers will feel in introducing further cuts, which promote additional moves toward privatization by university leaders in turn.

The privatizing public university runs ever more like a business with a consequent emphasis on reducing labor costs; the expansion of teaching by non-ladder faculty thus represents the labor component of this cycle. The history laid out in the following sections should be read with this devolutionary cycle—public funding cuts, privatization, more cuts, and further privatization—in mind. We argue that the increasing demand for a flexible faculty cannot be fully understood apart from this process, and the way it both erodes a sense of higher education as a public good and increases funding volatility at the university. At the same time, the devolutionary cycle offers an interpretation of the following history of labor restructuring at the UC as not merely downstream of the secular decline in state funding for higher education, but—like other moments in the cycle—also enabling those funding cuts.

Effects on Student Outcomes & Faculty Unionization

The public good model enshrined in the California Master Plan was premised on higher education providing public benefits to society as a whole alongside private benefits for students themselves, typically in the form of higher earnings upon

graduation. This public benefit, moreover, is unique to universities, as they “are the only social institutions devoted to helping the rising generation master coherent parts of the vastness of human knowledge and acquire personal capabilities that will renew themselves throughout their lives” (Newfield 2016: 15). The abdication of this public mission occurs most of all in the classroom, where students are betrayed not simply by declining per-student spending over time, but by the conditions in which student learning happens.

Kezar et al. (2019) draw on social learning theories to argue that the erosion of the working conditions of contingent faculty leads to impaired learning conditions for students. Because contingent faculty often lack an office on campus, may juggle appointments on multiple campuses, and are less likely to retain appointments semester to semester, students taught by contingent faculty have fewer opportunities for the sustained student-faculty interaction that many researchers have linked to academic success. Adjunctification can thus produce a more fractured academic community, impairing the social networks that sustain students over time. Crucially, Ehrenberg and Zhang (2005) have demonstrated that increasing use of non-tenure track and part-time faculty at four-year universities was associated with lower first-year persistence and graduation rates; Jaeger and Eagan (2009) demonstrated the same effect at two-year schools. The importance of strong faculty-student interactions is accentuated for students of color (Lundberg & Shreiner 2004) and first-generation students (McKay & Estrella 2008).

The lack of institutional support affects not only relationships outside the classroom but pedagogy itself: part-time adjuncts are less likely than either their full-time adjunct or tenure-track colleagues to use student-centered teaching methods associated with student success, such as essay exams, multiple drafts of written work, student evaluation of one another’s work, and group projects (Baldwin & Wawrzynski 2011). This may be because their stretched schedules and generally intense teaching loads prevent them from giving the time necessary for such an approach. This can in turn affect student retention. Schibik and Harrington (2004) found that students taking a more adjunct-heavy course load in their first semester on campus are less likely to continue into their second year.

Departures from this general pattern are themselves illustrative. Bettinger & Long (2010) found that while introductory courses with adjunct faculty can in fact increase the likelihood of students continuing to take courses and majoring in a given subject, that effect is more pronounced in those professional fields—engineering, education, and the sciences—where adjuncts might have industry experience outside the classroom, recalling the initial model of adjunct teaching. Likewise, a 2015 study of eight incoming cohorts at Northwestern University demonstrated that contingent faculty there were associated with improved indicators of student learning at the school—though the authors concede that insofar as “a substantial majority of contingent faculty at Northwestern are full-time faculty members with long-term contracts and benefits...[they] may have a stronger commitment to the institution than some of their contingent counterparts at other institutions” (Figlio et al. 2015: 723). Ran and Xu (2018), on the other hand, found that students taking introductory courses with contingent faculty achieve better grades but were then less likely to take another course in the same field later on, and performed more poorly when they did. This effect was stronger among non-tenure track faculty hired on a short-term basis than those with long-term contracts.

The drive toward increasing precarity outlined up to this point has contributed to a growing union presence across many American campuses. Kezar and Depaola (2018) argue that adjunct faculty unions can address some of the poor working conditions of contingent faculty, from last-minute hiring and lack of job security to lack of professional development opportunities and exclusion from faculty governance. Research has shown that collective bargaining results in better pay and benefits for faculty across institutional types (Katsinas et al. 2016, Katsinas & Hardy 2009). The 2012 survey conducted by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce mentioned above found that among respondents, median pay per course at unionized campuses was 125% greater than on nonunionized campuses (\$3,100 per course compared to \$2,475 per course), and that union presence was also associated with an increased percentage of contingent faculty reporting employer-provided health and retirement benefits, compensation for work outside the classroom, job security and promotional opportunities, and administrative support (CAW 2012).

A more ambivalent review of the scant empirical literature on collectively bargained contracts by Cain (2017) finds that while unions tend to offer greater protections of this sort for non-tenured faculty, “gaps and shortcomings relative to tenure-line colleagues” persist, and tensions between part-time and full-time contingent faculty can remain in bargaining units (112). More broadly, a survey of collective bargaining agreements from 2010 to 2016 found unions less effective in achieving adjunct participation in shared faculty governance and in disrupting the continuing trend of adjunctification of university workforces (Tolley & Edwards 2018). Even organization of contingent instructors, then, cannot erode the distinction between tenure-track and adjunct faculty. Their divide exemplifies the two-tiered compensation systems that began to be instituted even in fully unionized workplaces in the face of falling rates of profit in the US in the early 1980s (Chaison 2012, MacNeil 2013). Such systems privilege existing workforces while reducing the pay and/or benefits of new hires in efforts to reduce labor costs over time; the bifurcation of labor markets, including of workers within the same union, creates tensions among differently categorized workers and thus works against a broad solidaristic labor movement (Martin and Heertderks 1990). The reproduction of such dynamics within a university context is perhaps not surprising. As this review of the literature demonstrates, changes in the academic workforce are products of wider restructuring in the national political economy, and beyond the scope of contingent faculty to address on their own.

From the Master Plan to Reagan, 1960-1978

While the transformations in the composition of the academic workforce that have taken place across the UC do fit into a broader national story about the “privatization” of higher education and, even more broadly, the neoliberal restructuring of the American economy, the story cannot be adequately told without paying specific attention to the history of policy choices made in California over the last sixty years. In this and the following sections, some of this historical narrative will be described, beginning with the epochal Master Plan for Higher Education and continuing to the present.

A surge in college admissions following WWII and the passage of the GI Bill had left California legislators scrambling to plan state higher education on an ad hoc basis; in 1959 alone, legislators had proposed 23 bills calling for new institutions or adjustments in the functioning of existing ones. That year, with enrollment increasing across California's junior colleges, state colleges, and the UC system, the state legislature tapped a committee to consolidate operations of this tripartite system, streamlining finances and avoiding redundancies. The following year, the committee released its "Master Plan for Higher Education in California," the foundational event for California's modern postsecondary education system. The plan formalized the relationship between these differently situated institutions, laying the groundwork for everything from instructional focus to enrollment numbers to physical footprints. At the time, public institutions were supported overwhelmingly through state appropriations, as both the state colleges and the UC were to remain tuition-free to state residents. The state thus needed to anticipate enrollment in order to provide appropriate funding levels. "The fundamental problem," the Plan's authors wrote, "central to all that follows in the Survey, is that of students. How many have there been, how many are there, how many will there be in the next 15 years in the higher education institutions of California?" (1960: 45).

Burgeoning attendance demanded expanded instructional ranks. As such, the Master Plan recommended that: "Much greater effort be made to divert a greater proportion of college graduates into graduate training preparatory to careers in college and university teaching" (ibid: 11). This would depend in turn on an improvement in professorial salaries and benefits, to successfully recruit qualified candidates who might otherwise find their way to industry. Already in 1960, the authors suggested the most acute professorial shortages occurred in STEM fields, including chemistry, engineering, math, and physics (as well as now-dated fields of women's physical education and home economics). Graduate programs ought to be expanded to address these shortfalls; concomitantly, more funds should be earmarked for graduate study since graduate programs experienced high attrition rates "in large part, due to financial difficulty; and these withdrawals constitute not only a loss to the potential faculty supply but an economic waste to the state" (ibid).

The man overseeing the reconstitution of higher education in California, Clark Kerr, was one of a number of industrial relations experts tapped to lead higher education systems at the outset of the sixties (Schatz 2021). In a series of talks at Harvard in 1963, later turned into his manifesto on *The Uses of the University*, he championed a public good approach to higher education. For Kerr and the other architects of the Master Plan, the function of higher education as a public good was inextricable from its role as a motor of statewide economic growth. A more educated workforce would contribute to increasing prosperity from which all Californians were expected to benefit. This was in Kerr's mind a consequence of the radically new era in which American universities found themselves. If the first impetus toward the modern consolidation of the university system in the United States was the combination of the German research institution model and the federal land grant system initiated under Abraham Lincoln, the "second great transformation" had begun in the post-World War II period as the university was called upon "to educate previously unimaginable numbers of students; to respond to the expanding claims of national service; to merge its activity with industry as never before; [and] to adapt to and rechannel new intellectual currents," all with the result that "the university has become a prime instrument of national purpose" (Kerr 2001: 65-66). Observing the massive infusion of federal project funding into higher education and geographical propinquity of industrial activity and university-sponsored research centers, Kerr viewed the modern university as the central node of production in a burgeoning "knowledge industry," which in California was oriented primarily around defense spending.

This knowledge industry existed within a broader postwar social order characterized by rising productivity and wages and state-mediated class compromise, all buoyed by a Keynesian fiscal common sense. While more than forty years of neoliberal restructuring have since revealed this "golden age of capitalism" to be more of a transient condition than permanent achievement (and a new generation of scholars have identified the many race and gender-based exclusions that underpinned it), in such an environment postsecondary education was perceived as a quintessential public good, operating as a vehicle of equal opportunity, individual upward mobility, and statewide economic development. The primary objectives for those designing the Master Plan could therefore be "access"—securing equality of opportunity for those seeking to

receive a university education—and “excellence”—preserving the reputation of those new institutions Kerr had described as “instruments of national purpose” (Marginson 2016).

Of the knowledge industry, Kerr wrote that “The university and segments of industry are becoming more alike. As the university becomes tied into the world of work, the professor—at least in the natural and some of the social sciences—takes on the characteristics of an entrepreneur” (Kerr 2001: 68). At the same time, the university’s dealings with both students and professors were tinged with the language of industrial control. These constituencies, Kerr had earlier hypothesized, represented a “volatile element...by nature irresponsible,” and thus “never fully trusted by anybody, including themselves” (quoted in Dunayevskaya 1965). Meanwhile, the modern university, which Kerr called a “multiversity” more functionally and operationally complex than any that had come before, was producing an increasingly prominent administration: “The general rule is that the administration everywhere becomes, by force of circumstance if not by choice, a more prominent feature of the university” (Kerr 2001: 21). As higher education in California was rationalized and oriented toward cultivating the public good, the instructors working in the knowledge industry were at once entrepreneurs and employees in need of managerial discipline.

The very public explosion of free speech protests at UC Berkeley in 1964 would reinforce the apparent need for a powerful centralized administration, eventually extending beyond the Board of Regents and into California government. The student movement at Berkeley was a central aspect of Ronald Reagan’s gubernatorial campaign, which he launched with the promise to “clean up the mess at Berkeley.” The events unfolding at Berkeley became a conventional part of Reagan’s campaign rhetoric—what Kerr would later describe as a “catchy theme of Treason, Drugs, and Sex on the campus” (2001: 101). Reagan believed that the faculty and administration at the university were too supportive of the students; accordingly, after being elected as governor in 1966, he pressured the UC Board of Regents into dismissing Kerr from his role as president of the UC. Reagan would go on to fill vacancies on the Board of Regents over the coming years, ultimately resulting in a conservative majority. Reagan was thus able to dramatically intervene in university governance in a relatively short period.

More importantly, Reagan's ascension to governor would put into motion a series of structural and academic changes that would reshape how the UC system operated over the coming decades. During his time in office, Reagan continually took advantage of the student unrest across California's college campuses—broadly unpopular with the state's voters—as a political wedge issue, using it to advance a series of austerity budgets between 1966 and 1970. “The Free Speech Movement,” Nations suggests, “provided Reagan with a moral argument to reinforce his plans to reduce the size of government and a way to channel his anti-communist and anti-elitist views into action” (2021: 279). While the Master Plan had begun by “[reaffirming] the long established principle that state colleges and the University of California shall be tuition free to all residents of the state” (1960: 14), Reagan advocated the introduction of tuition at California's public universities to reduce reliance on taxpayer revenue.

Ultimately, the authority to introduce student tuition fees fell to UC's Board of Regents, who resisted Reagan's proposals until 1970, after years of declining state appropriations and wrangling with Reagan and his allies in the state legislature finally forced the issue. At a Board meeting in February of 1970, the Regents approved a \$250 “educational fee” at the UC—a pivotal decision that marked the introduction of tuition as a revenue component supporting the university's core teaching and research mission (Nations 2021). Despite the special designation, the educational fee imposed by the Regents marked what state senator Albert Rodda presciently described at the time as the new “era of the politics of tuition,” in which “we can expect tuition consistently to be more a matter of budgetary consideration in the future and we can expect...an even greater escalation in tuition” (1970). Indeed, the “educational fee” was explicitly rebranded as tuition in subsequent decades and has ballooned at many times the rate of inflation. Through “a series of relatively informal agreements in which the state allowed the university to keep both in-state and out-of-state tuition and to treat the expected revenue streams from tuition as capital rather than public revenue” (Meister 2011: 138), tuition became more and more central to the UC's operation, and is now allocated not only toward teaching and research but the university's other priorities as well.

The culture war also entered the classroom directly. In 1969, the Regents fired Professor Angela Davis from her position as Acting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at UCLA because of her affiliations with the Communist Party, citing two Regental policies

against hiring communists from the 1940s. With the growing enforcement of First Amendment rights in the 60s, abolition of the state-wide loyalty oath in 1967, and a 1969 amendment to university policy that prohibited the use of political tests for faculty promotion and appointment, the Regents were certain that Davis' dismissal would not hold up in court—but chose to proceed regardless. “We just couldn’t stand the heat of being called ‘soft on communism,’” one board member explained (Reich & Trombley 1969). Predictably, judge Jerry Pacht of the Los Angeles Superior Court denied the grounds for Davis' dismissal, barring the University of California from excluding communists from employment based on their political affiliation and calling such a political test “anathema” to a free system of government, not just academic freedom (“UCLA Barred from Pressing Red’s Ouster” 1969). However, even after Davis was reinstated in June 1970, the university announced that it would not be renewing her contract, citing budgetary constraints and job performance.² This ability to let go of instructors without firing them, through nonrenewal of short-term contracts, remains in effect and a vehicle for instructional churn.

Taxes and Labor, 1978-1983

Voters approved Proposition 13 in 1978, dramatically transforming the state’s budgetary outlook by capping state property taxes to 1% of a parcel’s assessed value at the time of purchase and requiring a two-thirds majority in the state legislature for future tax increases. The brainchild of charismatic businessman Howard Jarvis, the measure secured broad popular support in an era of increasing popular mistrust of the government, changing funding requirements for education, and rapid inflation—especially of home and property values. At the time of Proposition 13’s passage, state taxes had grown at a faster rate than personal income for the previous three years, and California property taxes exceeded the national average by approximately 52% (Citrin 2009). California’s Supreme Court had recently decided in *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) that the state’s reliance on local property tax bases for educational funding violated the Constitutional rights of students in low-income communities, triggering a wave of

² This episode is written about in more detail in a companion Luskin Center for History and Policy report on the multiple crises facing the university during this period.

redistributive efforts that sent tax revenue from richer to poorer districts (Danforth 2021). Popular discontent over high and rising taxes, spent “elsewhere” in the state, meant that homeowners turned out in droves for Proposition 13, which was approved on June 6, 1978 by a nearly two-to-one margin despite insistent warnings from many in the public sector that it would have a catastrophic effect on state finances.

By cutting property tax collection in half, the measure heavily curtailed the ability of local governments to raise revenue. In education, California’s community colleges, vocational schools, and adult learning programs experienced the most immediate constraining effects. A one-time infusion of \$4.2 billion in “bailout” funds from the state notwithstanding, community colleges across the state reported a 5% decline in total funding from 1977 to 1979, while adult education programs declined by 32% in the same period (Zucker 1982). Across California, layoffs and positions left vacant reduced the number of public employees on the state’s payroll by an estimated 113,000 employees by February of 1979 (Franz 1979). Proposition 13 also inaugurated structural transformations in California’s tax regime, making the state more reliant on income, capital gains, and sales taxes for public services (Citrin 2009; Meister 2011)—funding sources that are highly sensitive to economic downturns—and creating a tiered property tax system that disproportionately benefits long-time property owners with access to legacy tax rates, which subsequent amendments to Proposition 13 allowed to be passed down intergenerationally.

The constraint of available sources of public funds is a key component of Newfield’s devolutionary cycle. In this schematic, a retreat from the public good model of higher education—occasioned, for example, by pushback to redistribution of tax funds from wealthier, whiter homeowners to a diversifying student body—lays the groundwork for a retreat in state disbursements and a university funding model based increasingly on private sponsorships in the form of industry partnerships and student tuition, including through higher levels of student debt accrual. State budget cuts and the turn to private revenue sources—most importantly, student tuition fees—continually reinforce one another, while the “privatizing” university looks for ways to save on costs. Labor is an obvious place to trim. By 1980, the ratio of ladder faculty to non-ladder at the UC had dipped below 3 to 1 for the first time since the passage of the Master Plan (Douglass & Bleemer 2018). It is difficult to draw direct causal links between these

phenomena, but this gradual transformation of the academic workforce fits into a broader picture of university privatization (as signaled by the introduction of tuition) and increasing competition among state entities for a declining pool of available state appropriations (as exacerbated by the ratification of Prop 13).

There was, however, a countermovement simultaneous to the fiscal hamstringing of Prop 13. In 1978, having recently decided that public employees were able to collectively bargain in other sectors, the California legislature also passed the Higher Education Employer-Employee Relations Act (HEERA), determining the same to be true of workers at the state's institutions of higher ed. Within five years, professors at the CSUs unionized under the umbrella of the California Faculty Association. Librarians and lecturers at the UC consolidated pre-HEERA organizing efforts by voting to unionize with the American Federation of Teachers in 1983. From the first, lecturers at the UC experienced relative difficulty negotiating; while librarians' negotiations with the UC took six months, the lecturers needed two years to reach a deal (Goral personal communication). Tenure-track professors, meanwhile, voted against union representation, creating the two-tiered system—senate faculty with job security but no union, and precarious instructors with union representation—that still obtains at the UC today.

Graduate students tried likewise to achieve union representation on UC Berkeley's campus in 1983 with the formation of the Association of Graduate Student Employees, but would find themselves rebuffed by a state Public Employees Relations Board that declared their relationship with the state to be primarily educational rather than vocational (see *Association of Graduate Student Employees v. Public Employment Relations Bd.* 1992). After sixteen years of legal challenges, teaching assistants at UCLA finally won the right to collectively bargain with the UC in 1999, setting a precedent that would eventually make the UC the second university system in the US with unionized graduate students (PERB 1998, PERB 1999). A year later, union chapters across campuses integrated into UAW Local 2865, which negotiated its first contract that summer (Wertzberger 2020). Despite their ambiguous status as both students and workers, graduate students have increasingly provided the UC with low-cost labor; their organization across the UC occurred amid a wave of organization and militancy of graduate workers nationwide (Aronowitz 2001).

Schools, Prisons, and Declining State Appropriations, 1976-2007

In 1977, Governor Jerry Brown passed the Uniform Determinate Sentencing Act, replacing the penal system's goal of rehabilitation with a mission to punish (Gilmore 2007). It would contribute to an increase in California's prison population of close to 900% (Green 2012). Such a significant expansion would funnel money out of the state's higher education budget to support increasing prison populations, themselves precipitated by a suite of "tough-on-crime" laws. Then, in the first half of the 1990s, defense and aerospace cutbacks at the end of the Cold War and a bust in the housing market led to a recession (Cromwell 1994) that would in turn reduce state expenditures on higher ed. Baum and Bedrick (1994) consider in some depth the effects of this reorientation of state funding priorities. Declining educational budgets meant that the state sponsored massive waves of faculty retirement and course offerings dwindled. In 1994, California passed Proposition 184, the "Three Strikes Law," which propelled widespread incarceration for the next two decades. That same year, California's prison guards earned 58% more than the average national salary while UC professors earned 12.6% less than professors at comparable universities. From 1984 to 1994, California had constructed 19 prisons and only 1 state university. While the Department of Corrections added 25,864 employees, there was a reduction in higher education of 8,082 employees. The budget for higher education, which in 1984 had been two and a half times that of corrections, had dropped to about the same amount, with both accounting for about 9.8% of the state's budget. Prop 184 would only further exacerbate the shrinking higher education budget. The portion of the state's general fund that went to California's colleges and universities had declined from around 17% in the late 1970s to 10% in 1994.

Historians of the UC (Newfield personal communication, Hamilton & Nielsen 2021) have noted that declines in state funding for higher education coincide with the racial diversification of undergraduate ranks, suggesting that the reductions represent pushback to these changing demographics from wealthier and whiter residents of the state. In 1996, the state's voters codified this reaction with the passage of Proposition 209, which effectively ended affirmative action and immediately brought about a

decrease in students from underrepresented racial groups at the most selective campuses in the UC system, Berkeley and UCLA. Meanwhile, while funding recovered in the latter half of the decade, by 2000 the proportion of the UC's overall budget supplied by the state stood at 33% percent, compared to 67% in 1950 (Douglass & Bleemer 2018). Since that time, state appropriations for the UC have fluctuated dramatically with the business cycle—but have consistently lagged behind student enrollment growth. The result is that the university now spends approximately 18% less on teaching and research per student than it did in 2000 (from \$25,220 per student to \$20,670). The state share funding these core operations of the university has in the same period declined from 72% to 36%, while the tuition share has grown from 16% to 35% (*Budget for Current Operations 2020-21*).

Another economic downturn in 2001 following the bursting of the dot-com bubble would begin a devolutionary spiral from which the UC has never recovered. The funding cuts of the early 2000s spurred Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to strike a deal, the “Higher Education Compact,” with the UC and CSU to establish funding models for both systems in the years to come. In announcing the deal, UC President Robert Dynes wrote that “After years of deep budget cuts with no end in sight, this compact brings the promise of renewed fiscal stability for public universities in California” (Hayward 2004). That stability, though, stipulated that state funding would increase by 3 percent annually in the coming years while tuition would increase by 7 percent. This imbalance would lead the UC Academic Council to argue in 2007 that “the Compact does not stop the University’s financial decline or return its condition to that prior to the most recent fiscal crisis in California,” in turn ensuring that “the Compact will not allow the Regents to achieve their goal of competitive faculty and staff salaries in a ten-year time frame” (Newfield et al. 2007).

2008 Crisis

Even before the full effects of the 2008 financial crisis were felt in California and across the country, Schwarzenegger raised concerns about the solvency of the state’s finances and its ability to continue funding the UC according to the terms laid out in the Higher Education Compact. In its 2008-09 budget proposal, the Office of the Governor

warned of a “structural deficit” stemming from Proposition 13’s reduction in property tax revenues and public spending increases initiated during the (transitory) dot-com boom—and called for an across-the-board 10% reduction in state general fund expenditures to avoid a possible \$14.5 billion shortfall in the year to come (*Governor’s Budget Summary 2008-09*). Though the annual state funding increases guaranteed in the Compact somewhat moderated Schwarzenegger’s proposed cuts, the result was that state funding declined for the UC in 2008-09 and again in 2009-10 even as the number of full-time enrollments across the system grew by 10,000 (*2009-10 Summary of the Budget Request*).

By late 2008, the state budget had been fully thrown into disarray by the national economic meltdown. Between 2008 and 2010, state funding commitments to the UC fell by over \$1 billion relative to what had been forecast in the Compact (*2010-11 Summary of the Budget Request*). Expecting further austerity, the University proposed phasing in a 30% tuition increase over two academic years, initiating staff furloughs and layoffs, and reducing future enrollment and course offerings. Though these measures were met with immediate and vociferous student resistance throughout the 2009-10 academic year, the UC had by 2012 substantially raised tuition for three consecutive years, laid off more than 4,200 of its staff, and eliminated or left vacant another 9,500 positions (*Budget for Current Operations 2021-22*). In the 2011-2012 budget, student tuition and fees exceeded the state’s share of UC revenue for the first time in the university’s history.

The fallout from the financial crisis led to tension within the UC and, in some cases, a sense of competition for scarce resources. In a 2009 letter to administration, Andrew Scull, then chair of the sociology department at UC San Diego, and 22 other department chairs and professors decried the coming cuts in the wake of the economic downturn: “We believe that if these plans are implemented, the University of California as we know it will be dead – reduced to a mediocre shell of what it once was.” The problem, for the authors, was a lack of recognition of hierarchy across the system, and the implementation of cost savings through proliferating adjunct ranks. The ten ostensibly equal campuses of the UC had, they argued, de facto flagships. “Rather than destroying the distinctiveness and excellence at Berkeley, UCLA, and UCSD by hiring temporary lecturers to do most of the teaching (and contribute nothing to original research, nothing to our reputation, nothing to the engine of economic growth a first

rate research university represents), we propose that you urge the President and Regents to acknowledge that UCSC, UCR, and UC Merced are in substantial measure teaching institutions ... whose funding levels and budgets should be reorganized to match that reality” (2009). The chair of UC’s academic council responded to “strongly reject” the sentiments expressed by Scull (Croughan 2009), but the letter nonetheless demonstrates the attitude of a portion of ladder faculty toward their contingent colleagues, and difficulties faced by campuses in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

From 2003 to 2015, the UC’s debt tripled from \$5 to \$15 billion. This growth was driven in part by state cuts, but also increased even during (brief) periods of public reinvestment. Hoping to utilize what credit-rating agency Moody’s called its “powerful student market position” (Hamilton & Nielsen 2021), in 2013 UCOP took over the UC system’s debt from the state, over opposition from the Council of UC Faculty Associations, AFSCME and the UC Student Association. Thanks to a higher credit rating than post-recession California as a whole on account of its ability to pledge tuition revenue as collateral (Meister 2009), the Office of the President argued that the move would save more than \$100 million a year on debt financing. Instead, less than six months later, the system’s credit rating was downgraded. Even so, the maneuver meant that the UC could expand its use of state funds sans legislative oversight (Hamilton & Nielsen 2021). More generally, the increasing indebtedness of the UC is characteristic of a broader pattern of “financialization” at public (and private) universities in this period, which increasingly leveraged student tuition and other revenue streams to fund their operations through borrowing on capital markets in lieu of more conventional state appropriations paid for by taxes. The assessment of credit ratings within these markets “explicitly [rewards] high tuition rates, the proven ability to increase tuition further, and high revenues from research and hospitals” while “punishing high rates of faculty tenure and staff unionization” (Eaton et al. 2013: 15-16).

Tuition increases are of course less popular with students and their families than with capital markets. When Jerry Brown took office for his third gubernatorial term in 2011, he campaigned for the passage of Proposition 30, which increased the state’s sales and top marginal income taxes and earmarked the revenue for higher education. As governor, Brown also inaugurated a multi-year funding plan for the UC that restored some of the funding cuts experienced during the Great Recession while freezing further

tuition increases, which has resulted in UC's tuition costs remaining largely flat since 2013. In an effort to nonetheless continue bringing in tuition dollars, the UC expanded admission of nonresidents, who pay supplemental tuition. Nonresident enrollees climbed from 3,104 in fall 2008—6.4% of the admitted class—to 12,303 in 2017, or 18.6% (UC Infocenter). Yet these students, legislators felt, competed for enrollments with the California residents the Master Plan was designed to serve. With state legislators threatening to withhold funding, the UC Board of Regents voted in the spring of 2017 to cap non-resident admissions at 18% for each campus, with higher caps for those campuses enrolling a higher proportion the following year, offering a comparative windfall to the institutions—Berkeley, Irvine, Los Angeles, and San Diego—able to attract out-of-state and international enrollees (Hamilton & Nielsen 2021).

The Contemporary Adjunct Landscape at the University of California

The historical narrative in the foregoing sections is briefly illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts yearly changes in state appropriations for and tuition contributions to the UC, and Figure 2, which depicts the state and tuition share of the university's "core funds" for teaching and research at four snapshot moments in time: 1988-1989 (prior to the nineties recessions), 2005-2006 (at the inauguration of the Higher Education Compact), 2011-2012 (in the aftermath of the global financial crisis), and 2020-2021.³ Several salient points are immediately visible. First, as explained in detail above, California state funding of higher education is highly volatile and subject to dramatic annual cutbacks following economic crises, during which available state revenues tend to diminish. These funding cuts are routinely offset by increasing revenue from tuition—in, for example, 1992, 2003, 2009, and 2011. The blue dips (state funding cuts) and orange spikes (increasing reliance on tuition) starkly visualize Newfield's "devolutionary cycle" of university privatization. Though tuition increases are immediate—and in monetary terms often inadequate—responses to curtailments in state appropriations, the orange line rarely dips below zero, meaning that each tuition increase therefore constitutes a new baseline for both university and state funding decisions. Indeed, while

³ These figures are adapted and updated from data provided by Lu (2016) and the University of California Budget for Current Operations 2021-2022.

the tuition share of the UC's core funds peaked at 53% overall in 2011-2012—after state funding declined precipitously and the university began phasing in its 30% tuition increase—and has since declined to 49%, the tuition contribution to the university's finances in constant 2020 dollars is still roughly 7% higher in 2020 than in 2011 (\$3.171 billion vs. \$2.973 billion).

How do these funding patterns affect academic labor decisions at the university? Lu (2016) offers clarifying longitudinal data on UC personnel changes between 1964 and 2015 (including medical center personnel). He observes that between 1975 and 2015, the number of students within the UC system doubled, while the number of managers grew 13.6 times (1258%). The growth of tenured and tenure-track faculty, by contrast, did not keep pace with student enrollments during this period. Where in 1975 there were 22 undergraduate students at the UC for every tenure-track professor, that ratio has crept upwards to 28 students for every tenure-track professor in 2015. Moreover, between 1995 and 2015, lecturer (i.e. non-tenure) positions grew at roughly three times the speed of tenured positions. There are now more managers than tenured faculty at the UC, and the disparity has only grown in the time since Lu published his report. Between 2015 and 2020, the number of manager FTE positions has increased by an additional 48% (from 10,952.4 to 16,169) while the number of tenure track positions has grown by approximately 12% (from 9,615.9 to 10,810.5). One possible cause of this discrepancy is financialization. While headcount data from the UC does not disaggregate among administrative positions, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (2021) has shown that nationally, business and financial administration ranks are growing more quickly in terms of both total positions (25% growth from 2012 to 2018) and salary outlays (33%) than both managerial positions (9% numerical growth, 15% outlays) and instructors of all kinds. Over this same period, lower-pay and student-facing office and administrative support roles have fallen. This pattern of administrative expansion, the authors argue, contributes to the steady growth of student costs. This particular form of cost increase, moreover, contributes little to educational outcomes, as measured by graduation rates; comparable increases in spending on instruction at public institutions contribute twice as much.

Comparing the UC's changes to moments of state budget shortfalls and cuts (captured in Figure 1), Lu concludes that “increases or decreases in state appropriations

do not seem to impact UC personnel hiring rates” (2016: 13). We have tried to offer an alternative interpretation, based on a more holistic historical sketch of both the transformations of the academic workplace in the last forty years and the changing political and economic conditions in California since the Master Plan. From this vantage, the rapid growth of a strata of managers at the UC signals both the dispersal of traditional faculty responsibilities—particularly those related to campus governance and student mentorship—to other parts of campus, and a growing commitment of the university to a new financialized model that may enable it to better withstand state funding volatility. The failure of the ranks of tenured faculty to grow at the speed of enrollments, meanwhile, speaks to the broader decoupling of the faculty’s teaching and research responsibilities (and the devaluation of the former in relation to the latter). The teaching gap is addressed in an “entrepreneurial” environment through an increasing reliance on lecturers and other contingent faculty, who not only offer the university cheaper instructional labor in an era of secular declines in per-student funding at the UC but whose contracts are more easily terminated or not renewed in recurrent moments of crisis or shortfall.

Figure 3 shows changes to the composition of UC’s faculty (excluding the university’s medical centers) between 2011 and 2021.⁴ What this data indicates is that tenured faculty still comprise the majority of all three faculty types at the UC, but that the growth of lecturer positions has outpaced the growth of tenure-eligible positions in nine of the last ten years (before contracting somewhat after the beginning of the COVID pandemic). In this time, the number of lecturers has grown 50.13%, while the number of tenure-eligible positions has grown only 16.69% (Figure 5). Lecturers are further bifurcated by their part-time or full-time status. In 2011, there were 1,403 part-time lecturers on the university’s payroll; by 2021, that number had increased to 2,199. This growth in part-time lecturers (by 56.74% in ten years) has occurred more rapidly than the growth of lecturers in general, and part-time employees have constituted a greater share of the contingent academic workforce than full-time employees for the entire period for which data is available (Figure 5).

⁴ This information is drawn from the [UC Employee Headcount](#). 2011 is the earliest date for which data of this type is publicly available. It does not match the data reported annually by the UC to the Integrated Postsecondary Education System. The IPEDS data goes back much earlier in time, but does not include part-time employees and does not disaggregate between UC medical centers and general campuses, which we do here.

At the same time, the data presented in Figure 3 is misleading for two reasons. First, when we expand our scope of view beyond those designated as “faculty” by the university to include *all* academic employees—including graduate teaching and research assistants, postdocs, and “other academic employees” (a category that includes librarians, academic administrators, and others)—the tenure share of academic labor performed is put into perspective. This share becomes immediately more modest in such an expanded universe, comprising in April 2021 just 19% of all academic employees in raw numbers and 30% of the FTE hours distributed among them (Figure 4). A widened view of the pool of total academic labor, in light of the foregoing discussion, accounts for the position of graduate teaching assistants and researchers as a category of low-wage workers who perform specific functions for the university, if on less flexible contracts than their contingent counterparts. Second, there is an important distinction to be made between the consistent growth of lecturers in the last ten years, indicated in Figure 3, and the turnover of this workforce—who, in other words, is filling these positions, and for how long. In a recent investigative report for *CalMatters*, Zinshteyn (2021) found an average annual “churn” of 1,440 positions among lecturers within the UC between 2015 and 2019, and a peak of 1,618 in 2020. What this means is that even as the overall number of lecturers within the system continues to grow, the face of this workforce changes considerably from year to year.

How has the COVID pandemic affected employment trends at the UC? In total, the number of people employed by UC as of April 2021 has declined 12.16% from the previous year. The bulk of this decline comes from a massive reduction in student staff positions (down 42.75% from 2020, from 34,586 to 19,802)—the work/study roles the UC makes available to defray the cost of attendance for its undergraduates. Excluding this population of undergraduate student workers, the largest decrease in absolute numbers in 2021 came among professional and support staff, who provide technical, operational, clerical, and administrative labor to the university. Among the academic labor pool specifically, the tenure ranks and number of graduate student workers grew very slightly, while the number of adjuncts, lecturers, postdocs and other academic employees all declined (Figure 5). Interestingly, the number of full-time lecturers fell by 5.06% from April 2020 to April 2021, while the number of part-time lecturers actually slightly increased, by 1.06%—suggesting some additional shifting of instructional labor

from a full-time to a part-time track. While tentative, these changes taken together reinforce our view that growing contingency offers the university flexibility in managing its workforce in response to moments of crisis.

Futures

Looming budget uncertainty threatens UC's agenda in the medium term, as laid out in UC's 2030 plan. By that year, the Regents aim to have graduated 200,000 extra students (20% more than what had been projected based on 2019 growth trends), to increase degree completion to 90% of enrollees, and to close achievement gaps for students from underrepresented groups, first-generation students, and low-income students. This process will be enabled, according to the university, through the addition of 700 ladder-rank faculty between 2020 (the last year for which data is available) and 2022. As part of the plan, the UC has asked the state for \$60 million in permanent additional annual funding; as of April 2021, no such funding has been forthcoming.

As we have endeavored to show, the expansion of student ranks amid cuts to state funding has brought about an ongoing squeeze, which has led the UC to reduce instructional labor costs through proliferating ranks of cheaper contingent faculty. Despite their increasing importance to the university's core teaching mission—and the aforementioned impact of these instructors on student persistence and graduation rates—lecturers go unmentioned in the Regents' initial report laying out the 2030 plan. Precarious employment conditions—particularly part-time work, short-term contracts, and low pay—may hinder the ability of professors to provide the sort of instruction crucial to student success, and thus which might allow the UC to achieve its 2030 goals. Instructional turnover makes this an especially daunting task: lecturers spend an average of two years teaching for the UC, with a quarter leaving the school's employment rolls each year (Zinshteyn 2021).

Yet as mentioned at this paper's outset, the conditions under which these lecturers will work are currently under contest. The last strike by the UC-AFT, in 2002, won the establishment of "continuing appointments," in which lecturers who accumulate the equivalent of six years of teaching experience are granted indefinite teaching positions and guaranteed a year of notice before being laid off. Those lecturers who reach this status—currently some 1,200 of 6,300 total lecturers across the UC

system (Zinshteyn 2021)—offer a model of job stability that eludes many contingent faculty both in California and nationwide. The concessions won by the lecturers in their now-ratified post-COVID contract provide a degree of security to a wider swath of the bargaining unit, alongside pay raises, allowing more of the UC’s instructors the “opportunity to perform” (Kezar et al. 2019).

While a comparison of non-tenure employment conditions across institutional type and geographic location is difficult given a growing number of faculty categories and titles, full-time contingent faculty’s minimum annual salary of \$57,000 at the UC would place them above the 64% percentile of total annual pay—from teaching and non-teaching work—for adjunct faculty, according to a national survey by the AFT (2020). Though the percentage of UC lecturers receiving healthcare through the university has fallen since the beginning of the COVID pandemic by 2% (Fregozo & Kever 2021), the 55% of UC lecturers who do nevertheless far surpasses the 41% of lecturers nationally for whom this is the case (AFT 2020). In some regards, the UC’s treatment of its contingent labor force exceeds national standards. Even so, the high cost of living in California means that full-time non-tenured faculty making the minimum salary qualify as low-income or extremely low income at six of the nine campuses across the system (Luce personal communication).

So too are the employment conditions of other segments of the UC workforce in flux. A 2017 extension of HEERA included student researchers among those public higher education employees able to bargain collectively. A month after the lecturers signed their contract with the UC, student researchers across the system affiliated with the UAW successfully achieved recognition from university administration after likewise authorizing a strike. As of the time of writing, they have yet to begin bargaining. Graduate instructors enacted a wildcat grading strike in 2019-2020 at UC Santa Cruz, an effort quashed by the pandemic but sure to echo into contract negotiations with the university in 2022 (Feldblum & Schmidt 2020).

COVID’s effects suggest budgetary struggles to come, and the university has long passed such struggles along to an increasingly flexible workforce. While the system has managed to maintain a high level of quality even as state funding levels have dipped, the conditions under which contingent faculty teach threaten to undermine the UC’s ability to achieve its stated 2030 goal of high graduation rates among a broadening base of

students. In order to support these students, faculty need to be supported themselves. As such, we end with a suite of policy suggestions across multiple levels—within the university itself, as well as from the state and federal governments—which might empower the UC to work toward the good of its students, its workers, and California as a whole.

Policy Suggestions

The growth of a precarious, contingent workforce at the University of California is intertwined with wider political economic trends toward workforce casualization and outsourcing, as well as long-term declines in and volatility of state funding for higher education. As such, it is difficult for universities to address the spread of precarious working conditions—and thus work toward enhancing education and research—on their own. With this in mind, we suggest a number of policy interventions across scales extending beyond the university to the state and federal levels. The COVID pandemic clarified the long crisis of labor conditions in higher education, spurring academic labor organizing across the US. The multipronged efforts of such groups as the coalition of unions Higher Education Labor United and Scholars for a New Deal for Higher Education inform our set of recommendations for addressing the labor of higher education systematically.

University

- **Data collection and transparency.** In order to equitably address the problem of contingent academic labor, more information is needed about this group of workers. The university should therefore be more transparent about academic employee categories and responsibilities on both a campus and departmental level. This should include information about average length of employment and workforce turnover to account for the “churn” of lecturers that has heretofore only been addressed by investigative reporting (Zinshteyn 2021). The university should likewise survey contingent faculty—especially those working part-time—about career aspirations and other sources of income in order to get a better sense of who, precisely, is working for it.
- **Include contingent faculty in the UC 2030 plan.** The university’s ambition to graduate an additional 200,000 students and close achievement and retention gaps by 2030 is admirable, but it needs to include a specific vision about the educational role played by non-tenured faculty to be realistic. To this end, the university should articulate how lecturers fit into its broader UC 2030 agenda. It could do this by commissioning research on the relationship between lecturer instruction and educational objectives; working to reduce disparities in pay and employment

conditions between tenure-track faculty and their non-tenured colleagues; setting specific goals for at least half (or more) of the system's lecturers to achieve continuing status; or shifting part-time lecturers into full-time employment.

- **Involve contingent faculty in the life of the university.** The Academic Senate is the primary organ for faculty governance in university affairs. Membership is primarily restricted to ladder-rank faculty. To mitigate the two-tier academic labor system, the Senate should collaborate more directly with the unions representing the university's academic employees working outside of the tenure system, sharing data and resources. Additionally, departments should do more to integrate lecturers into decision-making processes and curriculum planning. Contingent faculty should be able to transfer credits that count toward continuing status across departments and across UC campuses.
- **Bring instruction and administration into balance.** The rapid expansion of managerial positions at the UC relative to both student populations and instructional ranks represents a site of cost increase that contributes comparatively little to educational outcomes. In order both to reduce university costs and ensure that spending contributes to the university's core functions, the university should establish benchmarks for its ratio of instructors to administrators. Research by Martin and Hill (2012) suggests that the ideal ratio for battling cost increases is three tenured professors for each non-academic professional staff person. While differences across campuses in employee characterization make such a determination more difficult, the UC should decide upon and pursue a ratio that would rebalance instructional and administrative hiring.

State

- **Make a new public commitment to public higher education.** The precarity of lecturers at the UC is inextricable from decades of disinvestment at the state level. State leaders should recommit to higher education not just as a way of preparing students for good jobs in the future, but also with the recognition that teaching should be a good job now. Long term funding commitments, tied to tuition reduction and wage guarantees for university employees (with cost of living taken into account), would demonstrate such a commitment. To accomplish this, the relative

proportion of higher education and corrections funding should be returned to levels prior to the carceral turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

- **Reduce revenue volatility.** The state's budget is perpetually thrown into crisis by revenues that fluctuate with the economy and intense competition for scarce resources. This has been exacerbated by the fiscal hamstringing of Proposition 13. Danforth (2021) has outlined some legal avenues for reform, but the structure of the law itself militates against this approach. A political solution is perhaps more realistic. Proposition 15, which was narrowly defeated at the ballot box in 2020, would have reined in some of the worst excesses of the Prop 13 regime by implementing a "split roll" system to end preferential tax treatment for large commercial properties. Initiatives like this point the way forward.

Federal

- **Forgive student debt.** As of Q3 2021, there is nearly \$1.6 trillion in outstanding student loan debt in the United States, most of it on the books of the federal government. This massive debt burden is a drag on the economy and exacerbates persistent wealth and race-based inequalities. While the current administration has extended a COVID-related moratorium on student debt repayment and granted limited forgiveness for certain borrowers, a comprehensive effort to address the student debt burden would reinvigorate a model of higher education as a public good rather than a private benefit and begin the process of reversing the cycle of privatization that has made tuition such a central dimension of university operations. Steps must also be taken to reduce the costs of attendance to prevent excessive debt burdens from accruing in the future.
- **Establish national standards for university workforces.** Each year, the federal government distributes hundreds of billions of dollars to American universities in the form of student loans and grants and contracts for research. This represents a powerful vehicle for transforming labor practices on university campuses nationwide. As proposed in the 2021 College for All Act, expanded federal support to universities should be tied to promptly ensuring 75% of courses are taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty. To reach that benchmark, colleges and universities should preferentially hire current non-tenure-track professors. To avoid

supporting the entrenchment of an instructional underclass, and as proposed by Scholars for a New Deal for Higher Education, these disbursements must also be tied to commitments from institutions to provide living wages to instructors, researchers, and staff—including graduate workers. Nobody can pay rent in tuition remissions.

A note on research

The Luskin Center for History and Policy aims to produce historical knowledge that will inform policy-making on salient political issues. As part of that mission, the Center hopes to promote this mode of inquiry, such that interested sister institutions might be able to engage in their own applied histories. While we harbor no pretensions of methodological novelty, we did find certain avenues fruitful in assembling our report. Most fundamentally, institutional records of headcounts and budgets provided the backbone for our narrative. In order to make sense of those data, we turned to both oral histories and primary and secondary literature on the UC. We began our project by interviewing representatives of staff unions and graduate unions as we worked to clarify our narrative. We are especially indebted to the UC-AFT, who were generous with their time and communication amid their protracted negotiations with the school; attendance of their bargaining sessions helped to elucidate the relationship between California's lecturers and their employer.

The University of California system is among the nation's largest, and has had an outsized cultural impact on American university life. As such, there is a large secondary literature on the system. Certain of those historians studying the system are, moreover, involved in its governance via the UC Academic Senate. The reports produced by the Senate in the Schwarzenegger years, detailing possible future funding patterns and outcomes for the UC, offer important precursors to our work with the Luskin Center—practical historical scholarship aimed at improving policy outcomes, and produced within the institution itself. Much of the wisdom concerning the university's history and possibilities is of course held by those upon whose labor the university depends. This, thankfully, is a resource for applied historians at higher education institutions of every sort.

Figures

Figure 1: Funding Volatility at the UC, 1972-2020

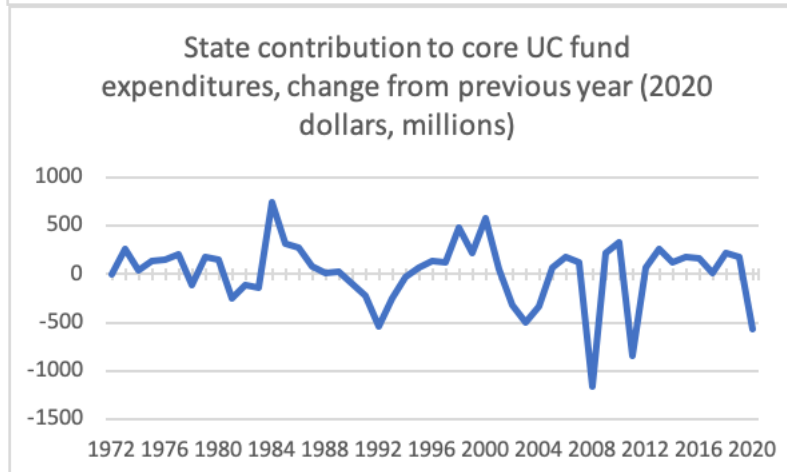
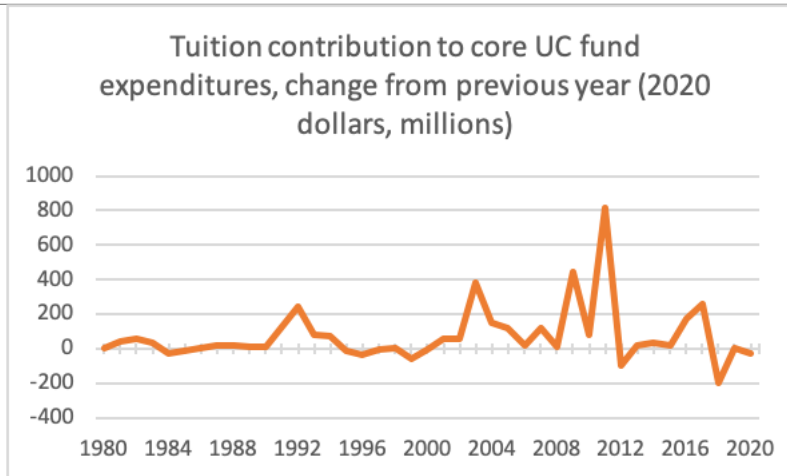
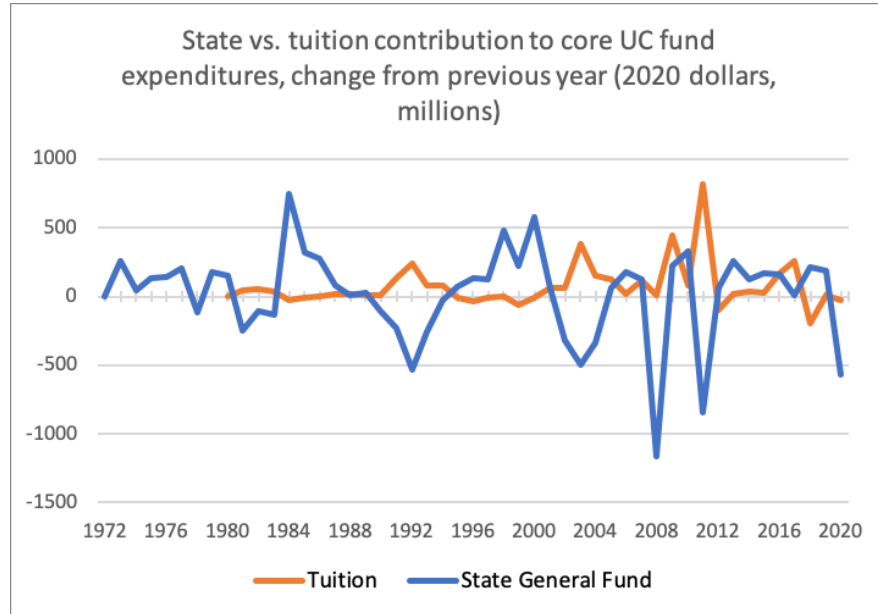


Figure 2: Changing State and Tuition Shares of UC Funds, 1988-2020

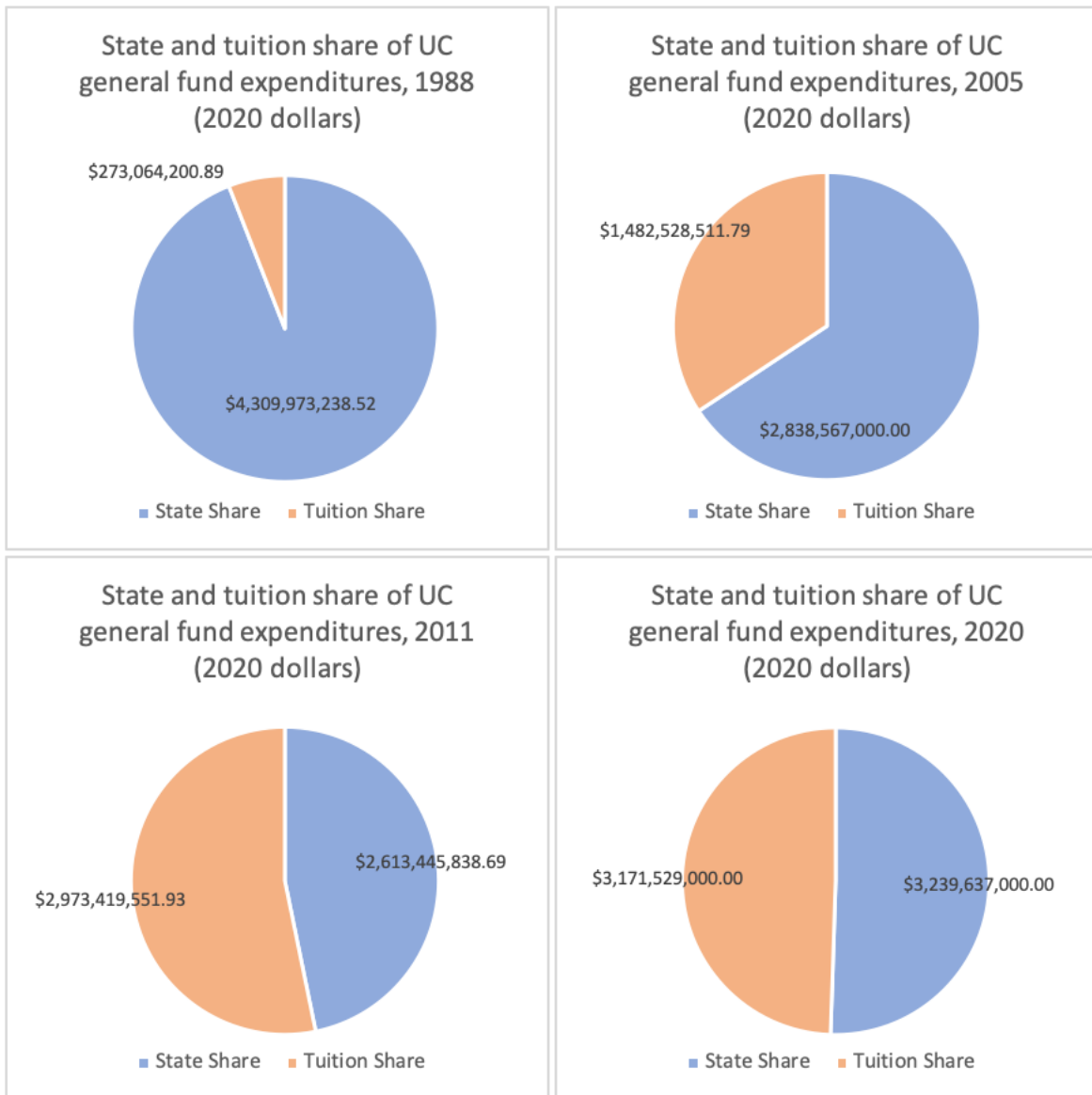


Figure 3: The Changing UC Faculty, 2011-2021

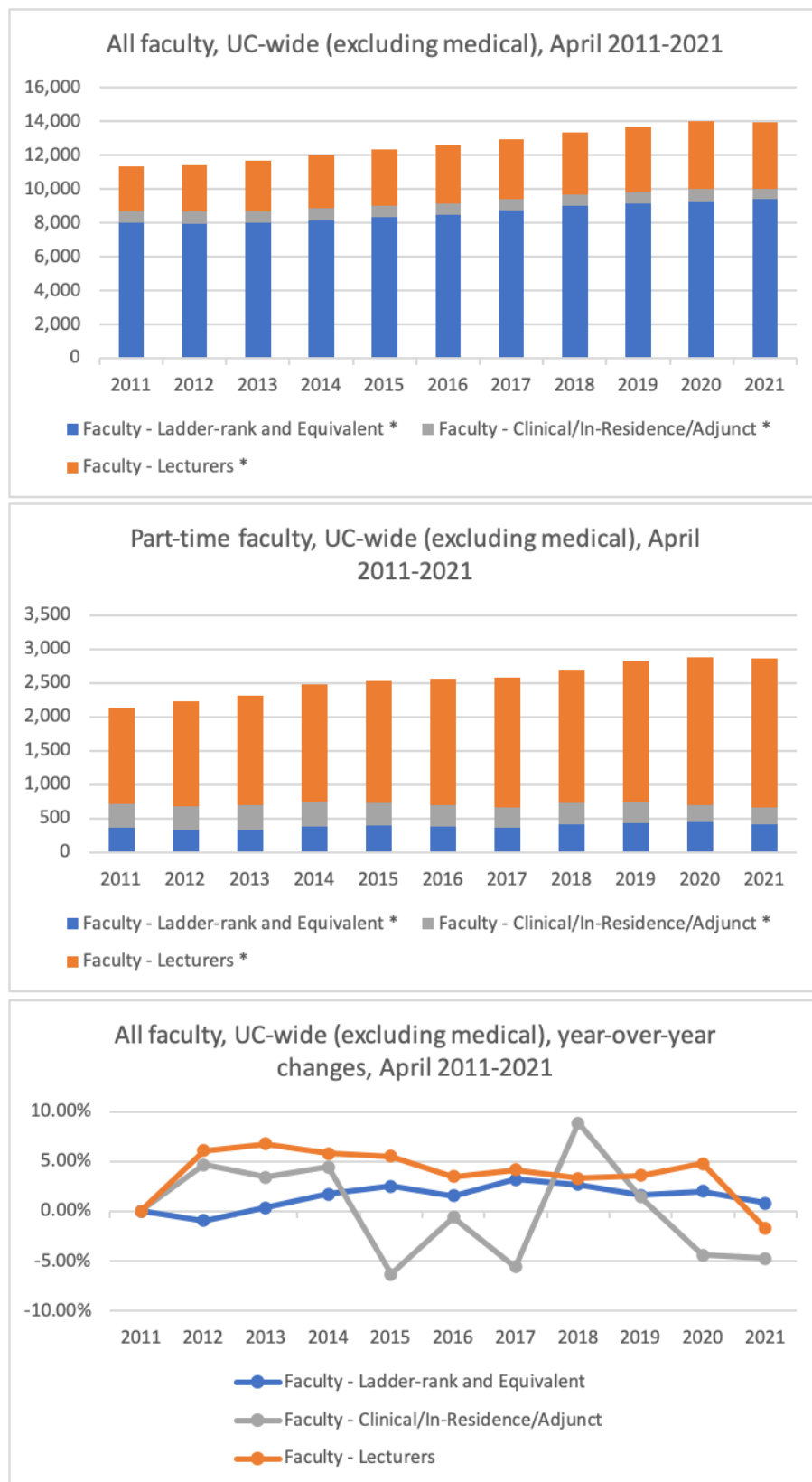


Figure 4: Composition of All Academic Employees, April 2021

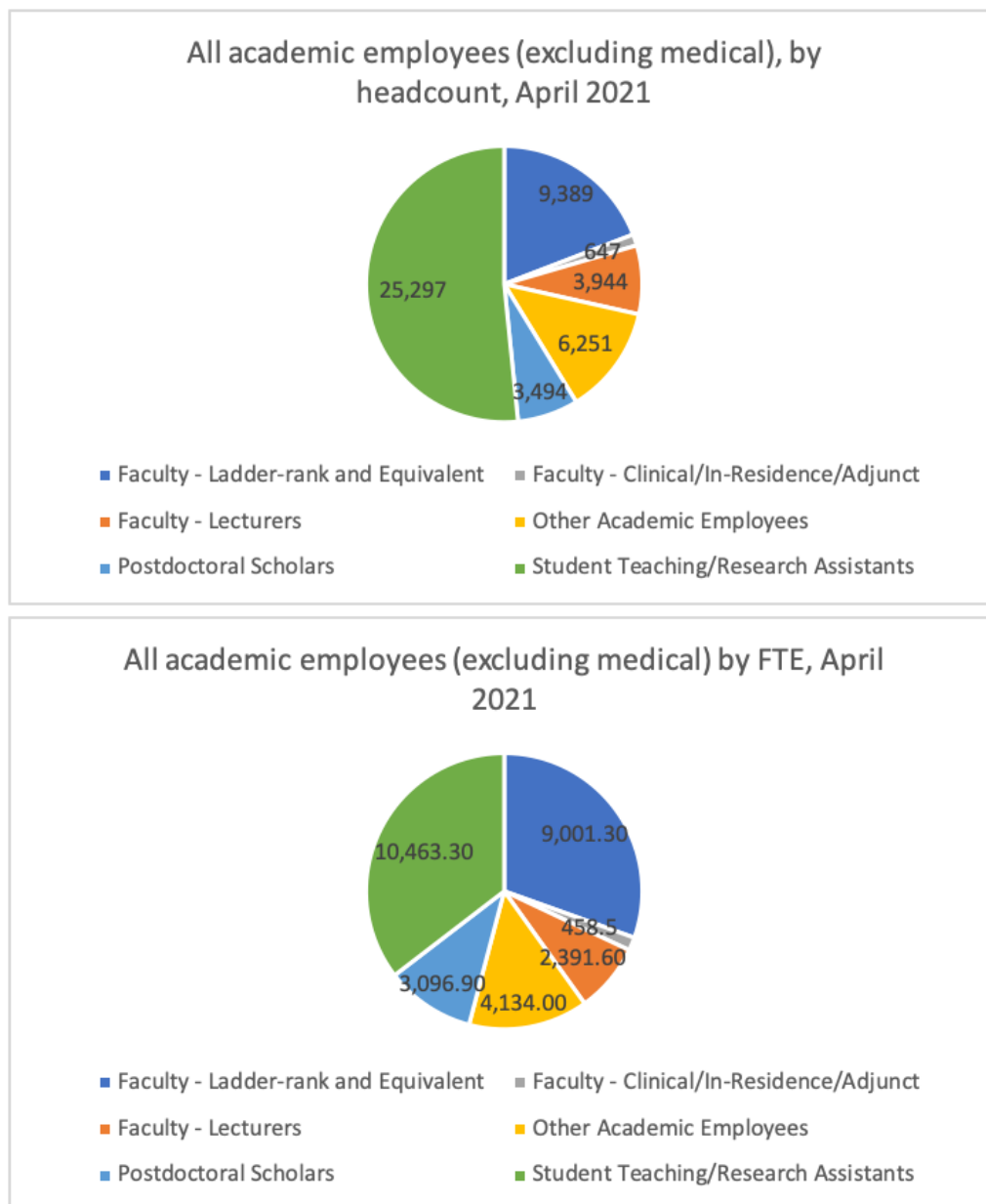
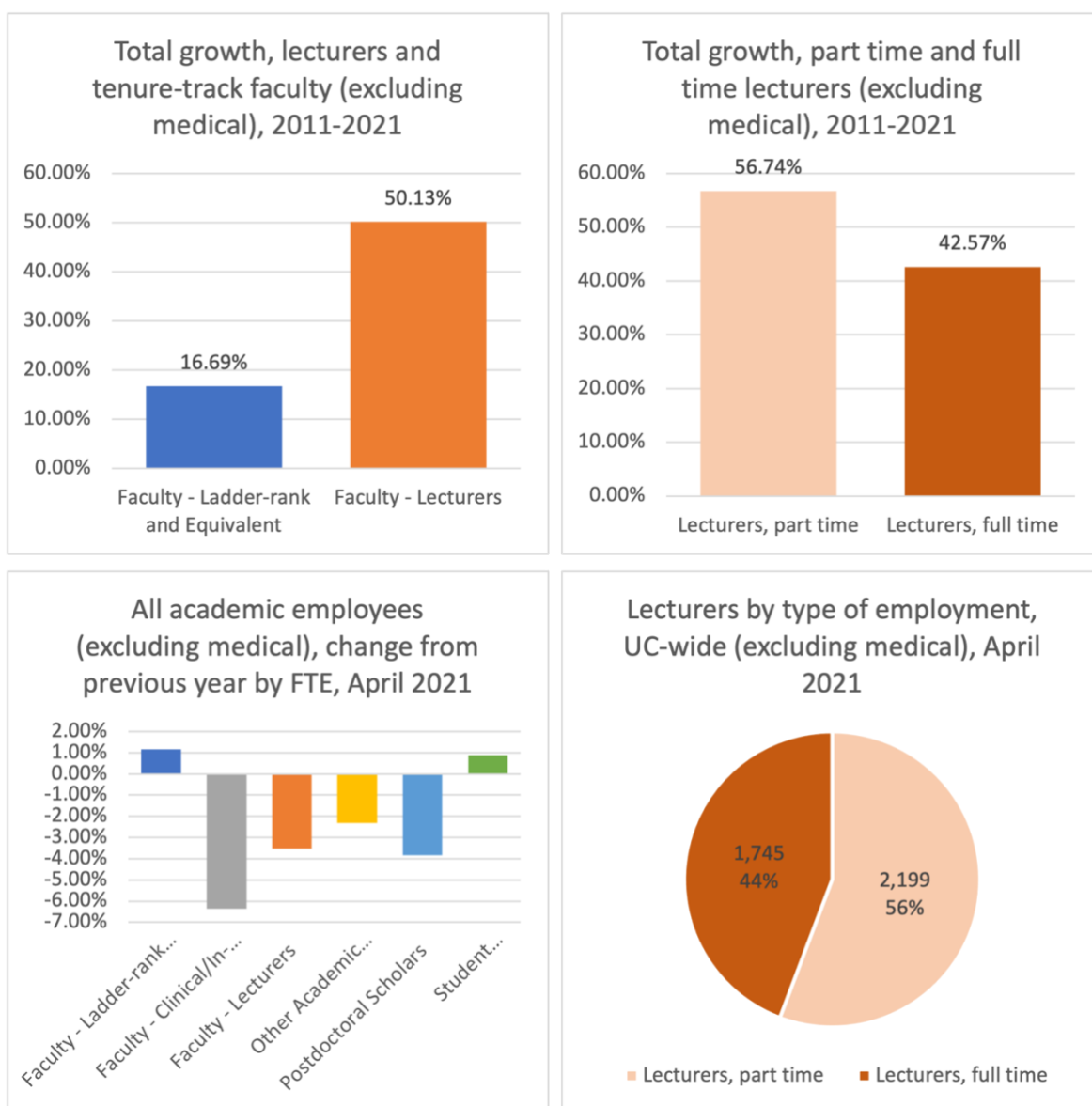


Figure 5. Faculty Composition Snapshots, 2011-2021



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Interviews

Jorge Cabrera, formerly bargaining team member with UAW 2865

Barbara Fuchs, Professor and Vice-Chair of Graduate Studies, UCLA Department of Spanish and Portuguese & President of Modern Languages Association

Miki Goral, UCLA Librarian & UC-AFT Secretary Treasurer

Toby Higbie, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment Associate Director, Labor Studies Faculty Chair, Professor of History and Labor Studies

Caroline Luce, Associate Director, UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies & Communications Director, UC-AFT

Michael Meranze, Professor, UCLA Department of History & 2019-2020 UCLA Academic Senate Chair

Jamie McDole, Nurse case manager UC Davis, President, UPTE-CWA 9119

Christopher Newfield, Director of Research, Independent Social Research Foundation, formerly Distinguished Professor of Literature and American Studies, UCSB

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