

dance studies association

Critical Contingencies Pledge

We recognize that the workforce in higher education is increasingly populated by contingent workers outside of the tenure track. Contingent work includes, but is not limited to, adjunct and lecturer faculty, postdocs, clinical faculty, part-timers, instructors, TAs, and non-senate faculty. The US Department of Education reported in 2015 that more than 70% of postsecondary positions nation-wide are held by those employed outside of the tenure track. This kind of contingent work is financially precarious and ill-resourced, despite the US academy's financial position. Dance departments continue to depend upon contingent labor, in particular, as the discipline requires studio courses taught by professionals in the field whose expertise often comes from performance careers before terminal degrees. Additionally, dance and dance studies have been historically on the margins of the academia as a humanities-adjacent field. To this end, universities and colleges often employ contingent faculty to teach one-off dance and dance studies courses, as tenure lines are not available or prioritized by the institution. Working in academia without a terminal degree creates a particular precarity and vulnerability for these dance professionals – the hierarchy of academic labor devaluing the very careers and skillsets of choreographers and dance pedagogues that lay the foundation of the field, as they simultaneously train the next generation of performers, scholars, and makers.

The Dance Studies Association proposes standards for equitable treatment and employment of contingent workers in dance and dance studies, and beyond. We are a community holding each other accountable and insisting that departments recognize and prioritize care and communication, while pushing towards equitable labor practices. Dance is a field that centers the body and recognizes explicit, political intersections of personhood, labor, identity, and radical/collective care. As a discipline we can be the gold standard for instructional labor practices in the academy. And as institutions continue to build dependency on contingent labor, the Dance Studies Association calls out continued inequities that cannot continue in earnest.

As signatory below, we pledge to the following:

- **Clear communication about contracts, well in advance of the start academic year.**

Contingent workers are balancing multiple jobs, as a matter of economic survival. While course contracts are tied to institutional/departmental budgets, calendars, etc., recognize that advance notice of offerings and/or cuts is a priority. Communication about employment and course scheduling will aim to be done at least 6-months in advance of course offering. If this cannot be achieved, communicate about the delay with candor so that individuals might seek other employment if their work is under threat of cuts. Be clear and up front about potential, last-minute course cancellations. If courses are tied to enrollment numbers, have a working plan in place to promote the course offering. Contingent faculty are often new to campus and/or not well-known to the student body. Thus, they depend upon you for the effective promotion of their courses. Course promotion can also be executed collaboratively with the instructor. Recognize that last minute course cancellation is an immediate and unexpected loss of income. Work with your contingent faculty to avoid this outcome if at all possible.

- **Orient to and integrate into the institution and department.**

Contingent workers show up to teach their courses and leave, too often without larger institutional/departmental interaction. Upon hire, offer (optionally) a tour, make introductions, invite to departmental events, etc. Show them how to login to WiFi, get a campus ID card, reserve space, use the sound system and/or projector (not 5 minutes before the class begins, but through an orientation).

Create a one-page document that helps this person take advantage of institutional teaching resources – i.e. library/discipline specific librarians/special collections, funds for special guests, computer labs, camera/technology resources, annual events throughout campus that might integrate into the classroom, centers for teaching excellence, trainings, etc.

Create a one-page document that helps this person take advantage of institutional resources for personal use – i.e. health and wellness facilities, parking, affinity groups, unions, etc.

- **Resource classroom spaces responsively.**

Do not assume what an instructor needs; ask. You may not be able to provide on all requests, but you will understand where your institutional holes collide with instructor intent. This might look like a type of accompanist (drummer not a pianist, or DJ not a drummer). This might look like an exemption from departmental dress codes (sneakers and loose-fitting clothes, not leotards and ballet shoes). This might look like covering mirrors or setting up tables/chairs. Ask contingent workers about accessibility needs. Contingent workers are unlikely to make these kinds of requests without prompting, as employment precarity begets quiet cooperation.

- **Fair treatment as faculty peer in pedagogy.**

Contingent workers are an integral part of students' learning. Students often do not know the employment status of their teachers. Treat contingent workers as your peer in education, helping contingent workers connect their classrooms to

larger initiatives and curricular goals. Faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.

- **Support pedagogical development.**

Observe teaching by department chair or senior faculty member at least once per year, offering feedback and discussion in written report. This write-up can be used by the contingent worker in a teaching portfolio and in application to other institutions. This also ensures that student evaluation forms are not the sole record of the classroom from an institutional perspective. If your institution offers a center-for-teaching-excellence, make this resource easily available to your contingent workers. Share syllabi so that contingent classrooms are operating in relationship to the larger curriculum, working in concert with other faculty. If required, offer support in syllabus building for the first course taught. Ask if the contingent worker requires syllabus-building support upon hire. Meet one-on-one at least once a quarter/semester to check-in, listen, and ask what is needed.

- **Push towards more equitable compensation and labor practices.**

Make it a part of your departmental mandate to push towards fair labor practices for all employees – as a relative part of your departmental budgets. This might include an eye towards multi-year contracts, regular and predictable raises, research funds for contingent workers, protocols for classes missed, opportunities for co-teaching, choreographic/performance opportunities. This might include transparency about compensation across the department. This might include undoing a mind/body dualism that resources studio and classroom courses differently. Set an annual goal for contingent labor practices, as to make small changes gradually and consistently. Allocate existing resources for contingent workers, including: conference support, career development opportunities, research assistantships, studio space/time, faculty concerts, office space, parking passes, etc.

- **Protect academic freedom in the classroom and through scholarship.**

While most institutions have policies on academic freedom and freedom of expression, contingent workers are particularly vulnerable to retaliation and firing over course content and/or scholarship. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) reports that tenure is the only secure protection for academic freedom in teaching, research, and service. (2003, updated 2014). The free exchange of ideas is threatened when contingent workers, as a rapidly growing demographic, are unwilling or afraid to take risks for fear of dismissal. Pledge to protect academic/institutional due process of any firing or disciplinary action against a contingent worker. AAUP recommends a written statement of reasons and a hearing before a duly constituted faculty committee if a contingent worker makes a prima facie case of an academic freedom violation or improper discrimination. Communicate this process clearly upon hire, as well as your institution's academic freedom policy (as well as any known limits of that policy).

We, signed below, represent the tenured faculty within the department herein listed.

We understand that this work is collective, and not the sole responsibility of a singular chair.

We recognize, with respect, the contingent labor that supports our own work, and we know that the privilege of tenure affords us an opportunity to advocate for and support our peers who are experiencing these critical contingencies.

We hold one another accountable for the care of our colleagues outside of the tenure track.

NAME OF INSTITUTION

NAME OF DEPARTMENT

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