

Unionization in Higher Education: A Scoping Review of the Literature and Suggestions for Future Research

Samuel Snideman, Doctoral Student, and Thalia M. Mulvihill, Professor, Ball State University

ABSTRACT

Union membership has been in decline in the United States for several decades. According to figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, roughly 11% of American workers belong to a union, down from 20% when the data were first collected in 1983 (2016). Among the public-sector workers are educators, and while educators broadly, in all categories, have some of the highest rates of unionization of any profession, unionization has been less-universal within the colleges and universities in the United States. This category of educators has a unique history of unionization and is worthy of renewed examination within the current context of higher education politics. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conduct a scoping literature review

(Mays, Roberts & Popay, 2001; Arksey and O'Malley, 2005), to identify areas of opportunity for future research on unionization within higher education leading to new knowledge and new directions. The results indicate that there exists a number of very intriguing research areas for scholars to examine in the years ahead, using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs, that may result in direct implications for researchers, theorists, higher education futurists, policymakers, and others.

INTRODUCTION

Union membership has been in decline in the United States for several decades. According to figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), roughly 11% of American workers belong to a union, down from 20% when the data were first collected in 1983. The disparity between rates of unionization between the public and private sectors are stark: 35% of public sector workers belong to a union, whereas just under 7% of private sector workers are unionized (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Among the public-sector workers are educators, and educators boast some of the highest rates of unionization of any profession.

Despite the storied history of union representation of educators at all levels of education, unionization has been less-universal within colleges and universities in the United States. This is especially true of contingent, or adjunct, faculty. Per Berry (2005), adjuncts are less likely than full-time faculty to be represented by a union, but a significant portion of adjuncts are represented. Approximately 27% of faculty are part of collective bargaining units, with higher levels of unionization found at two-year institutions (Berry & Savarese, 2012). Part of this lack of union membership may be because of the existence of other types of faculty

protections for full-time faculty, like contracts, tenure, and shared governance. Part of this might be explained by the collective action problem (see, for example, Olson, 1965): that it is difficult for individual faculty members to come together in the development of a public good like better employment protections for all. And, in some cases, states may have policies that reduce incentives to unionize (e.g. “right to work” legislation) or court decisions that can block unionization (e.g., the 1980 *National Labor Relations Board v. Yeshiva University* case) or otherwise limit union activities (e.g., the 1977 *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education* case, the 1991 *Lehnert v. Ferris Faculty Association* case, or the 2007 *Davenport v. Washington Education Association* case).

Nevertheless, adjunct faculty are beginning to unionize at institutions throughout the United States. At community colleges and private liberal arts institutions in Missouri, part-time faculty are voting to join unions and to seek better employment terms: more job security, better pay, and access to benefits (Addo, 2016; Hahn, 2016). Graduate students, who serve in a variety of teaching and research roles at public and private institutions, are similarly making efforts to unionize and collectively bargain (Flaherty, 2016b). Unions like the Service Employees International Union are working with adjunct groups nationwide to form local unions and to negotiate for better compensation, including payments for canceled courses (Flaherty, 2016a). Higher education, as Sproul, Bucklew, and Houghton (2014, p. 1), write is “slowly, methodically, and rather quietly” becoming one of the more unionized segments of the American labor force.

While these efforts are scattered and not always successful, the literature on adjunct faculty attitudes regarding unionization has been slow to develop. The popular media is full of stories on efforts to unionize, particularly among adjuncts. For example, Addo (2016) provides an example of a “no” vote on unionization at Webster University. Di Trolio (2017) detailed the successful push among contingent faculty at Barnard College to secure a collectively-bargained contract. What has not happened, however, is a real deep push among scholars to study this phenomenon.

Indeed, the literature on unions in higher education is relatively old, sparse, and focused on tenure-track faculty. While there is some literature on adjunct faculty unions and on graduate student efforts to unionize, these few pieces do not provide a comprehensive

examination of efforts to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining for improved working conditions. Educators within the category of higher education have a unique history of unionization, and this is worthy of renewed examination within the current context of higher education politics.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conduct a scoping literature review (Mays, Roberts & Popay, 2001; Arksey and O'Malley (2005), focused on general worker perspectives on unionization and unionization in higher education. A scoping literature review works "to map rapidly the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available, and can be undertaken as stand-alone projects in their own right, especially where an area is complex or has not been reviewed comprehensively before" (p. 194, Mays, Roberts and Popay, 2001). Furthermore, a scoping literature review is defined in contrast to a systematic review in that it "tends to address broader topics where many different study designs might be applicable. Second, the systematic review aims to provide answers to questions from a relatively narrow range of quality assessed studies, whilst a scoping study is less likely to seek to address very specific research questions nor, consequently, to assess the quality of included studies" (p. 20, Arksey and O'Malley (2005).

As the working conditions for adjunct faculty are not likely to change overnight, and adjuncts will need to continue to find ways to adapt in a changing higher education environment, new research agendas will need to keep pace. This scoping literature review is aimed at helping to identify areas of opportunity for future research on unionization within higher education that will lead to new knowledge and new directions.

GENERAL WORKER PERSPECTIVES ON UNIONIZATION

While not always speaking directly to the issue of adjunct faculty unionization (or even to unionism in higher education more broadly), the field of labor studies has developed a robust body of literature on why workers across the spectrum of employment opt to join (or to not join) unions. As a result, such literature can provide interesting insights into how the field of higher education can approach studying adjunct faculty union decisions. Questions have been raised in this literature as to what impacts the decision to unionize (both at the individual level and at the time of voting in certification elections) and what explains growth or decline in union membership.

What impacts an individual's decision to join a union or a group's decision to

unionize? The literature in labor studies and industrial relations provides many insights. In the broadest sense, individuals join unions for either collective reasons or for individual benefits, or some combination of the two (Waddington & Whitson, 1997). Collective reasons include mutual support, improved pay and working conditions, belief in the goals of the union or unionism, or the possibility of peer pressure (Waddington & Whitson, 1997). Individual benefits can include individual training, professional growth and development opportunities, and access to professional services (Waddington & Whitson, 1997). Many studies found that people join unions more often because of the collective reasons than they do for the individual ones (Haberfeld, 1995; Tolich & Harcourt, 1999; Waddington & Whitson, 1997).

People may join unions with varying levels of conviction in the cause or benefits of unionism (Seidman, London, & Karsh, 1951). They may have long family histories with particular unions, or earlier experiences with union employment (Artz, 2010; Seidman, London, & Karsh, 1951). They may also face peer pressures, from co-workers or other peer groups (Seidman, London, & Karsh, 1951).

While not all decisions on whether or not to join a union are strictly voluntary (an employee may need to join a union as a requirement for joining a union shop, as an example), one set of decisions around union formation certainly is voluntary: decisions about whether to form a union in the first place. Research on the topic of voter behavior in union certification elections (the process that formalizes a collective bargaining relationship between a group of workers, the union, and the employer) pointed to a number of factors that influence an individual's decision: social pressures (Davy & Shipper, 1993; Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1994), job satisfaction (Davy & Shipper, 1993; Premack & Hunter, 1988), job security (Farber & Sacks, 1980; Mellor, Holzworth, & Conway, 2003), union instrumentality or effectiveness, especially with regard to improving earnings or working conditions (Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1994; Farber & Sacks, 1980; Mellor, Holzworth, & Conway, 2003; Premack & Hunter, 1988), and psychological factors like social identity and perceptions of justice (Blader, 2007).

Depending on the research or the job sector, unions are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction (Artz, 2010) or lower levels of job satisfaction (Glus, 2012). Artz (2010) provided an interesting finding: nonunion workers with no previous union experience do

report higher levels of job satisfaction after joining unions for the first time, but it would appear that this effect does not last if the worker moves between union and nonunion employment in the future. That is, unions are associated with increases in job satisfaction, but these either do not last or are one-time effects. Glus' (2012) examination of K-12 school teachers found that teachers reported less satisfaction with their positions than teachers in nonunion positions, but that they were more enthusiastic about teaching and were less likely to leave for pay-related reasons than their nonunion counterparts. This suggests that while the unions may be able to provide something in the way of improving pay and benefits, the union may be constrained with regard to other factors that matter to job satisfaction: working conditions, the quality of co-workers, the quality of students, etc.

If workers face lots of different kinds of pressures or see benefits (whether individual or collective) to union membership, why is unionization in the Western world declining? Employer opposition is one hypothesized factor (Cranston, 2000; Fiorito & Jarley, 2012). Studies also pointed to declines in union organizing activity (Dickens & Leonard, 1985; Fiorito & Jarley, 2012), changes in the structure of the labor force (Koeller, 1994), and reduced success rates when organizing is attempted (Dickens & Leonard, 1985), and periods of poor economic performance that lead to plant closures and layoffs (Dickens & Leonard, 1985). There is also some literature that supported the notion that the values of workers are changing, from a focus on materialism to a focus on individual growth and fulfillment, and that this value shift may explain some of the declines in union membership (Davy & Shipper, 1988). These changing economic circumstances, including the so-called "gig economy" so popular with millennials, and the notion of a values shift among workers are things from which higher education is not immune. Indeed, as shall be seen in the literature on unionism and higher education, the changing face of academic employment may be one of the chief impetuses for promoting a strategy of unionization among adjuncts.

The one sector of employment where unionization seems to remain strong and growing is the public sector. Roughly 40% of the 20 million public sector employees in the United States are members of or represented by a union (Adler, 2006); this growth has occurred while private sector union membership continues to decline. Growth in public sector unions is a relatively recent development, picking up steam in the 1960s (Adler, 2006). Moreover, though scholars have predicted for several years that there would be a decline in unionism among

public sector employees (see, for example, Edwards, 1989), public sector unions (particularly in public safety professions) remain resilient.

WHAT INFLUENCES UNIONISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

The literature on unionism in higher education is more limited in scope than the literature on unions and the labor movement more generally, in part because of the more limited participation of faculty in organized labor and in part because efforts to unionize in higher education have been hindered by court cases (e.g., the *Yeshiva* case) or legal provisions (such as recent legislation in Wisconsin that narrowed the scope of public sector collective bargaining). Context matters greatly, since labor law varies in its application depending on whether the university in question is public (where state law and policy carry more weight) or private (where federal law and National Labor Relations Board decisions are dominant) (Alexander & Alexander, 2017). However, studies exist that examine the history of higher education designing curricula for preparing workers for union leadership, attitudes about unionization among tenure-track faculty, adjunct faculty, and graduate assistants (or future faculty). These bodies of research will be examined in turn.

HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers is an illustrative case of the role of higher education played in preparing workers for union leadership roles. The program both grew out of an interest among trade unionists to see more women have access to education and faced pressure (early on) from trade groups concerned about whether the program was a tool of capitalist propaganda and wealthy industrialists (Bauman & Heller, 1985; Heller, 1984; Heller, 1986). Women from a variety of backgrounds were provided with, among other things, instruction in labor economics by eminent female and male economists. This instruction provided them with the vocabulary and the mindset to further consider union activity when they finished the program (Bauman & Heller, 1985). Even the social aspects of the program provided the participants with the consciousness-building and community so necessary for the collective bargaining enterprise. The result of the program was a corps of women prepared with the knowledge, skills, and mindset to be fully engaged in the broader labor movement during a time of union ascendancy in the United States.

When the School began in 1921, it had a relatively narrow scope, and as Ard (1992) noted, leadership could not have foreseen how the School “would draw ever closer to the

organized labor movement” (p. 4). The focus of the school, while initially oriented toward individual improvement, shifted quickly toward an emphasis on broader social concerns (Ard, 1992). This focus shaped the choice of curriculum, which emphasized subjects vital to engagement with broader social concerns: economics and English (Ard, 1992).

Faculty and students became more engaged with union activity, both as observers and as participants. Despite efforts by the institution to remain neutral on questions relating to the labor movement, students and faculty came to more readily identify with the goals of workers and to align themselves with the labor movement (Heller, 1984). Students, particularly in the later years of the school, came to identify themselves as unionists (according to data in Schneider, 1941, upwards of 84% of students were union members by the time of the School’s closure) and served in a variety of union roles (Ard, 1992). Such an alignment ultimately created problems for the administration and alumnae of Bryn Mawr, and the public attention ultimately contributed to the closure of the School in 1938 (Ard, 1992).

Two features of the curriculum (beyond its emphasis on economics and practical exposure to the labor movement) are important to understanding why the School served so well in using higher education to provide a path toward leadership in the labor movement: a commitment to democratic processes and a commitment to shared power between students and teachers (Ard, 1992; Heller, 1986). Shared power and democratic processes are, ideally, hallmarks of unions and the collective bargaining process in the same way that they are hallmarks, ideally, of academic life. At the School, teachers took care to incorporate student voice and student interest in the design of courses and to set policies on the basis of a shared governance system (Ard, 1992; Hollis, 1994). It also emphasized the importance of student voice, as represented through assignments oriented toward autobiographical narratives of the students’ interior and exterior lives, including engagement with unionism and experience as a “worker” (Hollis, 1994).

TENURE-TRACK FACULTY

The drive for unions among any given faculty is going to be driven by a lot of different factors: economics, legal factors (specifically, can a union be formed?), instrumentality (that is, will it be effective?), job satisfaction or lack thereof, and demographic factors like gender and family history of unionization (Holsinger, 2008). Also, at work are “the peculiarities of the academic profession”

like tenure, shared governance, and academic freedom (Arnold, 2000, p. 6). This abbreviated list, except factors specific to academic employment, looks much the same as the factors important to the formation of an industrial union. Tenure-track professors who want to unionize do so in response to many of the stimuli as do those in blue collar professions.

Efforts to unionize faculty began in the 1960s and included efforts by the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, and, later, the American Association of University Professors (Arnold, 2000; Hutcheson, 2000). While unions have waxed and waned in their relative power, history and contemporary events demonstrate that unions “can and will attract faculty interest in the face of bureaucratic perceptions of the profession” (Hutcheson, 2000, p. 185).

Much survey-based and case study-based research exists that examines the individual and collective decisions involved in unionization among full-time faculty. Among the factors studied in depth by scholars are perceptions of power structures and power relations at the institution (Neumann, 1980); political ideology (Hemmasi & Graf, 1993; Katchanovski, Rothman, & Nevitte, 2011); faculty perceptions of issues to be bargained (Gress, 1976); wages, specifically that lower-paid faculty are more interested in union membership than higher-paid faculty (Dworkin & Lee, 1985; Hemmasi & Graf, 1993; Katchanovski, Rothman, & Nevitte, 2011; Savage, Webber, & Butovsky, 2012); job security (Dworkin & Lee, 1985); job or institutional satisfaction (Bernhardt, 1977; Bornheimer, 1985; Castro, 2000); work context (Hemmasi & Graf, 1993); whether the faculty member has tenure (Katchanovski, Rothman, & Nevitte, 2011; Kazlow & Giacquinta, 1977); union instrumentality at one’s own institution (Hammasi & Graf, 1993); and governance issues, like grievance procedures and input on decision-making (Bornheimer, 1985; Savage, Webber, & Butovsky, 2012). These results demonstrate that there are many specific factors of the academic profession that must be accounted for in any study of faculty attitudes about unions and collective bargaining.

However, academics, regardless of their institutional affiliation, face certain legal, cultural, and political obstacles to union formation, and these exist irrespective of the other potential benefits unions may provide. Faculty unions are “usually viewed with apprehension, if not outright distaste, by administrations and governing boards” (Arnold, 2000, p. 7). Administrations see collective bargaining as an adversarial process, and as antithetical to the

open, shared process of governance at the center of university life (Oliker & Kaufman, 1975). Administrations may engage in anti-union campaigns, and this may complicate efforts to organize effectively. Legal cases like the 1980 Supreme Court decision in *Yeshiva v. National Labor Relations Board* further limit attempts by faculty to bargain; in that decision, the Court (in a 5-4 ruling) held that faculty at the private Yeshiva University were managerial and, thus, not entitled to collective bargaining rights and other union protections. In subsequent Court decisions, faculty has not always been categorized as managerial, but *Yeshiva* certainly had negative impacts on collective bargaining and unionization at private institutions (Metchick & Singh, 2004). The political environment also undermines efforts at collective bargaining and unions at public institutions, as has been the case in Wisconsin.

ADJUNCT FACULTY

Whether called adjuncts, contingent faculty, part-time faculty, or something else, the work done by adjuncts is largely the same: they work for modest salaries and almost no benefits, focus almost exclusively on teaching, and often do so with very short-term contracts and experience higher turnover. According to recent statistics from the AAUP (n.d.), over half of all academic appointments are part-time, and many adjuncts teach the equivalent of a full-time load. The majority of adjunct faculty do not have professional careers outside of the academy; that is, teaching is what they do, and few have other sources of income for support (AAUP, n.d.). The average part-time faculty member makes approximately \$12,000 from her teaching income, and more than 20% of part-time faculty work at more than one institution (Berry, 2005; Monks, 2009). She is also less likely than a full-time faculty member to have a terminal degree: about one-third of adjuncts have a doctorate, while approximately two-thirds of full-time faculty do (Berry, 2005; Monks, 2009).

The research on adjunct faculty organizing is fairly limited, owing perhaps to the relatively recent increase in the reliance of colleges and universities on adjunct faculty and the relative newness of efforts of adjuncts to organize. Tirelli (1997) wrote that adjuncts are difficult to organize, frequently ignored, and largely unprotected. To the extent that adjuncts organize, they are typically organizing to gain respect, which can manifest itself as job security, equal pay, benefits, and treatment for equal work (Berry, 2005). The first real efforts to organize contingent faculty began in the late 1960s in New York (Tirelli, 1997), although before the 1970s, many thought that organizing contingent faculty was nearly impossible

(Berry & Worthen, 2012b).

Some of the focus in the literature on adjunct unionism is on an area where one would not expect to see large organizing efforts: in the for-profit sector of higher education. Berry & Worthen (2012a, p. 35) noted that the driving force for adjuncts in the for-profit sector to unionize is the same as those that drive other kinds of unionization: “decent pay, power over our work, and better educational conditions for our students.” Berry & Worthen (2012b) detailed the many attempts union organizers have made to create unions among adjuncts at institutions like the Art Institutes and Kaplan (both large, national for-profit institutions). The efforts of organized labor in the for-profit sector have often been met with defeat, although there have been rare exceptions. The lessons learned from these experiences are practical, according to Berry & Worthen (2012b): adjuncts need to be prepared for long fights, networks that are not yet cohesive and may need to rely on non-academic unions for support.

Some have postulated that if only there were more unionization, there would be less reliance on adjunct faculty. Indeed, this seems to be the logic of some of the literature on adjunct unions: unions would bring adjuncts job security, which might necessarily translate into less reliance on part-time, temporary faculty (see, for example, Berry, 2005). This makes the results presented by Dobbie & Robinson (2008) so surprising: they found that even in a country where unionization was high (Canada) and in states where unionization is high (e.g., New Jersey), the reliance on part-time faculty was still high. They propose that perhaps unions that focus on segmentation (between full- and part-time faculty, tenure-track and non-tenure track) may contribute to this; that is, there may be competition and self-interest at play, and there may not be a natural cohesion between competing union efforts. This would seem to suggest that efforts to unionize higher education faculty should focus on all faculty, and not just a segment (like adjuncts).

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

The literature on the unionization of graduate students, particularly of teaching and research assistants, is of interest to broader conversations about unionization in higher education. Indeed, given the relative similarities between graduate assistants and adjuncts (e.g., both are contingent, part-time categories of employees; neither group is paid particularly well or has much control over work environment), organizers of union efforts of graduate students sometimes call on adjuncts to

adopt their strategies. Media reports regularly document that graduate students are forming unions at institutions large and small, public and private (see, for example, Casler, 2016; Flaherty, 2016b; Keller, 2016; Then, 2016). In these very contemporary cases, graduate students are organizing to improve working and learning conditions for themselves.

Similar to the movement to organize full-time faculty, efforts by graduate students to unionize picked up steam beginning in the 1960s (Julius & Gumport, 2003). Before 2000, graduate student unions existed almost exclusively at public institutions, because of policies set by the National Labor Relations Board, which viewed graduate assistants as apprentices (Whitford, 2014). Compared to adjunct union organizing efforts, or the efforts of tenure-track faculty, graduate students tend to align themselves with the industrial unions (e.g., United Auto Workers) or with more traditional teacher's unions (e.g., American Federation of Teachers) (Julius & Gumport, 2003). Data show that the average graduate student union has the following characteristics: it is more likely to exist at a public institution; in the Northeast or the Midwest; and at an institution where full-time faculty are not unionized, but where other categories of employees are unionized (Julius & Gumport, 2003).

Why do graduate students organize? Per Singh, Zinni, & MacLennan (2006, p. 64), graduate student unions typically form for many of the same reasons as other unions: “demands for better wages and stipends, decreases in tuition, lowering of workloads, better benefits, and more systematic grievance procedures.” Other factors include issues around same-sex partner benefits and gender discrimination (Singh, Zinni, & MacLennan, 2006); “the lengthened time required to complete a degree, coupled with an increased reluctance on the part of students to live in what they perceive as academic ghettos” (Julius & Gumport, 2003, p. 196); and enabling legislation that allows for the formation of public sector unions, in some states (Julius & Gumport, 2003). Students may also use their activism and union organizing in ways to “shine a light on problems facing higher education today: governance, finance, diversity, environmental issues” (Whitford, 2014, p. 28); and to fight back against the corporatization of higher education and a changing economy (Lafer, 2003).

Institutions respond to efforts by graduate students to organize in different ways. Many institutions will simply choose not to recognize graduate student unions or negotiate labor agreements (Julius & Gumport, 2003). Graduate student unions have sometimes needed to

use the courts to obtain collective bargaining rights (Singh, Zinni, & Gumport, 2003). And while formal institutional responses have been negative, there is also research that suggests there are less formal, cultural barriers (within administrator, faculty, and student subcultures) to unionization among graduate students (Lee, Oseguera, Kim, Fann, Davis, & Rhoads, 2004).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ON FACULTY UNIONIZATION

All Faculty

While there exists some research on the impact of unionization on salaries and rank for faculty (Ashraf, 1997; Benedict, 1999; Benedict & Wilder, 1999), these studies could use some revision and updating. More states and different institutional types could be studied. Other questions also arise. In those states where collective bargaining rights have come under fire, what has been the effect on the absence of union/collective bargaining protections on things like salaries, the existence of tenure, and other benefits that had been collectively bargained? There is also value in attempts to disaggregate public and private faculty experiences with unionization, especially in those states where public sector collective bargaining is under attack.

A final line of inquiry would examine attitudes of young faculty of all types (especially those just out of graduate school) concerning unionization. Would unionization be attractive to millennial faculty? Does being a millennial influence union support? What is the influence on participation in a graduate student union on millennial attitudes toward faculty unionization? If higher education unions are to have power at all, they must capture young faculty, but these individuals will have grown up in an environment where unions are seen as bad actors or as largely ineffective. What impact will these perceptions have on willingness to organize? Alternatively, will unions have to adapt to the demands of millennials? These questions seem particularly relevant, given the recent political trend among voters, young and old, toward greater levels of populism (which, especially among the left, has historically embraced unionism and collective bargaining).

Adjunct Faculty

Given the varied and often challenging circumstances in which adjunct faculty work, it is hardly a wonder that so many are turning toward collective bargaining as a means of redress. Budgetary constraints are consistently blamed for the hiring of adjuncts and, by extension, their poor pay. Financial considerations, as well as more general work-related conditions such as teaching loads,

involvement in shared governance, and the like, are all (in many states) bargainable issues, if only adjuncts are able (or permitted) to unionize.

Because of this, while much research exists on unionization in higher education, it seems strange that there is a lack of focus in the literature on adjunct faculty, and especially on recent efforts to unionize in the face of rapidly changing economic and political circumstances. As a result, there are several potentially fruitful avenues for research on adjunct faculty unionization. Any number of studies could be carried out using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods.

At a minimum, the literature could benefit from more first- or third-person narrative accounts on the experiences of adjuncts, especially those who are engaged in (or hope to engage in) union activism. These studies would do well to distinguish between “true” adjuncts (those who derive their principal source of income from their teaching, and not from other sources) and both graduate assistants (who may pick up a course or two to supplement their stipends) and professionals who lend their expertise on a limited basis to colleges and universities.

For example, view the following Table for operationalized definitions of terms that might help guide future studies.

Table 1 A Typology of Contingent Faculty

Adjuncts (FT/PT)	General term for those who lack a tenure-track or long-term contract appointment. May or may not have a substantive role in shared governance process. Job responsibilities focus almost exclusively on instructional activities.
“Professionals”	Part-time, contingent faculty from the professions who are hired to teach because of their close relationship to practical, professional aspects of the course material.
“Freeway Flyers”	Faculty who work at multiple institutions in an effort to create something close to a full-time salary and position. Likely to be seen as adjuncts by each institution at which they work.
Graduate Students	Students enrolled in masters or doctoral programs who supplement assistantships with teaching part-time at another institution. Some graduate students without assistantships may also adjunct as a sole source of income.

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Full-time, Non-Tenure Track	Faculty hired on a full-time basis, but off the tenure-track. May hold the title of assistant professor or lecturer. May have a long-term contract or a shorter-term contract (e.g., a one-year appointment). Has a teaching load and other work responsibilities similar to other faculty colleagues.
Postdocs	Teachers who have completed their doctorates, and are hired to teach and research, usually at a lower rate of compensation than tenure-track colleagues. Will lack the job security of tenure-track or long-term contract-holding colleagues.
“Moonlighters”	Faculty who may hold long-term or tenure-track positions at one institution, but for whatever reason, choose to teach “off the clock” at another institution (sometimes with the sanction of their full-time employer, and sometimes without it).
“Visitors”	Those appointed on short-term (usually between one and three-year terms) contracts as full-time faculty. Typically holding the appointment of “visiting assistant professor.” Terms may or may not be renewed.

Using more refined categories such as those suggested above may not only help policymakers better understand what motivates an individual to choose activism, especially labor activism but might also lead to new research questions about and how such activism might inform their pedagogy.

Another area of research would be to examine the union experience of adjuncts by university type. Is the experience of adjunct faculty unions different at private institutions than it is at publics? Does size of institution matter? Are full-time faculty colleagues more or less supportive of efforts to unionize at different types of institutions?

Further, scholars could probe issues surrounding how adjunct faculty unions interact with other kinds of unions, either on campus or off campus. Berry (2005) discusses what he calls “the regional strategy,” and leveraging regional networks of unions in organizing. What relationships exist between adjunct unions and unions representing other kinds of on-campus employees (whether faculty, professional, or service employees)? What kinds of support are adjunct faculty unions receiving from these regional networks of off-campus unions?

A related line of study might focus on whether segmentation is beneficial to adjuncts. It would seem that adjuncts might benefit from the scale that comes from association with unions representing other groups (whether graduate students, full-time faculty, or service employees). But, being a less powerful group might mean that one’s interests as an adjunct

are not well-represented or are ignored in favor of other group priorities. What might be the benefits to the segmentation of unions by employee category? Recent decisions by the NLRB concerning “microunits” and the ability of adjuncts and graduate students who share “distinct characteristics” such as pay and benefits, location, supervisors, etc. to organize on the basis of those characteristics (as documented in Schmidt, 2017) might add additional interesting wrinkles to efforts to answer these questions.

CONCLUSIONS

Efforts to organize in higher education have existed in various forms for the last several decades, and examinations of unions in higher education demonstrate that the motivations for starting faculty and graduate student unions mirror those of individuals who form other industrial unions. What this review makes clear, however, is that there are some weaknesses in the literature, owing in part to the age of some of the studies and owing to the rapidly changing nature of employment in higher education. The results of this scoping literature review indicate that there exist some very intriguing research areas for scholars to examine in the years ahead, using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs, that may result in direct implications for researchers, theorists, higher education futurists, policy makers, and others.

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