Re-Thinking the Composition of the Business School Faculty

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, the faculty of U.S. colleges and universities has shifted from a workforce dominated by full-time tenured and tenure-track positions to one in which contingent appointments predominate. According to the American Association of University Professors, contingent faculty grew from about 47 percent of the national workforce in 1987 to roughly two-thirds by 2021 (AAUP, 2023). Business schools faced the same pressures, including cost constraints, a shortage of doctorally qualified faculty, ranking competition, and revised accreditation standards, but they responded differently. Drawing on two decades of faculty data from 180 AACSB-accredited business schools and a subsample of 54 schools at AAU institutions, this paper finds that business schools retained a substantially larger tenured core than higher education as a whole. By 2021-2022, non-tenured faculty accounted for about 26 percent of the total in the full sample and about 36 percent at the research-intensive AAU schools, while taking on growing roles in governance, curriculum, and industry engagement. We argue that the resulting portfolio of tenured, tenure-track, clinical, and lecturer faculty is a deliberate strategic response to market and accreditation forces. Tenured faculty sustain research, doctoral education, and leadership; clinical and applied-research faculty bridge academia and industry and anchor experiential learning. Managed deliberately, this balance strengthens business education rather than signaling its decline.

Keywords: faculty composition, tenure, contingent faculty, business schools, AACSB accreditation, experiential learning

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the composition of the faculty at U.S. colleges and universities has changed in fundamental ways. In the 1970s, the typical faculty member was full-time and either tenured or on the tenure track, balancing teaching, research, and service in proportions that varied by rank and institutional type. Over the following decades, that model gave way to a more differentiated workforce. Tenured and tenure-track lines declined steadily as a share of all faculty, while full-time and part-time non-tenure-track appointments expanded to fill the gap.

This shift has sharpened the division of academic labor. Non-tenure-track faculty are now concentrated in specialized roles, teaching as lecturers or conducting research as postdoctoral scholars, often with minimal involvement in governance or service. As the tenured and tenure-track pool has contracted, concerns have grown about the consequences for basic research, the quality of classroom instruction, and the appeal of an academic career.

Business schools offer a revealing case within this broader trend. They faced the same cost and enrollment pressures as the rest of the academy, but they also confronted a persistent shortage of doctorally qualified faculty, accreditation standards that redefined who counts as qualified, and ranking systems that rewarded teaching and professional engagement. These conditions raise a question the general literature on contingent faculty does not address: when a single professional field reshapes its faculty under these pressures, is the result a cost-driven retreat from tenure or a deliberate strategy for assembling the mix of skills the field requires? More specifically, this paper asks what exogenous forces reshaped faculty composition in U.S. business schools, how schools responded, and whether the resulting composition reflects strategic design rather than expediency.

Drawing on two decades of faculty data from AACSB-accredited schools and a subset of AAU institutions, we argue that business schools retained a substantial tenured and tenure-track core while expanding the governance, curricular, and industry roles of non-tenured faculty. The resulting portfolio of tenured, tenure-track, clinical, and lecturer faculty is a deliberate response to market and accreditation forces that strengthen business education. The paper

develops this argument in stages. Sections 2 and 3 set out the cost and labor-market pressures and the national trend in faculty composition, as reported by the AAUP. Section 4 reviews prior research on faculty type and student outcomes and identifies the gap this study addresses. Section 5 turns to the drivers of the shift, and Sections 6 through 9 examine the forces specific to business schools: post-tenure research productivity, AACSB accreditation, rankings, and the credentialing pathways that widened the faculty supply. Section 10 presents two decades of faculty data, and Section 11 draws conclusions and outlines directions for further research.

2. Cost and Labor-Market Pressures

Two pressures pushed colleges and universities toward cheaper staffing models: the rising cost of higher education (Archibald & Feldman, 2011) and a shrinking pool of domestic college-age students (Grawe, 2018). The sources of cost pressure differed by sector. Public universities saw state support per student fall sharply after the 2008 recession and recover only partially in the years that followed, shifting a larger share of the cost burden onto tuition (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association [SHEEO], 2025). They also faced limits on tuition increases and rising expenses for research facilities and faculty in high-demand disciplines. Private universities, competing for the same students, are offering discounted tuition and expanded financial aid while absorbing their own rising research costs. With limited room to raise tuition, institutions turned to fundraising, sponsored research, and expanded service fees to increase revenue. On the cost side, they focused on the most expensive input, the full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty member.

Two substitution strategies were employed (Ehrenberg, 2010). The first replaced full-time faculty with part-time instructors hired at lower cost and with minimal benefits. The second replaced departing tenure-line faculty with full-time lecturers and, in the sciences, postdoctoral appointments. Both strategies were feasible because most disciplines produced more PhDs than the tenure-track market could absorb. Zhang, Ehrenberg, and Liu (2015) document this substitution across four-year institutions and trace its consequences for institutional outcomes. The resulting decline in tenured faculty drew concern on three fronts: the capacity of institutions to sustain basic research, the quality of undergraduate instruction, and the strength of the applicant pool entering PhD programs.

These pressures also reshaped the academic labor market. The expanded use of postdoctoral scholars in the sciences and of PhD instructors in introductory courses reduced demand for tenure-track lines. At the same time, an academic career became less attractive. An oversupply of PhDs in many fields, combined with a longer time to degree, raised the opportunity cost of doctoral study in a market that offered fewer tenured positions. Over the long run, these conditions threatened the quality of the faculty that higher education could recruit.

2.1 Contingent Faculty

Contingent faculty are those appointed off the tenure track, whether full- or part-time (Kezar & Sam, 2010). The category is broad, ranging from graduate students teaching a single course to postdoctoral scholars supporting a laboratory or research project.

Traditionally, faculty work combined teaching, research, and service, with the balance determined by institutional type. Liberal arts colleges weighted teaching and service most heavily, while doctoral research universities emphasized research. Across both types, these were the responsibilities of tenured and tenure-track faculty. Contingent faculty, by contrast, were typically hired for a single function, either teaching or research, and worked in a supporting role with little involvement beyond that. Part-time faculty were usually engaged course by course. In most institutions, contingent faculty had little or no role in governance (AAUP, 2024; Kezar & Sam, 2010).

Contingent appointments also had advantages. Non-tenured faculty proved valuable in highly specialized courses and experiential learning, and business schools deliberately hired for these strengths. As the share of tenured faculty continued to fall across all types of institutions, a question came into focus. Was this decline simply an adverse outcome of forces both inside and outside higher education, or an opportunity to rethink the composition of the professoriate? The sections that follow address that question.

3. The National Trend in Faculty Composition

The most widely used national measure of faculty status comes from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which compiles federal data on academic appointments and serves as the standard reference for tenure trends. Its figures document a steady shift away from tenured employment. Between fall 1987 and fall 2021, the combined share of tenured and tenure-track faculty in the U.S. fell from about 53 percent to roughly one-third, while part-time appointments rose from 33 percent to 48 percent. By fall 2021, contingent faculty of all kinds, including full-time non-tenure-track and part-time faculty, made up about 68 percent of the national workforce, up from 47 percent in 1987 (AAUP, 2023).

This national pattern serves as the baseline for reading the business school case. Its risks are well understood: a shrinking tenured core can weaken the capacity for basic research, the renewal of disciplines through doctoral training, and the appeal of an academic career. However, national averages mask wide variation across fields and institution types. As the following sections show, business schools followed the same path but stopped well short of the national endpoint, retaining a substantially larger tenured and tenure-track core. Explaining that divergence is the task of the rest of the paper.

4. Literature Review

Research on faculty composition has focused on one question: whether the type of faculty teaching a course affects what students learn and whether they persist. The findings are mixed, and the disagreement itself is informative.

Ehrenberg (2010) describes U.S. higher education as heterogeneous, divided among public nonprofits, private nonprofits, and for-profits, with faculty responsibilities and status varying within and across institutions. Most full-time faculty hold doctorates, whereas part-time faculty more often hold master's degrees. The growing emphasis on research has shifted much undergraduate instruction to non-tenure-track faculty.

Several studies find that this shift carries costs for students. Ehrenberg and Zhang (2005) analyzed institutional panel data and found that higher shares of part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty were associated with lower graduation rates at four-year colleges, with the largest effect at public master's-level institutions. Umbach (2007), drawing on a national faculty survey, identified one mechanism: contingent faculty engaged students in effective teaching practices less often than their tenured and tenure-track colleagues. He located the cause in the conditions of employment rather than in the instructors themselves, since limited time, resources, and integration constrain the practices linked to student success.

Other work points the other way. Figlio et al. (2013) studied introductory courses at Northwestern University and found that students taught by full-time non-tenure-track faculty performed better in follow-on courses than those taught by tenure-track faculty. The authors caution that Northwestern's selectivity and its ability to recruit highly qualified non-tenure-track instructors may limit the extent to which the results generalize. Their proposed resolution was a division of labor, with research-intensive tenure-track faculty concentrated in graduate education and teaching-intensive lecturers in undergraduate courses. Bettinger and Long (2010) add a disciplinary qualification: students taught by adjunct instructors were more likely to take further courses in occupationally oriented fields, though less likely to do so in others, suggesting that the value of non-tenured teaching depends on the subject.

Carrell and West (2008) offer a useful distinction. Using the random assignment of students to instructors at the U.S. Air Force Academy, they found that academic rank, experience, and terminal-degree status were negatively associated with students' contemporaneous course performance but positively associated with their performance in follow-on courses. Less experienced instructors produced stronger immediate results and weaker long-term outcomes, and course evaluations predicted the former well and the latter poorly. The result cautions against judging faculty effectiveness based on a single course or on student ratings alone.

Within the professional disciplines, Hilmer and Hilmer (2020) examined full-time PhD-holding lecturers in public economics departments. Although they made up only 15 percent of the teaching faculty, they taught roughly half of all undergraduates. These lecturers were younger, more often women, frequently employed by their own PhD-granting institutions, and chose teaching over research. Their pay trailed tenure-track colleagues at their own institutions but exceeded tenure-track pay at non-doctoral schools. The case shows how a discipline can lean heavily on a specialized teaching faculty while reserving tenure lines for research.

Taken together, these studies converge on three findings and leave a fourth question open. First, the substitution of non-tenured for tenured faculty is widespread, appearing across institution types and disciplines. Second, the instructional consequences of that substitution are mixed. Full-time non-tenured faculty often improve performance in the current course, while persistence in follow-on courses depends heavily on institutional selectivity and the discipline involved. Third, the speed with which institutions adjust their faculty to labor-market demand varies with the field's cost structure, with lower-cost disciplines adjusting faster than higher-cost ones. What this body of work largely leaves unexamined is how a single professional field manages the transition as a deliberate portfolio strategy rather than as a cost-driven default. Prior studies treat non-tenured faculty primarily as a substitution variable measured against student outcomes and pay less attention to the institutional mechanisms that determine which faculty a school can recruit and how it deploys them. Accreditation standards, ranking pressures, and credentialing pathways such as the DBA fall outside the scope of most of these analyses. The present study addresses that gap. It traces two decades of faculty data in U.S. business schools and links the observed shift in composition to the

accreditation and market forces that produced it, arguing that a balanced portfolio of tenured, tenure-track, clinical, and lecturer faculty functions as a strategic response to those forces rather than as evidence of decline.

5. Drivers of Faculty Composition

If the previous section asked whether faculty type affects students, this one asks what drives the composition itself. The clearest driver is cost. Zhang, Ehrenberg, and Liu (2015) showed that substituting non-tenured for tenured faculty produces both a price effect, as institutions trade higher-cost lines for lower-cost ones, and an income effect on institutional outcomes. Prestige matters as well: more prestigious institutions employed fewer teaching-only faculty. In business schools, Cheslock and Callie (2015) found that rising salaries for current professors were associated with fewer openings for new job seekers, indicating that budget pressure directly affects hiring.

Faculty composition also responds to the labor market, though unevenly. Conzelmann et al. (2023) found that the number of bachelor's degree institutions awarded rose with demand for specific majors, but responsiveness varied widely: fields tied to particular occupations adjusted most, and an institution's capacity to respond depended on whether it could redeploy or add faculty quickly. High-cost disciplines such as science and engineering were the least responsive, while lower-cost fields such as the social sciences adjusted more readily. Disciplinary differences extend to effects as well; Xu and Ran (2022) found that long-term non-tenured faculty were less effective than tenure-track faculty at sustaining persistence in follow-on courses but more effective at drawing students into a field. The cost and orientation of a discipline, then, shape both how quickly it adjusts and what its faculty achieve.

Whether a school captures value from non-tenured faculty depends on how well it integrates them. Drake et al. (2019) describe the gap as invisible labor: non-tenured faculty control the classroom but remain absent from other dimensions of academic life, including committees, policy, faculty meetings, and governance, and often lack access to travel funds, research support, sabbaticals, and recognition. Treating these faculty as classroom labor alone fails to realize the value they could create in participatory roles. These drivers, including cost, prestige, labor-market demand, and integration, operate across all of higher education. The sections that follow turn to the forces that gave business schools a distinctive path.

6. Tenure and the Changing Shape of the Professoriate

Tenure protects academic freedom and gives faculty the security to pursue long-term, high-risk research. Critics counter that it can invite complacency once the protection is secured and that some tenured faculty add little measurable value afterward, a concern that has prompted many states and systems to adopt post-tenure review.

Recent evidence sharpens the picture. Tripodi et al. (2025) traced the research output of more than 12,000 U.S. faculty across fifteen disciplines and found that publication rates rise along the tenure track and peak just before the tenure decision. Post-tenure trajectories then diverge by field. In laboratory-based disciplines that depend on teams and external funding, output remains high, whereas in fields with less reliance on teamwork and external support, it tends to decline. Business and economics fall into the second group, where the post-tenure decline is most pronounced. However, faculty who shifted to new research agendas sustained their output. The pattern supports more selective and rigorous tenure standards at research-intensive institutions and a smaller, more research-active tenured core in business.

These dynamics are part of a broader shift in the shape of the professoriate. Finkelstein et al. (2016) describe the American faculty as a workforce that has become more diverse and internally stratified, with a contracting tenured core and an expanding contingent periphery. This trajectory is evident across all institution types, including research universities (AAUP, 2023). Nationally, the share of tenured and tenure-track faculty fell from roughly 53 percent in 1987 to about a third by 2021. The research-intensive schools in this study followed the same pattern: among AAU business schools, the share of non-tenured faculty rose from 8.9 percent in 2001 to 35.8 percent in 2021. The structure is shifting from one dominated by the tenure line toward a flatter form, with a smaller tenured top resting on a broad contingent base.

The meaning of tenure, however, varies with research intensity, and the trajectory should not be read as uniform. At research-intensive universities, tenure remains anchored in sustained scholarly productivity, and the case for a smaller, more selective tenured core, as Tripodi et al. (2025) imply, applies most directly there. At institutions with limited research missions, tenure-track appointments increasingly serve as terminal-degree teaching positions, with tenure protections attaching to roles defined largely by instruction rather than by research output. The same label, therefore, describes different kinds of work across the sector, which is why a single national figure understates how differently the tenured core is evolving at the top of the research hierarchy and at lower levels.

7. AACSB Accreditation and the Definition of Qualified Faculty

Among the bodies that accredit business schools, AACSB carries the most weight. It is the oldest and most selective, and fewer than 6 percent of the world's business programs hold its accreditation (AACSB, 2024b). While teaching-focused accreditors such as ACBSP and IACBE set a broader floor, AACSB defines quality for the research-oriented schools at the top of the field. Because its standards determine who counts as qualified faculty at those schools, AACSB does more than certify quality; it shapes the composition of the faculty. The changes this paper traces are, to a substantial degree, AACSB's standards at work.

AACSB's influence began with a shortage. In the late 1990s, the supply of new business PhDs declined even as demand grew, as MBA programs expanded and became more profitable, prompting many schools to scale back doctoral education and redirect resources toward the MBA, a shift that media rankings reinforced. The most research-intensive schools filled the gap by recruiting PhDs from mathematics, statistics, engineering, psychology, and economics, who brought new methods to business research. Master's-level schools, with fewer such options, faced a harder problem, and AACSB responded with programs to widen the faculty supply: initiatives to bring experienced professionals into teaching roles and postdoctoral bridge programs that qualified non-business PhDs to teach in business fields. The bridge programs faded as Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programs grew to serve the same purpose (EDBAC, 2023).

In the early 2000s, AACSB rebuilt its standards around each school's mission rather than a single model, and the resulting framework reshaped how schools staff their faculties. Two features matter most. The first is the distinction between participating faculty, who engage in governance and the life of the school beyond teaching, and supporting faculty, who do not. AACSB expects participating faculty to deliver at least 75 percent of a school's teaching and at least 60 percent within each discipline. This expectation drew non-tenured faculty into governance roles they had not traditionally held.

The second is a four-part scheme for faculty qualifications: scholarly academics, who sustain research in their field of study; practice academics, who maintain professional engagement; scholarly practitioners, who pair a master's degree with scholarship; and instructional practitioners, who pair a master's degree with continued professional experience. These categories give formal standing to clinical and professionally qualified faculty while reserving a research core: at least 40 percent of faculty, both within each discipline and school-wide, must be scholarly academics, and no more than 10 percent may fall outside the four categories (AACSB, 2024a).

Standard 8 reinforced that core from another angle by asking schools to maintain a portfolio of peer-reviewed intellectual contributions spanning basic, applied, and pedagogical work, consistent with their mission and peer group.

Taken together, the standards preserved a nucleus of research-active tenured and tenure-track faculty through the scholarly-academic requirement while opening governance and value creation to clinical, practice, and instructional faculty, who increasingly lead experiential learning (Smith School of Business, 2024). They provided schools with a sanctioned framework for assembling a mixed faculty of tenured, clinical, and lecturer roles, and in doing so actively shaped the trajectory documented in the rest of this paper.

8. Rankings and the Competition for Position

Rankings are central to the business of business schools. Since rankings of full-time MBA programs first appeared in 1988 (Gioia & Corley, 2002), the field has openly competed for position, drawing a crowd of rankers, including U.S. News & World Report, the Financial Times, the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, and The Economist. Their methodologies differ, but all center on MBA inputs and outcomes. The competition is self-reinforcing: a higher rank attracts stronger applicants, stronger applicants secure better jobs, and strong placement lifts the rank again, so selectivity and reputation feed on each other. Placement outcomes weigh heavily in this cycle, tying a school's standing directly to the employability of its graduates.

Because so much rides on position, schools reshape themselves to move up. Espeland and Sauder (2007) describe this reactivity in higher education: once a public measure exists, institutions reorganize around it, often prioritizing the appearance of quality over its substance. Gioia and Corley (2002) traced the same shift in business schools, where attention migrated from educational substance to the image the rankings reward. Zimmerman (2001) argued that the rankings race pushed schools to shift resources away from long-term investment in knowledge creation, doctoral education, and research toward short-term strategies aimed at the metrics, a reallocation he viewed as dysfunctional. Before the rankings, U.S. business schools competed on research and doctoral training, with spillovers

that benefited the institution, its faculty, and its students. The rankings narrowed their focus to the full-time MBA, and degree production and revenue grew, while faculty value creation shifted from research to teaching.

The consequences for the faculty pipeline were direct. As schools rewarded MBA teaching, demand grew for faculty with executive-education skills and business experience (DeAngelo et al., 2005), while the incentive to staff and fund expensive doctoral programs weakened. Domestic interest in business PhD programs lagged even as MBA visibility and rewards rose, and doctoral output did not keep pace with demand. AACSB's Management Education Task Force reported that more than 30 percent of U.S. business faculty were age 55 or older, up from under 20 percent a decade earlier. The leading fifty schools produced only 447 doctoral graduates in 2000, of whom about 278 entered academic positions, a one-year shortfall of more than 30 percent; more than 400 faculty positions stood vacant at those schools (AACSB, 2002). Foreign applicants sustained quality for a time, though their numbers thinned as strong programs emerged in Europe and Asia. Hiring increasingly weighed MBA classroom skills alongside research capability, an early sign of the move toward the clinical and professional faculty, which the accreditation standards would later formalize.

9. Faculty Titles and the Applied Researcher

Business school faculty once had a short list of titles: full, associate, and assistant professors on the tenure track, and lecturers for non-tenured teaching staff. Following the lead of professional schools, business schools have since broadened that list to include clinical professors, teaching professors, instructional professors, and professors of practice. These titles did more than relabel positions; they broadened the appeal of non-tenured roles and attracted stronger candidates who create value beyond the classroom.

The most consequential of these roles is the clinical or applied-research faculty member, best understood by the categories it straddles. The clinical faculty member is neither a lecturer carrying a heavy teaching load and little else, nor a tenure-track scholar whose work is primarily theoretical. The title can be misleading because it has carried two very different meanings. In its older usage, “clinical” was a destination for a tenure-track faculty member who did not earn tenure and was moved to a teaching line, a relabeling more than a role. The newer usage describes something deliberate: an experienced professional, often with a decade or more of industry experience, recruited to bridge the gap between practice and scholarship. These faculty conduct applied research, the rigorous investigation of real business problems, and anchor experiential learning. Many hold a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), a relatively new terminal degree designed for this purpose.

The DBA is central to the shift. AACSB business schools developed DBA programs to train experienced professionals as applied researchers, broadening the pool of qualified faculty beyond the traditional PhD pipeline. While the PhD prepares scholars to build theory, the DBA prepares practitioners to apply rigorous methods to problems that both practice and scholarship recognize as important (EDBAC, 2023). Graduates may remain in industry or move into clinical, practice, or tenure-track roles, depending on a school’s mission. They bring skills suited to experiential learning and to research with direct societal relevance. The DBA-trained clinical faculty member thus creates value differently from the PhD-trained scholar, complementing the research core rather than substituting for it.

9.1 Analytics and Artificial Intelligence

The demand for graduates fluent in analytics and artificial intelligence, alongside traditional business skills, has forced business schools to adapt on two timelines. In the short run, they have addressed faculty shortages by hiring PhDs from technical disciplines and DBA graduates with industry experience. Over the longer run, they have had to retool curricula and build lasting faculty expertise. Non-tenured titles make this feasible at speed: schools can bring in industry professionals, technical PhDs, and faculty from computer science, engineering, mathematics, and informatics through clinical and practice appointments far faster than they could grow a tenured cohort, giving them the agility to keep pace with a fast-moving field. The same flexibility frees tenured faculty to redirect their research toward these areas, a shift that can renew post-tenure productivity.

The stakes are not only curricular. Analytics and AI skills, paired with consulting capabilities, position graduates for top-tier consulting firms and other high-paying roles that recruit from them. Because rankings reward starting salaries and placement, a school that places graduates in elite consulting strengthens both its outcomes and its standing, sharpening the incentive to build these programs. The difficulty is that analytics and AI do not suit every student. Their quantitative rigor favors students with a STEM background or strong quantitative preparation, and the field carries more hype than most. Realizing the promise, therefore, depends as much on recruiting students equipped for the work as on hiring faculty to teach it.

10. Faculty Composition in AACSB Business Schools

This section traces the share of tenured and tenure-track faculty in U.S. business schools over two decades, drawing on AACSB survey data submitted by schools during their accreditation reviews. The analysis uses a sample of 180 AACSB-accredited business schools that reported faculty data in three periods, 2001-2002, 2011-2012, and 2021-2022, together with a subsample of 54 schools at AAU institutions. Faculty are the central resource of a business school, creating value for students, programs, and the university (Williams, 2014), so the composition of that faculty is a meaningful measure of how the school has changed. One caveat: the survey does not consistently distinguish between full-time and part-time appointments within the non-tenured category across all years, so the non-tenured totals include both roles.

Across the full sample, non-tenured faculty grew steadily as a share of the total, from 8.9 percent in 2001-2002 to 12.9 percent in 2011-2012 and 26.3 percent in 2021-2022 (Table 1). The absolute numbers tell a sharper story. Total faculty rose over the two decades, from 7,703 to 9,488, yet tenured and tenure-track faculty peaked in 2011-2012 at 7,789 and then fell to 6,995 by 2021-2022. By the end of the period, the 2,493 non-tenured faculty comprised 676 clinical and 1,817 lecturer positions, with the clinical line appearing only after AACSB adopted its revised standards.

The subsample isolates the most research-intensive schools. The Association of American Universities (AAU) is an organization of leading research universities in the United States and Canada, and membership signals sustained research intensity, large doctoral programs, and competitive standing. The 54 AACSB business schools at AAU institutions therefore serve as a high-research comparison group. Examining them alongside the full sample shows whether the most research-intensive schools managed faculty composition differently from the broader population of accredited schools (Table 2).

They did so more aggressively. Non-tenured faculty at the AAU schools rose from 8.9 percent in 2001-2002 to 15.3 percent in 2011-2012 and to 35.8 percent in 2021-2022, well above the full-sample figure. The contraction of the tenured core was sharper as well: between 2011-2012 and 2021-2022, tenured and tenure-track faculty at these schools fell by 281, even as total faculty grew by more than a thousand. Many AAU schools are private institutions whose primary degree is the MBA, and they appear to have responded more quickly to employer demand by adding faculty with specific skills, including those who lead experiential learning.

Two patterns stand out. First, business schools moved in the same direction as higher education as a whole but stopped well short of it: even at the research-intensive AAU schools, non-tenured faculty accounted for about 36 percent of the total, far below the roughly two-thirds contingent share reported nationally. Business schools retained a substantially larger tenured core. Second, the shift accelerated after the AACSB standards changed in the early 2000s and was most pronounced at schools most exposed to MBA competition and employer demand. The resulting composition fits a deliberate rebalancing toward a portfolio faculty rather than a simple cost-driven retreat from tenure, the argument the concluding section develops.

Table 1. AACSB Accredited U.S. Business Schools

Rank	2001-02	2011-12	2021-22
Tenured	5011	5370	4741
Tenure-Track	2004	2419	2254
Total	7015	7789	6995
Non-Tenure			
Clinical	0	0	676
Lecturer	688	1161	1817
Total	688	1161	2493
Total Faculty	7703	8950	9488

Note. Faculty data for 180 AACSB Accredited U.S. Business Schools from the academic years 2001–2002, 2011–2012, and 2021–2022. Data from Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), 2025.

Table 2. AACSB Accredited U.S. Business Schools at AAU Institutions

Rank	2001-02	2011-12	2021-22
Tenured	2124	2596	2294
Tenure-Track	984	1270	1291
Total	3108	3866	3585
Non-Tenure			
Clinical	0	0	652
Lecturer	302	698	1342
Total	302	698	1994
Total Faculty	3410	4564	5579

Note. Faculty data for 54 AACSB-accredited U.S. business schools at AAU institutions for the academic years 2001–2002, 2011–2012, and 2021–2022. Data from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), 2025.

11. Conclusions

Faculty composition has shifted across U.S. higher education, with contingent appointments now accounting for roughly two-thirds of the workforce. Business schools moved in the same direction but did not go as far. By 2021-2022, non-tenured faculty made up about 26 percent of the total in the full sample of accredited schools and about 36 percent at the research-intensive AAU schools, leaving a substantially larger tenured and tenure-track core than the sector as a whole retained. Within that core, non-tenured faculty took on responsibilities beyond instruction, contributing to governance, curriculum, and industry engagement. The pattern reflects a strategic response to academic and market pressures rather than a simple effort to cut costs.

Several forces produced this outcome. In the 1990s, business schools faced a shortage of doctorally qualified faculty as the supply of new business PhDs declined and the MBA drew students and resources away from doctoral education. Rankings then rewarded MBA placement and teaching, shifting the value schools placed on faculty from research to the classroom. AACSB's revised standards provided schools with a sanctioned framework for a mixed faculty, legitimizing clinical and practice roles while preserving a research core through the scholarly-academic requirement.

The result is a portfolio model. A mix of tenured, tenure-track, clinical, and lecturer faculty enables a business school to align expertise with employer demand, deliver applied and experiential learning, and sustain research and doctoral education. Tenured faculty remain central to research, doctoral mentorship, and institutional leadership, while clinical and applied-research faculty bridge academia and industry, bringing practical skills into the classroom. These roles are complementary, and a school staffed across these roles is better positioned than one built on either model alone.

This composition is a strategic advantage, the product of a deliberate effort to balance academic rigor with real-world relevance and to prepare graduates for a data-driven marketplace. Fournier and Thomas (2022) note that a full-time faculty presence remains essential to a strong residential culture in business schools and that a portfolio approach sustains that presence while broadening the range of expertise a school can offer. Managed deliberately, the balance between tenured and non-tenured faculty is a source of resilience rather than a sign of decline.

11.1 Further Research

Several questions follow from this analysis. The first concerns the Doctor of Business Administration. As DBA programs expand to supply clinical and applied-research faculty, how effectively do their graduates fill the talent gap, what are their long-term trajectories in academia and industry, and do they produce applied business research that differs in kind from that of tenure-track faculty?

Outcomes and evaluation form a second cluster. Clinical faculty often lead experiential learning, and future work could test whether their industry expertise yields measurable gains in student outcomes, job placement, and employer satisfaction. The post-tenure decline in research productivity in fields like business raises a related question: Does it reflect a mismatch between doctoral training and later institutional demands, and would faculty-development models

that sustain research engagement beyond tenure serve schools better than post-tenure review alone? Together, these questions inform how business schools should structure and develop their faculties going forward.

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No additional data are available.

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