



Department Chair Online Resource Center

Integrating Part-Time Instructional Faculty Members into the Department

T. J. Bryan. "Integrating Part-Time Instructional Faculty Members into the Department." *The Department Chair* 12(4)(spring 2002): 20 ff. Reprinted with permission from [Anker Publishing, Inc.](#)

The dissatisfaction among part-time nontenure track instructional faculty members is growing. Many of these part-time faculty have become proactive, campaigning for change and even unionizing. This mobilization is occurring at a time when their numbers have increased. In fall 1998, 43% of all faculty at degree-granting higher education institutions in the United States were part-timers. Nationally, part-time faculty members generated 27% of the undergraduate student credit hour productivity that year (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This increase continues a decade-long trend.

Poorly compensated as a rule, half as likely as full-time faculty members to receive benefits, and generally employed on a semester-by-semester basis, part-timers are in the lowest professorial caste. Part-timers see themselves as modern era serfs—exploited and expendable—whose labor preserves the higher-status full-timers' way of life.

Department chairs can play a pivotal role in dissipating or eradicating these feelings of exploitation and disconnection, for they can have an impact on the attitudes of their faculty colleagues and the administrative and support staff.

THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR'S ROLE

Importance and equality . Chairs must not only explicitly assert the equality of all faculty members but also act in accordance with this perspective. Chairs should signal the importance of part-timers by ensuring that they are oriented to the department and to the institution, by including them in shared governance when possible, and by acknowledging their accomplishments and contributions in celebrations during which faculty members are honored. Chairs must reinforce the importance of high-quality teaching across the department by ensuring that part-timers' instructional performance is regularly evaluated. Once part-timers have received feedback on their teaching, the chair should make professional development for them a priority by setting aside a portion of the department's development funds for this group of faculty—a percentage that is consistent, perhaps, with their share of student credit hours generated.

Full membership. Chairs must affirm the full membership of all faculty in the department through planned acts of inclusion. If the department displays photographs of faculty members, then all faculty should be represented. If the department publishes a directory, then information on all faculty members should be listed. When the department discusses faculty issues during its meetings, topics that are germane to part-timers as well as issues that are relevant to full-timers and those that apply to both categories of faculty members should be on the agenda. The chair, or designee, should communicate regularly with part-time faculty members and be available to them. The chair should provide them with as many resources as possible and space to meet with students, even if it is shared. In these ways, regardless of their employment status, a powerful message about the importance of all faculty members to the attainment of departmental excellence is communicated.

Value part-timers. If the chair values part-timers, it is likely that administrators and staff members in the department will respond in similar fashion. The chair should lead the way by educating others about the need to respect all faculty members and provide them with appropriate assistance. The chair should hold administrators and support staff accountable through the performance evaluation and merit pay processes, rewarding them when appropriate and encouraging change when necessary. Similarly, the chair can affect full-timers' responses to part-timers through the faculty evaluation process. Rewarding collegiality in interactions with all faculty members during this process should affect attitudes.

Orientation. Department chairs should ensure that part-timers are oriented to the institution and to the academic unit. Each part-timer should receive a handbook on departmental operations that supplements institutional materials. During the orientation, practical matters such as textbook ordering and copier services as well as academic policies, procedures, and programs should be reviewed and teaching strategies should be discussed. If possible, the chair should match new part-time faculty with full-time faculty members who are willing to serve as mentors or points of contact. The orientation should include a social dimension, perhaps a dinner, and should be scheduled at a time that is convenient for all department members. To accommodate part-timers with varying schedules, the orientation could be repeated, videotaped, or provided online. If funds are available, the chair should compensate part-timers, thus communicating that their time is valuable. If funds are unavailable, the chair should acknowledge part-timers' participation through written expressions of appreciation or through public recognition of their attendance.

Shared governance. Typically, part-timers do not participate in shared governance. While department chairs can affect institution-wide shared governance policies and practices over time, they can frequently have a more immediate effect on departmental policies and practices. Part-timers can be included in department meetings and seminars. They can assist with the preparation of part-time faculty handbooks, with the planning and implementation of part-time faculty orientations, and with the development of institutional and departmental policies affecting them. Part-timers can be enfranchised, at least on a pro rata basis. If the department is not willing to permit them to vote on all issues, they could be granted the right to vote on part-time faculty issues. To prepare for part-timers' participation and enfranchisement, department chairs must be careful to demonstrate to full-time faculty that the empowerment of these faculty members does not threaten the tenure system. The chair must help tenured and tenure-track faculty to see that the reality of the part-time faculty workforce is not likely to be reversed in the near term and that the part-timers' engagement with the department serves the best interests all.

Symbolic activities. When department chairs design and implement symbolic activities, they should include all faculty members. Awards acknowledging part-timers' excellence in teaching, certificates citing their years of service to the department or the institution, and other public recognition of their accomplishments boost morale at relatively little cost. When feasible, chairs should encourage part-timers to invite their families and friends to activities during which they are honored so that they may learn about the department and the institution. Such inclusion fosters loyalty and good will.

Evaluation. Departments often resist the task of evaluating part-timers. A commonly cited reason for this is the burden that it places on the chair and full-time faculty. Another claim is that student evaluations suffice, thus making peer evaluations unnecessary. While evaluations may be labor intensive, they must be completed to assure high-caliber instruction and to stimulate continuing improvement in the academic program. The chair should consider a variety of ways to implement evaluations of part-timers in an efficient manner. For example, experienced part-timers who receive tangible or intangible rewards for their assistance could share the responsibilities of classroom observations, teaching portfolio reviews, and other modes of instructional assessment. Regardless of how the evaluations are implemented, the chair should ensure that the same criteria are used to evaluate the teaching of all faculty members, regardless of their employment status.

Professional development. The department's reputation is the sum of all faculty variables. To achieve and sustain academic excellence, the chair must pair evaluation with the professional development of all faculty members. Part-timers' participation in specific on-site development activities designed to improve instruction and, hence, to improve student-learning outcomes, could be required periodically. These programs should, ideally, be continuations of discussions that began during orientation sessions. Necessarily, when such a requirement is implemented, activities should be offered at varying times to accommodate part-timers' differing schedules, and remuneration for participation should be provided. If funds are not available for compensation, consider intangible rewards (e.g., public recognition) to encourage participation. When department chairs have discretionary funds that may be used to support faculty travel to conferences, they should reserve an appropriate portion (perhaps based on credit hours generated) for part-timers. Allocation of financial resources on this basis implies not only an investment in individuals but also an investment in a proportion of courses. Such a distribution of financial resources suggests an evenhanded approach to ensuring that all courses receive an appropriate level of investment.

CONCLUSION

Words are not enough to close the divide that all too often exists between part-time and full-time faculty. Department chairs who value all faculty members ensure that the full complement of faculty members have opportunities to learn about the institution and the department, have access to information on effective instructional approaches, are granted access to decision making, receive feedback, and have support for professional growth. In these ways, the chair creates a context in which part-timers truly belong to the department and contribute at the maximum level to the academic unit's pursuit of excellence. Of all the stakeholders on campus, the department chair has the greatest power to affect the professional lives of part-timers—for the good of all stakeholders.

REFERENCE

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2001). *Institutional policies and practices: Findings from the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*. Washington, DC: Author.

T. J. Bryan is Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs and Academic Programs, University System of Maryland. E-mail: tjbryan@usmd.edu.