Over the past few years, the culture of higher education has been permeated by an apparent paradox of increased demands for containment of instructional costs and increased accountability for educational outcomes. Academic leaders have achieved lower costs largely through employing increased numbers of adjunct faculty and adopting various methods of instructional technology. While much seems to have been written about the more effective integration of technology into the teaching and learning environment, little has been reported on the potential positive impact of more effectively utilizing adjunct faculty. Grounded in a more factual understanding of adjunct faculty, the approach of a new millennium should challenge each of us to creatively rethink our strategies toward their role in our institutions.

In *The Invisible Faculty*, the most widely cited source of data on the status of part-time faculty, Judith Gappa and David Leslie report their research on the practices and policies toward part-time faculty used at all levels of higher education, and formulate a typology of four categories predicated upon their lifestyles and motivation. Gappa and Leslie found that over half of all adjunct faculty members are employed full time outside of academe and can be best categorized as *specialist, expert, or professional*. Their percentages are lowest among the faculties at liberal arts colleges and highest at private, doctoral-granting institutions. Their numbers are also significant at many community colleges. They are often pursuing new contacts, either social or professional, and the opportunity to fulfill themselves through sharing their expertise. *Career enders* include not only those who are already fully retired but also the rapidly growing number of those who have cut back on their full-time work hours and are transitioning to a more balanced lifestyle. *Freelancers* include those who by choice combine two or more part-time jobs to satisfy their multiple needs, artists and others who leverage their association with the college or university, and those whose primary role is caregiver to children or other family members. Gappa and Leslie’s fourth category—*aspiring academics*—includes the *freeway fliers* of whom we have read so much, gaining part-time employment concurrently at several institutions to patch together a full-time wage. While the ramifications of that situation should cause us concern, we must note that it is not the dominant part-time teaching profile at most institutions and therefore should not drive the strategies most of us employ to achieve effectiveness from our adjunct faculties.

Most adjunct professors derive their principal satisfaction from the intrinsic rewards of teaching. They relish teaching both introductory as well as advanced courses. They possess exciting work histories, specialized training, and a passion for their chosen fields that provide richer perspective and build meaningful connections in students’ minds to the world outside. They enable us to teach highly specialized courses for which there is an increasing demand. Successful adjunct instructors often provide linkages to community resources that would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate. For these and other reasons, our adjunct faculties are potentially invaluable, irreplaceable resources.

Although typically well grounded in their areas of expertise, adjunct instructors are often not prepared to effectively address the full range of needs of today’s students. Burdened by the demands of their personal and work lives, and conditioned by the rapid information delivery of television and personal computers, today’s students are far different from those occupying classrooms when the adjunct instructor was a student. Any human’s natural inclination to “teach as they have been taught” contributes to many new adjunct instructors’ “covering the material” through extensive lecture and ineffectively managed classroom discussions. Since it is not uncommon for adjunct instructors to be given teaching assignments on short notice, with a minimal overview of the course material and the institutional culture, should we be surprised when they stumble? When they teach in “off hours” at often-isolated locations with little or no support system, should we not expect them to feel disconnected from the institution and lose some of their desire for “re-upping” for the following term? As academic leaders, do we not too often permit the sporadic complaints of full-time faculty and students to create a self-fulfilling prophecy of negative expectations from adjunct faculty members that is not supported by fact?

In spite of flaws in our leadership of adjunct faculty, research indicates no significant difference between the quality of instruction they deliver vis-à-vis that of full-time faculty. Most adjunct instructors are highly motivated to succeed—the perceived stakes are high. Given a basic investment in their development, most will contribute significantly to the missions of our instructional units. Three years ago, we initiated a comprehensive, yet inexpensive, adjunct faculty development program at Indian River Community College that has a dramatic impact on their success in the classroom and resulting student satisfaction ratings. In the process, time-consuming “firefighting” of adjunct instructor-initiated problems has been all but eliminated. It might provide you valuable benefits as well.

The foundation of our adjunct faculty development program is a well-designed and continuously refined teaching methods course called “Instructor Effectiveness Training.” Its completion is required for new adjunct faculty prior to, or at a minimum concurrent with, their initial teaching assignment.
Each of its four sessions focuses on one key aspect of course management: course planning and syllabus development, getting the course off to an effective beginning, effective teaching and learning practices, and methods of evaluating the success of students and the instructor. The course is delivered on consecutive Saturday mornings, beginning prior to the opening of the term and overlapping its first few weeks. Thus, participants are provided not only essential information for successfully launching their courses but a forum for processing reflections of their early experiences. Through an active “icebreaker” and a half dozen experiential learning activities, participants begin to develop a network of peer support upon which they can draw for the remainder of their teaching careers. I teach the course myself, ensuring the delivery of appropriate content and working to provide a model of positive teaching practices. Teaching the course myself also provides an opportunity for me to better assess the strengths and limitations of each prospective instructor, improving short- and long-term decision making relative to instructor assignments.

Shortly before beginning their initial teaching assignment, each adjunct instructor receives a structured orientation by the department chairperson or a veteran full-time faculty member—creating a bond with potentially significant long-term benefits. While usually conducted one-on-one, orientation meetings involving several new instructors have been especially effective in building support networks. The orientation employs a checklist and addresses such general human resources issues as certification and pay procedures, instructional concerns such as privacy of student information, as well as such unit-specific issues as classroom opening and closing procedures and student retention activities. Some checklist items lend themselves to being addressed by other campus employees, promoting exposure to the wider campus community. After completion, a copy of the checklist is retained for the instructor’s file, while the original is maintained by the new instructor, serving as an evolving resource upon which answers to emerging questions can be built.

The plan’s third element is self-initiated mentoring between new adjunct instructors and full-time, or veteran adjunct, instructors. Mentoring is promoted by department chairs in their meetings with adjunct instructors, during the Instructor Effectiveness Training course, and at “Brown Bag Luncheons” (described below). Several mutually rewarding mentoring relationships have been launched through guest speaking and team teaching assignments.

Proactively addressing the isolation many adjunct instructors feel, we developed a structured set of opportunities for social interaction. First, Brown Bag Luncheons were scheduled for the first Friday of each month. Along with ample “chat time,” each luncheon incorporates a half-hour developmental activity, focusing on such topics as cooperative learning, test construction tips, and special challenges of “Generation X” students. Each academic year’s series has been successfully concluded with a reflection
time that encourages each participant to share a memorable teaching experience. A second vehicle for encouraging social interaction has been an end-of-the-academic-year informal reception for all faculty, but that especially targets adjunct instructors, engendering a sense of appreciation and teamwork.

The final component of the plan is a materials resource center, containing purchased and donated books made available on a “check-out” basis and an assortment of faculty-produced papers on teaching issues. While the materials are now housed in a designated area of the library, several other logical locations that would be convenient to adjunct instructors utilizing them in the evening or on weekends are possibilities.

Over the last few years, an increasing number of colleges and universities have developed Teaching and Learning Centers, largely as a resource for their full-time faculties. All of the elements of the adjunct faculty development plan outlined here could be effectively incorporated into a center, engendering among all instructors—part- and full-time—increased ownership of their individual development and collaboration with other faculty members to enhance the institution’s overall teaching effectiveness.

With its potential for contributing a wide variety of quality enhancements while lowering overall instructional costs, your adjunct faculty is a resource you can ill afford to ineffectively utilize. As any resource does, the adjunct faculty requires planned, continuous development for its value to achieve its full potential. Once developed, that resource can yield many valuable rewards throughout your institution’s exciting and challenging future.

**REFERENCE**


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