

Win-Win: Providing Support to Adjunct Faculty

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Working with adjunct faculty is a responsibility shared by most department chairs. As a new chair, I have thought long and hard about the most effective ways to work with adjuncts and have discovered a number of things that a chair can do to make both his or her working life smoother and the adjunct's experience more positive and productive.

Provide information. Collect basic contact information and update it regularly. Provide adjuncts with needed information about college and departmental policies and procedures. Send them regular reminders pertaining to their duties; new instructors will be overwhelmed with information and may not pick up on what's important to remember. Distribute a list of the benefits that are available for adjuncts and a list of college contacts and resources.

Recruit 24/7. Recruiting needs to be an ongoing process rather than a last-minute scramble. Regular advertising, participation in job fairs, networking in local colleges and at nearby four-year institutions, and word of mouth are all beneficial. Having a reputation for supporting adjuncts is the most effective recruiting tool.

Treat adjuncts as professionals. Adjunct faculty are a valuable part of the department and the institution and should be treated as professionals—and expected to act as professionals. This means following procedures, treating colleagues well, and maintaining a professional demeanor in the classroom. Evaluations are a professional responsibility, and an important part of an instructor's professional portfolio.

Teach classroom management. Provide ongoing training. This sends the message that adjuncts are worth the investment and that teaching is important. Training adjuncts in classroom management techniques, ranging from such seemingly obvious and simple items as writing course policies and developing a syllabus, to tougher techniques such as dealing with difficult students' classroom behavior and following through on established policies. This is probably the most needed area of training since

many adjuncts will come prepared to teach subject content, but lack skills in running an effective classroom.

Make adjuncts feel a part of the department. Adjuncts consistently comment on feeling isolated from their departments. Finding ways to link adjuncts to the department can result in a more responsible and effective workforce. Invite them to attend department meetings and serve on committees. Include them in monthly staff birthday celebrations and other department social events held both during the day and at night so that evening faculty may attend. It's a small thing, but it's important to many and sends a message that adjuncts are a valued part of the department.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. One effective way to improve communications is to include adjuncts on an e-mail distribution list to keep them informed about college events and training opportunities, share policy and procedure reminders, and engage them in issue discussions. E-mail is also a way to keep in regular contact with individual adjuncts about concerns or problems.

Train and then train some more. Training begins with an initial orientation and includes regular follow-up training throughout the year. This is difficult because adjuncts have such varied schedules and often they are not paid to attend such trainings (although serving food at these sessions helps encourage attendance). Orientations and trainings need to cover college policies and procedures, classroom management, and teaching techniques. An effective training technique is asking adjuncts to prepare to share with others one assignment or teaching tip that worked well for them and one that still needs improvement. In addition, having full-time faculty serve as mentors to adjuncts can connect full timers with adjuncts while passing along useful information and teaching good employee skills.

Provide support. Be sure that adjuncts have adequate places to work and meet with students, if possible, as well as instructional supplies. When possible, arrange adjuncts' schedules according to their own requests. To do so will send a strong message that your institution values the adjunct and the contributions that he or she brings to its learning community.

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