

RUNNING HEAD: CONTINGENT FACULTY

Contingent Faculty:
Exploring Adjunct Assessment in Higher Education Environments

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March 2012

Introduction

In the fall of 2010 the U.S. Education Department published a report that “documents the death of tenure” (Wilson, 2010, p. 1), suggesting U.S. college and university systems would become increasingly more dependent upon a pool of conditional, non-tenure track of adjunct instructors who frequently lack resources, development and training, characteristics of educators that promote student success. Within the realm of higher education, “Community colleges have employed adjunct instructors from the time the institutions initially were established,” (Lyons, 1999, p. 4). However, as community colleges have grown, so have their dependence on adjunct faculty. In an article published by the Union County College Chapter of the United Adjunct Faculty, approximately 800,000 faculty members, or about 2/3s of the total number of faculty members nationwide are considered adjunct, or contingent employees (Louis, 2009). The American Federation of Teachers (2009) noted that the number of adjunct faculty increased by more than 100% between 2006 and 2009 and that an estimated 68% of all faculty working in the community college are employed on a part-time, contingent basis.

The trend toward adjunct faculty has also been noted within traditional four-year institutions of higher learning. Both Callan (1997) and Goldstein (2005) reported that more than 65% of current college faculty are part-time, contingent or adjunct faculty, who are awarded few, if any, benefits to improve teaching skills or given reason to demonstrate loyalty to their temporary employers. Brigham Young University-Idaho documented 49% of its English faculty as adjunct in 2009 (Poole, 2009) while 2011 statistics reported that 88.3% of all composition instructors were contingent faculty (Gere, cited in Hammer, 2011). In fact, the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW) found evidence that adjuncts are being used more frequently

across collegiate contexts and that tenure/tenure-track positions were experiencing a disproportionate decrease (Jacobe, 2006).

Donoghue stated, “though no university administrators talk candidly about it.... Adjunct labor thus became a permanent feature of the academic landscape...and the prospects for PH.Ds...have been wretched ever since” (2008, p. 25). Due to the increasing tendency and willingness of colleges and universities to hire adjunct instructors, there has been a growth in academic and institutional research conducted to understand the impact such staffing practices have on institutions as a whole. Some of the major research findings suggest that part-time faculty provide both two-year and four-year institutions with financial flexibility (Schuster & Finklestein, 2006; Cohen, 2008), but that part-time instructors are also less accessible to the students, have less frequent interactions with students and with the campus cultures in which they work (Schuster, 2003; Umbach, 2007; Cohen, 2008). Beyond the need to understand the impact the adjunct population has on students, there is just as significant a need to understand the implications of the institutional culture on the adjunct employee.

Additionally, a gap in the current literature exists relative to any real exploration on the support adjuncts receive in carrying out their teaching duties, including the assessment of their work. While the main purpose of this exploratory paper is to gather exploratory data on the feedback adjunct faculty receive about their teaching, we begin with a general discussion of the characteristics of the contingent faculty population, including information pertaining to job stability, faculty compensation, teaching and development, and faculty voice as important preliminary information. We end with a set of research topics that we feel need to be addressed, including that of adjunct faculty teaching assessments.

Defining the Role of Adjunct

In a 2011 report, the American Association of University Professors defined adjunct faculty as those who identify as contingent faculty, postdocs, TAs, non-tenure-track faculty, part-timers, lecturers, instructors or non-senate faculty (AAUP, 2011). Adjunct faculty at community colleges are “often the ‘outside’ professional teaching in the applied and specialized career fields such as nursing, paralegal, and design programs where they bring the latest expertise to the classroom” (Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez and Muth, 2010, p. 23). Modern day adjuncts, as discussed by Donoghue (2008) are frequently newly minted PhDs patiently awaiting their opportunity for a tenure-tracked position at a traditional college or university. Wolfinger, Mason, and Goulden (2009) explained that there are traditionally two types of adjunct faculty; those with an outside job who only teach one or two classes at a time or those where teaching are their main profession. Academe (2005) recognized that for some individuals who teach part-time, teaching provides added intellectual stimulation and extra income to a career outside the academy. However these sojourners in higher education are also a minority population within the adjunct teaching ranks. Jacobs (2004) claimed that for most adjuncts, about half work for more than 50 hours a week, are paid 26 percent less than comparable tenure-track assistant professors (Monks, 2004), are less likely to get comparable resources of tenure-tracked faculty such as computers and office space (Wolfinger, Mason and Goulden, 2009), and have less protection and “less incentive to defend the intellectual and moral prerogatives of the professorate” (Wolfinger, Mason and Goulden, 2009, p. 1595). Furthermore, adjunct faculty are “second class citizens in almost every respect. They represent the academic

analogy of the ‘feminization of poverty,’ given that adjuncts are disproportionately likely to be women” (Wolfinger, Mason and Goulden, 2009, p. 1596).

Furthermore, it is posited that adjuncts who remain in the adjunct position for extended periods of time after graduating may become academically “stale” as they do not remain current in their disciplines and are not required to publish, create course content, or participate in curriculum development. Johnson summarizes it best when he claims that adjuncts “weakly connect everywhere, central to nothing” (2008, A10). They are the *ronins* of the academic landscape.

Faculty Voice

As adjunct faculty are often seen as transient members of the community college environment, it is not common for adjuncts to participate in departmental activities, campus committees or college governance (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Callan noted that although the adjunct faculty member is a qualified “asset to the college itself, inexpensive and expendable, he or she is unlikely to participate in college affairs, committee activities, curricular development and academic counseling” (1997, p. 99). On the other hand, Donoughue stated that adjunct faculty “rarely have a voice in departmental meetings, especially the important deliberations about hiring, tenure and salaries (2008, p. 56). The literature consistently demonstrates that “inviting adjunct instructors to departmental meetings on course development or revision may be of practical value, in addition to raising the stature and self-worth of the individual involved” (Wickun & Stanley, 2011, no page).

Mahon (2008) explained that adjunct faculty participation is welcomed in institutional governance and departmental meetings; however, it is not actively sought. In some cases, where adjunct participation was unavailable, institutional administrators have actually initiated changes

promoting limited opportunities to participate in faculty governance (Wilson, 2009), yet the relevance is negligible. The ASCCC (2002) has since suggested that due to this lack of participation, created from lack of awareness, opportunity or desire, there is a majority faculty within the college environment that is invisible. As the majority faculty has proven to be an adjunct population within the community college and representative of just fewer than 50% of faculty at traditional institutions, the question is how effective can processes, curriculum and student outcomes be when the majority population has minimal investment in the resources supporting the environment? To promote higher adjunct faculty voice and recognition within the college environment, many adjuncts have unionized. June (2009) discussed that recent years have seen an increase in adjunct faculty unionization as adjuncts strive for a voice in college environments, motivated by a drive for better working conditions, benefits, and college rights similar to those of full-time faculty. The same article also highlights the desire for adjunct faculty desire to raise awareness of the plight of the adjunct faculty with the hope it will spur further working conditions and improved college environments for student as well as faculty. Barbara Bowen, vice-president at the American Federation of Teachers stated, “For too long, there was the prevailing feeling among many adjuncts that they were an invisible part of the profession. But the silence in the profession about contingent faculty has been broken” (June, 2009, no page given).

Nationally, a newly formed advocacy group called the New Faculty Majority: The National Coalition for Adjunct and Contingent Faculty (NFM) established a network to link adjunct and contingent faculty nationwide. The organization’s mission focuses on “advancing professional equity and securing academic freedom for all adjunct and contingent faculty” (NFM, 2012). Its associated foundation focuses on providing educational information to the

public, conducting research on adjunct and contingent faculty, and advocating for institutional reform.

Job Stability

Adjunct faculty are defined as a part-time faculty member of a higher educational institution teaching courses or providing curricular or instructional services and “whose major responsibility is not related to the institution in question. These faculty are customarily assigned one or two classes with class related responsibilities” (www.aaup.org). By definition, the adjunct is considered a temporary, or fleeting, asset to the college environment, hired on a contract basis for specified periods of time. Some have described the adjunct as a modern day *ronin*, like the Japanese Samurai with no master or station in life wandering a hostile landscape without nurture or incentive (Breithaupt, 2004; King & Nanfito, 2012). Others have seen the adjunct position as one that offers advantages. Stenerson, et al. noted for example that “one of the attractive aspects of the adjunct labor is its very temporariness” (2010, p. 26).

But, for many adjuncts the very part time nature of their work is fraught with negative implications. The facets of job instability include lack of tenure and promotion along with feelings of alienation and devaluation. According to Gappa and Leslie (1993), at most colleges, adjunct faculty have little to no opportunity for job advancement and no chance for tenure. Supporting this statement, Donoghue noted that “... part-time faculty have no chance to gain tenure” (2008 p. 66). Hammer (2011) recognized that adjuncts can be dismissed or “not renewed” without cause, although they are completing the same work and teaching the same students as their tenure-earning counterparts. This suggests that adjunct faculty seek employment stability. As adjunct faculty are hired on a contracted basis, for periods as short as one semester, the only golden ticket related to job security is that of preference rights. According to the 2002

document titled *Part-time faculty: A principled perspective*, published by the Academic Senate for California Community College, the California Community College system supports “seniority based rehire rights for qualified part-time faculty with positive evaluation”. In principle, this state system offers preference for reassignment to the same class and the same teaching load if courses and funding are available.

For most adjunct faculty, however, the lack of stability creates an overarching feeling of alienation. Often the adjunct works at multiple sites. Bruce Culter, Vice-President of Los Medanos Community College, noted that adjunct faculty work at an average of five institutions (B. Culter, personal communication, June 17, 2010). Goldstein (2005) supports this reality reporting that most adjuncts have to work at several institutions simultaneously in order to earn enough to live. This offers limited, or no opportunity, for adjunct faculty members to become an integrated, integral part of the college environment in which they work. This weak, and sometimes nonexistent connection between adjunct faculty, the hiring institution, and institutional constituents leads adjunct faculty to display signs of alienation (Peckham and Hammer, 2010; Poole) from their tenured “colleagues” and the institutions,” (Pappas, 2008, p. A14-A16). Adjuncts have been termed second-class citizens.

These defining characteristics of adjunct faculty beg the question of institutional and disciplinary dedication. Rogers, et al wrote that “Historically, many adjuncts have felt detached from their departments, school and universities’ (2004, p.57). Rifkin (2000) noted that because adjuncts are typically employed at multiple campuses, they may not have the commitment to the college that is typical of full- time faculty. Stenerson, et al (2010) further emphasize this point and explain that balanced schedules created through adjunct employment at several institutions means adjuncts have prioritized commitments, often meaning that faculty do not have the time or

the motivation to truly connect with students and promote student learning through the cultural lens of the institution. As student retention, transfer and overall learning outcomes are related to student connectedness to faculty members low faculty engagement is a detriment to colleges (Stenerson, et. al, 2010).

Griggs (2008) reported that many adjunct faculty feel demeaned or paternalized by their hiring institutions. One example is the class situation in which adjunct faculty are “bumped” from a typical teaching schedule to fulfill contractual obligations of full-time/tenure-earning faculty. This not only demonstrates an institutional display of disinterest, but also may negatively impact the adjunct faculty members’ opportunity to work. When one class in an adjuncts chain of teaching jobs is taken away, there is a domino effect in their ability to teach at other institutions as well. Disruptions in the chain create chaos in the adjuncts ability to thrive in the workforce as an instructor. It also plays into the large turnover of contingent faculty (anonymous, 2010). As adjunct faculty have little to no knowledge as to where, when, or if they will have a teaching position after a semester has come to an end, it is not surprising instructors leave when more secure positions become available.

Although there are differences in how adjunct faculty are treated at higher education institutions, the overall picture is dismal. Part-time faculty are recognized for bringing in expertise and experience to the fields in which they teach, fill in temporary teaching gaps, provide for sudden growth in program areas and can save institutions significant funds in times of economic challenges (Eckler, Field and Goldstein, 2009). However, the benefits they offer institutions are far overshadowed by the instability in the working environment. Eckler, Field and Goldstein report that adjunct only stay in the field approximately seven years (2009), while

Dr. Venecia reports that typically, most contingent faculty “leave for greener fields within a year” (K. Venecia, personal communication, October 21, 2011).

The Economy of Adjunct Faculty

Faculty compensation is another topic of intense interest within adjunct faculty ranks. With the dry humor of understatement, Donoughue stated that “Adjuncts cast themselves as self-sacrificing artists, and they seek to benefit from the aura of prestige that universities strenuously try to project” (2008, p. 63), perhaps attempting to rectify low wages and minimal benefits awarded to their position. Callan (1997) noted that part of the allure of adjunct faculty is that they are less expensive to hire, have few benefits, require minimal to no office space, are paid on a per class-hour basis, meaning they are significantly less expensive than their full-time, tenure-tracked faculty counterparts.

Wickun and Stanley (2011) stated that a majority of adjunct faculty are employed on either a per semester or per course basis with salaries ranging from \$400 per course taught to as high as \$4000 per course taught. Beck (2008) reported that at community colleges, adjunct faculty are paid between \$1500-\$2000 per three hour course, while the same course at four-year institution taught by an adjunct brings in approximately \$3,171 - \$5,564, both well below the earnings of a tenure-earning/tenure-tracked full-time faculty member would earn for teaching the same course. Wallin (2004) noted that previous literature shows that part-time faculty are paid 25-35% less than full time faculty and that the pay differences are not based on differences in faculty qualifications, but on institutional policy and surrounding market conditions.

Furthermore, it is noted that adjunct faculty are rarely compensated with pay increases commensurate with length of service; a practice common of full-time faculty (Wallin, 2004).

This creates a greater discrepancy in faculty pay, setting adjunct faculty increasingly behind in

compensation. In a 2009 article posted in the Chronicle of Higher Education, the annual salary of adjuncts was posted as being \$20,000 or less as the norm. In California, the statewide average for salary for part-time faculty within the community college system is 39.27% of full-time wages (ASCCC, 2002).

Compensation also falls short for adjunct faculty in terms of retirement benefits and health, vision, dental and life insurance. Wallin stated “few colleges offer benefits to adjunct faculty, though that is changing somewhat with increasing unionization” (2004, p. 380). Gappa and Leslie (1993) noted that outside of little opportunity for promotion and salary increase, adjuncts rarely have access to benefits regardless of the length of service offered to the institution or recognized teaching excellence. Donoghue writes, “Not only are adjuncts ineligible for tenure, but 85% of them are hired on contracts of less than a year of duration...they are also ineligible for benefits...are paid by the course and earn as little as \$1000 per class taught...one adjunct calculated her hourly wage as \$2.12 an hour, without benefits” (2008, p. 56).

Contentious discussions regarding parity pay are what drive adjunct faculty attempts at balancing the compensation playing field at higher education institutions. In 2001, the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor held its third conference for the purpose of organizing adjunct faculty and advocating for parity pay with their full-time colleagues and in 2002 the American Federation of Teachers approved a set of standards for the treatment of adjunct faculty emphasizing equitable pay scale and compensation packages for adjuncts (Wallin, 2004). The ASCCC (2002) also continues to support the recommendation that local senates work with relevant collective bargaining units, boards, and administrators to promote part-time faculty equity pay as “comparable pay for comparable work.” Therefore, as a work-in-progress,

adjuncts are slowly being recognized for the valuable role they play in the college system through comparable compensation.

Teaching and Development

Feeding into the debate surrounding the value of adjunct faculty is the issue of adjunct instruction quality. Wickun and Stanley note that adjuncts possess “well rounded educations and a wealth of practical experience” however, “lack of teaching experience in the classroom is a major weakness that must be addressed” (2011, no page number). Denise Manger wrote “adjuncts reduce the quality of the education students receive. Sometimes those arguments are well motivated, and sometimes not. Some commenters assert that adjunct instructors, as a class, do not teach as well as full-time faculty...based on factors ranging from adjuncts often lower academic qualifications to simple prejudice” (2009, no page given). Wallin noted that “Lack of competency and experience” (2004 p. 380) are defining characteristics of adjunct faculty, however adjunct faculty apply approximately the same mix of teaching methods as full-time faculty and that part-time faculty constitute a well-qualified, valuable resource, and when properly used, contribute significantly to academic quality. The defining difference is working conditions and the existence of two completely different and separate working conditions (Gappa and Leslie, 1993). Although adjunct faculty are slightly less experienced and slightly less educated than full-time faculty (Wallin, 2004), there is no recent study that has found a significant difference in the quality of instruction provided between an adjunct and full-time faculty member. Magner recognized the range of “teaching quality found in adjuncts in about the same as it is for full-time and tenure-track faculty members....Some adjuncts are genuinely brilliant teachers, bringing their students rich and valuable experiences that can be part of an

outstanding education; others are just plain lousy. The same can be said of full-timers” (2009, no page given).

Perhaps further differentiating between full-time and adjunct faculty behavior in the classroom include resources for curriculum development, class preparation, and student interaction. Stenerson et al. recognized that “adjuncts need to know what the curricular, performance and mentoring standards are. . . . To accomplish these goals, the university must direct resources in support of adjunct faculty” (2010, p. 26). However, adjuncts are commonly not given access to basic necessities for teaching including office space, access to computers, copy services, printers, telephones, campus email, mail boxes, textbooks, and even on-campus parking spaces (Callan, 1997; ASCCC, 2002; Wallin, 2004; Donoughue, 2008). Cassebaum (1995) noted that adjunct faculty are frequently hired in August, assumedly late for the faculty member to become acquainted with the curriculum, campus, student culture and teaching requirements before the start of the semester. Wickun and Stanley note:

The lack of departmental support is another weakness of the adjunct system, particularly at larger universities. The adjunct faculty member typically has no office or telephone and often is not provide with a job description, course description, or even a syllabus. In our experiences as adjuncts early in our careers, our orientations consisted of picking up a book, a room number, and a class roster from the departmental secretary. There was no orientation or handbook to guide us, just some "friendly advice" from the secretary or a TA (2011, no page given).

This demonstrates that although adjunct faculty are expected to meet the standards of academic rigor set forth through mandated curriculum and meet student developmental needs, they are put at an immediate disadvantage and set up for failure as they are not provided the basic tools of teaching.

Research also suggests that adjunct faculty are deprived of developmental opportunities in the college context. Rogers, McIntyre, and Jazzar stated that “professional development must

be aligned to the vision of the higher education institutions, with an ultimate goal of preparing faculty members to carry out the instructional work of the organization” (2010, p. 54). Easton (2009) suggested that institutional values should be integrated into professional developmental programs so adjunct faculty have a better chance of becoming an active and valued part of the system. Marits (1996) notes that appropriate developmental activities for adjunct faculty include formal and informal activities that will ultimately help faculty improve the overall instructional quality of the courses they teach. It is further specified that developmental activities should be either discipline specific or focused on instructional processes.

However necessary, professional developmental trends in college and university environments overlook the adjunct faculty population. Wallin (2004) noted that “opportunities for professional development are limited for adjuncts, particularly in times of tight budgets” (2004, p. 383). Gappa and Leslie (1993) noted that there are frequently insufficient or no funds available for professional development, conference attendance, or enrollment in advanced coursework for adjuncts. Long-term adjunct faculty member S. Rodolfo of Los Medanos Community College stated, “most instructional workshops . . . are tailored for full time faculty” (S. Rodolfo, personal communication, October 20, 2011) and explained that programs in general are not targeted toward adjunct development. Rogers, et al (2010) noted that adjunct faculty are not only overlooked in terms of developmental opportunities, but many also report feeling unsure of where to go or who to ask for support; one stated support is so minimal that she believes adjuncts fall into the “out of sight-out of mind” category on college campuses. Literature illustrates that the needs of adjunct faculty are not greatly different from the needs of full-time faculty; however, institutions have seemingly not responded or recognized the adjunct population (Rogers, et. al, 2004).

Faculty Assessment

Tied closely to faculty development is the topic of faculty assessment. More importantly, the recognition that as faculty developmental opportunities are sparse for adjunct faculty, literature surrounding adjunct faculty development is virtually non-existent. Gibson-Harman, Rodriguez, and Hawoth touted that “conceptions of ...college quality should be gauged not only by student learning outcomes, but also by employees’ professional growth and their sense of being valued” (2002, p. 79). Other scholars define assessment in its role in accordance to access to funding in an era of limited resources and an increase in legislative accountability (Hindi & Miller, 2000; Michlitsch & Sidle, 2002; Urciuoli, 2005). Regardless, assessment can be defined as “the systematic gathering and analysis of information used to improve student learning” (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998, p. 2) and assertively impacts the overall success, in terms of student learning outcomes, legal compliancy and access to funding, of an institution of higher education.

Conclusion

Regardless of the reported benefits or disadvantages adjunct faculty bring to the higher education environment, the emphasis and dependence on adjunct faculty has exploded since the 1970s (AAUP, 2011). A comprehensive understanding of adjunct faculty in the higher education environment is vital to ensure that the evolution of the position matches the evolution of the college. Current conditions offer adjunct faculty little stability, low compensation, and minimal faculty voice. In addition, higher education has increasingly come to rely on a teaching force that it neither compensates reasonably nor develops. The old song that the faculty form the core of the higher education institution has become distorted. This study seeks to understand the reality of this change by looking specifically at the assessment of teaching.

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