As institutions increasingly attempt to be more responsive to the changing needs of students and future employers, reliance on adjunct faculty has increased. This module describes the benefits and pitfalls associated with the use of adjunct faculty, and the processes that contribute to adjunct faculty dissatisfaction and turnover. It describes the process by which adjunct faculty may be integrated into the institution in a way that increases their involvement and participation in the institution’s larger goals, and highlights nine key actions that are helpful in supporting and retaining adjunct faculty. Finally, a case study is presented, demonstrating how an institution chose this topic for a quality action project, and how it has systematically approached the issue.

Opportunities and Challenges

The use of adjunct faculty presents many opportunities and challenges. Of course it can be financially advantageous for an institution to rely on adjunct faculty because they are often paid less than their tenured colleagues and they have fewer fringe benefits. Aside from this, adjunct faculty can enhance an institution’s ability to respond quickly to fluctuations in enrollment. For example, if enrollment dramatically increases, class sections can be immediately added so that fewer students must be put on waiting lists for classes. Conversely, if classes are not filled, it is much easier to release an adjunct faculty member than it is to reduce the schedule of a full-time contractual faculty member. Adjunct faculty can often enrich the type of learning environment an institution can offer to its students. Since many of them work in other jobs during the day and teach at night, often in content areas that match the courses, they can inject their specific content expertise and current real-life experiences in to the curriculum. They also provide a pool of experienced teachers who may fill tenure track positions.

There are also some common problems associated with using adjunct faculty. Many institutions experience a high degree of turnover among the adjunct faculty. They tend to have changes in family situations or in their need for full-time employment that affect their availability. Also, part-time teaching can be very demanding. Preparing for and delivering a class for the first time can be extremely time consuming, as is grading papers and meeting with students outside of class time. And while institutions may enjoy the scheduling flexibility that adjunct faculty provide, last minute assignments or class cancellations can be very frustrating for the instructors affected, potentially decreasing their satisfaction and loyalty. Adjunct faculty are often dissatisfied with the amount of basic support they get from their institutions in the way of course outlines and other instructional materials, workspace, and access to equipment. And since adjunct faculty often work in the evenings or on weekends, they often lack the help they might otherwise expect from support staff and services that are only available during business hours. Finally, since they are not often invited to department meetings or institutional training opportunities, and since they often have minimal interaction with colleagues, they are less likely to feel a sense of community or to understand and buy into the broader goals of the institution.
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**Attracting/Recruiting**

High-quality adjuncts are crucial to an institution’s success (*1.2.4 Profile of a Quality Faculty Member*). Full-time faculty can be very helpful in identifying potential candidates through professional networking and can, through one-on-one discussions, recruit some excellent candidates who may not view themselves as potential teachers. Job fairs for recruitment offer exposure to larger numbers of candidates. Ideally, adjunct faculty work outside of the institution during the day in careers that involve the content areas that they teach. It is also ideal if they are chosen from college advisory committees, or from local businesses or professional organizations. Institutions can successfully attract quality candidates by understanding and addressing the individual motivations of potential adjuncts. Aside from the economic benefit, some reasons why people pursue adjunct teaching include, the desire for intellectual stimulation and working in an academic community, helping students learn and succeed, and being able to “give back” something to their professions. It will also positively impact the recruitment process if effective adjunct faculty support systems are available and if these are well known to potential candidates.

**Adjunct Continuum**

Figure 1 shows the “life” of an adjunct, represented by six categories progressing along a three-phase continuum, from recruitment to full commitment and continued growth. Notice that at each stage of the continuum, the institution and the adjunct are represented by capital and lowercase letters representing the degree to which each “owns” the process relative to the other at any given time. During the recruitment phase the institution is acting independently and is totally responsible. In the intermediary four stages the onus of the partnership shifts from the institution being primary, to the adjunct being primarily responsible, to the point of assessment, evaluation and development in which the partnership is equal.

In the final phase of broadened contributions and growth, the adjunct (A) moves to a higher level of professionalism by making significant and enhanced contributions to the institution (*4.2.2 Becoming a Self-Grower*). While the institution provides the environment, the adjunct (A) becomes responsible for the contributions such as mentoring other faculty, improving instructional design, contributing to the organization’s mission and culture, or expanding professionalism within the discipline. While progressing through the continuum, the adjunct’s level of professionalism and responsibility increases (Maslow, 1971).
9 Keys to Supporting and Retaining Quality Adjunct Faculty

To facilitate progress through the continuum, several key areas need to be addressed:

1. Orientation

Regular orientations are very important to maintaining effective adjunct faculty. This is the time to emphasize the principles, mission, vision, and values of the institution (Pruitt-Logan, 2000). It is also important to cover topics such as internal communication; safety policies, environmental health, FERPA, etc.; media operations, duplication, technology, mail, and bookstore services; and professional development resources and expectations. Another way to provide a welcoming environment and communicate the college’s interest in supporting the success of adjunct faculty is to compensate them well.
2. Basic Support
It is very important that adjunct faculty have places to work that include access to computers and other office equipment, and that these spaces are well publicized. The areas should offer quiet/confidential space to meet with students. It is also essential that adjunct faculty have access to e-mail, telephones, copiers, fax machines, and audiovisual assistance (Carroll, 2003).

3. Course Outlines, Portfolios, and Resources
A frequent reason why adjuncts leave institutions is that teaching requires such a significant time commitment. Academic departments can significantly reduce the preparation burden by making outlines of instruction or curriculum available to adjuncts. Adjunct faculty members are hired for their content expertise, but there is no particular value in "reinventing the wheel." This policy also helps to ensure that instruction across classrooms is consistent and that underlying instructional design components align with the larger mission of the college. Some departments have organized resources that include learning outcomes, syllabi, learning activities, sample quizzes, and tests (Bransford, 2000). This type of material has a great deal of value for adjuncts and has also proved to be a valuable resource for newly hired tenure track faculty.

4. Departmental/Institutional Support and Inclusion
Adjunct faculty can be helped to feel part the larger team when they are invited to department meetings and planning activities, and when they are provided with a formal or informal mentor. By including adjunct faculty in strategic planning and other institutional service projects, one can foster a culture that is supportive of overall organizational effectiveness.

5. Evaluation/Assessment
Adjunct faculty need and deserve feedback in the form of assessments from either a supervisor or a seasoned faculty member in their discipline (4.1.1 Overview of Assessment and 4.2.1 Overview of Mentoring). Feedback that provides the opportunity to grow and improve is valued. It goes without saying that, if adjunct faculty members are serving in a probationary period, evaluation and assessment can play an even more important role.
6. Professional Development Opportunities

Professional development expectations for adjunct faculty may take the form of some type of certification or professional growth (1.3.7 Annual Professional Growth Plan). It makes tremendous sense to inform part-time faculty about professional development opportunities and expectations. Timely invitations to professional development opportunities also help build a sense of community. It can certainly enhance the evaluation/assessment process when professional growth objectives for adjunct faculty are identified each year.

7. Stability in Employment

Predictable continuity of employment results in employee retention. People have an easier time planning their lives when they have advance notice of teaching opportunities. While many adjuncts do not operate under a teaching contract, it is important to explain the nature of the employment relationship, as most can respect and understand that teaching opportunities are subject to sufficient enrollment. Individuals also understand and respect that continued employment is subject to satisfactory performance. If an adjunct faculty member is going to be released for a performance-based reason, it is a sign of respect to tell them so. Performance feedback also allows individuals to address the problems and issues (1.2.4 Profile of a Quality Faculty Member). Respect, demonstrated by assignments and continued employment, pays future dividends including staff retention and commitment (Pareles, 2000).

8. Economic Considerations

Compensation differentials between contractual colleagues and adjunct faculty are common. Justifications include the contractual faculty members’ responsibilities beyond teaching; a more rigorous selection process; their ongoing commitment to continue with the college; and their service in various capacities within the college and the community (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000). It is helpful to provide the rationale and explain the reasons for the differences. Adjunct faculty members, who participate in college projects, meetings, in-service activities, and so on, should be compensated accordingly.

9. Recruit From Within

Possible Full-Time Employment is a great motivator! Some adjuncts express the desire to move into tenure track faculty positions. Good performance in an adjunct capacity can be an indication of future success as a tenured track faculty member. While institutions will not guarantee full-time employment, they can help adjuncts qualify for full-time opportunities by identifying employment procedures and expectations coupled with effective professional growth reviews.
Case Study of a Quality Action Project

Historical Background:

During the late 1990’s, the adjunct faculty of Madison Area Technical College (MATC), partially motivated by uneven support for faculty across departments and campus locations, organized as an American Federation of Teachers local union. As a result of a very successful collaborative effort between union leadership and the administration, they established an annual in-service program and developed a college handbook for orienting adjunct faculty.

In 2001, a committee of union leaders, board members and administrative staff surveyed 1800 adjuncts on their experiences with specific institutional practices, their satisfaction with aspects of the teaching experience, their career goals, and demographics. The results of the survey reinforced what was already known anecdotally: that support for adjunct faculty was uneven across campuses and academic disciplines. Through the responses to the survey they also identified what were regarded among adjuncts as best practices, and shared this information with all departments for their consideration. MATC provided additional support in the form of a resource handbook, a new adjunct faculty institute, and invitations to college-wide in-services and the Technology Academy, with attendance paid for by the college. They also instituted a system whereby adjunct faculty would be notified of all full-time vacancies, allocated work areas to adjunct faculty working at the two largest campuses, and provided locker space, and email and telephone services. They also committed to creating a better system of collaboration among adjuncts, tenure track faculty, and administration.

Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP)

During 2003, the institution began to participate in the Academic Quality Improvement Process (AQIP) to address institutional re-accreditation. A college-wide survey of current needs revealed a need to provide all part-time instructors with equivalent instructional support. The goal of this effort was to create and implement a systematic process that would include and regard all part-time instructors as valued partners in the work of the institution. A team of adjunct and contractual faculty, administrators, and support staff was given a budget to support this work and to ensure that part-time faculty team members were compensated for their work on the team. The team was charged with assessing disparities in support being provided to adjunct faculty.

Using the earlier work, the AQIP team recommended adoption of policies to assure the following: provide adjunct faculty with the opportunity to attend an orientation session prior to their first period of teaching at the college; offer all new hires a mentoring relationship with an experienced faculty member; provide new
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teachers with all available course documentation prior to the start of any particular course; and assign to the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) the responsibility of providing for the professional development needs of adjunct faculty. Specific outcomes have been developed and the AQIP team continues to monitor progress.

Progress Thus Far...

Though the policies have been adopted and practices instituted, there continues to be unevenness of institutional support based upon the department, and inconsistency on the part of adjunct faculty in taking advantage of the opportunities offered. These variances are being addressed through ongoing assessments followed by recommendations to achieve better institution-wide compliance with the policies. Quality is improved as areas that need to be addressed become increasingly clearer and more discrete.

Concluding Thoughts

It is well understood that quality adjunct faculty make significant contributions to learning environments because they benefit students by allowing institutions to respond to fluctuating enrollment levels, and enrich the students’ experience by adding current, real-life perspectives to course content. Commitment to adequate support is imperative if optimal benefit is to be realized. With it adjuncts can develop professionally and make greater contributions to the students and the institution, which can enhance their commitment to the institution, reduce turnover, and increase institutional effectiveness. The ongoing challenge is for institutions to give priority value to the time and monetary commitment required for quality support of this population of personnel. The second part of that challenge is the motivation and commitment of adjunct faculty to choose to participate in growth opportunities offered.
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References


