

The Importance of Training and Inclusion for Part-time Faculty in Higher Education

Jennifer Combs

Morehead State University
Chattahoochee Technical College
980 South Cobb Drive, F2135
Marietta, GA 30060

Descriptors: training, adjunct faculty

Abstract

This paper is intended to assist full and part-time faculty and administration on training and inclusion into the educational institution. Part-time instructors, sometimes referred to as adjunct instructors, are a vital part of higher education institutions. In the United States, approximately 62% of the faculty at degree-granting institutions are employed on a part-time basis (Ruiz, 2015). Proper training on school policies, online management systems and pedagogy for part-time faculty is imperative due to the increasing number of these faculty members in higher education institutions. Part-time instructors should be connected to the institution and the department that they are teaching. The better connected one feels, the more likely they are to have job satisfaction and will retain their position, which provides students with continuity in their education.

Introduction

Part-time instructors, sometimes referred to as adjunct instructors, are a vital part of higher education institutions. In 1969, approximately 21% of college faculty in the United States were employed on a part-time basis (Tolley, 2018). As of 2015, approximately 62% of the faculty at degree-granting institutions are employed on a part-time basis (Ruiz, 2015). With the ever-present economic considerations in the field of education, it is likely that this number will increase. When the economy declines, higher education administrators reduce costs by hiring adjunct faculty (Tolley, 2018). That increase is just one of the reasons it is vital for adjunct faculty to be properly trained on school policies, online management systems and pedagogy within their respective departments and feel as though they are active members of the academic community.

Proper training in pedagogy, content and technology is also imperative because with the increasing number of adjunct faculty, means that more college students are being taught by part-time instructors. With the lack of funding for higher education, there is a deficiency in the amount of training that part-time faculty receive. Some colleges and universities have a general training program for the online management system that they use, but aside from that, adjunct faculty are often left with little or no support. This is problematic for several reasons, but primarily because some of these adjuncts may not have any previous teaching experience.

While most educators might agree that adjunct instructors have a wealth of content knowledge to share, it is a disservice to the students if the instructors are not properly trained in how to best disseminate that knowledge. Adjunct instructors also need to be connected to the institution and the department that they are teaching. They should feel encouraged and supported. The more connected to an institution, especially to a specific department, an adjunct instructor feels, the more likely they are to be successful in the classroom, both online and face to face. This responsibility lies with the full-time faculty members and administration of the institution at which they are teaching. "They should be included in all college activities that deal with effective teaching and should have opportunities to connect with colleagues" (McGlynn, 2014, p.19).

Suggested Strategies

There are a variety of ways to incorporate part-time faculty into the day-to-day activities of the institution. Even if part-time instructors cannot participate due to other employment obligations, they will likely still feel valued because they were included. One simple way for inclusion of adjunct faculty is to invite them to department faculty meetings and any school-wide employee appreciation or in-service days. This approach is also cost-effective, since the part-time faculty would be an addition to an already scheduled event. This is especially important for online

faculty who may not be required to visit the campus for classes. Even if part-time instructors are unable to attend, they are likely to feel valued just for the simple gesture.

Some colleges have begun paying their part-time faculty to take professional development courses (Anft, 2018). There are others that have on-campus staff development days where part-time faculty are encouraged to attend. Even if the institution does not have the funding to pay for part-time faculty to take courses or attend conferences, it would be easy to send an email notifying them of upcoming events.

Another example of including faculty where they would also be gaining knowledge on how to teach, is for part-time faculty to observe full-time faculty teaching their courses. The part-time instructors could then share with their supervisor what they learned, and what components will be implemented into their course(s) (Anft, 2018). This could be a favorable approach for new part-time instructors who do not have previous teaching experience.

Many institutions have student clubs in which adjunct faculty can get involved. For example, the largest technical college in the state of Georgia, Chattahoochee Technical College, has a Public Safety Club. This club is run by the Lead Instructor of the Criminal Justice department as well as another full-time instructor. The club consists of student members who meet bi-weekly, have guest speakers, and take day trips to police departments, jails and prisons. This gives the students a different perspective into the criminal justice system as well as an excellent opportunity for networking. Inviting an adjunct instructor to be a guest speaker, either at a club meeting or in a regular class meeting, is a great way to make them feel a part of the college and also an opportunity for them to meet some of their students or potential students in person. After all, part-time instructors are the subject matter experts who are currently working in the field that they are teaching. This training is especially important for adjunct instructors who teach solely or primarily online. Face-to-face interaction is a vital component to a positive relationship. With over half of college instructors being part-time, training is imperative, as is providing opportunities to participate in college activities. Ensuring that instructors feel inspired and supported, will provide a positive learning environment for students.

On-boarding Process

The author has been an educator for 10 years and began as an adjunct instructor. Over the years, after working with several part-time faculty, training guidelines have been created to make sure that the most important topics are covered. When a new adjunct instructor is hired, the author proposes the following steps be taken to ensure that they are adequately trained and comfortable with their new role in the classroom. After all, part-time instructors are the professionals working in the field, but may need some guidance in how to effectively distribute the information to students.

1. Pair the part-time instructor with a faculty member in the department where they will be teaching.
2. Provide them with all relevant materials (syllabus, previous assignments/tests, learning outcomes for the course, etc.) and explain the importance of timely feedback and frequent checks for understanding.
3. Meet with the instructor to train them on the online learning system. This meeting should be at their convenience and might have to be during non-traditional hours and/or at their place of employment.
4. Invite them to observe a face-to-face class so that they can get some familiarity with what will be expected of them.
5. Get the instructor in contact with the book publisher for the course that they will be teaching. Providing this contact information will allow the instructor to communicate directly with the publisher's representative so that the instructor can receive all online supplemental resources.
6. Give the instructor a hard copy as well as an electronic copy of "important" people that they might need to reach at the college (Human Resources, Information Technology etc.).
7. Invite them to an upcoming meeting or event that the school is hosting. This should be done throughout their employment and not just when they are first hired on.
8. Ensure that they are familiar with the policies and procedures of the school. This includes training on ADA accommodations, sexual harassment policies and plagiarism.
9. In addition to the hands-on training, provide them with a hard copy of administrative duties and how to perform them. For example, how to submit final grades.
10. Demonstrate how to create videos to embed into their courses and show them online resources that will aid in teaching the material (Kahoot, Quizlet, etc.).

This training meeting is an important time to get to know your new instructor and develop a relationship and an open line of communication. Part-time instructors "may not be cognizant of the constantly evolving variety of teaching methods or proficient at implementing them" (Strom-Gottfried & Dunlap, 2004, p. 446). New instructors

are likely to feel overwhelmed with all of the new information that they are learning, and a little apprehensive if they are new to teaching. To reduce any possible nervousness, follow up with an email outlining everything that was covered during that meeting. It is good to have a resource to refer back to at any time.

Conclusion

Students deserve a high-quality education at any institution. With more than half of higher education faculty being part-time, their role is critical to the college or university employing them. Faculty development and training should be part of every new instructors' goals and it is the responsibility of the individual institution to provide that training to them. If part-time instructors feel dissatisfied with the educational institution due to lack of training and support, and as a result, do not maintain their employment, this is a disservice to our students.

Full-time faculty should embrace part-time faculty because they are an asset to our students learning experience and aid in reducing large class sizes and teaching overloads.

References

- Anft, M. (2018). Colleges step up professional development for adjuncts. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 65(16), 1-3.
- McGlynn, A. (2014). Engaging part-time college faculty to improve student success. *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 25(1), 18-20.
- Ruiz, Avila. (2015). Job satisfaction of adjunct faculty who teach standardized online courses (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (3718104)
- Strom-Gottfried, K., & Dunlap, K. (2004). Teaching notes: Assimilating adjuncts: Strategies for orienting contract faculty. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 40(3), 445-452.
- Tolley, K. (Ed). (2018). *Professors in the gig economy: Unionizing adjunct faculty in America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.