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# Integrating Part-Time Faculty into the Academic Community

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*This article presents seven ideas on how to integrate part-time faculty into the academic community and help them deal with their feelings of isolation and loneliness. The key role of faculty development program directors is identified as well as specific strategies for working with part-time faculty. These ideas are based upon the author's experience as both a part-time and full-time faculty member, as well as a director of faculty development programs, and upon several surveys conducted among part-time faculty.*

In the 1980s, the number of part-time faculty at colleges and universities, both public and private, has increased. While full-time faculty increased from 400,000 to 550,000 from 1980 to 1989, part-time faculty increased from 150,000 to 350,000 during that same time period (Polishook & Nielsen, 1990). If this trend continues, before we enter the twenty-first century, part-time faculty will become the majority of instructors at colleges and universities in the United States.

Although this trend is not entirely welcomed in higher education, it reflects the realities of the workplace as more organizations become more dependent upon part-time workers—in business, government, and education. In business and government, part-time employees ordinarily work closely in the same office with full-time employees: the situation is different, however, in education. Part-time faculty usually work alone in the classroom and have only limited contact with other faculty (full- or part-time). Indeed, they may have very little

association of any other kind with the university itself. Most part-time faculty are not included in the ordinary and normal activities of the university - committee and task force meetings, seminars, conferences, etc. Consequently, part-time faculty feel isolated, having little to do with the institution while being central to the university's mission.

Little is known about the effect this sense of isolation has on a part-time faculty member's teaching in the classroom. Whether more association with other faculty and more inclusion in university activities would stimulate part-time faculty to be more effective teachers is also unknown. It is certain however, that colleges and universities must develop ways to include such faculty in more activities of the university, not so much as part-time faculty but as part of the faculty of the institution.

There are seven specific ways that colleges and universities can accomplish this task and enhance the role and relationship of part-time faculty in the organization:

1. Give part-time faculty an identity that has meaning and value.
2. Identify the place of part-time faculty within the organizational structure of the college or university.
3. Involve part-time faculty in activities beyond teaching in the classroom.
4. Enhance the education of part-time faculty as scholarly teachers.
5. Make part-time faculty more accountable for improving their teaching.
6. Give part-time faculty a role in governance.
7. Provide career services to part-time faculty.

## **An Identity that has Meaning and Value**

Faculty who teach part-time are generally identified as part-time employees by agencies, such as the Internal Revenue Service and regional accreditation associations. For a professional, the idea of being a part-time employee is not as complimentary as being a faculty member, and most such faculty do not identify themselves as part-timers. Rather than wait for part-time faculty to claim their own titles to identify themselves, it is important that the university choose a title

and identity appropriate to the responsibilities, roles, and relationships of faculty, both part-time and full-time.

Part-time faculty generally value their association with institutions of higher education. For some part-time faculty, the title is less important than the work. Although part-time faculty are hired to teach, few at the college and university level choose to identify themselves as teachers. In a survey of 329 part-time faculty of National University (Drops, 1991), only one faculty member chose to be identified as a teacher. One explanation for this may be that “teachers” work in the K-12 grades, while “faculty” teach in colleges and universities and prefer an identity that reflects the distinction.

Some titles part-time faculty use to identify their relationship to the institution may not be complimentary. Occasionally part-time faculty identify themselves as “hired hands,” believing that they are readily disposable by their employer. Other part-time faculty who teach at a number of institutions call themselves “freeway flyers” because of the amount of time they spend on the road traveling from one institution to another to teach. Others identify themselves as professionals who teach in their work area (accountants, writers, etc.) rather than as faculty, instructors, or teachers. What title would be most appropriate for part-time faculty that gives them meaning and adds to their value as faculty of the university?

In the National University survey of 329 part-time faculty (Drops, 1991), a clear preference for specific titles is evident, as shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Title Preferences of Part-Time Faculty**

149*	Professor	11	Lecturer
90	Adjunct	2	Doctor
43	Faculty	1	Educator
39	Instructor	1	Teacher
80	Don't know or care	1	Part-Time

\* Number of times these words were used in the titles chosen by part-time faculty. Titles were often combined, such as “adjunct professor,” and were counted each time they were used — alone and in combination.

As the survey responses show, part-time faculty prefer the title “adjunct” over “part-time” faculty. It also seems that such faculty prefer to be identified in some way as “professor,” though such a title may cause confusion with the standard titles of full-time faculty as professors, associate professors, and assistant professors. It appears that part-time faculty see the titles of “professor” and “adjunct” as adding more value to both their identity and their relationship to their university, especially when they introduce themselves at professional conferences and in community activities and meetings outside the university. They represent the academy, not as part-time employees, but as faculty who teach for their college or university

## **The Place of Part-time Faculty within the Organizational Structure**

Once part-time faculty have been given an identifying title, they need to be given a place in the organizational structure of the institution. Part-time faculty should be assigned to a particular school as their “home” school even though they may teach in a number of schools. They also may be assigned different ranks, such as associate adjunct or core adjunct, that distinguish them from one another.

Again, there is the possibility of creating confusion if similar titles to distinguish rank are used for both part-time and full-time faculty. So care must be taken in deciding how to distinguish individuals and classes within the faculty

## **Accountability for Improving Teaching**

Since efforts to improve teaching are the intrinsic rewards and the most motivating approaches to working with faculty (Cross, 1990), then colleges and universities must support such activities as much as possible. This can be done in a number of ways:

- Requiring part-time faculty to identify efforts they make to improve their teaching in the classroom. This can come in the form of a teaching portfolio to be completed and used for teaching re-appointment decisions.

- Encouraging (or even requiring) part-time faculty to invite other faculty and administrators to observe their teaching. Such observations can be developmental, providing feedback on improving teaching, or evaluative, and used to decide on teaching reappointments.

When faculty and administrators observe teaching in the classroom, the basic question becomes: what is good teaching? Good teaching includes planning and preparation, lecturing and discussion, assessing and evaluating. Before any other person enters the classroom, a clear idea needs to be developed about what visitors will be looking for in their observation of teaching and what kind of criteria they will be using in assessing classroom teaching. Part-time faculty need to have a part in determining these things.

- Inviting part-time faculty to deliver presentations in both the academic forum and business community. Faculty need to share their subject knowledge with their colleagues as a way of receiving some measure of acceptance for their ideas. Within the academic community, it is important for faculty to identify how such ideas and presentations affect or change their teaching in the classroom. Presentations that have no relevance to university teaching may have little value to university life.

Some part-time faculty regularly present their ideas to their peers and colleagues. Others may not be as willing or experienced in presenting and publishing their work, and may need assistance in this area. Nearly all need to become aware of the importance of using such presentations and publications to bring new ideas into the classroom through their research and preparation for such work.

### **Part-time Faculty as Scholarly Teachers**

Many part-time faculty, particularly those professionals from the business world, may not be as acclimated to the higher education environment as they may wish and need to be. Few faculty, at the college and university level, either part-time or full-time, have received any formal training in effective teaching, no matter how little

this may be admitted or discussed. Yet as professionals, most faculty want to be effective teachers and are usually open to learning how to teach more effectively when approached in the right way about such learning.

One way to approach such learning is to help part-time faculty understand and appreciate the distinction between training and education (Apps, 1985). Coming from the professional world of business, part-time faculty may see no distinction between training and education, or may value training more than education and bring a training approach into the classroom. Such an approach may be especially valued by students who are adult learners, professionals from business and government more interested in practical applications of knowledge than in critical thinking and analysis of ideas and assumptions.

Certainly there is nothing wrong with teaching students to apply their learning. But there is a difference between learning how to do something and learning how to think differently about something. Students can easily understand the difference between a “trained” seal found in many animal parks, in contrast to an “educated” seal found nowhere. Faculty and administrators who are not clear about this distinction may want to consider the approach used by corporations as described in specific business journals (Wiggenhorn, 1990). Some organizations focus on educating employees as a necessary way of preparing them for job training.

A second approach is to help part-time faculty distinguish between lecturing and other forms of teaching. All too often the focus for teachers is on their teaching rather than on their students’ learning. Education then becomes a matter of putting the teacher’s world of experience and knowledge into the mind of the student. And since the best way to impart a great amount of knowledge is through lecturing, part-time faculty may be more inclined to lecture as their primary, or only, way of teaching. Understanding what their students are learning and what are the best ways for students to learn can make a great difference in the way faculty teach.

A third approach is to put part-time faculty in the role of a student, or in the role of being scholarly in both their knowledge of the subject and their teaching of students. The more teachers learn about both their subject and their methods of teaching, the more likely teaching will

improve and learning among students will increase. For students, one of the best ways to learn may be to teach. For faculty, one of the best ways to improve teaching may be to continue learning.

## **Involvement in Activities beyond Classroom Teaching**

For full-time faculty, greater involvement in the activities of the institution may lead to a greater commitment to work, but this may not be so for part-time faculty.

- Many part-time faculty work full-time in some other job where both their commitment and time given to their primary work is greater. It is difficult for part-time faculty to commit themselves equally to two different organizations and two different jobs. If their primary source of income is derived from another job, it is natural for their primary commitment of time and energy to be given to that other work rather than to part-time teaching. Consequently, asking or expecting part-time faculty to become more involved in a variety of university activities may actually lessen the amount of time they have available to focus on their teaching.
- In addition, when part-time faculty are asked to attend school and department meetings they often receive no compensation for this time and work. While full-time faculty who attend the same meetings are being paid for their attendance, part-time faculty may be giving up the opportunity to gain income while attending such faculty and university meetings. The responsibilities for such involvement may be reasonable, but from the part-time faculty members' view, the lack of remuneration is not satisfactory.

However, when a meeting contributes directly to improving teaching or enhancing advancement within the teaching profession, part-time faculty are usually more willing to attend. Part-time faculty who are serious about teaching at the college level will commit their time and energy to worthwhile meetings. Full-time faculty and administrators need to be very sensitive to the needs and interests of part-time faculty for using their time efficiently and effectively.

In her article, “Teaching to Improve Learning” in the *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, Patricia Cross (1990) states that extrinsic rewards (such as increased pay) are “...not very effective in changing faculty behavior.” Much more effective are intrinsic rewards that come from the intellectual stimulation of discussing teaching with other faculty and the satisfaction that results from the support of other faculty for the good things accomplished with the students in the classroom. Such rewards are even more motivating than the respect and recognition from other faculty, which usually come more “...for past performance...” than from efforts to improve teaching.

My experience working with part-time faculty bears out the value of involving part-time faculty in discussions and activities outside the classroom. Over the past year I have coordinated or developed eight different workshops for faculty, focused primarily on improving teaching in the classroom. All of them have included an opportunity for faculty to talk with each other about the subject being presented. The two most common responses from participants in these programs can be summarized as follows:

- The best part of the program was the opportunity to share ideas about teaching with other faculty, especially faculty teaching in the same school, department and curriculum.
- Much appreciated were the handouts that identified key ideas and could be studied in greater detail at a later date.

Thus, the more relevance a meeting or topic has to teaching in the classroom (the *raison d’etre* for part-time faculty to associate with the university), the more value that meeting or topic has. Part-time faculty want more involvement in things that deal directly with teaching in the classroom—curriculum development, sharing “what works in the classroom” with their colleagues, and how to get additional teaching assignments.

## **The Key Role of Faculty Development Directors**

Because part-time faculty are focused on teaching, directors of faculty development programs are in a key position to work with such faculty. Directors usually work with all faculty, full- and part-time,

and cut across the boundaries of all schools and colleges within the institution. More than deans and full-time faculty, they have a better perspective on the quality of teaching and the variety of teaching approaches throughout the institution.

Part-time faculty, in particular, may be more responsive to faculty development programs and services because their continued teaching at the university greatly depends upon their effectiveness as teachers and their efforts to improve their teaching. Faculty development directors also may be the individuals that part-time faculty feel most comfortable with, especially if the director's responsibility is one of developing faculty rather than evaluating faculty for reappointment.

## **A Role in Governance**

Part-time faculty need to be recognized and respected as faculty, not just as part-time employees. There is great psychological value in treating part-time faculty as contributing members of the university faculty. Involving part-time faculty in decisions related to teaching can increase their sense of self-worth and motivate them to become more effective in their work. Consequently, they need to have some representation in the university or on the faculty senate, someone who understands their specific needs and concerns—one of their own who can speak for them. Part-time faculty deserve their own voice and vote in decisions that affect their status as faculty and their responsibilities for teaching.

The day may come (and is now here in some institutions) when part-time faculty become dominant within the university. While not primarily concerned about power and influence in the academic institution, part-time faculty do look for support in their teaching. If that support is missing, and if recognition and reward for their teaching are lacking, part-time faculty may become more involved in governance out of necessity rather than out of commitment to the institution.

## **Career Services**

Part-time faculty, particularly professional teachers, greatly need and want some stability in their lives related to their work. They look for some measure of security and continuity in any of their working

relationships and, in many cases, would most prefer that to be in the context of the college or university. If institutions of higher education are truly dedicated to learning, part-time faculty should see the university as their main support for continuing their own learning. Consequently, they hope the university will provide:

- assistance in developing course materials, slides, overheads, etc., to improve teaching
- training in computer skills, public speaking, etc.
- some measure of benefits available to other employees
- administrative support for research, public speaking and writing
- information about conferences, seminars and workshops in their field
- information about research grants and funding proposals
- opportunities for consulting in their own field
- opportunities for associating with peers and colleagues in their field
- occasions for using them in the community as experts in their field.

Universities need to review the assistance and support they provide for other employees, both full- and part-time, and at least offer a minimum level of similar support for part-time faculty. They deserve such assistance because they are employees of the university and not independent contractors.

## **Conclusion**

Part-time faculty may become more dominant in numbers and teaching responsibilities in the future, particularly in community colleges and private institutions. Such faculty can be the most difficult group to work with because of their isolation from the normal activities of the institution and because of their commitments of time and energy to organizations separate from the university. Part-time faculty need to be understood and appreciated as both different than and similar to full-time faculty, and need to be treated accordingly. They need to be included in university programs, continuously encouraged to meet with other faculty, and regularly given feedback on their performance as teachers. They cannot be treated as a group that operates inde-

pendently of the university and yet are in the classrooms. They are not independent agents; they are faculty teaching on a part-time basis.

Because the director of faculty development programs usually has responsibility for working with all faculty, and may receive a greater response to such programs from part-time faculty, he or she becomes critically important to these faculty. The quality of teaching in the classroom by both full- and part-time faculty can be greatly improved through faculty development programs. And the integration of part-time faculty into the academic community can be greatly enhanced by directors of such programs, especially when part-time faculty feel isolated from much of what happens in the institution and neglected by most other administrators and faculty within the academy.

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