



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Cultivating New Adjunct Faculty

A spreadsheet comparing academic departments' use of full-time/part-time faculty, included in our college's quarterly Institutional Productivity Report, indicated that, at 58 percent, my department led the college in the percentage of student semester hours taught by full-time faculty. I was surprised because we employ a substantial number of adjunct professors for a variety of general education and specialized elective courses in the behavioral and social sciences, education, and health and fitness areas. This staffing profile reinforced for us the importance of cultivating a well-qualified and effective adjunct faculty pool. Some of our discoveries and successes are described here.

Two years ago, I administered a needs assessment survey of part-time faculty prior to a formal start-of-the-year collegewide orientation meeting and held personal interviews with current adjunct professors. Feedback revealed predictable needs and concerns related to facilities, support services, equipment, and supplies. However, an unanticipated problem surfaced—adjuncts were uncomfortable with the use of the term "mentor" to describe a full-time faculty contact person. The mentor designation implied a controlling, supervisory relationship. Furthermore, the traditional mentoring relationship fostered the assumption that an adjunct faculty member was limited in terms of background, experience, and academic credentials.

To correct this perception of adjunct inferiority, bolster the value and importance of adjunct professors, and develop a more effective communication and support system between full-time and part-time faculty, we substituted the term "liaison" for mentor. A liaison relationship implied mutual support and appreciation, a team approach to instruction, and a greater sense of professional equality. This change of terminology, and the goals behind such a change, resulted in positive feedback from both full-time and part-time groups. Increased comfort on the image level alone provided a necessary substructure for new methods of contact, communication, and support.

At present, liaison assignments involving two-person teams of full-time and adjunct faculty members are routinely assigned at the start of each semester. In most

cases, these relationships have generated goodwill, mutual support, resource sharing, and increased adjunct faculty involvement with department planning and activities. Occasional problems of incompatibility are quickly corrected through intervention and/or reassignment.

As an enhancement to the liaison relationship, the department began to pilot test a more structured approach to instructional effectiveness and quality control—the *Guidance and Assessment System for First-Time Adjunct Faculty*. We had four major objectives in mind: to provide ongoing assessment of the educational program, to monitor the teaching and presentation skills of new adjunct professors, to enhance the orientation and professional development of adjunct professors, and to reinforce communication and positive rapport between adjunct professors and full-time department faculty.

During each semester, there is important interaction between a first-time adjunct and a full-time department member.

* **Welcome and orientation contact.** Early in the semester a department faculty member will make formal contact with an assigned adjunct, respond to general questions, offer to share (as appropriate) course syllabus and other general information, and make referrals on unique needs or administrative matters.

* **Pre-observation conference.** At some point (after approximately 25% of instructional days have transpired), a meeting is scheduled to check on progress and arrange for a mutually convenient set of classroom visitations when each will visit the other's class.

* **Classroom visitations.** The style and precise nature of these mutual visitations may vary somewhat based on relationships and preferences. For example, the atmosphere might range from a fairly informal peer coaching session to a formal instructional evaluation using approved institutional assessment forms for data collection, follow-up discussion, and recommendations.

* **Post-observation conference.** Shortly after each visitation (within one week), a follow-up session is scheduled to discuss assessments and offer a practical



number (one or two) of targeted professional goals (i.e., suggested readings, experimentation with alternate techniques, review of support materials, attendance at workshops, etc.).

*** Information sharing with the department chair.**

This stage of the process is designed to improve quality control, assist with future scheduling decisions, and review other by-products of professional interactions (i.e., curricular changes, instructional experimentation, academic enhancement activities, etc.). Overall impressions of department faculty based on formal qualifications, general communication, and assessment activities are shared with the department chair in confidence. Collaborative ventures and other suggestions are reviewed and discussed as appropriate.

The *Guidance and Assessment System for First-Time Adjunct Faculty* has been in effect for approximately 18 months. Survey documents and individual conversations reflect an improved work environment characterized by more frequent and substantive communication, greater comfort with both individual and department image, more efficient long-range course scheduling, and a series of unique professional collaborations and pilot projects. On the most general level, department faculty have developed a greater sense of trust and pride in an essential part-time support team. When necessary, part-time staffing changes have been made in response to poor performance and department concerns.

Planned interactions between full-time and part-time faculty members in common teaching disciplines have forced both groups to engage in self-assessment on course content and pedagogy. In several cases, full-time and part-time faculty have been motivated to pool their talents and resources in team-teaching approaches to both traditional and new curriculum. What began as a department concern with image and qualifications has evolved into a systematic process of orientation, guidance, and assessment.

Jared S. Graber, *Chairman, Department of Social Sciences*

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Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

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