

Adjunct Faculty in Distance Education

What Program Managers Should Know

Sandrine Gaillard-Kenney

A NEW BREED OF FACULTY MEMBER

A GROWING TREND

Many institutions offering distance education programs have increased their reliance on online adjuncts as their enrollment numbers have soared (Brewster, 2000). For example, Jones International University has 125 adjuncts on staff, with only six full-time faculty members (Carnevale, 2004).



Sandrine Gaillard-Kenney, Program Director and Assistant Professor, Master of Health Science, College of Allied Health and Nursing, Nova Southeastern University and Doctoral Student, Instructional Technology and Distance Education, Nova Southeastern University, 3200 South University Drive, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33328. Telephone: (954) 262-1260. E-mail: gaillard@nova.edu

Sixty-four percent of the faculty members in community colleges are part-time (Ellison, 2002). Lake Superior Community and Technical College in Minnesota quadrupled its online enrollment in 2003 and had to hire an additional 31 adjuncts (Foster, 2003). The online Master of Health Science at Nova Southeastern University employs two full-time faculty and three times as many adjuncts. Several reports indicate that opportunities for tenure track are declining overall (Anderson, 2002; Holub, 2003). Citing studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, Holub (2003) puts forth the reasons for this trend as including cuts in state and federal funding, state or federal policies impacting personnel policies, and a mounting negative opinion of the current tenure system. Of particular interest is the increased need for flexibility due to the demands of online education.

This new trend may reflect the reluctance of full-time, tenured faculty to use technology. The part-time faculty members seem more flexible and ready to embrace online education. Oftentimes, part-time faculty members come from the corporate world, where the use of technology is generally much more common than in traditional academic institutions. They possess those technology skills and are not afraid to innovate in the classroom more than their full-time tenured counterparts (Carnevale, 2004; Pratt, 2000).

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADJUNCTS

Anderson (2002) reported that adjunct faculty members are likely to be female and younger than full-time traditional campus faculty. They are also likely to hold a master's degree. In terms of health and other benefits, compensation, and academic support, they fare significantly worse than their full-time counterparts. However, they show the same level of overall job satisfaction. This might be due to the job flexibility adjuncts enjoy as opposed to full-time faculty.

The work of Gappa and Leslie on "The Invisible Faculty," was summarized by Lyons (2000). Part-time adjuncts can be divided into four different categories. The "experts" are people employed full-time outside of academia. They may be employed in the corporate world and teach specialized courses. This is one of the selling points of the University of Phoenix for example (University of Phoenix Website, 2005). The "career enders" are people retiring or cutting down on their hours as they approach retirement. The "freelancers" like the flexibility of part-time assignments and combine work with several different institutions. The "aspiring academics," who are trying to get tenured positions, are the fourth type of adjuncts, but remain a minority (Lyons, 2000).

Adjuncts are akin to entrepreneurs who sell their knowledge in the academic market. Some even build their own teaching business, as can be seen on the site of "Adjunct Solutions" (<http://www.adjunct-solutions.com>). These new professionals develop and teach courses to answer market demands (Hess, 2004).

GETTING THE BEST

One of the reasons for the popularity of contract or adjunct faculty is that a university can hire specialists in their fields for a specific course or curriculum (Holub, 2003). Program directors can contract a specialist from virtually anywhere in the

world, especially if the course is delivered at a distance, without paying the significantly higher cost of an equally qualified full-time faculty. Online adjuncts typically hold graduate degrees and have years of experience in a specific field, hence bringing experience to the classroom and establishing a connection for the students between the classroom and the professional world (Anderson, 2002; Carnevale, 2004; Lyons, 2000). Studies have shown that there is no significant difference in the quality of teaching between part-time and full-time faculty (Lyons, 2000).

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility of hiring decisions for institutions is a major advantage (Holub, 2003). For part-time adjuncts, flexibility of location and ability to contract with several different institutions offers many possibilities (Holub, 2003). Carnevale (2004) conducted a detailed interview of one of these off-site, part-time adjuncts and reported that she was able to teach for four different institutions in three different states. She listed the main advantage as freedom to choose assignments and institutions to contract with.

Many part-timers are willing to teach in the evening and on weekends. This is of tremendous importance for institutions, as enrollment of nontraditional students continues to increase (Lyons, 2000). They also enable institutions to offer specialized courses that would not justify a full-time position.

CHALLENGES

The flexibility and lack of strong ties between the part-time adjuncts and the institutions are also a source of challenges. The key factors to ensure successful distance teaching are listed by Mielke (1999) as being: teacher enthusiasm, organization, dedication to fostering interaction between learners, comfort with the course

technology, and technical and academic support. These are extremely difficult conditions to achieve when adjuncts faculty members are paid by the course and rarely (if ever) come to the campus.

QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

Far from arguing that adjuncts may not be qualified, the argument remains that an effective professor needs to be connected to a brick and mortar institution and able to hold office hours, even virtual ones (Carnevale, 2004). Another concern is that part-time faculty are oftentimes left to their own devices when it comes to employing instructional strategies. Questions of quality control arise, as well as academic freedom and research potential. Academic freedom is traditionally linked to tenure, which adjuncts do not have (Marshall, 2003). A part-time adjunct is not expected to conduct research and is unlikely to contribute to decision making and policies of the college. Hess (2004) criticizes the practice of hiring of adjuncts who design courses as products to be taught over and over without much maintenance to maximize profit.

ISOLATION

Part-time faculty members show less involvement in curriculum development, instruction, and scholarship (Freeland, 1998). They may lack the opportunity, motivation, and incentive to become involved in curriculum development or other program activities (Holub, 2003). Part-time faculty members who teach for several institutions also impede their availability to participate in conferences and committees (Hollowell, 1998). Isolation, frustration, and lack of recognition are common feelings of adjuncts as they feel marginalized in the teaching profession (Pratt, 2000; Yohe, 2000).

MANAGEMENT AND HIRING ISSUES

Beyond the issues of quality control when a distance education program relies too heavily on part-time distance faculty and allegiance associated with online or on campus part-time adjuncts, issues of status and personnel management emerge for this particular type of employee (Carnevale, 2004). Hiring, interviewing, orienting, integrating, and evaluating adjuncts are some issues institutions need to face (Brewster, 2000).

Concerns are emerging that academia is being overrun by this new breed of faculty (Carnevale, 2004). There is a fear that colleges are relying too heavily on and taking advantage of their online adjuncts. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has complained about the rising number of distance education institutions awarding degrees without any face-to-face interaction and reliance on distance adjuncts. In 2002, the AFT prepared a series of standards for the treatment of part-time faculty members, suggesting equal pay, paid office hours, a seniority advancement system and specific evaluation policies and procedures (Smallwood, 2002). Rice University even acknowledged that some of their adjuncts were underpaid (Hess, 2004).

However, it is worth noting that adjuncts are starting to organize. It seems that they are somewhat able to negotiate for improvement of their status. A landmark decision by a judge in Alaska granted part-time faculty the right to form a union. The Alaska adjuncts had not received a raise in 20 years (Basinger, 1998). Although isolated, this decision may pave the road for more similar actions forcing academic institution to review their practices when hiring and compensating adjuncts.

The conditions of faculty employed as adjuncts have also been denounced, as they do not have job security or guarantee of renewed contracts. Institutions do not invest the same amount of time and money into their adjuncts, because they are not thought of as "real" team members

(Ellison, 2002). They can be isolated from the institutions and viewed as “second-class” faculty. They can be hired as a mere convenience to fill a temporary need if a full-time faculty member is on leave or if no one else is available to teach the course. Compensation and benefits for part-time faculty are typically well below levels received by full-time faculty (Hom, 2001).

Because part-time faculty do not have the opportunity to participate in research or activities in the institutions, their resumes lack consistency and substance (Hollowell, 1998). This vicious circle keeps them in the same situation in the academic world.

SOLUTIONS FOR PROGRAM MANAGERS

SOUND ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

To avoid overrelying on online adjuncts, and to maintain the same academic integrity online as in on campus courses, some higher education institutions have devised plans, including requirement of the same qualifications from professors regardless of the delivery modes. They also try to keep the proportion of adjuncts and full-time faculty similar in online and on-campus courses. Instructors can be trained through certification processes designed by the institutions (Carnevale, 2004).

The Office of Human Resources needs to play a key role in the screening, selection, and training process of adjuncts in collaboration with the academic departments (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). The individual in charge of hiring needs to be aware of issues—such as salaries, benefits, and certification requirements—associated with this academic population. Provisions need to be made if the adjuncts are online and do not come on campus for even an interview. The availability of resources for online or on-campus adjuncts needs to be addressed, along with the delivery mode. Assessment of those

resources will help determine how many adjuncts to recruit (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003).

SCREENING AND HIRING

Schnitzer and Crosby (2003) are especially concerned with the issues related to online adjuncts. They recommend making a list of desirable characteristics and asking scenario-based questions during the interview to assess the candidate’s reaction to problems that are sure to arise in the distance education environment. If a face-to-face interview is not possible, they recommend assessing how the candidates interact online and their level of grammar and writing skills.

Once an institution decides who to hire as an adjunct, it is essential to write up a contract. This contract should clearly establish the nature of the teaching assignments and expectations. For example if the adjunct teaches online, issues such as frequency of interaction with the students need to be clarified. Having a contract ensures that the adjunct is aware of the conditions of the employment and can help establish ground rules (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003).

INVESTMENT OF RESOURCES

Considering adjuncts lesser faculty than full-time professors is damaging for the institution in the long run and does not encourage part-time faculty members to fully invest themselves in their teaching. Ellison (2002) and Labeouf (2000) stated that adjuncts should be considered equals and be involved in the institution’s efforts to promote excellence. Lyons (2000) contends that even though faculty development money may be tight, investing some of it in adjuncts reaps many benefits on the educational and instructional levels. It also positively impacts the overall morale and perception the adjuncts have of the institution. This also influences their level of commitment to the school. Before teaching an

online course, it is essential that the faculty go through training in the use of educational technologies (Garells, 1997). Rather than losing adjuncts and having to hire new ones on a regular basis, investing in people through training will save the institution time and money, and will promote consistency in teaching.

ORIENTATION OF ADJUNCTS

After the hiring decision has been made, institutions should schedule an orientation to help the new recruits feel part of the organization. Online orientations can be organized. Online adjuncts can familiarize themselves with their new employers through the use of streaming video (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). An orientation should include administrative and instructional information, as well as a comprehensive overview of available resources. The Community College of Baltimore County developed an orientation that promotes knowledge sharing and learning communities by requiring all new faculty members to attend a 2-hour biweekly meeting during their first year (Ebersole, 2003). In the context of online programs, an orientation could be held through chats or discussion board to provide that initial needed support.

ADJUNCT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Beyond the initial orientation, provisions for subsequent faculty development opportunities are also essential in combating the feeling of isolation and to ensure quality of teaching. A sound faculty development program needs to be user friendly, flexible, and well-organized. Training and support for adjuncts may take many forms. Everglades University in Florida provides monthly adjunct faculty training online (Neil Kenney, personal communication, May 15, 2005).

For off-site adjuncts, one of the solutions to foster a sense of belonging with the university is to develop material such as faculty handbooks tailored specifically to their needs. Grieve (2003) has been developing such handbooks focusing on useful teaching strategies such as how to motivate the student or how to connect with adult learners. A simple hard copy faculty handbook, such as the one produced at Florida Community College at Jacksonville (2000) can provide support and references.

Whenever possible, physically setting up space for adjuncts to feel more at home on campus, such as the "Adjunct Faculty Commons" at Washtenaw Community College in Michigan, is another approach. This physical location provides access to equipment and working spaces, and also development and training opportunities (Yohe, 2000).

McFarland (1998a, 1998b) designed and assessed a training program specifically for distance education adjunct faculty. This program was a 12-week, self-paced video program. This program resulted in significant improvement in skills with online software and utilities.

The University of Illinois (2004) created the Illinois Online Network (ION) with instructional resources for faculty such as how to create course objectives, how to encourage student participation online, and so forth. The ION introduces faculty to the characteristics of online teaching and delivers the contents in a self-paced, independent manner. Distance adjuncts can access those resources and learn about the different learning styles and the types of online activities catering to each.

Pennsylvania State University World Campus also caters to the needs of its online faculty by putting its faculty development program online (2004). The institution designed a course entitled "Faculty Development 101" to introduce online education to its faculty, and to assist in authoring and teaching a course in the

online environment. Learning about the needs of online students, how to determine course goals and objectives, and how to choose the technology are all objectives of "Faculty Development 101."

Other institutions, such as the University of Maryland, design in-house training programs that result in teaching certificates (Schweber, Kelley, & Orr, 1998) blending initial training, observation, practice, mentoring, and discussions. Virtual faculty lounges can be created to encourage communication between adjuncts and exchange of tips (Carnevale, 2004).

Beyond the initial training, adjuncts need to benefit from professional development sessions through their careers to keep up with the changes in technology. The University of Maryland offers stipends to encourage adjuncts to participate in refresher courses. Workshops are also helpful in retaining adjuncts and keeping them effective (Schweber et al., 1998). To promote collaboration quality and consistency, leaders at the program or departmental levels and instructional technology teams need to plan technology training that will support the needs of part-time faculty (Reasons, 2002).

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FULL-TIME FACULTY

Adjuncts should be an integral part of the system and interact with full-timers. There may be some tensions between full-time and part-time faculty members that need to be diffused in order for a true teaching community to emerge (Freeland, 1998). Opportunities for collaboration should exist to facilitate scholarly exchanges and the building of a teaching community (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). Full-time faculty and part-time faculty have much to learn from each other and can be mentors or sharers of experience with technology.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ADJUNCTS

As the number of adjuncts is increasing and those professionals are starting to organize and build an identity, new resources providing support and information are appearing. For example, "Adjunct Advocate" (<http://www.adjunctnation.com/magazine>) is an international publication entirely dedicated to these issues. The Website "Adjunct Solutions" (<http://www.adjunctsolutions.com>) coaches adjuncts on how to build a successful and profitable career.

CONCLUSION

Adjuncts play an essential role in answering higher education institutions' needs for specialized courses and flexible employees. Program managers and educational leaders will likely need to hire adjuncts as programs grow and tight budgets do not allow for full-time positions to be created. Ensuring fair treatment, sound training, and consistent support for those part-timers is essential to deliver high-quality courses and to develop satisfied and loyal employees.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, E. L. (2002). *The new professorate: Characteristics, contributions, and compensation*. American Council on Education. Washington, DC: Center for Policy Analysis. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED478300)
- Basinger, J. (1998, January 23). Alaska judge clears way for adjuncts to bargain. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 44(20), p. A14. Retrieved December 8, 2004 from the ProQuest database.
- Brewster, D. (2000). The use of part-time faculty in community college. *Inquiry*, 5(1), 66-67.
- Carnevale, D. (2004, April 30). Part-time adjunct faculty in high demand by online universities. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 5, 2004, from <http://www.ed-x.com/newsdesc.asp?pType=1&NewsID=5880>

- Ebersole, T. (2003). *A learning community for new faculty*. Laguna Hills, CA: League for Innovation in the Community College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED473686)
- Ellison, A. B. (2002). The accidental faculty: Adjunct instructors in community colleges. Unpublished manuscript. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 466874)
- Florida Community College. (2000, August). *Telecourse faculty handbook*. Retrieved July 26, 2004, from <http://www.distancelearning.org/unused/telemat.html>
- Foster, A. L. (2003, December 19). How one community college copes when online enrollment soars. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50(17), p. A31. Retrieved December 8, 2004, from the ProQuest database.
- Freeland, R. S. (1998). *Adjunct faculty in the community college*. Unpublished manuscript. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED424899)
- Garrells, M. (1997). *Dynamic relationships: Five critical elements for teaching at a distance*. Faculty papers. Retrieved December 9, 2004 from http://www.ihets.org/distance_ed/fdpapers/garrells.html
- Grieve, D. (2003). *A handbook for adjunct/part-time faculty and teachers of adults* (5th ed.). Ann Arbor, MI: Part-time Press.
- Hess, J. (2004). The entrepreneurial adjunct. *Academe*, 90(1), 37. Retrieved December 8, 2004, from the ProQuest database.
- Hollowell, R. E. (1998). *Part-time faculty: %, !, ? Or statistics, responses and questions*. FACTC focus. Washington, DC: Faculty Association of Community and Technical Colleges (FACTC). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED460682)
- Holub, T. (2003). Contract faculty in higher education. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 482556)
- Hom, W. C. (2001). *Part-time faculty: Literature review and bibliography*. Sacramento, CA: California Community Colleges, Office of the Chancellor. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED454921)
- Illinois University. (2004). *Illinois Online Network*. Retrieved July 20, 2004 from <http://www.ion.illinois.edu/OINresources>
- Labeouf, J. P. (2000). *Tapping into the academic workforce: Beyond complaints to dialogue, resolution and accommodation*. Unpublished manuscript. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED451870)
- Lyons, R. (2000). What academic leaders should do about part-time faculty. *Academic Leader*, 16(11). Retrieved December 5, 2004, from <http://www.uu.edu/centers/faculty/resources/article.cfm?ArticleID=226>
- Marshall, E. (2003). Victims of circumstance: Academic freedom in a contingent academy. *Academe*, 89(3), 45. Retrieved December 8, 2004, from the ProQuest Database.
- McFarland, T. W. (1998a, April 4). *Assessment of an internet faculty training program for distance education adjunct faculty*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Adjunct Faculty Guild. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED418698)
- McFarland, T. W. (1998b). *Changes in Nova Southeastern University's full-time faculty and part-time faculty: Fall term 1995 to fall term 1998*. Research report. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Nova Southeastern University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED443375)
- Mielke, D. (1999). Effective teaching in distance education. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED436528)
- Pennsylvania State University. (2004). *Faculty development 101*. Retrieved July 7, 2004, from <http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/facdev101/overview.html>
- Pratt, G. (2000). Confessions of a recovering adjunct faculty member or, how I learned to stop worrying and love technology. *The Labyrinth*, 9(1). Retrieved December 5, 2004, from <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/labyforum/Fall00/laby1.html>
- Reasons, S. (2002). Are colleges and universities doing enough to develop part-time faculty use of instructional technology? *Academic Leader*, 18(10), 5-7.
- Schnitzer, M., & Crosby, L. S. (2003). *Recruitment and development of online adjunct instructors*. Paper presented at the 2003 DLA conference. Retrieved July 22, 2004, from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer62/crosby_schnitzer62.html
- Schweber, C, Kelley, K. B., Orr, G. J. (1998, August 5-7). *Training, and retraining, faculty for online courses: Challenges and strategies*. Proceedings of the annual conference on Distance Teaching and Learning, Madison, WI. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED422874)

Smallwood, S. (2002, August 2). Faculty union issues standards for treatment of adjuncts. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 4(47), p. A12. Retrieved December 8, 2004, from the ProQuest database.

University of Phoenix. (2005). About University of Phoenix. Retrieved February 13, 2006

from <http://www.universityofphoenix.com/About/>

Yohe, R. (2000). Closing the digital divide for our adjunct faculty. *The Labyrinth*, 9(1). Retrieved December 5, 2004, from <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/labyforum/Fall00/laby3.html>



**Connect with the World
of Distance Learning...
Join USDLA Today!**

800.275.5162
www.usdla.org
information@usdla.org

 **USDLA®**
UNITED STATES DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION
8 Winter Street, Suite 508 • Boston, MA • 02108 • USA