

A Full-Time Dilemma: Examining the Experiences of Part-time Faculty

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Abstract

Part-time faculty now account for more than half of all faculty in American colleges and universities. Existing scholarship primarily has focused on the teaching effectiveness of part-time faculty. In this exploratory study, the authors employ a qualitative approach to examine the perspectives of part-time faculty members at a public, regional institution. We identify several significant themes related to the experiences of part-time faculty members, including teaching evaluation; student-centered instruction; instructors' use of technology in the classroom; and disconnection from the university. We also offer pragmatic recommendations for administrators and other faculty designed to improve the overall experience of part-time faculty.

Keywords: Part-time faculty, teaching, contingent faculty.

The professoriate in the United States is diverse, complex, and evolving. More than 1.5 million faculty members (both full- and part-time) are employed in American colleges and universities. The number of part-time, or adjunct, faculty increased by 162% between the years 1991 and 2011. Part-time faculty now account for more than half of all faculty in degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2012). In addition, the percentage of full-time, non-tenured faculty (e.g. lecturers or instructors) grew by 22.7% from the years 1992 to 1998 (AAUP, 2014b). Part-time and full-time, non-tenured instructors, collectively referred to as "contingent faculty," account for 70% of all faculty today (AAUP, 2014a).

Contingent faculty are appealing options for institutions for myriad reasons. First, in the era of budget cuts and constraints contingent faculty are more economical hires than tenure-track faculty (Ochoa, 2012; Umbach, 2007). Most part-time faculty do not receive benefits, which results in savings for their universities. Tenure-ineligible full-time faculty generally have few, if any, service or research obligations, and therefore can carry a heavier teaching load. Additionally, once a faculty line is shifted from the tenure-track, the funds are reallocated with little likelihood of the tenure-track position being restored (Ochoa, 2012). Second, some argue that the tenure system is contributing to the contingent faculty trend, because of associated costs and a lack of faculty productivity (Umbach, 2007). Third, an aging faculty (driven largely by the elimination of the mandatory

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retirement age) and a multitude of newly minted PhDs seeking employment are other factors in the growth of contingent faculty. Administrators can no longer plan for a faculty member's retirement; as such, hiring contingent faculty is more attractive and offers increased flexibility. Fourth, the prevalence of distance education contributes to the hiring of contingent faculty, as they are often employed in this capacity. Finally, a new competitor has emerged on the academic scene: for-profit institutions, whose enrollments have increased. These colleges and universities generally do not offer tenure, which may be appealing to business-minded trustees and directors at non-profit institutions (Ochoa, 2012).

Contingent faculty enjoy little or no job security, receive few benefits or opportunities for career advancement, and are generally underpaid (AAUP, 2014a). Moreover, contingent faculty are often excluded from socialization, curriculum development, promotion opportunities, and faculty governance (Kezar & Sam, 2013). Thus, contingent faculty may be relegated to an "outsider" status, with little institutional support.

Despite the increasing reliance by colleges and universities upon contingent faculty, relatively little is known about their experiences, particularly at four-year institutions. Current scholarship on contingent faculty is largely confined to the community college context. The existing research on contingent faculty at four-year institutions has generally examined the teaching effectiveness of such faculty.

Teaching Effectiveness

Perhaps the most salient questions surrounding contingent faculty involve student learning, teaching effectiveness, and faculty members' interactions with students. Current research primarily has examined the role of contingent faculty in undergraduate education (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Ochoa, 2012; Umbach, 2007). Such studies have sought to investigate the quality of teaching by contingent faculty, especially as compared to faculty in tenure lines. Others have analyzed possible grade inflation attributable to contingent faculty and the instructors' role in student retention.

Eagan and Jaeger (2008) cite some benefits associated with employing contingent faculty. In addition to offering reduced labor costs and budget flexibility, contingent faculty are known to be "student-centered." In particular, part-time faculty are flexible with their teaching schedules, instructing courses in the evenings, on the weekends, and online, which is beneficial to many students. Full-time, non-tenure track faculty tend to be dedicated teachers, and presumably, without scholarship or service expectations, can devote all their efforts to student learning. However, Eagan and Jaeger observe "full-time nontenure-track faculty teaching loads are often higher than tenure-track faculty teaching loads, which may leave these faculty members with less, rather than more, time for students" (p. 41). Furthermore, part-time faculty are often employed across multiple institutions and may hold jobs outside of higher education, which suggests less accessibility for students and diminished involvement on campus (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008).

Umbach (2007) hypothesized contingent faculty would exhibit lower levels of commitment to their institutions and lower measures of performance as indicated by relevant good practices in undergraduate education (e.g. student faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning techniques, and setting high expectations for students). Umbach found “contingent status, particularly part-time status, is negatively related to undergraduate education” (p. 102). Part-time faculty spent less time preparing for their classes and were less likely to utilize collaborative and active teaching techniques than their full-time peers. While tenure-ineligible full-time faculty and tenure-track faculty were similarly likely to engage with students outside of class to discuss course content, part-time faculty were less inclined to do so. However, all contingent faculty were less likely to interact with students outside of class on matters unrelated to course content. Overall, tenure-ineligible full-time faculty behaved more similarly to their tenured and tenure-track counterparts (Umbach, 2007).

Eagan & Jaeger (2008) examined the effects of contingent faculty in “gatekeeper” courses (i.e. introductory courses that are prerequisites to the major field of study), namely the retention of students and their continuation in their major. Eagan and Jaeger found tenure-ineligible, full-time faculty had little impact on students’ continuation into their second year of studies. Students appeared to be negatively impacted when taking courses taught by part-time faculty in gatekeeper courses. This may be attributable to students having more limited access to these instructors and thus feeling disengaged. For example, gatekeeper classes tend to be competitive, larger in size, and delivered in the traditional lecture format, therefore leading students to pursue additional assistance and feedback. Since part-time faculty may lack office space and hold fewer office hours, students might not receive the extra help they are seeking (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008).

Baldwin and Wawrzynski (2011) sought to advance the study of the effects of contingent faculty on undergraduate education. They examined the likelihood of contingent faculty using various teaching strategies (learning-centered or subject-centered) versus tenured or tenure-track faculty. Baldwin and Wawrzynski found contingent faculty were more likely to employ subject centered techniques (e.g. multiple choice exams) than their tenured or tenure-track peers. Part-time faculty were less likely to utilize learning-centered strategies, such as short-answer exams, group projects, and research papers. However, full-time contingent faculty were more similar to their tenure-eligible counterparts in this regard. Additionally, part-time faculty were less likely to use technology, such as email communication and websites, to interact with students. Thus, most part-time faculty’s interactions with students are face-to-face. Both tenure-eligible and full-time contingent faculty were more inclined to use technology to communicate with students (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011).

Grade Inflation

A serious concern in higher education has been the prevalence of grade inflation (Sonner, 2000). In many cases, higher grades have been attributed to contingent faculty for various reasons. First, some hypothesize that contingent faculty may assign higher grades in order to diminish student complaints, in fear of being terminated. Second, contingent faculty

may have less teaching experience, and therefore, are unable to distinguish among grades (Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005).

Kezim et al. (2005) examined grades of business students over a 20-year period at a small, private college. The authors compared student grades across all faculty ranks: tenured, tenure-track, and adjunct. Although student grade point averages rose across all faculty classifications, the GPAs of students of adjunct faculty reflected the most significant increase (Kezim et al., 2005). In a similar study, Sonner (2000) investigated the grades of students at a small, public university, at which approximately 70% of courses are taught by adjunct faculty. The results indicated, even when controlling for class size, instructor credentials, and course discipline area, adjunct faculty assigned higher grades than full-time faculty (Sonner, 2000).

Online Education

Facing economic uncertainty, many institutions are utilizing online educations as a means to save funds (Mueller, Mandernach, & Sanderson, 2013). Contingent faculty are often employed to teach such classes, in part because of the flexibility contingent employees offer (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Mueller et al., 2013). Mueller et al. sought to compare student performance in online courses taught by adjunct faculty and full-time faculty whose teaching loads were exclusively online. Student performance indicators included grades, withdrawal rate, failure rate, and student satisfaction following the course. The results suggested students were more likely to complete the course successfully when taught by full-time online faculty. In addition, students reported higher satisfaction with their learning experience in courses instructed by full-time faculty. One result is of particular note: students taught by full-time online faculty received higher grades than students instructed by adjunct faculty (Mueller et al., 2013). This is the reverse of findings by Sonner (2000) and Kezem et al. (2005) and may result from the teaching expertise of the full-time faculty.

Evaluation of Contingent Faculty

Although all faculty are subject to evaluation, some marked differences exist between the evaluation of tenure-track and contingent faculty. Contingent faculty are evaluated almost exclusively by students through course evaluations (Heller, 2012). Thus, non-tenure track faculty may be more vulnerable to student complaints than their tenure-eligible peers. For example, contingent faculty are more likely to teach lower-division courses, have larger class sizes, carry heavier teaching loads, and share crowded office space with several other instructors. Any number of these issues may impact students' views of an instructor or course, and as such, the instructor's evaluations may suffer (Heller, 2012). Furthermore, contingent faculty are more susceptible to losing their jobs as a result of poor student ratings. Heller asserts tenure-track faculty are more apt to receive mentorship from senior faculty if they receive lower student evaluations and argues contingent faculty should be treated similarly.

“In consultation with contingent faculty, colleges and universities should establish fair,

consistent, and objective procedures for performance review of instructors...These procedures should resemble those for evaluation of tenure-line faculty and include peer reviews of teaching, community service, institutional service, conference presentations, and publications” (Heller, 2012, A10-A11).

In an effort to further understand the evaluation process of adjunct faculty, Langen (2011) aimed to determine what sources of information administrators use to evaluate adjunct faculty, as well as the criteria used for such evaluations and decisions of reappointment. In most cases, administrators (usually department chairs) are responsible for evaluations and decisions of reappointment. Student evaluations were the most common method of instructor evaluation, followed by classroom observation and syllabus reviews. Administrators ranked classroom observations as the most accurate criteria for evaluation purposes. When asked to rank factors relating to reappointment, administrators cited teaching performance as the most important criteria, ahead of student evaluations, availability, and work experience (Langen, 2011).

The Contingent Faculty-Institution Relationship

Although the number of contingent faculty on college campuses is markedly increasing, very few institutions have crafted policies and practices in support of these instructors, which may contribute to a negative working environment for such faculty. Kezar and Sam (2013) sought to identify institutional strategies to move forward policies and practices related to contingent faculty, and the associated challenges of implementing such policies and practices. In a series of interviews conducted with contingent faculty, Kezar and Sam note several points of interest. First, developing awareness was instrumental in overcoming apathy and mobilizing contingent faculty for change. For example, some contingent faculty reported they were unaware of pay disparity between tenure-eligible and non-tenure track faculty until they were provided with the data. Second, disseminating information through various communication channels (e.g. newsletters, listservs) was critical in recruiting and uniting faculty to effect change. With appropriate levels of awareness and participation, the contingent faculty were able to enlist the help of various allies, such as tenure-eligible faculty and administrators, to implement policy changes (Kezar & Sam, 2013). These findings suggest the importance of communication between contingent faculty themselves and other members of the institution.

To examine adjunct faculty’s institutional loyalty, Hoyt (2012) investigated adjunct faculty’s reasons for teaching, their job satisfaction and teaching methods, and perceived departmental and institutional support. Hoyt found that the majority of adjunct faculty held more than one position and primarily taught for enjoyment. Only about half of the faculty reported attending a departmental orientation and being assigned a faculty mentor. Most adjunct faculty utilize discussion and lecture as their primary teaching method. Perhaps most importantly, the majority of respondents indicated job satisfaction and strong loyalty to their institution. However, several adjunct faculty suggested better pay and benefits, professional development, opportunities to serve on committees, and more interaction with the department chair as ways to improve their work environment (Hoyt, 2012).

Likewise, Eagan, Jaeger, and Grantham (2015) examined the association between part-time faculty satisfaction and campus climate and their use of institutional resources (e.g. office space). Their findings indicate part-time faculty are unsatisfied with their relationships with administrators and colleagues; however, workplace satisfaction increased when part-time faculty reported feeling respected. Seemingly small gestures, such as access to office space or personal computers, appear to increase part-time instructors' workplace satisfaction.

Mentoring Contingent Faculty

Emerging scholarship has suggested the need for mentoring among adjunct faculty. For example, Franczyk (2014) discusses several strategies employed by an academic department at a four-year, regional institution to address some of the challenges encountered by adjunct faculty. This department, whose part-time instructors outnumber full-time faculty by a four-to-one margin, assigned an adjunct mentor to support and develop their part-time faculty. The adjunct mentor was a practitioner with more than 30 years of professional experience and was a seasoned part-time instructor. The adjunct mentor serves as a liaison between the adjunct faculty and departmental leadership and regularly engages with part-time faculty through meetings and workshops (Franczyk, 2014). In addition, the adjunct mentor advises part-time faculty on teaching practices, including assessment and classroom protocols.

Similarly, Santisteban and Egues (2014) suggest that mentoring programs for adjunct faculty be a comprehensive initiative, with sufficient resources and clearly defined goals and expectations. Further, they recommend all faculty participate in a mentoring orientation, during which the roles of both the mentor and mentee are clearly defined and program goals are articulated. They also assert that the mentoring process requires frequent evaluation, with adjustments made as necessary

Research Design

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state that personal experiences are opportunities for research. Research can originate from one's life experiences. They further state that "however, it is not simply the fact that we experience something that matters. What matters is how we think and feel about the experience. In other words, *we problematize our experience.*" (p. 73) The goals of this project were to first, determine what types of narratives part-time faculty told regarding their teaching experience, in order to see what the common themes, if any, arose in the narratives. Second, we wanted to discern how the part-time faculty members viewed their role at the university. Finally, operating from a pragmatic perspective, we wanted to learn if there were specific strategies recommended by the contingent faculty to help them succeed that administrators could implement, regardless of the academic department or institution where they work. The design for this study was inspired by one author's former personal experience as a contingent faculty member. The second author's experience serving as the Basic Course Director for communication courses, where she works primarily with part-time faculty also inspired the study, as well as the fact that both authors are motivated to improve the working situations for part-time facul-

ty at their respective university. The method of interviewing part-time faculty allowed for a deeper, richer understanding of how these faculty members see their teaching roles and how they construct their identity as faculty members. Qualitative research methods, particularly interviewing, were the ideal methods for studying this often neglected, yet vital, group of faculty members.

Recruitment

There were several criteria for inclusion in this study. In order to be legally able to volunteer to participate, subjects had to be at least 18 years of age. All participants must have self-identified as part-time faculty and must have currently been teaching at least one college class in order to participate in the study. Talking with part-time faculty about their experiences was necessary in order to understand how they viewed their role in the functioning of the university and how they evaluated their teaching practices.

The recruitment of subjects was done solely by email. Since one of the authors is the Basic Course Director at her university, she has access to an email list-serve, which made it very easy to send an email recruiting participants. This approach resulted in 7 respondents, which was the entire data set. The authors knew all of the respondents personally. Snowball sampling, which involves asking respondents for names and contact information of others who might be interested or qualify for the study, resulted in no responses. Since this was exploratory research, we felt comfortable proceeding with the smaller sample size as our analysis yielded significant results.

Sample Demographics

The sample included a total of seven part-time faculty members from a regional, public, institution: three women and four men. All of the participants live in Kentucky. The participants' ages ranged from early 30's to late 60's.

Interview Procedures

Seven interviews were conducted over a two month period. Interviews occurred at one of the author's office. Two part-time faculty members were unable to come to the author's office, so we conducted two telephone interviews in addition to the five in-person interviews. Interviews were useful because they allowed for an understanding of "the social actor's experiences and perspective" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). The first thing that we did at each interview was that one of the researchers presented and read an informed consent form to the interviewee. We answered any questions that the research participant had and were careful to obtain the participant's verbal consent before we proceeded with the interview. We received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. The actual range of the interview time was 30 minutes to 60 minutes. What was of paramount importance to us as researchers was that the interviewing process yielded knowledge that was valuable to the authors but also to the participants in our study. We recorded the interviews on a digital recorder, which allowed us to focus our attention on the interviewee and his or her experience, rather than writing notes

all the time. We did take some notes on phrases or words that stood out to us during the time of the interview.

Method of Analysis

We reviewed the data looking for themes that emerged during the interviews. The process of reading the data and coding it was a highly interpretive one. Using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) concept of saturation, we never had an exact number of part-time faculty we planned to interview. Our results show that even with only seven participants in the study, there were several themes that emerged multiple times, and we believe we reached saturation (1967) of the sample. What follows is a discussion of the most prominent themes as a result of analyzing the data.

Discussion

Evaluation of Teaching

One of the more significant themes emerging from this research was the faculty members' perceptions of their teaching evaluations. The participants were especially vocal about the use of student ratings as the primary vehicle to evaluate their teaching effectiveness. As Heller (2012) observes, student ratings are the most commonly utilized method of evaluating contingent faculty. The seven participants in this study were interviewed about the method(s) used to evaluate their teaching effectiveness. All seven participants in this research reported student evaluations are conducted for every course they instruct, each semester. The instructors' perceptions of the accuracy of these student evaluations were mixed. Two faculty members stated student evaluations of their teaching were "absolutely not" fair. Participant #2 characterized student evaluations as "cruel" and "gripe sessions," and admitted to barely reading them. Five instructors indicated the student ratings were somewhat or partially reflective of their teaching effectiveness, while only one faculty member believed the student evaluation process was "fair." Participant #3 expressed concern that students may feel pressure to "help themselves" when completing faculty evaluations, in an effort to improve their grades. As a result, this instructor believed his evaluations tended to "skew higher." Two instructors believed students are often in a rush to complete the evaluations, which may affect their accuracy. Participant #4 stated, "There is so much variance [in the evaluations] between years. I know I don't change that much." Overall, most of the participants felt student evaluations of their teaching were somewhat accurate and/or helpful; however, the majority of the faculty members interviewed expressed some concerns with the practice.

In addition, the faculty members revealed different experiences related to classroom and/or peer observations. Five out of the seven faculty members reported being observed by the basic course director, who serves as their immediate supervisor. One of the participants who had not been observed by a peer or supervisor teaches at a satellite campus. This instructor considered recording a class session to be used for an observation, but this idea has never materialized. The other faculty member who had not been observed in the classroom by a peer or supervisor primarily instructs online or hybrid courses. Notably,

only two of the participants had been observed in the classroom by someone other than the basic course director. In both of these instances, the faculty members were observed by the department chair. All of those interviewed indicated classroom observations had been beneficial. Participant #2 believed the observation conducted by the basic course director had proven more helpful than students' evaluations. Another faculty member, Participant #6, stated the department chair's observation was a "positive experience" and noted the observation encouraged him to include more group activities within the classroom.

Student-Centered Instruction

A second significant theme that emerged from this study was the instructors' perceptions that they are very student-centered in their instruction. The results from our research align with Eagan and Jaeger's (2008) work that states that contingent faculty are known to be "student-centered." Almost all of the participants echoed, to some degree, the words of Participant #1, when she said, "I feel like I'm helping somehow." Participant #3 said that he was "proud to be serving these students. It's a service." Participant #5 went as far to state when talking about a student, "He's my friend, he's not my student." Comments such as these were echoed by varying degrees from six of the seven participants.

Many of the participants stated that they felt that, by teaching these college courses, they were making a difference, and that what they were doing as part-time instructors contributed to the mission of the university. Participant #3 stated that he was "very proud" to be associated with the university. He further stated, "This is not a job, but an opportunity." Participant #5 stated when it came to the mission of the university: "I'm bought in." Participant #7 said she was "happy for the opportunity to interact with students."

When examining our data and the comments made by the majority of the respondents, it is clear that our data contradicts the research presented by Umbach (2007) that hypothesized that contingent faculty would exhibit lower levels of commitment to their institutions or that having contingent faculty in gateway courses is detrimental to student success. The participants in our research were student-centered faculty who thought they were making a difference in the lives of their students and believed that they were contributing to the mission of the university. The majority of our respondents indicated in the interviews that they were committed to student success.

Instructor Use of Technology

This research yielded significant findings related to the faculty members' use of technology in the classroom. When asked to describe their approach to utilizing technology when teaching, most of the faculty members indicated they embraced technology and often used it for instructional purposes. However, when asked to provide further details regarding specific technologies, the majority of the instructors struggled to articulate their precise usage. For example, six of the participants reported they brought laptop computers to class, which they connected to the room's projector. Three instructors stated they regularly use the slide show presentation program, PowerPoint, during class sessions.

One faculty member preferred using Keynote for classroom presentations. Four participants indicated they frequently utilize Blackboard, a common learning management system. Additionally, six of the faculty members often incorporate videos from YouTube, TED, and NBC Learn to help facilitate learning. Just one faculty member expressed reluctance to integrate technology in the classroom. This instructor, Participant #5, felt it was “too easy to get caught up in technology,” which can lead to decreased focus on students.

The above findings reveal the limitations of the faculty members interviewed related to their incorporation of technology in the classroom. None of the faculty members reported using more advanced technologies than presentation programs, audio and video clips, and the learning management system, Blackboard. The audio and video clips were primarily used to provide examples of speeches, while Blackboard served as a means to communicate with students and record grades. Only one instructor, Participant #7, reported using the discussion board feature for classes that meet face-to-face. None of the faculty members indicated they use additional software, websites, or applications (e.g. AnyMeeting; Remind; PollEverywhere) for instructional or communication purposes.

A Sense of Disconnection

The majority of the part-time faculty who were interviewed in this study expressed a sense of disconnection from the university. Their insights support the findings from previous research that stated contingent faculty are often excluded from socialization, curriculum development, promotion opportunities, and faculty governance (Kezar & Sam, 2013). Our research underscores Kezar and Sam’s earlier work that found contingent faculty may be relegated to an “outsider” status, with little institutional support.

Although the part-time faculty members expressed the sentiments that what they did on campus was making a difference and was important to students' education, they still voiced their concerns about "fitting in" on campus. Participant #3 stated, "There's a disconnect as an adjunct." Participant #4 mentioned that he was a "lowly adjunct," and that he would "like to be connected with faculty." Several of the part-time faculty said that they do not hold office hours, even though all the participants in this study have access to a communal part-time faculty office for their use. Participant #7 used the word "disconnect" when describing her experience as a part-time faculty member. She further elaborated that part-time faculty "aren't included" in any of the events or meetings on campus that are held for full-time faculty. She then went on to ask the question, "Where do you really fit?" She mentioned her desire for professional development workshops that were created for adjuncts only. These findings relate to the work of Eagan et al. (2015), who emphasized the importance of part-time faculty feeling respected and supported on campus.

Recommendations

Holistic Approach to Evaluation

Most of the faculty members interviewed expressed at least some reservations about the student evaluation process. The instructors voiced concerns that students spend little time or thought completing the evaluations. Furthermore, some faculty members believed students feel pressure to rate the instructor favorably, even though evaluations are not distributed to faculty long after the grade submission deadline has passed. A few faculty members stated students use the evaluations a means to complain or vent, which was a source of frustration for the instructors. The faculty members in this study who had been observed by a supervisor valued the experience. However, most of the participants had never been observed by anyone other than the basic course director (i.e. Teaching and Learning Center Director or peer). Thus, the instructors receive only limited feedback about their teaching from peers or mentors.

To improve the evaluation process of part-time faculty, we recommend administrators employ a holistic approach, in which instructors submit a portfolio for review each year. The portfolios may include student ratings of instruction, peer observations, and examples of classroom assignments, exams, and activities. We encourage administrators to meet on an annual basis with all part-time faculty members to discuss their evaluations. In these sessions, feedback may be given on assignments, classroom activities, and peer observations. For example, if an instructor's exams are composed mostly of objective, multiple-choice questions, chairs and administrators can discuss assessments requiring higher levels of critical thinking, and if needed, recommend professional development opportunities to the faculty member. In addition, holistic evaluations may alleviate some of the stress associated with the student rating system, as described by the participants in this study. Future studies could examine the effects of holistic evaluations on part-time instructors' teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction.

A Sense of Community

All of the faculty members who participated in this research expressed gratitude for the opportunity to teach at the institution. However, some of the instructors indicated they felt, at times, disconnected from the university. Participant #7 remarked, "There is a sense of where do I [as an adjunct] fit?" Most of the faculty members recognized their role in fulfilling the teaching mission of the university, but a few described themselves as a "lowly adjunct" or "cheap labor." The participants also revealed they spend limited time with other part-time faculty members. For example, two instructors stated they "don't really know" the other part-time faculty in the department.

The above issues demonstrate the need for fostering a stronger, more inclusive community for part-time faculty. Although a challenging undertaking (e.g. significant variance in the schedules of adjunct faculty), a stronger community for part-time faculty may prove beneficial for the institution, in terms of both teaching effectiveness and the instructors' loyalty to the university. More research is needed to explore the relationship between

part-time faculty and their institutions, and to what degree an inclusive community affects teaching performance. However, at this time, we encourage administrators to invite part-time faculty participation in professional development opportunities (e.g. academic conferences and workshops) and social events (e.g. end-of-semester gatherings). Professional development opportunities related to advancement in rank or educational attainment may prove beneficial to both the instructor and the institution (Eagan et al., 2015). Further, we recommend part-time instructors be given the opportunity to interact with each other at the departmental, college, and university levels. Often, adjunct faculty participate in a “part-time faculty orientation,” but rarely do they engage with each other afterward. Teaching and Learning Centers and academic departments should create specialized programming and events designed for part-time faculty. The implementation of a mentoring program for part-time faculty may also foster an inclusive and supportive environment (Franczyk, 2014).

Conclusion

Part-time faculty now account for more than half of all faculty in degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2012). Despite the increasing reliance by colleges and universities upon contingent faculty, relatively little is known about their experiences, particularly at four-year institutions. Previous research has only examined part-time faculty members’ teaching effectiveness and impact in the classroom. We hope that our research has shed light on the importance of the experience of part-time faculty and how they view their role in four-year institutions. These institutions could not survive without the work and the help of part-time faculty. Our study has illuminated some of the joys and the obstacles that part-time faculty encounter while teaching. As our work was exploratory in nature, we hope that others will continue this line of research, perhaps in larger studies on campuses that are diverse in size and in demographics. We have also offered some pragmatic suggestions to help improve not only the teaching practices of part-time faculty, but their experiences as members of these institutions as well. By implementing simple strategies to better the working environment for part-time faculty, we will also improve the experience of the student they teach. Small, but significant changes, can make a substantial impact on the working environment of this growing, and increasingly important, population.

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Appendix

Interview questions for the part-time faculty research project:

Describe how you prepare for your classes.

Do you hold office hours? If so, how many? If not, why don't you hold office hours?

What type of assignments do you give? Group projects? Research papers? T/F or multiple choice assessment? Please describe your typical assignments.

What type of informal interactions do you engage in with your students outside of the classroom?

Describe your use of technology in the classroom.

Do you believe your teaching evaluation is an accurate reflection of your teaching effectiveness? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Have you been observed in the classroom by anyone other than the course coordinator at your institution? If so, who? Describe the outcome.

Describe what it means to be an employee at this institution as a part-time faculty member. Could the institution implement any strategies to improve your working environment? If so, explain.

Describe how you see your role fulfilling the mission of the institution.