

For-Profit Career College Adjunct Faculty and Their Affiliation Needs and Experiences

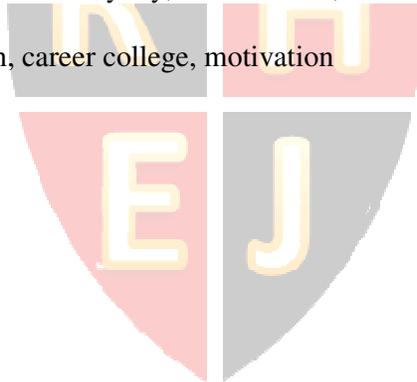
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ABSTRACT

A qualitative single case study design encompassing constructivist theory was used to explore the affiliation need of nine career college adjuncts and the influence that their working conditions have on their professional growth, motivation, commitment, sense of loyalty, and connectivity to the institutions they serve. Also examined were the psychological influence of the working conditions of adjuncts regarding their affiliation and connection to their institutions and the types of professional support programs or activities adjuncts perceived to be beneficial for their needs for affiliation and teaching performance. Findings indicated that regardless of the lack of fellowship, interaction, and participation in professional development activities, adjuncts remain loyal to their students and motivated to teach. Participants acknowledged both their need to be affiliated with their institutions and strategies to increase their senses of loyalty, commitment, and motivation.

Keywords: adjunct, affiliation, career college, motivation



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INTRODUCTION

Adjunct instructors are not adequately supported by their institutions and are facing low pay rates, no benefits, lack of professional development, heavy course loads, and minimal hope of becoming full-time tenured faculty members (Bradley, 2013). Dailey-Hebert, Mandernach, Donnelly-Sallee, and Norris (2014) stated that adjuncts are disconnected from the institutions in which they teach. However, many adjuncts still deliver excellent teaching in the American classroom (Schmidt, 2014). According to Monks (2009), adjuncts are being taken advantage of through low pay and poor working conditions. Lack of affiliation to higher learning institutions in which adjuncts serve may affect their commitment, motivation, retention, and teaching which, in turn, would affect student learning and academic achievement.

This qualitative case study was an in-depth investigation of the affiliation needs and working conditions of career college adjuncts in South Florida, including their lived experiences and challenges. Additionally, this was an exploration of the type of professional support programs or activities perceived by adjuncts to be beneficial to their affiliation with, and teaching performance in, their respective institutions. The primary focus was on adjuncts' needs in building an association with their institutions, having a sense of belonging, and perceptions on creating a sense of loyalty and affiliation.

The case study population included nine participants who have taught or currently teach in career colleges as adjuncts and have experienced a lack of professional support and appreciation as well as a sense of isolation within their institutions. The findings of the study indicated that although adjuncts are loyal to their students and motivated to teach, they still lack fellowship, interaction, and participation in professional development activities.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a dearth of research, attention, and interest given to career college adjuncts. It seems that their needs have been unnoticed by leaders in their community, although institutions of higher learning rely on adjuncts to teach a heavy load of classes (Boerner, 2013; Buller, 2012). A review of literature shows that adjuncts are lacking the necessary academic support and respect from educational leaders or their colleagues (Buller, 2012; Diegel, 2013; Fagan-Willen Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2006; Halcrow & Olson, 2008). According to Ellis (2013), adjuncts are vital to teaching effectiveness and student academic achievement. Adjuncts are still struggling with not having a sense of belonging within their institutions; however, the availability of literature for recommendations on the affiliations of adjuncts in higher education, as well as in career colleges, is quite limited.

It is beneficial to the institutions of higher education for adjuncts to have a secure and positive environment including support and incentives for teaching to improve teaching effectiveness and to retain quality adjuncts. Ellis (2013) explained that adjuncts are essential to student academic achievement and teaching effectiveness. Nonetheless, adjuncts are still struggling with a lack of feelings of belonging in higher education. Snyder and Dillow (2012) explained that there had been an increase in part-time faculty from 1999 to 2009. A later report by Snyder and Dillow (2013) indicated that part-time faculty increased by 54% from 2001 to 2011.

Adjuncts bring their expertise from their real-work experience and flexibility to benefit higher education institutions financially (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). The Coalition of the Academic Workforce (CAW, 2012) concluded that the salaries of adjuncts are low, adjuncts lack instructional support and professional development, and many would like to become tenure-track faculty someday. According to CAW (2012), about 73% of survey respondents reported their interest in making teaching their first employment. However, in many institutions, adjuncts are not eligible to become full-time tenure-track faculty (Gappa,

2000). Adjuncts are known to hold more than one part-time job in more than one institution and some are portrayed as being unhappy and displeased, while some other adjuncts are characterized as being experienced with a full-time professional position and have proved to be intrinsically motivated (Leslie & Gappa, 2002).

Burr and Park (2012) defined adjunct as “an addition to something else, an appendage, but not essentially a part of it” (p. 155). Adjuncts are part-time faculty members with real-world experience and expertise, flexibility, and availability; but receive a very low salary with a “shameful lack of support” (Lyons, 2007, p. 1). Adjuncts have had many titles, such as seasonal faculty, contingent faculty, adjunct instructors, adjunct professors; assistant associate, and community faculty; or just adjuncts (Lyons, 2007). Adjuncts are more numerous, yet hold less power than do full-time, tenure-track faculty. Adjuncts are disconnected from their institutions and they are not supported by the academic community (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2014). Adjuncts complain of being invisible to faculty and staff within their respective institutions. Although adjuncts play a significant role in reaching the institution mission, educational leaders are still not investing in the professional development of this fast-growing group (CAW, 2012).

Adjuncts are working in institutions that have no obligations to them other than the minimum required for the term an adjunct is currently teaching, and their working conditions and remuneration are less than adequate (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2014). Adjuncts face last-minute scheduling leaving inadequate time for class preparation as well as last-minute cancellations of classes and a lack of professional development (Parrott et al., 2007). Institutions do not have to pay adjuncts for cancellations due to limited student enrollment (Mueller, Mandernach, & Sanderson, 2013). CCCSE (2014) concluded that adjuncts very rarely participated, nor were they invited, to meetings about strategies to enhance teaching and learning or student progress. Adjuncts most often feel they are not part of their institutions and that they serve and function “outside of the system” (Dedman & Pearch, 2004, p. 24).

Despite the working conditions, lack of affiliation, and low pay, the number of adjuncts is growing rapidly in community colleges and 4-year universities, and have been more numerous than full-time faculty in many colleges (CCCSE, 2014). According to Wagoner (2007), there are two separate groups of adjuncts: The first has many skills and expertise, are not retired or hold another full-time job. The second group is perceived to have less training and fewer skills than do full-time faculty (Wagoner, 2007).

Gappa and Leslie (1993) classified adjuncts into four groups: career enders; professionals, specialists, or experts; aspiring academics; and freelancers. The career enders are at the end of their careers, retired, or about to do so. Although they want to be active, associated, and inspired, they have no interest in becoming full-time faculty (Green, 2007). Career enders mostly teach courses related to their careers even if they are no longer working in their fields (Lyons, 2007).

The professionals, specialists, or experts are more concerned about serving their communities and the students (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Green, 2007). For example, this group of adjuncts could be composed of lawyers, doctors, engineers, nurses, or scientists (Liftig, 2014). Though they teach primarily part-time, they are considered to be the largest group of faculty (Lyons, 2007).

Gappa and Leslie (1993) described the third group as aspiring academics. They differ from the other groups as they are hoping to be full-time faculty; additionally, they are teaching as adjuncts, sometimes in multiple colleges and more than one course (CCCSE, 2014; Green, 2007). These adjuncts “teach largely for the income it generates, and are sometimes referred as ‘roads scholars, freeway flyers, or gypsy scholars’” (Lyons, 2007, p. 4). The freelancers are the last group of adjuncts (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). The freelancers

choose to have more than one part-time job, and they could be “homemakers or primary care people; artists and others seeking affiliation with an institution for a variety of reasons” (Lyons, 2007, p. 60).

Degeneffe and Offutt (2008) stated that their survey participants agreed that adjuncts make an impact on the mission and the goals of their programs and are motivated to teach although their roles and motivations could be conditional. Adjuncts’ roles in higher education institutions as well as community colleges have increased, and enrollment in colleges and universities has increased as well (Bradley, 2013; Green, 2007). According to Mueller et al. (2013), this increase in hiring adjuncts in community colleges and universities may be economic; however, the growing number of adjuncts has not ended the feelings of isolation and disconnection with their institutions and adjuncts are pushing for better pay, job security, better working conditions, and for their voices to be heard (June, 2012).

Feldman and Turnley (2001) confirmed that adjuncts are disappointed with the low financial incentives and lack of promotional opportunities they receive; however, they still show love and commitment for their teaching profession. Community college adjuncts enjoy what they do, but they feel unappreciated and disconnected from academia (Green, 2007). Their sense of frustration is associated with lack of office space or sharing of the workspace (Schmidt, 2014). The CCCSE (2014) affirmed the many obstacles that adjuncts face, including limited or no office space, technical support, academic guidance, or time for class preparation.

METHODOLOGY

The research encompassed a descriptive, single-case study. Triangulation of data was achieved through semistructured interviews, a focus group session, and member checking as well as comparing and cross-checking the data collected. The following overarching research questions were the basis of this study:

1. How do career college adjuncts describe their working conditions in light of their affiliations with their institutions?
2. How do career college adjuncts rate their affiliation as it relates to their job performances?
3. How do career college adjuncts cope with the psychological impact associated with their working conditions?
4. How do career college adjuncts’ working conditions influence student academic achievement?
5. Is there a lack of career college adjunct affiliations with the institutions in which they serve?
6. Do career college adjuncts perceive that instructional support and programs are essential to their professional growth?

First, using these research questions as the cornerstone of this research, three separate recorded interviews of 90 minutes each were conducted with all nine participants in order to obtain in-depth data from answers to 11 very specific, open-ended questions, later categorized using NVivo 10 software. The three-member focus group met once and answered 12 open-ended questions regarding various aspects of their affiliation with their academic organizations as active adjuncts.

Limitations

It is important to note that this study was limited in scope to that of the affiliation needs of career college adjuncts in South Florida and therefore cannot be used for generalized consideration in other areas or nations.

RESULTS

The results of this study were obtained from interviews that were based on Seidman (2006), as each of the interviews were undertaken with an interval of 3 days to 1 week. The interviews were pilot tested as this method would help establish significant and effectual discussions of the interview questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Participants

Participants included nine career college adjuncts who took part in three interviews each, as well as a focus group that comprised three career college adjuncts. The interviews took place during a 3-month period and were audio-recorded. These career college adjuncts represented a diverse group of cultures and races and ranged in age from 30 to 64 years with up to 30 years of experience in education as shown in Table 1 (Appendix). The focus group comprised three adjuncts, two of whom had professional degrees in medicine and law as shown in Table 2 (Appendix).

The nine participants in this study came from primarily three cultural and racial backgrounds, with each of them having experience in teaching in career colleges in South Florida. The demographic backgrounds of the career college instructors were equally divided (33.3%) among Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics.

Interview Responses

Participants' responses to six interview questions were used to gather data on the participants' lived experiences. As indicated in Tables 3 through 8 (Appendix), each of the interview questions is categorized by participant, thematic word or phrase, and code description.

Focus Group Responses

The focus group comprised three adjuncts from the original nine participants. These participants discussed aspects of their feelings of affiliation by responding to nine focus group questions as shown in Table 9 (Appendix).

DISCUSSION

The participants were keen to discuss and describe their experiences, job satisfaction, and their lived experiences as adjuncts in career colleges. In the interviews, they provided recommendations to improve the quality of their working conditions and addressed their needs for affiliation. Many mentioned a desire for professional development as well as recognition as a professional colleague at their respective colleges. The major findings and most frequent themes included adjunct needs, sense of affiliation, feelings of belonging, and lack of professional development. The following is a list of the salient aspects that came out of the interview responses:

- Adjunct Needs: Job security; better communication, relations, and recognition
- Job Security: Uncertainty of semester-to-semester courses and uncertainty of hours offered; the inability to refuse offered classes even when they were not convenient for the adjunct; lack of medical benefits; low salary
- Communication: Lack of interaction, feeling of being an invisible faculty member
- Recognition: The feeling that their opinions did not matter; lack of institutional support or respect
- Sense of Affiliation: Felt connected only to other adjuncts and not to the institution; sense of isolation and being invisible to full-time faculty and administration
- Professional Development: Adjuncts felt a lack of professional development; indicated a desire to be compensated during non-working hours

- Training and Orientation: Indicated a generalized lack of training and orientation as detrimental to getting off to a good start in the institution and for teaching classes; felt a lack of motivation as a result
- Compensation: Remuneration was not an overarching issue with adjuncts who expressed a passion for teaching in their field of expertise

Unexpected Findings

A number of participants felt an affiliation to their respective college and felt they were a part of the institution. The majority of these participants were in the category of professionals, specialists, and career enders. This finding provides an insight into the level of academic acumen and professionalism demonstrated by many, if not most, of career adjuncts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was limited in scope to nine career college adjuncts in South Florida and therefore did not mirror the lived experiences of adjuncts in other areas. Further research is highly recommended to add to the field of knowledge regarding career college adjuncts in other states and nations.

CONCLUSION

The participants in this study felt a lack of affiliation, motivation, and inclusion as career college adjunct faculty. Nonetheless, they are still excellent professors, who are loyal to their institutions and maintain a desire to teach and become full-time employees. Career colleges should consider supporting these professionals with better pay, recognition, affiliation, and respect which will eventually better the institutions by having a more stable and professional instructional staff to serve their students and community.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
Career College Participants' Demographic Data

Name (initials)	Gender	Highest degree	Years of teaching	Country of birth	Currently teaching*	Location**
AG	Male	MD	25	Cuba	FT	PBC
AR	Male	MD	3	Haiti	FT	PBC
AL	Female	MD	35	Venezuela	FCC	BC
AN	Male	MD	15	Africa	FMI & MIC	DC
AT	Male	JD	3	Haiti	EC & ASA	DC
AI	Female	Associate	6	Cuba	FT	PBC
AM	Female	Associate	19	U.S.	FCC	BC
BM	Male	Bachelor's	1	U.S.	FT	PBC
BR	Male	Associate	5	U.S.	FT	PBC

Note. *Fortis College (FT), Florida Career College (FCC), Everest College (EC), Faith Medical Institute (FMI), Kaplan College (KP), ASA College (ASA); **Broward County (BC), Dade County (DC), Palm Beach County (PBC)

Table 2
Demographic Information of the Focus Group

Name	Gender	Highest degree	Years of teaching	Country of birth	Currently teaching*	Location**
AG	Male	MD	25	Cuba	FT	PBC
AT	Male	JD	4	Haiti	EC/ASA	DC
BR	Male	Associate	5	U.S.	FCC	BC

Note. *Fortis College (FT), Florida Career College (FCC), Everest College (EC), ASA College (ASA); **Broward County (BC), Dade County (DC), Palm Beach County (PBC)

Table 3
Results of Interview Question 1

How would you describe your past life with your colleagues, educational leaders faculty members, and the entire instructional community before becoming a career college adjunct?	
Participant	Thematic word or phrase
AI	“Was a radiologist technician working for 3 years.”
AM	“Decided to go back to school.”
AG	“I am medical doctor from Cuba.”
BR	“Was working at Diagnostic Imaging as a full time employee.”
AN	“Medical director at HIV clinic.”
AR	“I studied medicine in Santo Domingo.”
AT	“Taught social studies at Miami Dade public school.”
BM	“I was making \$16 an hour in urgent care as a graduate.”
AL	“Graduated as an MD in 1980 in Venezuela

Table 4
Results of Interview Question 2

How do you perceive yourself about being a career college adjunct?	
Participant	Thematic word or phrase
AT	“Was good at Everest as novice adjunct.”

BM	“You do not exist.”
AI	“As an adjunct, I had a good experience.”
BR	“Get to be part of faculty meeting.”
AR	“2 days before or the day after the final exam to get your schedule.”
AG	“Do not get support that we need from administration.”
AN	“Without benefits is no fun.”
AM	“Hiring adjuncts has to do with money.”
AL	“Have my medical assistant degree from there.”

Table 5
Results of Interview Question 3

Based on your lived experiences, how would you reconstruct a typical day as a career college adjunct in the institutions you have taught or are currently teaching?	
Participant	Thematic word or phrase
AG	“First day here as an adjunct, I was lost.”
AL	“I was all prepared.”
AN	“First day I had no problem.”
AR	“It was pretty quiet.”
	“Fulltime faculty make you feel awkward.”
BM	“Not given instruction about grading and class procedures.”
BR	“My team leader was there to guide at the beginning.”
AT	“Did not know that I was able to tweak syllabus.”
AI	“Got to the classroom at 7:45 am.”
AM	“Prepare my lessons on my time.”

Table 6
Results of Interview Question 4

How do your working conditions in a career college as an adjunct influence your sense of belonging and affiliation with the institution?	
Participant	Thematic word or phrase
AG	“Adjuncts do not attend any events nor get invited to them.”
AL	“Lack of affiliation affects motivation.”
AN	“I feel part of the vision of the school, mission of the school.”
AR	“Just teach the class and rush to get out.”
AI	“I have a full-time job that I was committed to.”
AM	“Involved in some of the decision making.”
BM	“No connection with staff or other colleagues.”
BR	“Part of the institution and accomplishing the school mission.”
AT	“Do not participate an in any activities that go on in the school.”

Table 7
Results of Interview Question 5

How do you see yourself now in reaching your affiliation needs that you perceived as necessary for your professional growth and the mission of the institutions?	
Participant	Thematic word or phrase
AG	“Part in these activities is essential to reaching the vision and mission of the school.”
AL	“If I don’t belong, I will not be loyal.”
AR	“Would like to be part of the school, the mission of the school.”

AI	“We all want to be accepted by others.”
AM	“Professional development, orientations are all part of professional growth.”
BM	“Have no intention of becoming affiliated with the school.”
BR	“Important to have feeling of fulfilment.”
AT	“I am not affiliated with the institutions the way that I would want to.”
AN	“I affiliated now with my schools.”

Table 8
Results of Interview Question 6

How do you see yourself moving in the future as a career college adjunct?	
Participant	Thematic word or phrase
AG	“More stability, better payment and benefits with stability.”
AL	“Adjuncts would certainly like to become full-time.”
AN	“No future here as a career college adjunct.”
AR	“To become full-time faculty with benefits.”
AI	“Become full-time faculty.”
AM	“I am getting ready to retire.”
BM	“I would never work again as a career college adjunct.”
BR	“Affiliation, commitment, and belonging will remain the same.”
AT	“Adjuncts are second class citizen.”

Table 9
Results of Focus Group: Questions 1–9

1. Is there enough office space and time allocated for advisement or counseling after class hours?	“I see students in the classroom.” “No time or space allocated students.” “Talk takes place in the hallway or immediately after class.” “As an adjunct, we don’t have privileges.” “Not supposed to go over in your hours.”
2. How would you describe your sense of belonging?	“Academic dean does not know you very well.”
3. How would you describe the instructional support that you receive as an adjunct?	“They expect you to get the additional resources you need to teach.” “Gave me the textbooks and told me the class to teach.” “Get textbooks 2 days before the beginning of class.” “Forgot to order my textbooks.” “Did not know that the curriculum was changed.”
4. Do you have a long-time relationship with your institution?	“I have been with Everest now for 3 years and ASA just under a year.” “I have been with my institution for about six years and a half.”
5. Are the institutions investing in the professional growth of adjuncts?	“Once in a while, [with] the in-house professional development.” “They do not take the initiatives.” “Always ask you to take some courses.”
6. How would you describe your sense of recognition and contribution to the school?	“[Director of education] stopped me in the elevator to tell me what a great job [I was doing]. Before that, I was invisible.”

7. Do you have any feeling of isolation in your institution?

“We are all involved”

“Opportunity to get involved and not to feel isolated.”

“Folks don’t really know that I am still practicing.”

“Been mistaken as a student.”

8. How would describe your connection with the school?

“First-time instructor in the school; I was very disconnected.”

“Teaching for three months before I could get my email.”

“We get along with everyone including adjuncts.”

“Usually get email set up within one week.”

“Adjuncts at my school are involved.”

9. How was your orientation as a new instructor?

“First started, I received do’s and don’ts from HR.”

“I did not have orientation.”

“Requirement to have orientation; very detailed orientation.”

