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Academic Leadership Journal

Adjuncts in the Academy: Ethical Issues

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Sally gets up at 6:00 a.m. in order to complete her forty-five minute commute to one of her classes as an adjunct professor. Even though she requested a Tuesday/Thursday teaching schedule, she has been assigned two Monday/Wednesday/Friday courses. One begins at 8:00 a.m.; the other is scheduled to start at 12:00 p.m. During the three interim hours, Sally has no office, so if she is to be accessible to her students at all, she must sit in the library and hope they can find her. Sally also teaches four courses at another institution of higher learning. There, she is given an office which she shares with three other instructors. Working at these two institutions, Sally is able to survive financially, but she does not enjoy the benefits of full-time employees. For example, Sally has no health insurance or retirement package.

On the day that she was hired, Sally was handed a pre-printed syllabus for each course that she teaches. She has absolutely no control over which textbook she may use in the classroom. All of these decisions are made by a committee of full-time instructors, who, ironically, are free to use any textbook they wish.

Another concern of Sally's is the fact that she has virtually no time to spend with classes outside of instruction time. She gives her students her email address on the course syllabi and responds immediately on the rare occasions that they actually contact her electronically; however, she feels that practice is woefully inferior to the face-to-face contact from which students often benefit with full-time instructors. Some full-time instructors are even openly hostile towards her because she is not required to advise students or serve on committees, as they are. Why should the academy care about Sally's plight? Increasingly, Sally's experiences are becoming the rule, rather than the exception.

Hickman (1998) states, "Adjuncts and part-time professors, once a stopgap solution to unexpected enrollment or a temporary fix for lack of expertise in a particular academic field, now account for nearly

half of all American professors. And this development has changed the nature of higher education, mostly for the worse? (p. 15). Zabel (2000) states that at community colleges in 1992, ?Sixty-nine percent of the new hires were part-timers? (p. 33). Although part-timers make for added flexibility and big savings, they also make for fewer job opportunities for full-time professors. Another cause for the influx of adjuncts in the academy is the refusal of full-time professors to teach large, introductory-level sections of core courses (?Adjuncts in Academe,? 1997).

The hiring of adjunct, or part-time, instructors raises the following ethical issues for administrators of higher education: salary/benefits, instructor workloads, and campus involvement.

Salary/Benefits Issues

Hickman (1998) writes that the average (part-time) salary for one course is \$1,500. In Texas community colleges, this number varies from \$800 per course at Western Texas College to \$2,100 at Blinn College (?Compensation,? 2000). Zabel (2000) explains, ?Though rates of pay vary widely, most part-timers make around \$2,500 per course. At eight courses over two semesters?a heavy load by full-timer standards?that?s only \$20,000 per year? (p. 34). Scarff (2000) registers the following complaint:

Last fall I taught four freshman-composition courses at two colleges: one state, one private. At these schools, a full-time professor usually teaches five courses in a whole year. From August to December, I made \$7,000 teaching a load almost equal to a full-time professor?s, for which he or she would usually earn a minimum of \$45,000. If I divided my pay by the number of hours I worked, it would be well below the minimum wage (p. 10).

Zabel (2000) discusses the plight of the adjuncts of Northeastern University in Boston. At this institution, part-time instructors average \$2,100 per course. Full-time instructors earn nearly \$7,000 per course. Hickman (1998) writes, ?By paying adjuncts a few thousand dollars a course and by keeping benefits to a minimum, institutions can save 60 to 75 percent on faculty costs?the same logic behind corporate downsizing? (p. 15). Zabel (2000) states that most part timers have no health insurance or retirement benefits. According to a publication from the NEA (1989), ?Part-time faculty are paid lower salaries and often receive no benefits. Full-time temporary faculty may receive benefits, but are usually paid on the low end of the salary schedule. They often have no clerical support or office space, and are usually ineligible for professional development programs, grants, and sabbaticals? (p. 2). One very important benefit that full-time

professors possess, and adjuncts are not given, is job security. Avakian (1995) states, "Adjunct faculty members are hired on a semester basis with no guarantee of continuing employment from one semester to the next" (p. 35).

Workload Issues

Certainly, workload creates serious concerns for both adjunct instructors and their administrators. Scarff (2000) states that in each of her four courses each semester the students write five essays plus a research paper. They are also required to rewrite at least two of them. She reasons, "If I wasn't prepping for a class or driving to a class or teaching a class or meeting with students, I was reading papers, rereading papers and marking papers. I wrote comments, and I deliberated for some time before assigning grades" (p. 10).

Ludlow (1999) asserts that the maximum section size for a part-time instructor is often larger than the maximum section size for full-time instructors. She makes the following request of her readers:

Consider that the majority of courses taught by "non-regular" faculty are "service courses"—lower division and introductory-level courses that fulfill college and university requirements and department and program prerequisites—and that these courses often have larger enrollment numbers per section than the courses reserved for tenure-track professors. It becomes clear that the role of these "non-regular" faculty is crucial to the economic state of an institution (p. 11).

Hickman (1998) writes that although students might sometimes enjoy having instructors who are not completely submerged in their research, this fact could backfire for the students. As adjuncts focus on teaching, sometimes in many different institutions, they have no time left to pursue research interests. Therefore, they fall behind in their respective fields, which inevitably affects what they teach. He further states, "Adjuncts frequently receive less institutional support—email accounts, secretarial and computer services, peer review—than their full-time colleagues do. And, without these resources, even the most talented professors teach at a distinct disadvantage" (p. 15).

Campus Involvement

Arguably, the most important ethical issue dealing with adjuncts in the academy is campus involvement, or more appropriately, the lack of campus involvement. Volz (1996) states, "Full-time faculty see students outside of class, but part-time adjuncts are only paid to teach and may not be able to put as much effort and time into preparing for classes"

(p. 3). Scarff (2000) agrees with this assertion and adds, "Adjuncts are so busy juggling jobs that they're underavailable to students who, at private institutions, can pay as much as \$30,000 for tuition, room, and board. Students need teachers who are accessible, teachers who have permanent offices and time to spend in them" (p. 10). She further advises, "I don't want to put adjuncts out of work, but if I were a student looking for a college, I'd ask about full-time-to-adjunct-faculty ratios. Full-time professors aren't necessarily better teachers than adjuncts, but they have more time—they're there to stay" (p. 10). This issue raises serious questions about fairness, both to the adjunct and to the student he or she teaches.

Hickman (1998) also addresses this situation. He claims that it is very difficult for "under-resourced, overworked" adjuncts to effectively serve their students. For example, giving a student individual attention is a component of excellent teaching.

However, forty-one percent of adjunct professors have no office hours. Nine percent of full-time faculty have no office hours. He further claims that the adjuncts do want to individualize instruction for students; they simply do not have the time to consider that as an option. Avakian (1995) concurs with this assessment and adds, "Adjunct faculty members complain there is little time or available office space for them to meet or mentor students. Nonetheless, committed and conscientious adjunct faculty members insist they are available for advising and nurturing students. They are also ready to assume noninstructional duties" (p. 36). Certainly, all of these factors must affect the quality of instruction. Even the most conscientious adjunct instructor simply may not be able to address a student's concern when he or she needs it to be addressed. Part-time instructors do their best to serve students; however, the task overwhelms many, if not most of them.

In many cases, part-time instructors do not have the luxury of forming relationships with their colleagues who are hired full-time. Neither do they have many opportunities for developing professional relationships with other adjuncts. Many times, full-time instructors resent the influx of part-time teachers as illustrated in the following quote: "Permanent faculty members fear that program continuity is compromised since some adjunct faculty members lack teaching experience, and others are inferior teachers who expect either too little or too much of students" (Avakian, 1995, p. 36).

Another ethical concern for the administrators of institutions that employ part-time faculty is the lack of representation that adjuncts

are normally given in the decision-making process. The NEA advises, "Temporary faculty are commonly excluded from department meetings, committees, and academic senates. They find it difficult to meet students outside the classroom because they frequently lack office space. Their marginal status in departments makes it difficult for them to be well-informed about degree programs and required course work" (p. 2).

Avakian (1995) writes that for several years, adjunct professors have been accused of not being interested in participating in the life of the institution, or for that matter, even being supportive of the institution. Some full-time faculty members complain that adjuncts are far less committed to the institution than full-time faculty members. The reality, however, is that adjunct instructors generally wish to be more involved in campus issues. Time does not allow them this luxury. Even if attending sporting events, concerts, or other extra-curricular activities is out of the question, many adjunct professors do try to keep abreast of these activities on their campuses.

Adjuncts also need to be asked to serve on committees. Whether it be advising students, helping with registration, or serving on curriculum committees (where part-timers are woefully underrepresented), adjuncts need this opportunity to get involved. It is true that many part-timers will be forced to turn down these committee assignments due to lack of time; however, the ones who can accept them will benefit both the institution and the students. Some department heads may be surprised to find that part-timers, though very busy, may accept service on a decision-making body simply because they have felt so isolated and alienated from these processes for so long.

Summary

What should community college and university administrators do about these ethical issues of adjunct instructors? Most people agree that full-time instructors are much more beneficial to the institution in every way (except financially) than part-time instructors. However, administrators must balance this information with the fact that part-timers are much more appealing than full-timers when contemplating budget considerations. Perhaps Avakian (1995) sums it up when she asserts, "Administrators have been persuaded that something must and will be done [about this dichotomy]. But, they concede, it is often easier said than done" (p. 36).

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