Adjunct versus Full-Time Faculty:
Comparison of Student Outcomes in the Online Classroom

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Abstract

Interrelated to the growth of online learning programs is the increasing reliance on adjunct faculty to teach these courses. This surge in the number of courses taught by adjunct faculty members has sparked debate concerning the relative effectiveness of adjunct versus full-time faculty. The current study examines student performance as a function being taught by either adjunct or full-time online faculty. Findings reveal a performance and satisfaction advantage for students in the course sections taught by full-time online faculty. Implications include the need for universities to examine faculty development, support, incentives, and community for online adjunct faculty in order to ensure excellence across all modes of instruction.

Keywords: adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, online teaching, faculty development, student learning, student performance, student satisfaction

Introduction

Economic challenges over the past decade are changing the face of higher education. In the words of Hayes (2010), "as the economy continues to stagger, universities are forced to respond to increasing numbers of students knocking at their virtual doors in search of online classes" (p. 17). This increased demand has been welcomed by a growing number of universities who see online education as a means of balancing their own budgets through increased revenue at decreased expense.

This emerging trend is a function of simple economics. During periods of economic stress, individuals seek ways to maximize their income potential with the least financial burden. Online courses provide individuals the opportunity to seek education and enhance marketability without impacting current employment schedules. Simultaneously, online courses provide universities the opportunity to offer courses without many of the traditional overhead costs associated with physical classrooms such as utilities, maintenance, and so on (although it is also worth noting that some online courses may require special equipment or technical assistance that can impact costs). In addition, free from the constraints imposed by the limitations of classroom space or scheduling time, potential revenue streams can be stretched even further by offering an increased number of online course sections.

As a by-product of these complementary market forces, many universities are offering more online courses than their traditional full-time faculty are able to teach; as such, growing online programs are increasingly relying on adjunct (also referred to as "part-time," "casual," or "sessional") faculty to facilitate online course offerings (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Lyons, 2007). This surge in the number of courses taught by adjunct faculty members has sparked debate concerning the relative effectiveness of adjunct versus traditional full-time faculty. While this debate is not new or unique to online education, the rapidly increasing number of adjunct faculty facilitating online classes fosters renewed interest in the issue.

Literature Review

The last decade has seen a steady increase in the rate of online courses, with online enrollments growing at a substantially faster rate than overall enrollments in higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Bettinger & Long, 2010). As indicated by The Sloan Consortium's annual survey (Allen & Seaman, 2008), 66% of institutions in the United States report an increased demand for new online courses, and 73% indicate increased demand for existing online offerings. These demands are being met primarily through the use of adjunct instructors to teach the increasing online course offerings.

According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), 48% of instructional faculty in degree-granting institutions in the United States are adjunct; the trend toward increasing numbers of adjuncts holds true across an international analysis of higher education as well (Cowley, 2010; Gottschalk & McEachern, 2010; Husbands, 1998; Knight, Baume, Tait, & Yorke, 2007; Smith & Coombe, 2006; Tait, 2002). While research identifies applied perspective, critical expertise, and real-world experience as advantages to instruction by adjunct faculty (Berry, 1999; Cowley, 2010; Lyons, 1999, 2007; Peters, Jackson, Andrew, Halbomb, & Salamonson, 2011; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009), the more commonly discussed advantage to adjunct faculty emphasizes the financial benefits to the university (Benjamin, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Wyles, 1998). Simply stated, adjunct faculty teach for less money than traditional tenure-track faculty (National Education Association, n.d.). In addition, reliance on adjunct faculty provides universities with increased scheduling flexibility that allows the university to add or cancel courses in response to enrollment numbers (Berry, 1999; Rahman, 2001). Similarly, since adjunct pay is dependent upon actual course offerings (rather than annual contract) universities can avoid paying salaries for courses that are cancelled due to low enrollments.

Reflecting on the lower salaries received by adjunct faculty, it is not surprising that Shiffman (2009) found job security, advancement, and benefits were of least importance to adjunct faculty. Rather, adjunct faculty are motivated by the intrinsic rewards of teaching (Knight et al., 2007; Maguire, 2005; Schroeder, 2008) and report that the joy of teaching, personal satisfaction, and flexible work schedule were the most common motivations for online teaching (Shiffman, 2009). On the flip side of these benefits, adjunct faculty report feeling less respected and more isolated than their full-time counterparts (Dobbins, 2011; Jensen & Morgan, 2009).

Within this framework, it is important to note that while these findings may hold true for a portion of part-time faculty, some scholars caution against a "one-size-fits-all conceptualization of part-time faculty" (Wagoner, 2007, p. 26). Specifically, Wagoner posits that there are two types of adjunct faculty: (1) highly skilled scholars employed full time outside of academe with close ties to the private sector; and (2) less-skilled scholars with traditional academic backgrounds and aspirations who seek full-time faculty appointments. Recognizing these differences, while a portion of adjunct faculty is motivated by intrinsic rewards, there is also a subpopulation for which the monetary implications, status, and isolation of part-time employment are more problematic. Echoing these findings, Gottschalk and McEachern (2010) report an increase of adjunct faculty who are working at multiple institutions but seek job security through a permanent, full-time academic position. Similarly, Husbands (1998) challenges any assumptions being made about the nature of adjunct faculty as "there is still remarkably little nation-level information about their [adjunct faculty] numbers or upon the variety of their employment and contractual circumstances, let alone about their own views on the nature of their employment" (p. 259).

In addition to the intrinsic benefits and monetary implications to the adjunct faculty member, online students (primarily non-traditional learners) report that the real-world, applied expertise of adjunct faculty, along with their evening/weekend availability, are more amenable to their expectations. Online learners want faculty who are actively working in the real world, flexible, and aligned with customer-service orientations of education (Lyons, 2007; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). As such, the flexibility offered through technology-mediated educational environments creates a new pool of part-time faculty venturing into online education as a complement to their primary career path (Bates, 2005; Bates & Poole, 2003).

[Lazerson (2010)](#) observes that "the shift to part-time faculty members, already under way during the last two decades, is accelerating, and almost no one knows the consequences" (para. 12). The purpose of the current investigation is to compare student learning outcomes in an online course when identical content is taught by either an adjunct or full-time online faculty.

Methods

A single target class, *University Foundations* (UNV), was selected for in-depth analysis to compare student performance between online course sections taught by an adjunct instructor or a full-time instructor. UNV is a required, introductory level course (within a 4-year bachelor's degree program) designed to prepare students to be effective learners in the college setting. As such, topics include an introduction to the learning management system, academic skills, goal setting, time management, research, reading, plagiarism, and an overview of specific University policies, expectations, and resources.

All sections of the target UNV course were taught in an online format. The course is 7 weeks in duration and is organized into weekly, time-limited, asynchronous modules. All modules contain online lecture information (primarily text-based overviews with embedded multimedia supplements), discussion activities, and homework assignments. The instructional content, activities, and assessments are identical between all sections of the course. Similarly, the final course grade for all sections is based on a common rubric and with identical objectives across all faculty and course sections. Beyond the shared core structure of the course, faculty individualize instruction through three primary avenues: (1) inclusion of supplemental course content; (2) interaction with students; and (3) nature of feedback. As such, while all faculty begin with an identical course structure (including basic content, assignments, and grading criteria), there is considerable variability in how faculty implement this common curriculum to foster student learning.

Prior to teaching online, all faculty (full-time and adjunct) are required to complete a 3-week, asynchronous faculty training program covering best practices in online instruction, online pedagogy, course management, and University policy. While teaching the online course, faculty are required to interact regularly in the asynchronous discussion boards, provide written feedback on all assignments, assign grades using provided rubrics, post supplemental instructional content, and facilitate management and interaction of the overall course. All courses are monitored by the online faculty services department to ensure adherence to best practices in online teaching and University policy.

Per the course assignment process of the University, students enrolling in UNV are randomly assigned to a course section; students do not have the opportunity to select their course section and/or instructor. As such, student characteristics do not vary systematically with the assignment to a course section taught by either an adjunct or full-time faculty member. This random assignment process limits concerns of aggregation and endogeneity bias that often plague research examining the impact of adjunct faculty (see [Bettinger & Long, 2010](#) or [Johnson, 2011](#) for a comprehensive discussion of these issues).

To compare student performance between those learning from online adjunct faculty and those learning from full-time faculty teaching exclusively online courses, composite outcome data was generated from archival records obtained through the reporting feature of the learning management system. The following outcome measures were collected:

- *Successful completion rate:* This represents the percentage of students who received a final course grade of D, which equates to 1.0 on a 4.0 grade point average (GPA) scale, or higher.

- *Failure rate:* This is the proportion of students who received a final course grade of F (0.0 on a 4.0 GPA scale).

- *Withdrawal rate:* This is the proportion of students who withdrew from the course by the 15th day of the semester; students who withdraw from the course do not receive a final course grade.

- *Failure–withdrawal combined rate:* This is the proportion of students who originally enrolled in the course but did not receive any course credit for completion.

- *Course grade:* This represents the grade point average of all class members on a 4.0 scale for this course.

- *Grade variance:* This is the dispersion of the course grades calculated using the population variance formula.

- *Continued enrollment rate:* This is the percentage of students enrolling in a subsequent course.

- *End-of-course satisfaction rate:* This is the weighted average of all student responses (on a scale from 1, low, to 5, high) on the final course evaluation; for example, if the weighted average for a given instructor is 4 out of 5, the end-of-course satisfaction rate is 80%.

Outcome measures represent the mean (reported as a percentage) across all sections.

During the two target semesters, 396 sections of UNV were offered in an online format delivered via the ANGEL learning management system. There were 199 sections (including 3,351 students) that were taught by adjunct online instructors and 197 sections (including 3,660 students) that were taught by full-time online instructors. Table 1 provides the average class size, number of sections, number of instructors, instructors' degrees, and students per semester.

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of faculty*

Semester	Faculty Status	No. of Unique Instructors	Avg. No. of Sections per Instructor	Faculty Degree		Total No. of Sections	Total No. of Students	Avg. Class Size
				Master's	Doctorate			
Fall 2010	Adjunct	91	1.69	79%	21%	154	2,510	16.30
	Full time	17	4.12	100%	0%	70	1,144	16.34
Spring 2011	Adjunct	34	1.32	91%	9%	45	841	18.69
	Full time	29	4.38	100%	0%	127	2,516	19.81
Overall	Adjunct	104	1.91	85%	15%	199	3,351	16.84
	Full time	29	6.79	100%	0%	197	3,660	18.58

None of the instructors in the target investigation teach face-to-face courses at the physical campus. The adjunct online faculty are representative of typical adjunct faculty in that most teach adjunct courses online as a supplement to their full-time employment. The full-time online faculty are full-time employees of the University whose faculty position requires them to work traditional 8-hour days, 5-day work weeks at a designated teaching center (full-time online faculty work a 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday to Friday schedule). The sole obligations of the full-time online faculty are to teach online courses; unlike traditional campus-based faculty, the full-time online faculty have no service or research obligations as a function of their faculty position. Full-time online faculty simultaneously teach four online courses during each 8-week semester.

Results

An initial factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) examining the interaction between semester (Fall 2010 versus Spring 2011) and faculty status (adjunct versus full-time) revealed no significant effect on any of the outcome variables; as such, the data were collapsed between the two semesters, and subsequent between-groups ANOVA examined the impact of faculty status (adjunct versus full-time) on successful completion rate, failure rate, withdrawal rate, failure–withdrawal combined rate, course grade, grade variance, continued enrollment rate, and end-of-course satisfaction rate.

Findings reveal a significant main effect for all student outcome variables: Successful Completion Rate, $F(1, 394) = 74.08$, $p < .001$; Failure Rate, $F(1, 394) = 60.91$, $p < .001$; Withdrawal Rate, $F(1, 394) = 7.33$, $p = .007$; Failure–Withdrawal Combined Rate, $F(1, 394) = 74.08$, $p < .001$; Course Grade, $F(1, 394) = 80.00$, $p < .001$; Grade Variance, $F(1, 394) = 9.05$, $p = .003$; Continued Enrollment Rate, $F(1, 394) = 7.32$, $p = .007$; and End-of-Course Satisfaction Rate, $F(1, 394) = 70.36$, $p < .001$. See Table 2 for the complete ANOVA results.

A comparison of the means on each student outcome variable favored the performance of full-time online faculty members over the adjunct online faculty. Table 3 provides an overview of the descriptive data highlighting student learning and performance; data include successful completion rate, failure rate, withdrawal rate, failure–withdrawal combined rate, course grade, grade variance, continued enrollment rate, and end-of-course satisfaction rate.

Students learning from full-time online faculty were more likely to successfully complete the course (and likewise, showed a lower failure rate) and were less likely to withdraw from the course. In addition, students of full-time online faculty received a slightly higher mean course grade and were more likely to continue their enrollment into the next course. Complementing results of the learning and performance variables, those students being taught by a full-time online faculty member were more satisfied with their online learning experience.

Table 2. *Comparison of student outcome measures between full-time and adjunct faculty*

Student Outcome Measures		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Successful Completion Rate	Between Groups	13,040.79	1	13,040.79	74.08*
	Within Groups	69,358.24	394	176.04	
	Total	82,399.02	395		
Failure Rate	Between Groups	8,781.60	1	8,781.60	60.91*
	Within Groups	56,807.74	394	144.18	
	Total	65,589.34	395		
Withdrawal Rate	Between Groups	419.68	1	419.68	7.33*
	Within Groups	22,569.42	394	57.28	
	Total	22,989.10	395		
Failure–Withdrawal Combined Rate	Between Groups	13,040.79	1	13,040.79	74.08*
	Within Groups	69,358.24	394		
	Total	82,399.02	395		
Course Grade	Between Groups	22.90	1	22.90	80.00*
	Within Groups	112.75	394		
	Total	135.65	395		
Grade Variance	Between Groups	3.54	1	3.54	9.05*
	Within Groups	154.15	394		
	Total	157.69	395		
Continued Enrollment Rate	Between Groups	1,057.59	1	1,057.59	7.32*
	Within Groups	56,923.88	394		
	Total	57,981.46	395		
End-of-Course Satisfaction Rate	Between Groups	3,783.13	1	3,783.13	70.36*
	Within Groups	21,184.32	394		
	Total	24,967.45	395		

*$p < .01$

Table 3. *Mean student outcome scores as a function of faculty status*

Semester	Faculty Status	Successful Completion Rate	Failure Rate	Withdrawal Rate	F–W Comb. Rate	Avg. Course Grade	Grade Variance	Cont. Enroll Rate	End-of-Course Satisfaction Rate
Fall 2010	Adjunct	62.73%	26.73%	10.54%	37.27%	2.24	2.16	72.76%	85.12%
	Full time	73.62%	17.42%	8.96%	26.39%	2.71	2.02	76.76%	91.47%
Spring 2011	Adjunct	65.68%	26.10%	8.22%	34.32%	2.28	2.27	74.31%	87.82%
	Full time	75.57%	17.03%	7.40%	24.43%	2.74	1.98	76.17%	92.16%
Overall	Adjunct	63.40%	26.59%	10.01%	36.60%	2.25	2.18	73.11%	85.73%
	Full time	74.88%	17.17%	7.95%	25.12%	2.73	1.99	76.38%	91.91%

Discussion

Across all learning, performance, and satisfaction variables, a consistent difference was found favoring students learning from full-time online faculty compared to adjunct online faculty; not only did students learn more (as measured by higher course grades), but they were also more satisfied with their online learning experience. These findings are particularly interesting with respect to other research (Johnson, 2011; Sonner, 2000) suggesting that adjunct faculty often grade more leniently due to perceptions of job insecurity. Contrary to these findings, the current investigation found that despite the transient nature of the adjunct position, adjunct faculty assigned lower overall course grades than did their full-time counterparts. Aggregating this finding with the nature of the online course (identical course structure, assignments, and grading rubrics) provides support for the assumption that differences in final course grades is a function of student learning (as opposed to a by-product of grade variance or inflation).

Key to the current investigation, the core content of the target course was identical (same course structure, assignments, and grading rubrics); yet, it is clear via the findings that the way in which a faculty member taught the course had a significant impact on the student experience. As such, effectiveness of the learning experience cannot be a function of the curriculum or the online course design, but rests in the choices, behaviors, and actions of faculty. In online programs that utilize a standardized course design, these individualized faculty choices are most apparent via: (1) inclusion of supplemental course content; (2) interaction with students; and (3) nature of feedback. Central to the current investigation, then, is an

examination of the differences in the nature of an adjunct versus a full-time position that leads to differential choices in how one facilitates and implements an online course.

Within this comparative framework, it is important to stress that this is not a criticism of the quality of adjunct online faculty, but rather to examine the differences between the full-time and adjunct online teaching models that may impact the student learning experience. While integration and utilization of an increasing number of full-time online faculty may be desirable, the reality for most universities is that economic and administrative constraints mandate ongoing reliance on adjunct online faculty. As such, it is beneficial to examine naturally occurring differences in the work environments of full-time online faculty compared to adjunct online faculty to identify key initiatives to more effectively support a geographically diverse, part-time teaching body. As Tipple (2010) highlights, adjunct faculty are not typically mainstreamed into the traditional faculty body and may be demotivated by perceptions that the institution does not treat them with the same respect, prestige, and investment as is granted to full-time faculty. Adjunct faculty often report feeling marginalized in the higher education setting due to lack of resources, administrative support, technical assistance, and significant salary disparity (Galliard-Kenney, 2006; Gappa & Leslie, 1993, 1997; Maguire, 2005; National Education Association, n.d.; Rifkin, 1998); perceptions of marginalization may be intensified in the online environment in which adjunct faculty are working in geographic isolation. As such, it may be lack of access to training/professional development, differential motivation, variability in time-on-task, and/or lack of professional community that are the driving factors behind differences in student performance (Brindley, Zawacki, & Roberts, 2006). Key to fostering student success may lie in adapting university structure, policy, and expectations to be more deliberately supportive of online adjunct faculty or in creating unique full-time positions that target the online learning experience.

Universities seeking to examine the impact of various faculty populations must examine access to professional development opportunities. Historically, faculty development and training initiatives have been geared primarily toward face-to-face, full-time faculty. As such, any differences in student performance may be a function of the resources and professional development opportunities made available to the faculty teaching the course (Green, 2007; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003; Sixl-Daniell, Williams, & Wong, 2006). In addition to the opportunities available, one must also consider the incentives of each faculty to participate in those professional development initiatives that are offered. While full-time faculty may have incentives for participation in professional development built into their position, these same incentives may not be relevant for adjunct faculty. In addition, the timing and format of professional development activities may not be amenable to the schedules of a geographically dispersed adjunct population. Blodgett's (2008) research echoes these concerns, reporting that online faculty desired increased training in learning management systems, online pedagogy, university support resources, and instructional design.

Similarly, full-time and adjunct faculty may have differential motivation for their investment in the teaching and learning process. Part of this motivation includes differences in the evaluation process, annual reviews, and/or monetary incentives associated with longevity of employment. Faculty employed full-time may be more likely to invest in their teaching as it is an integral component of their overall annual evaluation of performance; as such, exemplary teaching performance may have opportunities for recognition and/or advancement. In contrast, the nature of the adjunct position generally dictates that employment is semester-based with minimal opportunity for employment security, longevity, or advancement regardless of the quality of their teaching. This is not to imply that adjunct faculty are not invested in their positions or that they lack concern about their teaching, rather there may be a difference in the extrinsic motivation to excel in their teaching.

Per the nature of the adjunct teaching, the majority of adjunct faculty teach as a supplement to their regular, full-time employment (Shiffman, 2009). As such, adjunct faculty may simply have less time available to invest in the online classroom. Similarly, there may be differences in the time required to respond to student posts, grade assignments, or provide feedback. Additional research is needed to determine if there are relative differences in time-on-task in the classroom, response times, and/or quality differences in interactions provided by adjunct or full-time faculty. And, if any differences do exist, whether or not these differences can account for variations in student learning from full-time faculty compared to online faculty. Related to this issue, online adjunct faculty (due to the nature of course assignments being made as a function of enrollment numbers) may not receive sufficient planning time between the time a course contract is issued and the start of a course (Dobbins, 2011). This decrease in course preparation time may also negatively impact adjunct faculty's ability to impact student learning.

In the current investigation, full-time faculty all taught their online courses from a unified teaching center; as such, the full-time faculty had a community of scholars present (both in time and location) while teaching. In contrast, adjunct faculty taught their online courses from varied physical locations as well as varied time schedules. It is possible that the community of teachers (all focusing on the same course) provided a network of ideas, resources, and/or support that facilitated the instructional process. As Eib and Miller (2006) indicate, online faculty lack diversity in their instructional practices as the isolation of their position limits exposure to novel or innovative approaches. Research is needed to determine the impact of a teaching community on student outcomes and whether or not the lack of a physical teaching community impacts the quality of instruction provided by adjuncts in the online environment (this impact may be unique to the online setting as research on the quality of face-to-face adjunct instruction is unable to address the isolation experienced by online faculty). Dobbins (2011) focuses on these feelings of isolation in a reflective essay explaining the unique challenges of conducting scholarly teaching research as an adjunct faculty who "experiences exclusion from the core business of the wider programme, department and university" (p. 3). Echoing these concerns, Baron-Nixon (2007) discusses the need for universities to integrate adjunct faculty beyond exclusive emphasis on teaching in order to foster an engaged educational experience for students.

Implications and Limitations

The current investigation is a preliminary step in examining the relative impact of adjunct faculty compared to full-time faculty in the online environment. While considerable research has provided a generalized comparison of the quality of adjunct versus full-time instruction in the face-to-face classroom (Ghaffari-Samai, Davis, & De Filippis, 1994; Hellman, 1998; Jaschik, 2006; Landrum, 2009; Wollert & West, 2000), there is little to ensure that these findings generalize to the online classroom. In addition, the increasing reliance on adjunct faculty in the online setting necessitates continued assurance of quality standards.

The student outcome differences indicated in the current investigation favor full-time faculty instruction over that of adjunct faculty. While this finding provides some evidence that the nature of the full-time faculty position is more likely to promote student learning, the results need to be interpreted in light of the current study design. One of the key limitations of this study rests in the inability to randomly assign instructors to either the adjunct or full-time position; this self-selection into faculty population leads to a host of questions surrounding causes for measured differences in resultant student learning. One could theorize that more effective educators are more likely to secure the full-time positions; this argument is supported by Wagoner's (2007) discussion on the bimodal effectiveness, value, and impact of adjunct faculty. But, as also highlighted by Wagoner, the true impact of adjunct faculty may be masked by study designs that look at the overall adjunct population as an aggregate. Examining the mean impact of the adjunct population may fail to consider differential impact of a heterogeneous part-time faculty population that includes lesser-qualified adjuncts who are seeking full-time employment as compared to highly qualified adjuncts that maintain full-time careers outside of academe. As Gottschalk and McEachern (2010) point out, shifts in the economy are changing the profile of adjunct faculty; their research reports an increase in adjunct faculty who are employed in multiple part-time positions and seek job security through a more traditional academic appointment. Future research is needed to determine the profile of online adjunct faculty and to examine differential effectiveness as a function of their motivation, qualifications, and experience (Cowley, 2010).

Beyond potential differences in the individuals who hold adjunct teaching positions, it is equally possible, as the authors have posited, that differential student outcomes are not a function of the individual faculty members, but rather exist as a by-product of the working conditions unique to online adjunct faculty. There are a number of naturally occurring differences between an adjunct and a full-time teaching position; specifically, adjunct faculty may have fewer opportunities for professional development, decreased motivation for demonstrating teaching excellence, less time available to devote to teaching, and decreased connection to the professional community. In addition, many electing to teach in an adjunct role may have less instructional experience and may lack any systematic training in pedagogy or andragogy (Brendtro & Hegge, 2000; Coombe & Clancy, 2002; Peters et al., 2011). These differences may be intensified even more in an online environment in which adjunct faculty are working in geographic isolation. As such, universities need to carefully examine differences in these factors within their own institutional practices, requirements, and expectations to address these unique challenges (Baron-Nixon, 2007; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009; Sixl-Daniell et al., 2006; Tipple, 2010).

Recommendations

To maximize the effectiveness of online adjunct faculty, universities must create an environment that recognizes values and supports the unique needs of this faculty population. Inherent in this shift is the need to create an institutional culture that aligns with the specialized conditions surrounding geographically dispersed, adjunct faculty. A number of recommendations to facilitate the potential effectiveness of remote, part-time faculty teaching online courses are given in the subsections below.

Foster an Integrated Faculty Body

Two primary conditions must be met in order to foster an integrated, collaborative faculty body: (1) adjuncts must be motivated to engage beyond their contracted course; and (2) opportunities for inclusion must be amenable to the circumstances surrounding a remote appointment. As such, it is not adequate to simply inform online adjuncts of departmental or university initiatives, but steps should be taken to ensure they are able to effectively participate (i.e., inclusion of tele-, video-, or web-conferencing options; scheduling at times to accommodate part-time schedules; inclusion of sufficient context to allow effective contribution to university initiatives; etc.). Along with increased opportunity, campus-based programs must shift attitudes to foster a culture in which the contributions of part-time faculty are respected and valued. Central to this paradigm shift is the need to connect adjunct faculty to the full-time faculty body through shared initiatives, dialogues, and collaborative efforts.

Implement Targeted Faculty Development Programming

Research (Knight et al., 2007) reveals that adjunct faculty report the two primary sources for developing their skills as teachers: (1) the academic environments (departments and teams) in which one works; and (2) reliance on their past experiences in educational settings. Recognizing these primary sources of professional development for part-time faculty, online adjuncts may be at a heightened disadvantage. Due to their time-limited, non-continuous academic appointments, they may lack a connection to the larger academic department. This dissociation is compounded by the geographic remoteness of their position. In addition, the relative novelty of online education may dictate that not all adjunct faculty have extensive personal experience with effective teaching and learning strategies in this modality. As evidence of these deficiencies, research finds that adjunct faculty report a lack of training on grading strategies (Smith & Coombe, 2006) and pedagogical/andragogical teaching strategies (Peters et al., 2011). To address these disparities, universities need to develop specific faculty development initiatives that target remote faculty. As such, not only should programming address issues of effective online instructional strategies but should be offered in a web-based, asynchronous manner that allows for participation outside of traditional work hours.

Enhance Communication

The dissociation reported by adjunct faculty results in many individuals working independently (Peters et al., 2011) with little understanding of their role in the broader institutional context. To effectively engage online adjunct faculty, it is essential to explicitly communicate the norms, standards, and other 'hidden cultures' relative to the department, program, or course (Smith & Coombe, 2006). As such, universities should provide detailed guidelines to enhance online adjuncts' holistic understanding of the role of each course within the program (Dobbins, 2011; Knight et al., 2007). This issue may be intensified for online programs in which the curriculum is developed and set by others outside the control of the instructor (Tait, 2002). Providing the broader context, rationale, and purpose of a course can assist online adjuncts in maximizing student learning through the sequencing of skills, knowledge, and abilities across the curriculum. In addition to communicating course-specific information, it is also important that online adjuncts have knowledge of support systems, structures, resources, and contacts (Knight et al., 2007); ensuring remote faculty are aware of the university resources available to students allows them to be more effective advocates for student success.

Examine Institutional Policies

Inherent in the course-by-course, contractual nature of the adjunct teaching position is a lack of expectation, incentive, or motivation for adjunct faculty to take advantage of professional development, collaboration, and service opportunities available through the university (Peters et al., 2011). Not only is it an issue of limited adjunct faculty investment, but research also indicates that universities are hesitant to increase demands or expectations about the amount, nature, and quality of adjunct teaching due to an awareness of the knowingly low pay (Smith & Coombe, 2006). Universities must examine alternate structures or policies that encourage adjunct faculty to invest their time, effort, and resources outside the confines of the class they are contracted to teach. For example, an incentive program could be developed

to offer priority course scheduling for online adjuncts who demonstrate an ongoing commitment to professional growth through participation in faculty development initiatives.

Conclusion

With no manipulations in place to control for the range of factors that may impact the effectiveness of full-time and adjunct faculty, the current study found a difference in student learning outcomes favoring students learning from full-time faculty members. These findings are not to suggest that adjunct faculty are less effective teachers; rather, it underscores potential discrepancies that may occur as a function of the naturally occurring disparity between the roles of those who teach adjunct compared to those who teach full time. To address this disparity, universities need to be diligent in supporting, integrating, and embracing adjunct faculty in policies, expectations, and support services. Specifically, the effectiveness of online adjunct faculty may be enhanced through dedicated attention to fostering an integrated faculty body, implementing targeted faculty development programming, enhancing communication, and examining institutional policies.

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