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### **Assessment of Professional Development Activities, Instructional Needs, and Methods of Delivery for Part-Time Technical and Occupational Faculty in U.S. Community Colleges**

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**Abstract:** This study describes the professional development activities and perceived instructional needs and best methods of delivering professional development opportunities for part-time occupational and technical program faculty within the community colleges in the U.S. Introduction to the policies and procedures of the college and/or department, introduction to other college faculty/staff, orientation to the course/classroom, and help in meeting administrative requirements were the professional development activities found to occur at least once a quarter or semester. The types of instructional help part-time faculty members were perceived to need most were: (a) identifying the learning characteristics of students, (b) alternating teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles, (c) participation in web-based instruction, and (d) participation in distance learning. It was discovered that professional development activities should be offered to part-time faculty at least once per semester or quarter using seminar discussions, group classroom activities, and computer assisted instruction or multi-media interaction as the preferred methods of delivery. An evening/night format and during the Fall were found to be the most suitable times to offer professional development opportunities and per diem and travel expenses should be provided to part-time faculty for participation in professional development activities.

#### **Introduction, Significance, and Statement of the Problem**

In the last 20 years community colleges have been confronted with an increasing number of part-time adult students and course offerings along with diminishing budgets (Galbraith & Shedd, 1990; Levine, 2001). In response to these trends as well as other factors, segments of higher education and especially community colleges, have resorted to utilizing part-time or adjunct faculty to a greater degree (Gappa & Leslie, 1997; Leslie, 1998; Ostertag, 1991). "The modern community college would be hard pressed to meet its comprehensive mission without relying upon a substantial part-time instructional work force" (Osborn, 1990, p. 17). Higher education's reliance on a part-time workforce, in conjunction with the increased attention to both the quality of teaching and the performance of students, has created a need for policies and practices for employing, managing, and professionally developing part-time, adjunct, and casual faculty members (Watters & Weeks, 1999).

Numerous community college courses have been taught by part-time faculty whose primary job responsibilities center outside the field of teaching. Many of these instructors have had no formal preparation in teaching skills prior to their employment as part-time career and technical educators (Pucel, Walsh, & Ross, 1978). The induction process of non-degreed vocational teachers has been unique in that the majority of these teachers are recruited from business and industry with generally little or no formal teacher preparation, and without the

benefit of a formal college education (National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1991). "Since part-timers provide so much of the instruction at community colleges, any comprehensive effort at improving instruction must include the part-time faculty" (Ostertag, 1991, p. 18). Professional development activities, needs, and methods of delivery for part-time occupational and technical community college faculty have not been known or available in a college by college, statewide, or national perspective or format. As such, information to understand the characteristics of the part-time community college faculty member, specifically, the kind, amount, and method of exposure to professional development activities that they receive or were perceived to need was deemed necessary.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Base and Related Literature**

The diversity of both part-time faculty characteristics and the institutions in which they teach was a major conclusion of the review of literature. Emmet (1981) stated there are two basic realities about part-time faculty: (a) all part timers are not alike in their motivations for employment, their work roles, or their career directions and (b) the reasons for employing part-time faculty differ among institutions and part-time employment in academe differs from that which is encountered in other work settings. This contingent workforce has provided institutions the flexibility to adjust to enrollment changes, fill temporary vacancies, teach specialized courses, and reduce faculty costs (Levine, 2001; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2001). The use of part-time faculty has also helped two-year institutions keep tuition costs as low as possible which helps fulfill their primary mission of maximizing access to higher educational opportunities (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 1995). NCES (2001) indicated that, in 1997, fully two-thirds (64%) of the faculty at public community colleges were part-time employees; this, in contrast to 1992 figures of 42%, reveals an increase of 22% in just five years.

Because the use of part-time teachers has increased and, "The quality of education depends largely on what happens when teachers meet students in the classroom" (Cross & Angelo, 1989, p. 24), postsecondary and adult education institutions need to develop guidelines to ensure the availability of support services for part-time teachers. Although community colleges have found part-time faculty attractive and necessary because of their flexibility, convenience, and lower rate of pay, college administrators have been concerned that part-time faculty may not be well-qualified, at least in the pedagogical context (Kelly, 1991). Additionally, the shortage of certified vocational teachers had led to hiring people directly from industry to fill vacant teaching positions. Although these industry-based teachers have the technical skills required in the workplace of their particular discipline, many often lack the instructional background and experience that enable them to manage the classroom and inspire learning (Brown, 2000). As Olson (1991) states, "Industrial/business experience continues to be seen as essential, whereas knowledge of teaching is seen only as desirable" (p. 341) If higher education is to maintain a balance between theory and praxis, the professional skills, contemporary experiences, and "real-world" focus of part-time academic staff needs to be identified and subsequently applied in concert with the ability to effectively teach (Watters & Weeks, 1999).

### Research Methods and Procedures

This study used descriptive survey research methodology (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). The target population for this study were the occupational education officers at community colleges in the 50 states of the U.S. The frame for the study was the American Association of Community Colleges' list of community college occupational education officers found in their 2001 membership directory. The accessible population was comprised of 101 individuals. The study included the entire population of interest as a census with no sampling techniques utilized using a survey instrument developed and administered by the researcher. Content and face validity were established using a panel of experts ( $n = 11$ ) chosen based on their knowledge and experience in descriptive survey research design, survey instruments and/or data collection, and the intricacies of the part-time faculty phenomenon in postsecondary community college education. Panel comments, input, and recommendations were considered and incorporated into the final instrument. Thirty-two occupational education officers or their equivalents were selected from the National Council for Occupational Education's (2000) membership directory to participate in a pilot study to establish the reliability of the survey instrument. A reliability coefficient of .70 was set *a priori* for this study and results of the pilot test provided Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .70 for all of the summated scales used in the survey instrument. Recommendations of satisfactory levels of reliability provided by Nunnally (1967) and Ary et al. (1996) led to the determination that the instrument was reliable. Dillman's (2000) Tailored Design Method applying the tenets of the social exchange theory and utilizing the five elements for achieving high response rates were the basic structural features around which the survey administration process was designed. After controlling for non-response error, it was determined that the data collected from the respondents used to generate the findings of this study can be generalized to the target population.

### Findings and Conclusions

Current professional development activities identified by respondents to occur at least once a quarter or semester focused on orientation to the policies and procedures of the college and/or department and the course/classroom, introduction to other college faculty/staff, and compliance with administrative requirements. The summated means for six teaching skills categories indicate that attention should be given to designing professional development programs and activities in course planning, instructional skills, classroom/student management, implementation of media, evaluation, and interaction skills. Special emphasis should be placed on professional development which addresses teaching and learning styles, teaching methods, and distance learning using the Internet and web-based technology. Regarding the ways in which professional development should be delivered to part-time faculty, respondents felt that part-time faculty would be willing to participate in *at least one* activity per quarter or semester and would most like to learn using seminar discussions, group classroom activities or some type of group formatted activity. Professional development activities for part-time faculty were perceived to be best scheduled to occur in the evening or at night, during the fall of the year, and in consideration of the distance and travel times which part-time faculty may encounter when choosing to participate. School staff at the program, division, or institutional level were indicated to most often provide part-time faculty professional development. Both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards were perceived to be important incentives to encourage part-time faculty to

attend professional development activities. Other job commitments, distance of travel, remuneration issues, personal motivation, and experience or inexperience as a teacher were also found to be factors which might interfere with part-time faculty member participation in professional development activities.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Concerning the part-time faculty member teaching skill needs identified in this study, the following recommendations are offered: (a) regarding course planning skills, some professional development would be beneficial in this area with special emphasis on *identifying the learning characteristics of students*; (b) some help is needed in the instructional skills category with specific assistance in *how to recognize and apply different teaching methods to accommodate student learning styles and paces of learning*; (c) management of the classroom and students is a subject which part-time faculty were perceived to need some help in developing; (d) the overall perceptions towards the implementation of media skills indicate that part-time faculty need some help in this area with special emphasis on *educational delivery using web-based instruction, distance learning techniques, and use of the Internet for webcasts or on-line discussions*; and (e) data collected regarding teaching skills focusing on evaluation and teacher/student interaction showed that some help was perceived to be needed by part-time faculty but no single factor of either category demands special attention.

Concerning the perceived best method(s) of delivering part-time professional development activities, at least one activity should be provided each academic year and attempts should be made to offer at least one activity per semester or quarter. Professional development activities should be formatted around a collective setting where direct communication is employed and, multi-media or computer-based delivery when distance technology techniques are more appropriate. Evenings and nights are the best time to schedule part-time faculty professional development activities and efforts should be made to provide professional development activities in the Fall when most, if not all, academic terms begin. Since distance and time of travel are considered barriers to both the decision to participate as well as interventions to actually attending professional development opportunities, community colleges should consider strategies to lessen this barrier/intervention. For instance, providing professional development activities which are repeated within a semester or quarter, developing technology based distance education materials and, off-campus or "satellite" delivery of professional development would be viable considerations to address the issue of time and distance of travel. Staff at the school or division level should continue to be utilized in delivering professional development activities with some consideration of how outside expertise may enrich the professional development of both part and full-time faculty. Both intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems should be assessed for their effectiveness in providing incentives for part-time faculty attendance at professional development activities and, a faculty member's commitment to their discipline and the teaching profession should be nurtured. Lastly, community college administrators should attempt to ensure that cost recovery mechanisms are in place to reduce or eliminate personal "out of pocket" expenses for part-time faculty who attend professional development activities.

Community colleges should establish a minimum standard of "help" which they think part-time faculty need in order to perform triage on which teaching skills should be provided in a professional development program. Community colleges should assess the disparities and

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similarities between what professional development activities they currently provide and the recommendations provided in this research to determine if changes are warranted and/or appropriate. Finally, a long-term and meaningful commitment of time, money, and personnel should be the first step to developing and designing professional development programs and activities which meet the needs of part-time community college faculty.

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