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Adjunct & Faculty Survey: Perceptions of Quality & Rigor

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Abstract

Seeking comprehensive feedback about adjunct faculty experiences at Fort Hays State University, the authors created an anonymous survey tool to inquire about full-time and adjunct faculty perceptions of a broad range of factors affecting adjuncts and the classes they teach. Results include valuable information about adjunct satisfaction, compensation, recruitment, orientation, and support, as well as perceptions of course and program quality. Findings suggest significant differences in perceptions of academic rigor and expectations of student clock-hours. Results were shared with the Adjunct Faculty Advisory Committee and will be used to make various recommendations to the Provost and Academic Council. Additional research is needed, to clarify factors which affect adjunct and full-time faculty perceptions.

Introduction

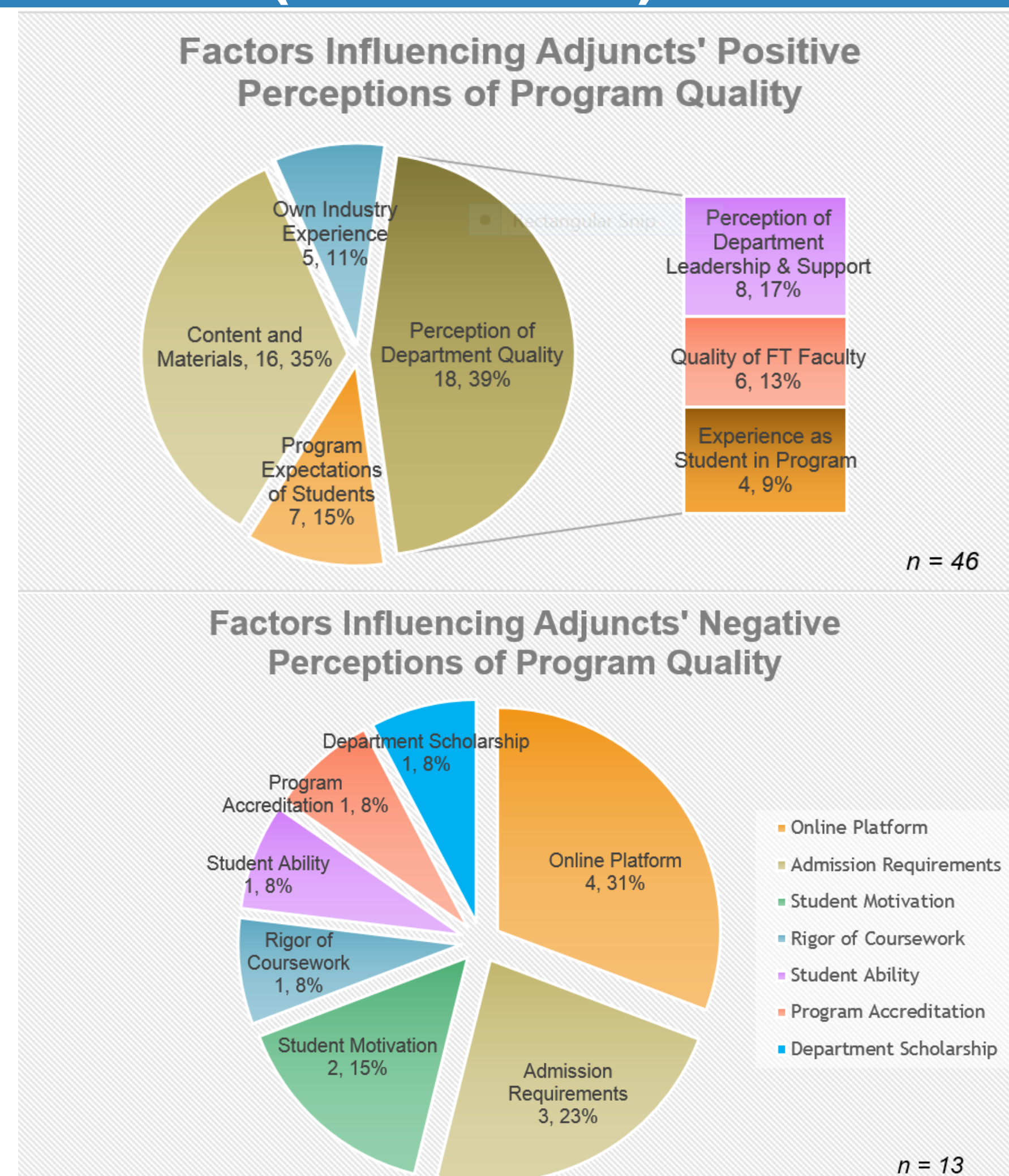
Universities are making increasing use of adjunct faculty in order to reduce costs and enter the online delivery of programs (Charfauros & Tierney, 1999). Previous research has indicated some differences in quality and satisfaction between courses taught by full-time faculty and adjuncts (Mueller, et. al. 2013). Bensimon, Ward, and Sanders (2000) reported that while there is a high probability of resulting effects on quality and rigor when adjuncts are used, this is not due to academic unpreparedness but rather due to hierarchical removes and the biased views of full-time faculty about adjuncts being second-class faculty members.

There is a critical need to better understand the needs and environment of adjunct faculty as universities seek to balance the needs of expanding online enrollment and issues of quality of instruction. This survey project seeks to understand the integration of adjunct faculty into the academic life of Fort Hays State University. This includes investigating the perceptions of adjuncts, full-time faculty, chairs and deans regarding the processes of recruiting, onboarding, support, instruction, and professional development for adjuncts; as well as perceptions about the quality and rigor of programs. The data collected in the Fall of 2017 has been analyzed using mixed methods protocols. It will be used to make reports and recommendations to the Provost at FHSU regarding those same processes, as well as to provide the basis for peer-reviewed publication in journals appropriate to the topic of supporting the academic life of adjunct instructors in higher education. This poster represents only a small portion of the data related to a comparison of adjunct and full-time faculty perceptions of program quality.

Methodology

Two surveys were constructed, approved by IRB, and administered to respective participant groups 1) adjunct faculty and 2) full-time faculty and administrators. Full-time faculty participants were only allowed to respond if they indicated knowledge of or responsibilities for adjunct faculty. The surveys were administered online through Qualtrics. The surveys contained both selected response and constructed response items, soliciting participant demographics and perceptions about satisfaction with work, support for adjuncts, program and teaching quality, expectations of rigor and engagement, and professional development needs. Ninety-eight surveys were returned from adjunct faculty and 67 surveys were returned by full-time faculty. Descriptive statistics were obtained for rating scale items using SPSS and constructed response items were coded with a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) using Quirkos software.

Results (Qualitative)



Results (Quantitative)

- Adjuncts and full-time faculty differ significantly in perceptions of course academic rigor.
- Adjuncts and full-time faculty differ significantly in expectations of weekly student clock hours spent per credit hour.

Item	Item Description	Mean (Adjuncts)	Mean (Faculty)	T Value (2-tailed)	Significance
Academic Rigor	How would you rate the expectations of academic rigor on students for courses you currently teach? *For full-time faculty: ...for courses taught by adjuncts in your department?	3.82	3.43	2.180	0.031 Significant
Academic Engagement	How would you rate your students' engagement with rigorous and challenging academic work? *For full-time faculty: How would you rate students' engagement with rigorous and challenging academic work within courses taught by adjuncts in your department?	3.52	3.22	1.736	0.085 Not significant
Clock Hours / Credit Hour	Which of the following best represents the approximate number of clock hours you expect students to work on your course per credit hour? *For full-time faculty: ...in each department course	2.47	3.12	-3.471	0.001 Significant

Conclusions & Implications

While variance in estimations of student engagement was not significant, full-time faculty showed significantly lower estimations of class rigor and significantly greater clock-hour expectations, than did adjunct faculty. Limitations to this study include persistent notions of adjunct faculty as inherently inferior instructors, possibility of bias in responses from adjunct faculty when describing rigor and quality in their classes, and the increased incidence of experience in doctoral-level programs among full-time faculty as a frame of reference for assessing course rigor and quality, as well as an increased likelihood of full-time faculty to teach upper-division and graduate classes, compared to adjunct faculty. Further research is needed, to determine what factors influence adjunct faculty and full-time faculty motivations for describing courses and overall programs as high-quality and rigorous.

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