

RESEARCH BRIEF

COLLEGE of EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

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Planning for Integration of Part-Time Faculty in a Rapidly Growing Comprehensive Regional University

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Introduction:

It is essential that university and college leaders include part-time faculty in their strategies for improving institutional effectiveness. However, many part-time faculty report feeling they are treated as expendable commodities, feeling disrespected and devalued, and being seriously underpaid for their positive contributions. Although there has been an increase in awareness of the issue, research, and suggestions, no published research has focused on the systemic aspects with equal weight afforded to each of the three constituencies (administration, full-time faculty, adjunct faculty), and no published research has proposed a systemic planning model to develop integrative strategies which are sufficiently flexible to accommodate rapidly changing circumstances and still be sustainable. This research is a first step in that direction.

Methodology:

This is a qualitative case study that used individual interviews for primary data collection. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen administrators and faculty (tenured, tenure-track, and adjunct) to understand in detail how each group views the issues under research. Three separate interview protocols, one for current full-time faculty, one for current adjunct faculty, and one for those with administrative responsibilities, were used. After each interview, data was transcribed and initially coded by the first investigator, then reviewed by the second investigator for agreement. Finally, overarching themes were identified, and used to identify issues that might be considered when developing a college plan that incorporates the effective use of adjunct faculty.

Results & Discussion:

After analysis of the interviews, certain overarching themes became apparent with each constituent group. Although adjunct faculties were not highly dissatisfied, they shared a number of frustrations about inadequate communication and support, and they felt underappreciated most of the time. Regular faculty evidenced mixed opinions about the use of adjunct faculty, understanding they bring certain strengths and benefits to both faculty and students but also viewing them as temporary participants who require no more than minimal investment or support. Administrators expressed appreciation and respect for adjunct faculty and even discussed plans to better integrate the group into the life and culture of their department. The absence of any implementation strategies or more than the most rudimentary efforts to address known issues, however, belies those intentions. Each university must undertake to analyze its culture, to establish a legitimate and fully participatory planning process, and to implement strategies which are sequenced, coherent, and responsive to the concerns of all participants. There is a model of planning based on systemic theory which we propose as an excellent structure for consideration. There are, additionally, some topics we suggest that the planning process evaluate, and there are some specific actions within the administrative purview we believe are worthy of serious consideration.

Citation:

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