

Taking Learning Seriously: A Comprehensive Adjunct Faculty Support System

by Jody Tomanek & Randy VanWagoner

Adjunct faculty are critical for community colleges to carry out their basic mission of teaching and learning. From the time they take that first step in becoming an adjunct to helping them develop their teaching skills and strategies, support for adjuncts can take on many forms. Whether it be expanding current support systems for adjunct faculty or developing new ones, institutions can take some coordinated steps to strengthen the relationship between the college and its adjunct faculty.

If community colleges are serious about learning and student success, a comprehensive support system is needed – with components

of adjunct faculty intake, support and connection. Rather than attempting to address individual components, the entire system should be evaluated and strengthened to reinforce the overall teaching and learning effort and provide for a more consistent learning experience for students.

Recruitment and Hiring

Recruitment and hiring are two essential pieces in finding an adequate pool of qualified adjunct faculty. To assist with recruitment, a market salary survey should be conducted a minimum of every three years by calling local competitors to gauge their compensation levels to maintain currency in the marketplace for adjunct faculty pay rates. One great recruitment tool is to host an annual hiring fair that is advertised through thoughtful and

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creative ad placement. During the fair, full-time faculty and instructional administrators should be available to interview and meet with potential adjunct faculty. This is a meaningful way for the college to make a connection with potential adjunct faculty and it carries the possibility of hiring adjunct faculty immediately through an on-site interview at the fair. A tracking system should be developed to identify the number of attendees and track how many actually are hired and assigned to teach in the coming academic year. In addition to an adjunct hiring fair, an ongoing recruitment effort will allow for a steady stream of candidates that will provide for greater flexibility and a more substantial pool of substitutes.

Orientation and Mentoring

Once adjunct faculty have been hired they should be required to participate in a two-tier orientation program. Logistics orientation consists of the basic operations for submitting grade sheets, identifying textbook materials, administrative contacts and other information necessary for survival and success within a department or program. The second segment, instructional orientation, consists of teaching success strategies, learning styles, assessment of student learning, and other items that will assist first-time adjunct faculty, many of whom have valued applied experience but may have limited teaching experience. Instructional orientation should consist of 5 or more adjunct faculty attending the same session so they can ask questions and connect with their peers and explore teaching and learning issues together.

Supporting adjunct faculty in their teaching can take place both inside and outside of the classroom. Providing adjuncts with a mentor, who is also a full-time faculty member can have great rewards. The adjunct is paired with an individual who knows the college and can also help them with questions related to curriculum and classroom management.

Training and Development

The extent to which adjunct faculty feel supported and valued by the institution greatly influences the ability to attract the most qualified and talented pool of adjuncts in the area – what does an institution offer beyond the opportunity to teach and competitive pay? Professional development opportunities can set an institution apart in attracting and retaining the best adjunct faculty. A specific adjunct development program can consist of six to seven different courses throughout the year that allow adjuncts to focus on different teaching topics. Faculty who complete this program can earn an honorarium upon completion along with a certificate of completion.

It is also beneficial to ensure that adjunct faculty receive feedback on a regular basis. Adjunct faculty should be

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observed by their mentor or other full-time faculty member in their first term of teaching. This then allows the adjunct faculty member to have some feedback on their teaching to help improve for the next term and provides them with a contact person within the department. After the first term, adjunct faculty should be evaluated a minimum of every three years to ensure that they are still effective in the classroom and to let them know that the department values their teaching and performance.

Resources and Tools

Providing adjunct faculty with the appropriate resources and tools is critical to their effectiveness and an institution's overall reputation. If even a few adjunct faculty are not equipped to actively engage students in the learning process, it reflects poorly on the entire faculty and the institution as a whole. Minimum standards and resources should be set by each department and/or program to set adjunct faculty up for success on day one. These resources may include department-standard Power Point's or lecture notes as well as access to a department Share point site or learning object sites like QUIA. More personal items may include business cards, name tags and dedicated office space for adjuncts. An adjunct faculty support coordinator is key to facilitating access to these resources. This person is ideally a current adjunct faculty member at the institution. Their job is to work with adjunct faculty and communicate various issues and be a sounding board for those who might have questions or issues that should be addressed. In

addition to working closely with instructional administration to address adjunct concerns, the coordinator also has the ability to participate in college governance as the adjunct faculty representative to various councils and committees.

Communication and Support

The adjunct faculty support coordinator not only takes the lead role in most communications, but also finds ways to involve adjuncts with other members of the college community. This can take form in different ways, such as facilitating quarterly adjunct roundtables. This allows adjunct faculty to meet faculty and administrators from all over the college to discuss important issues for adjuncts. This helps adjuncts to convey their ideas for the college or helps to bring about issues related to adjunct faculty. In addition, a biannual adjunct faculty perception survey can also provide an additional means to solicit and receive perspectives on the experience of adjunct faculty and gauge their satisfaction with their experience at the college.

Keeping adjuncts informed of what is happening at the College is key to connection. Producing a newsletter for adjunct faculty can achieve this goal. The newsletter can be printed each term and sent to current adjunct faculty. A message from the chief academic officer along with updates from student services, records, admissions, libraries and other academic departments can provide adjuncts with much needed information. An Adjunct Faculty Handbook is another publication that is useful for





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adjunct faculty. This handbook can be produced yearly with updated vital information for any adjunct faculty member. A comprehensive web site dedicated to adjunct faculty can bring all of these communication elements together. The web site can include links to other important college information along with electronic versions of the adjunct handbook, minutes from governance meetings, frequently asked questions and teaching resources along with a list of upcoming activities and important dates that might interest adjunct faculty.

Recognition and Reward

Beyond having solid intake and support components in place, a comprehensive adjunct faculty support system includes thoughtful recognition and reward elements. In addition, compensating adjuncts for the time they spend serving on college-wide committees can help increase adjunct involvement. Offering adjunct faculty and their dependents discounted tuition at your institution can also be a great incentive as well. Not only does it make adjunct faculty feel appreciated, but their use of such an incentive can potentially have a positive impact on enrollment.

A more visible way to show adjunct faculty appreciation is to hold an annual appreciation dinner. This appreciation dinner can help bring adjunct faculty from across your institution together with each other and with full-time faculty. Presenting teaching awards to adjunct faculty and presenting service awards for their commitment can help add a celebration component to the evening.

Summary

Many community colleges are seeing increasing enrollment trends of both traditional and non-traditional students and are increasingly relying on adjunct faculty to help answer this community demand. If community colleges are serious about learning, they won't leave student success to chance but will make intentional efforts toward implementing a comprehensive adjunct faculty support system. Colleges can achieve this with intake, support, and connection components that communicate the high value placed on adjunct faculty as an integral part of the organization. ✍

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May 7, 2008: "When Will Substance Finally Supplant Seniority?"

In California, higher education leaders are freaking out. Well, calmly, of course and with regal bearing and presence of mind, as Chancellors and Provosts are expected to do. Governor Ahhhnold has proposed a state budget that calls for a drastic cut in the funding for higher education, about \$1.3 billion dollars, to be precise. The community college system, the largest in the world, with an enrollment of 2.6 million students, would take a \$500 million dollar funding hit, and the California State system, which enrolls 450,000 students, would see cuts of over \$800 million. According to this article, published in the UC-San Diego Guardian, the student newspaper, CSU spokesman Paul Browning said, "We might need to cut part-time faculty."

You think?

The California Faculty Association represents 22,000 of the faculty who teach in the CSU system, more than half of them are lecturers. Within the union, the Lecturers Council advocates on behalf of the full- and part-time lecturers. Thanks to the efforts of the union, some lecturers in the system teach under multi-year contracts. The contract calls for lay-offs to be handled by seniority and appointment type...

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