

The Adjunct Problem and Strategic Planning

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What began as a simple Google document over a year ago with one instructor's efforts has helped bring the ongoing issue of pay and treatment of adjunct instructors to the forefront of higher education. Joshua Boldt, a writing instructor at the University of Georgia, started a publicly editable Google document on February 2, 2012, and asked part-time colleagues to detail their pay per course, institution, and department. The document was later moved to its own website called the Adjunct Project. Now, the website address is adjunct.chronicle.com, and at the bottom of the page, it is called a service of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. That the *Chronicle*, a well-known and respected publication in higher education, would put its name on this project shows the importance of adjunct instructors and the changing nature of the professoriate. The widespread use of adjunct instructors in higher education is not a new issue, but Boldt's document, as well as the efforts of advocacy groups, has brought the issue new prominence recently. This paper will discuss the significance of this problem, its impact on strategic planning, and offer some ideas and conclusions.

Significance of the Problem

More than two-thirds of the faculty providing instruction in nonprofit higher education is currently employed off the tenure track, and their numbers continue to rise (Kezar, Longanecker & Maxey, 2013). The increasing numbers of adjunct faculty are affecting students, faculty, staff, and administrators at higher education institutions. Adjuncts were formerly in a category for special arrangements, but they have now become an administrative crutch for hiring teachers without having to pay for the benefits that support tenure-track positions. Adjuncts are less likely to be involved in campus governance or have representation. Because few part-timers are

involved in campus governance bodies, few of them get to vote on campus initiatives, new hires, policy changes, or union contracts that affect them. Part-timers are often excluded from committee and college meetings, institutional searches, and even division and department meetings (Nutting, 2003).

In addition to being excluded from important meetings, non-tenure-track faculty members – particularly part-time faculty members – often do not receive an orientation or professional development or mentoring. They may not understand institutional goals, and only a very few are involved in curriculum design and governance, even though they may outnumber tenure-track faculty or teach a majority of the credit hours at their institutions (Kezar, Longanecker & Maxey, 2013).

The effect of the use of adjunct faculty on students in higher education institutions is becoming better known. Adjuncts are typically hired only for classroom duties and may be employed elsewhere, may travel between multiple campuses, or are restricted by their appointment; therefore, they are generally less accessible and less available to students. However, students report that the most important interaction is contact with faculty outside the classroom. Jaeger (2008) speculates that the negative effects on student persistence of having gatekeeper classes taught by part-time faculty stem from the inability of students to meet or connect with these instructors outside the classroom.