

# Adjuncting in Higher Education: Challenges and Recommendations

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## INTRODUCTION

Not only are high student debt, student loan default, excessive executive salaries and high remedial rates causing a crisis in higher education; the massive faculty layoffs and the widespread incorporation of hiring part-time faculty are causing additional fractures that are reshaping the infrastructure of higher education (Fulton, 2000; Nutting, 2003). If there is one word to describe the hiring trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce it is the word, adjunct.

The term adjunct is Latin for accessory. It refers to the teachers and instructors whose compensation and/or benefits, even at a prorated proportion do not equal those of full-time contractual or tenure-track faculty. Temporary, part-timers, contingent workers, or adjuncts are the words to describe trends in today's workforce. This is a growing movement, from retail to banking, to K-12, to higher education hiring practices. Employers across the nation are exploiting temporary workers in order to avoid paying health benefits, cost of living and mandatory pay raises, and other benefits (Cashwell, 2009; Underwood, 2003).

This chapter explores some of the key issues regarding the growing use and exploitation of adjuncts by institutions of higher education and the challenges adjuncts face. The motivation behind their exploitation, effect on student success, court cases, and realities for adjuncts; what can strategic leadership and management do to stop this unjust practice will be explored in this chapter as well.

## Exploitation of Adjuncts: A Human Rights Issue

Part-time faculties who work in higher education have recently received considerable attention by the courts and the media. Due to lack of fair salary pay, compensation and benefits, lack of unionization, and poor general working conditions, adjuncts are finding it difficult to make a living wage (Berry, 2005; Fulton, 2000; Underwood, 2003). Many community colleges and universities know this, but because it is a cost savings to their budgets they employ more adjuncts (part-time contingent faculty) than full time faculty. This hiring practice has crossed over to become a key 21<sup>st</sup> century civic rights violation, which is ironic because while institutions of higher education charge the faculty to impart civic engagement and democratic ethos to students, their administrations deny adjuncts the ability to be fully engaged and active participants in the campus community (AACU, 2014) while at the same time adjuncts are denied benefits and a decent living wage (Chronicle of Higher Education 2014; Institute for Policy Studies, 2014).

Having a high ratio of adjuncts affects student success. Research shows there are correlations between decreases in student persistence, coupled with negative student outcomes with the increase of exposure to part-time faculty (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Maynard & Joseph, 2008; Smith, 2010). Universities and

colleges especially use contingent faculty in lower-level and introductory courses, a role less valued than upper course levels or engaging in research (Kezar & Sam, 2010b; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). College administration need to employ more inclusive techniques, it is questionable whether authentic learning can take place in an environment that does not foster inclusion, justice, and collaboratively oriented action (AACU, 2014; Nutting 2003; Smith 2010). Adjuncts respond positively to being cared for by being paid a living wage, consequently this positivity will in turn trickle down and be grasped by the students.

No one in higher education can doubt that issues surrounding the over-use of adjunct faculties at American colleges and universities have entered the social injustice language. The exploitation of adjuncts is becoming a human rights and social justice issue (Underwood, 2003). In addition, it is a violation of the Code of Ethics, as noted by the Board of Directors for American Association of Community Colleges-AACC.

According to the Code, the college or university chief executive officer and other members of the campus organization should strive to promote the following core values as noted from the AACC—both internally and externally:

1. Trust and respect for all individuals.
2. Honesty in all actions.
3. Just and fair treatment of all people.
4. Integrity in all actions (AACC, 2012).

Clearly, knowingly exploiting adjunct instructors is a violation of this Code.

## History of Adjunct Use

The beginning of adjunct use can partially be explained by the growth in enrollments during the 1960s and 1970s, along with the need to keep tuition low and to maintain flexibility in scheduling, a course of action that allowed colleges to meet the burgeoning need while keeping costs to a minimum. Initially, part-time faculty tended to be drawn from business sectors of the community in order to capitalize on their professional expertise (Cohen & Brawer, 1992). This also aligned well with the certificate and technical courses being offered at two-year colleges, as these professionals were ideal instructors and mentors for students going into the perspective fields. These instructors worked at their day jobs and lent their expertise during courses offered in the evening. This selection and use of part-time faculty was fairly well-considered and advantageous to students, who also made practical connections with the business and trades community. In addition, small numbers of part-time faculty were hired to provide for temporary fluctuations in enrollment and budget cuts. In reaction to cuts in funding and rising enrollments, part-time faculty were hired in many departments, intended as a temporary expedient to address urgent situations (Feldman & Turnley, 2004; Schuster & Finklestein, 2006). But the “expedient situations” eventually became the norm.

The numbers and percentages between full-time and part-time faculty members in institutions of higher education have changed dramatically in the past forty years. In 1969, over the broad spectrum of universities, colleges, and community colleges, 78.3% of faculty members were either full-time tenured or tenure-track, and 21.7% were non-tenure-track, often part-time. Sometime in the 1990s the majority of full-time instructors of higher education became part-time/contingent teachers (Berry, 2005). For a dramatic comparison, in 2009 these respective figures had almost reversed themselves: roughly 35%

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