Assimilating Adjuncts: Strategies for Orienting Contract Faculty

Based on the work of

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Overview

This presentation is based on an evaluation of a workshop designed to orient adjunct faculty to a university social work program.
Adjunct Faculty

- Adjunct or contingency instructors supplement instruction when
  - There is an insufficient number of constituent faculty
  - Existing faculty lack expertise in areas of curriculum
  - Other faculty have been reassigned to research or administrative duties

(Pratt, 1999)
Prevalence

• Increased use of adjunct and contract faculty due to
  - 1987-1994 threefold increase in social work
    • Decrease in funding
    • Larger enrollments
    • Downsizing of tenure-track faculties
Advantages

• Contingency faculty sought after for
  - Specialized knowledge
  - Economic advantages for university
  - Enhancement of cultural/racial diversity
Controversy

• Use of adjuncts opposed by some because:
  - Undercuts tenures system
  - Diminishes control of curriculum for those who teach it
  - Reduces professional status of teachers
  (Pratt et al., 1992)

• Opposed within social work
  - “failure to provide part-time faculty a living wage and reasonable benefits and working conditions constitutes a violation of the very values on which the profession is based” (Noble, 2000)
Other Difficulties

- Contract faculty not always assimilated to teaching role (Greive & Worden, 2000)
  - Curriculum
  - University policy and procedures
  - Role of assigned course(s) in overall program
- Less familiar with evolving teaching methods
- Less familiar with mechanics of
  - Syllabus design
  - Designing and grading assignments
  - Developing and evaluating exams
Results of Difficulties

• For program
  - Unevenness of how courses are delivered
  - Unevenness of how program policies are enforced
  - Gaps in curriculum that disrupt its sequencing

• For contingency faculty
  - Precariousness of situation
    • Pressure to inflate grades
    • Potential for mishandled classroom interactions
Constituent and Adjunct Faculty

- Mentor relationship difficult to arrange
  - Busyness of full-time faculty
  - Adjunct’s situational context
    - Other job responsibilities
    - Infrequent course assignments
    - Odd class times
  (Carroll, 2002)
Constituent and Adjunct Faculty cont.

- Dissension
  - Adjunct support lifestyle of constituent
    - Teaching least desirable courses
    - Teaching at least desirable times
  - Full-timers dismiss adjuncts as "moonlighters"
Integration

• Contract faculty rarely participate in
  - School governance
  - Curriculum committees
  - Continuing education seminars
  - Scholarly lectures
(Carroll, 2002)
Orienting Adjuncts

• Proper orientation and assimilation
  - Begins with selection
    • Should include discussion of expectations
  - Continues with hire
This Study

• Reviewed contract faculty needs
• Reviewed literature on effective instruction
• Developed training program
  - Available to adjunct social work faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill
  - Adaptable to
    • New full-time faculty
    • Teaching assistants
    • Doctoral student instructors
• Describes workshop
Program Structure

• Ideal orientation structure would be
  - Multiple sessions over extended period of time
  - Later sessions building on previous ones

• Pragmatics of location and scheduling dictate
  - 1-day workshop with continuing “booster” opportunities
Participation

• Not mandatory
  - Other programs have made participation a condition for hire

• Incentives
  - Continuing education credits
  - Free parking
  - Lunch and refreshments
  - Two books, pens, and notepads

• Possible future incentive
  - Differential pay or privileges for those who participate
Goals of Workshop

- Convey content
- Demonstrate effective use of teaching techniques
- Address instructors’ fears
- Equip instructors with resources (Greive, 2002)
Topics

• Forces that shape social work curriculum
• Effective teaching strategies
• Policies and procedures of classroom instruction
• Challenging classroom situations
Activities for Forces
Shaping the Curriculum

• Review CSWE standards
• Vertical and horizontal integration
  – Chart illustrating curriculum and course linkages
• Categorical grouping exercise
  – Participants physically arrange themselves in relation to each other to reflect how their courses connect
• Discussion of maintaining program integrity
  – Stress importance of communication between instructors
Topics for Effective Teaching Strategies

• Educational theories (Bloom, 1963; Bogo & Vayda, 1987)
• Principles of adult learning (Bigge, 1976; Coulshed, 1993, Greive, 2000)
• Effective teaching methods (Eble, 1988; Ericksen, 1984; Vazquez & Wainstein, 1999)
• Evaluation of student learning (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Hutchings, 1999; Murray, 1987; Ory & Ryan, 1993)
• Effective time management in class preparation and grading (Carroll, 2001)
Activities for Effective Teaching Strategies

• Leader delivers content on the following by employing the given technique
  - Collaborative groups
  - Discussions
  - Debates
  - Experiential learning activities

• Discussion of promises and pitfalls of each
Policies and Procedures

• Present guidelines for
  - Academic integrity
  - Accommodation for students with disabilities
  - Grading standards
  - Resources for students with academic or personal problems

• Discuss or involve personnel responsible for
  - Book orders
  - Class registration
  - Evaluations
Policies and Procedures cont.

• Discuss roles of
  - Associate dean
  - Advisors
  - Field department faculty

• Provide copy of “faculty checklist” (Greive, 2002) that addresses these
Challenging Classroom Situations

• Discuss and brainstorm strategies for such situations as
  - The class being silent
  - Being caught off guard by a student question
  - One student monopolizing class discussions
  - Student challenging leadership of instructor
  - Report of student cheating
  - Student disclosing excessively personal information in class
  - Student making racially or religiously offensive remarks
Evaluation

• Participants’ written and verbal feedback as primary method of evaluating program
  - All attendees complete a form of 7 open-ended questions addressing
    • Helpful and unhelpful content
    • Length of program
    • Delivery
    • Ways it will influence their teaching
    • Additional topics for follow-up

• Feedback so far suggests program is positive and worthwhile
Shortcomings

• Insufficiency of time
  - Addressing content
  - Offering individualized consultation

• Failure to make program mandatory
  - Undermines systemic effects of overall improvement
Future Needs

• Way to determine degree to which participation improves teacher performance
  - Contract faculty receive comparable evaluations to constituent
    - No baseline comparison available however
• Potentially require participation of all faculty
  - Prior performance could be used as basis of comparison
• Use of formalized needs assessment (Burnstad, 2000)
Future Needs cont.

- Peer evaluations before and after training
- Precise tracking to gauge increase or reduction of student complaints
- Follow-up tests of knowledge
  - Still may not capture skills
References

• Adjunct as object: A closer look at a dozen dissertations. (2002, July/August). Adjunct Advocate, 9, 6-7.
References cont.


References cont.

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References cont.


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References cont.


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• Statement from the conference on the growing use of part-time and adjunct faculty. (1998). Academe, 84(1), 54-60.

References cont.
