

CAFDN Meeting, April 20, 2007

Summary of Panel Discussion

This is a summary of the panel discussion between Dr. Barbara Millis and seven members from different institutions on the topic “Part-Time Instructors: Challenges and Strategies for Success.” The summary is my personal reconstruction of the discussion. I apologize for important comments that I left out or comments that I might have misunderstood or inadvertently misrepresented. There was no opportunity to have every panel member review and correct my summary. –Edmund Hansen

The panel members included:

Laura Bork, English instructor, College of Lake County

Cathryn Bulicek, Anthropology instructor, Northeastern Illinois University

Mary Lynn Carver, Adult Education instructor, College of Lake County

Dr. George Drucker, ESL instructor and President of the Adjunct Faculty Association, Triton College

Dr. Jelena Ozegovic, Assessment Chair, Robert Morris College

Dr. Priscilla Perkins, Assoc. Dean of Arts and Sciences, Roosevelt University

Dr. Robert Rotenberg, Chair of Anthropology, DePaul University

Three main questions were addressed:

1. What do you consider your institution’s “best practice” in regard to part-time faculty, particularly in terms of faculty development?

- Substantive pedagogy packages for new instructors that highlight the university’s overall teaching philosophy (Roosevelt U.)
- An orientation for faculty on how to teach the First Year Experience courses (DePaul U.)
- A six-hour workshop on adult learning theories. All new part-time faculty are required to take it (College of Lake County)
- A small stipend given to part-timers when they participate in a faculty development workshop (total of \$40) (Triton College)
- It is largely up to individual departments whether they have activities for part-timers, although the CTL has started offering a 1.5 hour orientation for part-timers last fall (Northeastern Illinois U.)
- The “Bill Jasper” case scenarios of typical mistakes first-time instructors might make (see Barbara’s handouts) (Barbara Millis, U. of Nevada, Reno)

2. What is your institution’s greatest challenge? What area in regard to part-time teachers would you address, if you could?

- Our institution needs to address that we are actually here!
- The college is making it hard for us by putting a cap of two courses per semester that we can teach on campus
- Our adjuncts haven’t had a pay raise in many years
- Full-time faculty avoid discussing teaching issues with part-timers because they feel guilty about the poor pay part-timers receive
- We have a one-year course for new full-timers entering our university, but no special training for part-timers
- It is difficult to get the names and contact information on newly-hired part-timers

3. Select one issue that most colleges and universities face in regard to part-time faculty and offer concrete suggestions to address it.

- What's glaringly missing is consistent supply of information about our school's culture. We need to find ways of providing part-timers with a constant flow of messages on this
- It's important for part-timers to feel wanted. Provide a guarantee that instructors will be hired back as long as they are doing a good job and there is work available
- Help part-timers to have manageable lives, and help them also understand the university culture. As part of the latter, they should be given more options to learn what assessment is all about
- It's been very helpful how RMC has put everything worth knowing about a given course into a Blackboard holding place
- There should be more communication between part-timers and their chairs, and their chairs should do a class observation to provide constructive feedback
- Provide a mentoring program for part-timers. That program should consider different levels such as: course/teaching logistics, program and department procedures, and individual teaching needs

Finally, there were a number of questions and comments from the audience, to which different panel members responded:

Colleges should provide field-specific professional development!

- The Illinois Online Network has provided good support in this regard.

It is difficult for faculty developers to stay in touch with part-timers. Any ideas?

- Try to obtain the instructors' personal e-mail accounts, i.e. the ones they have created for themselves (at AOL, Yahoo, etc.) rather than the university accounts many of them never use.
- Use a web-board for instructors
- For department chairs with a modest number of part-timers, there is nothing better than personal contact: walk around to their offices!
- Get instructors to contribute to the faculty development office's newsletter
- From the time they are hired, force instructors to regularly visit a special Blackboard site because that's where the sample syllabi and other materials are

What can be done to treat adjuncts as true partners?

- Involve them in the University's program assessment activities. Pay them for reviewing student portfolios and scoring student papers, etc.

Do any colleges require part-timers to formulate personal teaching goals?

- [I don't recall any answers to this question]

What are good strategies for rewarding part-timers for quality work?

- Small pay increases can go a long way
- DePaul has a merit pay system that allows a \$1,000 range for rewarding teaching excellence in instructors
- Our monthly campus newsletter acknowledges special faculty activities (such as publications and conference presentations) with a short note together with the faculty's photo. Why haven't part-timers been recognized more often in this publication?

- Barbara's previous faculty development office produced a newsletter just for part-timers once a semester. It was distributed by the department chairs and departmental liaisons
- Consider doing a blog newsletter!

How do we get part-timers to attend faculty development activities?

- Aim small! Do more of these activities but make them shorter
- Offer revolving topics so that instructors who can't make the first event on a topic can attend the second or third one
- Consider videotaping or video-streaming faculty development events

Do your institutions survey adjuncts on what they want or need?

- The College of Lake County just finished its first survey of this kind
- Barbara does a short survey during the orientation. She also added the 5-page Fullerton College's Part-time Faculty Survey to her handouts

Should part-timers be asked on what they think they should be evaluated?

- Roosevelt just tried some of this in its development of a new student evaluation instrument
- It would be helpful to give instructors some informal feedback (e.g. from a mentor) before doing formal evaluations
- Barbara thinks that instructors should have a voice in their evaluations

How common in higher education are multi-year contracts for part-timers?

- At DePaul, five percent of the part-timers are on multi-year contracts
- SIUE has multi-year contracts
- Georgia State has multi-year contracts

Can we learn any lessons from the military academy model (Barbara's previous institution)?

- The Air Force Academy provides a lot of mentoring to its instructors, as well as a five-day orientation

Which institutions have grants for faculty development?

- The University of Nevada, Reno provides Instructional Enhancement Grants that are very competitive. Faculty are required to produce a poster session as part of their obligation to the grant.