

**Community college adjunct faculty inclusion:  
Variations by institutional type**

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Abstract

The present article is drawn from a larger study about the academic and social inclusion of adjunct faculty at representative public, 2-year colleges in Texas. The research identified a significant difference in adjunct faculty inclusion by institution type according to Carnegie Classification. Subject institutions represented Basic Carnegie Classification categories—rural, suburban, and urban. Data from survey responses of 75 adjuncts were analyzed using a variety of statistical methods. Results indicated that adjuncts from the rural community college were included in academic and social campus cultures more often than were adjuncts from the suburban and urban community colleges, but other anomalies emerged from the data that will warrant further investigation. Because a majority of community college students receive instruction from part-time faculty, it is important to understand how adjuncts interact with and perceive their relationships to their institutions and students.

Keywords: Community colleges, adjunct faculty, part-time faculty, basic Carnegie Classifications, academic and social inclusion

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**INTRODUCTION**

American community colleges are responsible for the higher education of a growing and increasingly diverse student body (Carr, 2009; Jones, 2010; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Riggs, 2009). Altogether, adjunct faculty teach more community college students than their full-time peers. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011, Table 2,), part-time faculty outnumber full-time faculty by more than two to one in public 2-year institutions. Nevertheless, adjuncts are often regarded, and treated, as peripheral to an institution's mission. Studies of their role in higher education have tended to treat adjuncts as an undifferentiated group and to generalize about their experiences at and their impact on the colleges and students they serve.

The present study derives from an investigation of adjunct faculty inclusion at three Texas community colleges. The sample was chosen from among 50 public community college districts as being representative of the different Basic Carnegie Classifications for associate degree-granting institutions: rural, suburban, urban. Although the research focused on a much broader topic, significant findings emerged which indicated that adjuncts in the 2-year sector may have substantially different experiences and interactions with their institutions according to the type of campus they serve. The purpose of this article is to elaborate those differences and their implications for institutional practices related to adjunct recruiting, hiring, and support.

### **BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

Higher education scholarship is replete with affirmations of the importance of adjunct faculty in fulfilling the community college mission. Alternately described as the “heart” (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2005, p. 32) of the community college and the connection between the institution and student learning, adjunct faculty are currently employed in record numbers but often remain disconnected, both academically and socially, from their institutions. The issue of adjunct faculty inclusion emerged as a theme in the literature in the mid-1990s and has only grown in prominence.

McLaughlin (2005) posed the question that has informed much of the research: “*How* [italics added] can professors who join the faculty as part-timers be sufficiently integrated into the academic culture to prevent feelings of marginalization?” (p. 189). First, is the matter of status. Part-time faculty lack status in the academic hierarchy as do community college faculty compared to those who teach at 4-year colleges (Weisman & Marr, 2002). At community colleges, full-time academic faculty rank first, followed by full-time occupational faculty, and finally by part-time faculty. Community college part-time faculty are regarded as a “contingent

expendable workforce that allows colleges to quickly respond to changing environmental conditions while saving considerable dollars by not employing full-time faculty” (Jacobs as cited in Wallin, p. 375).

Next is the issue of connection: Roueche, Roueche and Milliron (1996) found that adjunct faculty were often estranged from the collegiality of their campuses due to the lack of institutional support, socialization, and integration. To improve the experiences of adjunct faculty to make them feel “ more like valuable organizational players” (p. 34), Roueche et al. created the Part-Time Faculty Integration Model to assess how adjuncts identified themselves within the organizational culture. They found that “few college administrators [were] aggressively and systematically directing their colleges’ efforts toward integrating part-time faculty” (p. 39). However, their research identified strategies that model colleges used to improve adjunct faculty connections. Among the integration strategies found most effective were: discussion groups to explore adjunct faculty issues on campus; occasions for participating in college life such as advising and social functions; activities to permit full-time and part-time faculty interaction; a faculty center to support adjuncts; and recognition programs for years of service or teaching excellence.

Roueche et al. affirmed that adjunct faculty socialization, communication, and integration strategies should be interwoven into the systems of community colleges. They asserted that the “largest faculty cohort deserves that inclusion” (p. 44) but acknowledged that the inclusion of adjunct faculty was not happening readily. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the lack of adjunct faculty inclusion remains a concern.

Third is the issue of different perspectives between college administrators and the adjuncts they employ. Reid’s (1996) research explored these differences and found that adjunct

faculty recruiting and hiring practices were not regulated and that administrators “expressed dissatisfaction and frustration” (p. 136) while adjunct faculty were satisfied with the simplicity of the processes. Reid found divergent views about socialization of adjunct faculty into the campus culture, with administrators believing adjunct faculty were provided ample chances for integration and adjuncts reporting “few opportunities to meet peers or to interact with administrators” (p. 140). Reid’s work revealed the need for the continued study of adjunct faculty related to recruiting, hiring and retention, orientation, socialization, job satisfaction, and enculturation. Notably many of his recommendations still merit study more than 15 years later.

Hinkel (2007) compared the perceptions of administrators to those of adjunct faculty regarding the importance of institutional support for part-time faculty. Her study included 18 administrators and 133 adjuncts from one Southwestern community college where 72% were part-time instructors. Hinkel (2007) found a significant statistical difference between the perceptions of participating administrators and adjunct faculty on three basic categories of institutional support: (a) orientation and professional development, (b) access to support services, and (c) evaluation and recognition.

In interviews, both adjunct faculty members and administrators recommended that institutions make greater efforts in professional development and orientation support. Adjuncts indicated the need for more opportunities to interact socially with others on campus and the desire to have their names included in the course catalogue. While administrators conveyed the impression that adjunct faculty needed to be monitored more closely to ensure academic integrity, they also expressed the need for greater divisional inclusion of adjunct faculty in support of quality teaching. Administrators also acknowledged that they needed to recognize adjunct faculty better, including taking time to say “thank you” and “we appreciate you.”

Summing up the reasons why campuses need to attend to their adjunct faculty better, Lyons (as cited in Hinkel), explained:

In an age where legislators, students and the community are expecting increased instructional quality and accountability, community colleges can no longer afford to provide greater support of full-time faculty members without doing the same for their increasingly critical part-timers. (p. 88)

Evident from the literature is adjunct faculty's central role in meeting community colleges' instructional mission and the need to ensure proper support and inclusion of adjuncts in their institutions. Many studies have focused on a single institution, and a substantial amount of qualitative research has reflected the voices and perceptions of adjunct faculty. Notwithstanding this body of research, many issues identified earlier remain, especially the disconnect that exists between adjunct faculty and their institutions. To understand the extent to which adjunct faculty are academically and socially included and connected to their campuses, the present study examined four questions:

1. *What are the demographic characteristics of community college adjunct faculty?*
2. *What are the inclusion experiences of community college adjunct faculty members?*
3. *How do community college administrators perceive adjunct faculty inclusion?*
4. *Are there differences between adjunct faculty and community college administrators' perceptions of adjunct faculty inclusion?*

The presenters will explain the research methodology, the findings, and the implications for improving adjunct faculty inclusion at different types of 2-year institutions. Discussion will focus on the differences that exist between institutional type and how best practices might be adapted from one type to another.

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