Adjunct Faculty Orientation and Professional Development

*Custom Research Brief*

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

- How is orientation for new adjunct faculty structured, and who is responsible for conducting orientation activities?
- What materials are included in adjunct faculty orientation, and how useful do adjuncts find this information?
- What types of professional development opportunities are available to adjunct faculty members?
- What methods are used to increase the accessibility of orientation and professional development information to adjuncts with limited scheduling availability?
- How is the effectiveness of orientation and professional development programs evaluated?

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board’s internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (http://nces.ed.gov/)

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Parameters
The Council interviewed administrators in charge of faculty affairs and teaching center directors at public and private institutions in the South.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment: total/undergraduate (Fall 2009)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>8,800/5,100</td>
<td>Doctoral/Research Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>14,600/12,100</td>
<td>Research Universities (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>5,400/4,400</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>5,700/5,000</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>29,200/5,900</td>
<td>Research Universities (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University F</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Public</td>
<td>23,000/18,000</td>
<td>Research Universities (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College G</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>3,300/2,700</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University H</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>8,900/7,600</td>
<td>Doctoral/Research Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University I</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>4-year, Private</td>
<td>7,100/4,600</td>
<td>Research Universities (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Key Observations

❖ Orientation and development programs for adjunct faculty vary widely across contact institutions. At institutions with a small adjunct population, who maintain limited non-teaching responsibilities, administrators typically conduct department-level orientations for new adjunct faculty members. In contrast, institutions with larger adjunct populations organize comprehensive university-wide orientation sessions for adjuncts.

❖ Because newly hired adjuncts typically have prior teaching experience, orientation programs that focus on institution-specific information and teaching policies are reportedly more useful than sessions about pedagogical training. Department chairs and teaching centers are available to supplement orientation content by providing additional information about teaching skills or courseware technology if adjuncts require additional assistance.

❖ Teaching centers provide information about courseware technology and pedagogy through seminars, individual consultations, and mentoring programs; these opportunities are generally available to adjuncts. Although services provided in teaching centers typically target tenure-track faculty members’ professional development, only one institution prohibits adjuncts from participating in teaching center programs. All other institutions actively encourage adjunct faculty to patronize professional development opportunities at the teaching center.

❖ Teaching centers offer flexible hours, maintain internet resources, and offer alternative scheduling for workshops and confidential professional development sessions to increase adjuncts interest in and accessibility to orientation and professional development. Contacts report that making a conscious effort to create a welcoming environment for adjuncts increases engagement overall.

❖ Contacts stress that efforts to acknowledge the value that adjunct faculty members add to an institution and to actively include them in the campus community and culture should be encouraged by high-level administrators. Administrators organize adjunct appreciation dinners, offer special recognition for senior adjunct faculty members, include adjuncts on committees and councils, and employ an adjunct coordinator in each department in order to acknowledge the value that adjuncts bring to the institution’s community.
III. ADJUNCT FACULTY POPULATIONS AND TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

Adjunct faculty are categorized differently across contact institutions. Some institutions classify all part-time faculty members as adjuncts, while others consider full-time, non-tenure track faculty members in the adjunct population. Adjunct faculty populations vary in size across institutions, ranging from 20 percent to 75 percent of the entire faculty body. Institutions with larger adjunct populations typically provide structured, robust orientation programs and are more intentional in ensuring that adjuncts have access to available professional development opportunities.

### Overview of Adjunct Faculty Populations across Contact Institutions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Categorization of Adjunct Faculty</th>
<th>Number or Percentage of Adjuncts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Faculty members not on a full-time contract; adjuncts teach one to two courses each semester</td>
<td>700 adjuncts, 390 full-time faculty; adjuncts teach 30 percent of courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Part-time faculty</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>Full-time and part-time faculty with only instructional responsibilities</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>Part-time faculty; teach one to three courses</td>
<td>140 adjuncts, 340 full-time faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>Part-time faculty</td>
<td>75 percent adjuncts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University F</td>
<td>Part-time faculty and full-time non-tenure track faculty</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College G</td>
<td>Teach up to five courses each year, and no more than two each semester</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences: less than 25 percent adjuncts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University H</td>
<td>Part-time lecturer</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University I</td>
<td>Specialized lecturers hired on a course-by-course basis</td>
<td>2 percent permanent adjuncts, 16 percent part-time adjuncts</td>
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</table>

### Graduate Programs Utilize Greater Numbers of Adjuncts

The institutions with the most prominent adjunct faculty populations are the Graduate School at College G and University E, where eighty percent of students are enrolled in graduate or first professional programs. Contacts indicate that graduate programs employ more adjuncts than undergraduate programs because a larger percentage of graduate classes are held in the evenings and several graduate-level classes require specialized expertise. Many adjunct faculty members have other employment commitments during the day and thus are only available to teach in the evening. In addition, adjuncts typically have professional experience in their respective industries, qualifying them to teach specialized graduate courses.
Most contact institutions rely on department chairs or deans to employ new adjunct faculty to accommodate a sudden increase in enrollment or provide specialized professional expertise for a course. University H is the only exception among contact institutions; adjuncts are hired centrally through the Provost’s office. Contacts indicate a preference for a decentralized hiring process because department chairs and deans are typically better suited to identify a genuine need for an additional adjunct faculty member in a particular department than the provost. Furthermore, because the responsibilities of adjunct faculty are usually limited to instruction, research experience, usually evaluated by the provost, is less relevant to hiring decisions. Adjunct faculty members are employed primarily because of their comprehensive industry knowledge or practical career experience.

Hiring Process for Adjunct Faculty

The hiring process for adjuncts typically begins when the department chair identifies a need for an additional instructor. Applicants are usually drawn from the surrounding community or other nearby institutions. For example, College G hires individuals from the local business community to teach courses as adjuncts. At University A, in order to recruit candidates from the community, departments advertise open positions in the local newspaper.

At most contact institutions, department chairs are responsible for screening and hiring applicants. In contrast, at University E, deans or associate deans maintain this responsibility. Several contacts note that applicants are screened for prior teaching experience, among other relevant qualifications.

Departmental deans or provosts typically grant final approval in the hiring process and review the credentials of screened applicants before administrators make an employment offer. Nevertheless, several contacts note that the dean rarely vetoes a hiring decision that is made at the department level.
IV. ORIENTATION

Orientation programs organized for adjunct faculty members across institutions may occur at the department level or at the university level, and tend to focus on information about the policies, procedures, and culture of the institution or academic department. Although institutions provide information about courseware technology or offer training in teaching, contacts report that this type of information is less useful for adjuncts during orientation sessions, because many of them have prior teaching experience and are familiar with the courseware technology used. When adjuncts require additional assistance to improve teaching skills or to use courseware technology effectively, they typically solicit guidance from the institution’s teaching center or their department chair.

Structures of Adjunct Faculty Orientation Programs

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<th>Individual Department-level Orientation</th>
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<tr>
<td>All institutions conduct orientations for new adjuncts within individual academic departments. During these sessions new adjunct faculty members meet with the department chair, or in some cases, one or two other tenure-track faculty members. Adjuncts receive information on policies, departmental procedures, and goals. At University B, for example, new adjuncts receive a cultural orientation that includes an overview of the institution’s history and its Christian mission. The department chair serves as the primary source of assistance for adjuncts as they adapt to the institution.</td>
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<tr>
<th>University-wide Orientation for All New Faculty</th>
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<tr>
<td>Only University H holds a single university-wide orientation session for all new faculty members—both tenure-track and adjunct. New adjunct faculty members at University H attend the first day of orientation with new tenure-track faculty members. During this session faculty members are informed about professional development opportunities and attend interactive sessions that feature student and faculty discussion panels. The students and tenured faculty members who serve on these panels provide new faculty with information about what will be expected of them from their students and colleagues. Contacts emphasize that new faculty members previously working at other institutions are often unfamiliar with institution-specific norms; they find the student and faculty panels provide a thorough introduction to University H’s environment and culture.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Dedicated Orientation Sessions for Adjuncts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Some institutions hold separate orientation sessions for new adjunct faculty, either at the university or college level. University C holds a day-long orientation for full-time adjuncts in the fall, and University A is piloting a similar program this year. University D holds a university-wide orientation session for adjuncts in both August and January. The adjunct sessions are held at night to accommodate adjuncts who have other employment commitments during the day. For similar reasons, the College of Education at University E provides orientation specifically for adjuncts through an online module instead of in person.</td>
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Dedicated orientation sessions for adjunct faculty members allow administrators to tailor content to the adjunct experience and to ensure that adjuncts do not receive irrelevant information about benefits or tenure.
IV. ORIENTATION

Strategies for Increasing Access to University-wide Orientation

Contacts at institutions that hold university-wide orientation programs for adjunct faculty members stress the importance of providing new adjuncts with an overview of the institution. Although department-level orientations provide faculty with the information they need to begin teaching, department chairs are often unable to give adjuncts the aerial perspective and cultural orientation that an institution-wide program can. Nevertheless, many adjuncts have other professional obligations aside from teaching, and day-long orientation programs often result in scheduling conflicts. Although institutions that only conduct focused department orientations avoid scheduling challenges, contacts note that certain strategies, discussed below, may be employed to increase adjuncts’ access to university-wide orientation programs.

**Provide Alternative Schedules for Orientation Information**

At University D, dedicated orientation sessions for adjuncts are organized both in August and January, and are scheduled in the evening to accommodate adjuncts who have full-time jobs during the day. In contrast, the orientation for new tenure-track faculty is held during the day. The university-wide adjunct orientation College G is piloting this fall is scheduled to take place during the day, but contacts are contemplating offering a second evening session to accommodate adjuncts who have other professional obligations during the day.

**Offer Information through Internet Resources**

The entire orientation program for new faculty in the College of Education at University E is provided through online modules to allow faculty members to complete the program at their convenience. Adjunct faculty members who are unable to attend the day-long orientation session at University H may access relevant information about teaching policies and administrative responsibilities on an adjunct-specific web page. The internet resources include an adjunct faculty resource manual, technology handbooks, and information about policies and procedures at University H. Staff members at the teaching center at University H also schedule meeting sessions with adjunct faculty members to provide information they may have missed because they were unable to attend the orientation program.

**Using Surveys to Collect Faculty Responses to Orientation Programs**

University H collects faculty responses to the university-wide orientation program through a survey that is distributed during the final day of orientation. Previously, University H used an online form, but contacts note that response rates are higher when the survey is conducted in person. The survey gathers information about which aspects of the orientation were successful and which areas could be improved. Suggestions are taken into consideration when planning future orientations.
V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

At most contact institutions, professional development opportunities are available to both adjunct and tenure-track members of the faculty through a designated center or department. Nevertheless, some institutions, such as University F, limit the extent to which they advertise and provide programming to adjuncts because of budgetary constraints. Faculty development centers offer various training opportunities including seminars on courseware technology and pedagogy, individual training consultations, and occasionally, mentoring programs. Contacts report that professional development also occurs informally between adjuncts and department chairs or other tenured or tenure-track faculty members.

Development Opportunities Offered by Teaching Centers

Technology

A major component of faculty development opportunities at most contact institutions is training in courseware technology. Contacts report that although faculty receive a brief introduction to courseware technology during their orientation, the teaching centers at University H and University A offer additional trainings in technology resources throughout the academic year. During these trainings adjuncts improve their proficiency in teaching with modern technologies such as Blackboard and other relevant courseware applications.

Pedagogy

Contact institutions provide training through a variety of programs, most of which encourage adjuncts to interact with teaching center staff and other faculty members. These seminars cover topics ranging from basic information about course development and syllabus creation to more complex sessions about utilizing writing in the classroom and adapting to students’ diverse learning styles.

Delivery of Professional Development Services

Seminars and Workshops

Seminars and workshops are offered regularly throughout the academic year to provide small groups of faculty members with an overview of a specific topic, and sometimes take the form of weekend-long retreats. Seminars provide skill-building trainings on course development, grading, and the role of writing in the classroom.

Individual Consultations

Individual consultations provide faculty members with the opportunity to discuss specific challenges with a faculty development professional. These consultations typically address areas of needed improvement identified during classroom observations or focus group discussions with the faculty members’ students.

Mentoring Relationships

Mentoring relationships pair less experienced faculty members, including adjuncts, with their more experienced colleagues, typically tenured or tenure-track faculty. Mentors meet with their mentees regularly throughout the academic year to discuss specific challenges the mentees face and to develop concrete strategies to improve their teaching skills.

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Profession Development at *University C*

Adjunct faculty members at *University C* have access to a wide range of professional development programs and some of the most innovative practices provided by contact institutions.

**Mentoring Initiative**

The mentoring initiative provides faculty with the opportunity to collaborate on shared teaching interests and to brainstorm specific strategies to improve their teaching skills. One part of this initiative, in which communities are formed around common interests, is frequently patronized by adjunct faculty. Faculty members may write proposals, receive small budgets for books and food, and meet and conduct research over the course of the semester for projects that positively impact teaching practices at University C. This initiative builds a communal environment between adjuncts and tenured faculty, encouraging collaboration and strengthening faculty networks.

**Improving Teaching Practices in Science**

The chair of one of the science departments met with the adjuncts in her department over the course of a semester to read and discuss a book about best practices for teaching science. At the end of the semester, an article reporting best practices uncovered during these meetings was published in the newsletter of the teaching center.

**Integrating Technology into Teaching**

In an effort to develop more interactive courses, a group of adjunct faculty in the music department created a video clip demonstrating guitar fingerings for their students. The mentoring initiative gave the faculty members the opportunities to creatively integrate technology into teaching.

**Faculty Retreat Series**

The year-long faculty retreat series at University C consists of quarterly retreats that are organized to allow faculty members to reassess and improve their teaching skills. The retreats are open to all faculty members and several adjuncts participate each year. Based on the work of an organization that organizes retreats for K-12 educators, the retreats generally take place from Thursday evening to Saturday morning, providing faculty members with the opportunity to dedicate time to their personal growth within a supportive community setting. Contacts at University C observe significant long-term professional development among the faculty members who participate in the retreat series.

**Mid-Course Reviews**

University C also provides adjunct faculty with the option of participating in a mid-course review process. About halfway through the semester, teaching center staff members meet with instructors’ students to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a faculty member. The students’ responses are returned to the faculty member, who then has the opportunity to attend individual consultations with staff at the teaching center to discuss student feedback. Contacts stress that this process is solely for the improvement of teaching; the results are not shared for tenure consideration or promotion. Contacts report that the students who participate are informed prior to the evaluation that an instructor will be reviewed through an optional professional development program; students have consistently contributed thoughtfully to the evaluation process.
V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Improving Access to Professional Development Opportunities for Adjunct Faculty Members

Though the majority of contact institutions provide adjunct faculty members access to most of the professional development opportunities available to tenure-track faculty, adjuncts’ patronage of these services varies among contact institutions. The extent to which adjunct faculty members engage with professional development opportunities depends on the effort the teaching center makes to market and tailor faculty development services to adjuncts. Administrators across institutions have used flexible office hours, alternative schedules, night programs, internet resources, and the assurance of confidentiality as tools to increase adjuncts’ accessibility to professional development services.

“Anytime a center for teaching excellence begins to be perceived as a clinic for sick teachers, then the faculty stop coming.”
-Council Interview

Flexible Hours

Faculty development centers at University I and at University H are available after normal business hours to increase availability to adjuncts who work during the day. Staff at the University I teaching center are willing to schedule sessions later in the evening for adjuncts who require it, and the center at University H stays open past 5:00pm every evening.

Alternative Scheduling

College G hosts an adjunct appreciation dinner every semester as an alternative to the mid-semester lunch for full-time faculty. University H holds a similar meeting on a Friday night, rather than earlier in the week and also schedules each professional development seminar at two different times of the day (10:00am and 4:00pm) to accommodate adjunct faculty schedules.

Internet Resources

Both University H and University D publish professional development resources online as an alternative method of reaching adjuncts with unique schedules. University H’s adjunct faculty manual is one of many resources available on the teaching center’s website.

Ensuring Confidentiality

The teaching center at University H ensures that all the center’s resources may be accessed confidentially. Similarly, the results of the optional mid-course review program at University C are not shared for promotion purposes to ensure that the process is entirely dedicated to the improvement of teaching. Contacts report that ensuring privacy encourages faculty participation.
VI. ADJUNCT FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

Several contacts observe that although adjunct faculty members who are more engaged in an institution’s community typically have greater success in the classroom, promoting adjunct faculty engagement and participation continues to be a shared challenge across contact institutions. Encouraging adjunct faculty engagement with an institution’s community requires administrators to project the value that adjuncts contribute to an institution’s teaching mission and to allow more adjunct involvement in institutional governance. Several strategies that reportedly positively impact adjunct faculty engagement are described below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjunct Appreciation Dinners</th>
<th>Core Adjunct Status and Inclusion on Committees</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The graduate program at College G organizes an adjunct appreciation dinner every semester, during which the teaching center director speaks to adjuncts about grading policies and professional development. Though this event is intended to be a professional development program, it is also an effective tool to express appreciation for adjuncts. Contacts note that though adjuncts typically cannot commit to attending monthly meetings, it is important to bring them together a few times a year to involve them with the campus community and to show gratitude for their work.</td>
<td>Adjuncts who have taught at University E for several years and are heavily involved in faculty committees are given core adjunct status to indicate their seniority. Contacts note that this status makes adjuncts more personally invested in the success of the institution. Occasionally, adjuncts serve on curriculum or academic review committees at University E. Including adjuncts on faculty committees is an increasing trend across institutions, and a tangible way for academic leadership to express confidence in the work that adjuncts do.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Adjunct Representation on Faculty Governing Boards</th>
<th>Adjunct Coordinators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The academic council at University D has one seat for an adjunct faculty member who is elected to the council by other adjuncts. This individual has typically taught at University D for several years and presents adjunct needs and concerns during council meetings. The adjunct representative identifies adjunct needs either informally, as students and faculty members raise complaints about instructors’ weaknesses, or through formal focus group meetings with adjuncts. Contacts, however, report difficulty in scheduling focus group meetings at times that will be convenient for the majority of the adjunct faculty body.</td>
<td>Each college at University C has an adjunct coordinator, usually an administrative assistant, whose task it is to help adjuncts get settled at the university. The adjunct coordinator manages logistical processes, including providing adjunct faculty members with a desk, a parking pass, and access to the university web server. Contacts observe, however, that administrative assistants often view coordinating adjunct faculty transitions to the institution as an added burden, causing some departments to have limited success with this program.</td>
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</table>
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