

**ADJUNCT FACULTY ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING, SCHOLARSHIP AND SERVICE:  
GAPS IN ROLE DEFINITIONS AND RELATED STRESS IN SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT:** Given the current increase in the use of adjunct faculty, this research addressed faculty role expectations for the purpose of clarifying program stressors. Involvement in faculty decisions is considered a key component of the quality of students' learning environment according to NCATE accreditation standards intended to address the systemic nature of faculty involvement. More than half the courses in many Schools of Education are taught by associate faculty hired to teach but unlikely to be part of the infrastructure of programmatic design and administration that core faculty are. The lack of participation in and understanding of departmental and university affairs may translate into a "loss of credibility with frustrated students" (Edmondson & Fisher, 2003, p 11). Because university policies on adjuncts are open-ended or unspecified, each participant defines adjunct roles differently; these definitions are not always compatible. This session will raise the issues of systemic stress and stability, emphasizing the interdependent nature of all faculty positions within Schools of Education.

*Keywords: faculty definitions; systemic stress;*

The changing face of faculty in public and private colleges and universities has been well-documented (Chait & Trower 1998; Chronister 1999; Mallon 2000; USDOE NCES 2003), including descriptions of the non-academic forces influencing the increased reliance on tenure-ineligible faculty (Aronowitz and Giroux 2000; Chait and Trower 1998; Chronister 1999; Finkelstein 2003). Additional work has explored faculty roles and job satisfaction among tenure eligible and tenure-ineligible faculty, for instance, Gappa, (2000) and Perry et al. (1997) reported that job satisfaction for core and non-core faculty were similar. The underlying assumption of this work assumes that the role of non-core faculty is universally understood and agreed upon by the core faculty, non-core faculty, and administration. However, evidence does suggest that specific job descriptions outlining the roles of non-core faculty are often absent (Chronister 1999), in flux (Jonas and Weimer 1997; Mello 2003), and/or poorly defined (Finkelstein 2003).

In Schools of Education (SOEs), as in other professional schools, these non-core faculty are often career professionals, working full-time or recently retired, who are neither interested in a full-time academic commitment nor the day-to-day administrative tasks of full-time faculty. They are well-respected within their professions and they see their non-core positions at graduate, professional schools as enhancing their already well-established professional lives and as a gesture of service to the profession, though not necessarily to the university (Gappa 2000; Klein, Weisman, and Smith 1996; Schneider 2003).

Adjunct faculty members have been variously described as peripheral to campus life, marginalized from the academic mainstream and frustrated by their exclusion from campus governance, less likely to interact with students outside of class, less effective as teachers, more focused on their lack of long-term job stability than the system that provides the job, and more likely to inflate students' grades which may compromise academic rigor in order to sustain

student approval (Klein & Weisman, 1996; Johnson, MacGregor, & Watson, 2001; Lane 2002; Rifkin, 1998; Scheutz, 2002, Sonner, 2000; Wyles, 1998). The lack of participation in and understanding of departmental and university affairs may translate into a “loss of credibility with frustrated students” (Edmondson & Fisher, 2003, p 11).

On the other hand, adjunct faculty are recognized for their expertise and the cutting edge knowledge they bring to the classroom, along with their ability to illustrate theoretical perspectives with real-world experiences (Edmondson & Fisher, 2003; Ellison, 2002; Schneider, 2003). Additionally, there are analyses suggesting that adjunct faculty appreciate their association with the teaching institution (Klein and Weisman, 1996), have limited interest in participating in the administrative details of the academy (Lesley and Gappa, 2002; Schneider, 2003), and maintain long-term adjunct teaching connections with the institution (Schneider, 2003).

This dichotomy is particularly apparent when comparing adjunct roles at community colleges to those in professional graduate programs, such as Schools of Education (e.g. Ellison, 2002; Lane, 2002; Rifkin, 1998 versus Edmonson & Fisher, 2003, Johnson, MacGregor & Watson, 2001). Community college adjunct faculty often hope to establish a full-time career in academia and be fully involved in campus life, yet may need to teach at multiple institutions earn a livable salary (Sonner, 2000).

In contrast, graduate level adjunct instructors in Schools of Education may be career professionals, working full-time or recently retired, who are neither interested in a full-time academic commitment nor the day-to-day administrative tasks of full-time faculty (Klein & Weisman, 1996; Schneider, 2003). They may see their adjunct positions at graduate, professional schools as enhancing their already well-established professional lives and as a gesture of service

to the profession, though not necessarily to the university. Klein & Weisman (1996) reported this to be true in schools of social work; this may be true of other professional schools, such as law or business, as well.

Questions are therefore raised about the role of adjunct faculty in professional graduate programs, specifically in SOEs. These questions are not always apparent to the adjunct faculty themselves nor to their full-time colleagues nor to the overall system. Are the adjunct faculty members “merely” clinical experts, “merely” substitute teachers, or “merely” bargain-priced service providers? Or are the adjunct faculty members truly part of an academic team that should contribute to the development of their academic department and the trajectory of the institution itself? With these questions our investigation began.

*Schools of Education: Complex Systems*

While these questions cut across academic and professional disciplines (Johnson, MacGregor & Watson, 2001; Klein & Weisman, 1996) they are of particular concern to SOEs which offer graduate level education to classroom teachers. Recent changes in teacher education expectations and policies (NCATE, 2002; USDOE, 2002) have influenced an increasing number of teachers to return to school to upgrade their credentials. Programs in Schools of Education (SOEs) are administered and taught by faculty with a great range of association to the university. Many SOEs are relying on adjunct faculty to help them meet the needs of these students and to stay within budgets that have not been adjusted accordingly (Johnson, Kavanagh, & Mattson, 2003; Kirp, 2003). These external and internal pressures generate stress to which the faculty must respond. Involvement in faculty decisions is considered a key component of the quality of students' learning environment according to NCATE accreditation standards intended to address the systemic nature of education programs.

The discussion here is based on 13 interviews with core and adjunct faculty members at two SOEs. One SOE is a traditional, state-funded campus-based graduate program serving teachers who live in a small Midwestern city. The second SOE is at a private university offering graduate degree programs on a national basis in a satellite cohort model. As with most Schools of Education, there are multiple degree and certification programs with many overlapping course requirements and close connections to academic units in other schools of the universities. The complexity of the system is increased with the great range of faculty responsibilities, which vary greatly among the different faculty roles.

#### *Faculty Roles in Schools of Education*

The explicit role of full-time faculty is three-tiered: teaching, service, and scholarship (Lesley University, 2003-2004; SOE IUSB, 2003). On the other hand, adjunct faculty describe a role that lies solely with the realm of teaching: while they are influenced by the realities of their professional positions, they are less concerned with the needs of the overall university system and more influenced by the practical realities as they manifest in their professional lives and in the graduate classrooms in which they teach (Jonas & Weimer, 1997; Rifkin, 1998).

Initial discussions with full-time faculty at the two institutions suggest that what full-time faculty bring to the classroom is informed and influenced by their service and scholarship. Due to their full-time affiliation within the institution, full-time faculty have a systemic perspective that colors their understanding of decision-making processes and course integration; their course revisions are informed by both theoretical understanding (e.g., scholarship) and policy directives (e.g., service to the university).

Graduate programs in Schools of Education (SOEs) are administered and taught by faculty with a great range of association to the university. An important difference between core

and non-core faculty is how they obtain, understand, and utilize information about university and SOE policy, procedures, curricular mandates, and institutional concerns, which are derived from state directives, organizational responses to federal, state, and local initiatives, institutional budgetary concerns, and student evaluations of courses and programs.

*A Brief Portrait of Contingent Faculty*

The common bond tying together all adjunct faculty is their lack of permanent connection to the university and the existence of a contract that can be nullified with no penalty at the behest of either the university or the faculty member. Based on the literature and confirmed by preliminary interviews with core and adjunct faculty members, adjunct faculty appear to limit their role to their teaching wherein they may share their specialized knowledge with willing students: “That’s what they hired me for.”

Adjunct faculty often hold full time professional positions within their field of expertise; such faculty generally recognize that their interests lie in the interaction and contact with students (Schneider, 2003) rather than in the development of an academic persona or maintenance of an academic infrastructure. Therein lies the basic stress to the system: each participant in the system defines the role of the adjunct somewhat differently and these overlapping but separate definitions are not always compatible. A tension develops within the range of expectations held by all perspectives (full-time faculty, staff, administrators, students, adjunct faculty members, and professional community) regarding the participation of adjunct faculty.

While non-core faculty may accept that their participation is important, institutional expectations of participation are neither sufficient nor compelling enough to inspire meaningful participation beyond attendance at irregular get-togethers. Simultaneously, SOE administration

looks to maintain flexibility in scheduling while ensuring that the adjunct pool is strong and viable. Thus, there is an administrative imperative to tolerate less adjunct participation than is considered necessary for systemic health.

*The Student in the System*

Because the students are the ultimate recipients of the systemic health of the institution, they are also the most vulnerable to confusion, mixed messages, inconsistent implementation, and misinformation, seeking assistance from their most frequent or personally accessible points of contact. Ultimately, the instructional delivery of the adjunct instructor rests on the beliefs and definitions of the adjunct him/herself, and this delivery may inadvertently undermine the official efforts of the institution. Although adjuncts offer specific expertise and clinical experience that help students bridge the intellectual gap between theory and practice, adjuncts' lack of connection with the institution may belie a full understanding of the values, needs, and institutional expectations that underlie the interdependent nature of individual courses within SOE programs. While the institution and the full-time faculty may perceive the role of adjunct faculty as influential beyond the confines of the classroom, adjunct faculty may prefer not to venture beyond their interactions with the students in the classroom.

Full-time faculty blend teaching, service, and scholarship by teaching each other in addition to teaching their students (Boyer, 1990). This is a synthesis of professional responsibilities impossible for adjunct faculty who are therefore reduced to transmitting the decisions and insights of the core. Their own learning of the programs and content area is therefore of lesser quality than those involved full time. This articulation and cultivation is based on the infrastructure of communication that is allegedly used by all members of the institution.

An important difference between adjunct and full time faculty is how they obtain, understand, and utilize information about university and SOE policy, procedures, curricular mandates, and institutional concerns, which are derived from state directives, organizational responses to federal, state, and local initiatives, institutional budgetary concerns, and student (and, to a lesser extent, faculty) evaluations of courses and programs. There is therefore little promise of a leadership role, while leadership is the service required of full-time faculty.

Because the role definition of the adjunct faculty member – the purveyor of specialized knowledge – is not necessarily compatible with the adjunct’s role definition as understood by the full time faculty or the system itself, the adjunct faculty may place less importance on the specifics of the communication and they may be unwilling and/or unable to integrate this information and knowledge into their classroom presentation. Adjunct faculty may be less concerned with the theoretical implications of policy directives and more interested in the practical applications of these policy decision. Thus, this lack of clear definition adds stress to an already overburdened academic system.

*Systemic Weakness: Organizational Leadership*

SOEs must align with external systems, i.e., NCATE (2002), which require democratic participation by all faculty, including adjuncts, in curriculum development and program implementation, evaluation, coherence, and integrity. Continuous changes within the external (regulatory) systems has forced a dynamic approach to system change. The decisions that must be made in response to these changes are necessarily complex and therefore require extraordinary organizational leadership to remain consistently aligned.

In part due to the rapid systemic change, university policies regarding adjunct responsibilities have become open-ended and unspecified. Therein lies the basic stress to the

system: each participant in the system defines the role of adjuncts somewhat differently and these definitions are not always compatible.

Full time faculty encourage adjunct participation in governance and curriculum development--not just for efficient division of labor but also for more effective implementation of policies (Edmondson & Fisher, 2003). In this way, students of adjuncts would have equitable access to intellectual and logistical resources. There are many models of adjunct inclusion into departmental structures (Edmondson and Fisher, 2003; Howard & Hintz, 2002; Johnson, MacGregor & Watson, 2001). These models all presuppose that adjunct faculty wish to participate or have the time to participate in orientation and on-going mentorship programs or are interested in maintaining an active two-way communication with the SOE. More progressive schools require participation as a condition of employment (Gadberry, J, & Burnstad, H. (2005).

Statements from faculty of the two SOEs revealed a marked difference, in part because one is specifically geared toward providing graduate programs in temporary locations quite distant from the programs offered on campus, while the other is exclusively focused on campus. The first has an elaborate system of support, with supervising core faculty monitoring adjuncts who must first attend an on-campus orientation and shadow an experienced instructor for one of the intense weekend courses. There was a difference between the core and adjunct faculty assessments of this system: Although the adjuncts acknowledged the effort to communicate with them and the reality of distance which precluded their fuller participation, the source of their alienation was related more to the insecurity of the position. As one instructor pointed out, “

Full-time faculty may hope adjunct faculty will, in addition to sharing their specialized knowledge with the SOE, contribute to the development and implementation of program policy. Alternatively, they may regard adjuncts as a necessary condition of an under-funded system

better served by more full-time position (Johnson, Kavanagh, & Mattson, 2003; Kirp, 2003). The institution may officially acknowledge the adjuncts' role-positive contributions, in part to justify the increasing proportion of adjuncts responsible for implementing programs (NCATE, 2002). Additionally, the institution may encourage adjunct faculty to participate in student evaluation, program assessment, and collection of both artifacts and data for national, state, and local accreditation exercises (USDOE, 2002). However, full-time faculty report that although adjuncts who do participate feel professional pride in being 'a part of the team' and respected for their input, most adjunct faculty do not participate, even when invited: "We invite them, but they never come." And "We can't pay them, so they don't come." "They are too busy." Core faculty and administrators further admit that communication is inconsistent at best, reducing the response rate and increasing the tendency for adjuncts to be faceless and voiceless when decisions are made. Minutes from meetings are not routinely distributed.

While adjunct faculty may accept that their participation is important, institutional expectations of participation are neither sufficient nor compelling enough to inspire meaningful participation beyond attendance at irregular get-togethers. Simultaneously, SOE administration looks to maintain flexibility in scheduling while ensuring that the adjunct pool is strong and viable. Thus, there is an administrative imperative to tolerate less adjunct participation than is considered necessary for systemic health.

Adjuncts may be less connected to the institution than full-time faculty but they may not see this as a detriment to their goals because their professional goals lie elsewhere (Ellison, 2002; Jonas & Weimar, 1997; Schneider, 2003). Ironically, solutions to some systemic problems interact to generate miscommunication: Efforts to make graduate programs accessible, i.e., after hours, weekend, or off-site classes with no staff or core faculty on duty, remove students from

more authoritative guidance. This was more evident at the on-campus SOE than the distant programs that provide online support staff. The distant adjunct faculty reported that students complained more about the administrative tasks than the teaching, whereas the on-campus students tended to combine their frustration with the system.

However, the communication structure in both SOEs exposes the tensions in the system. Due to professional demands, adjunct faculty are less likely to look to printed sources of information, cyber or otherwise, and rely, instead, on the face-to-face communication that is less available to them. Additionally, these printed sources present adjuncts with disembodied information that may seem meaningless, useless, and/or irrelevant to their concerns and professional perspectives although the information may be relevant for student guidance and appropriate presentation of the University “face.” Finally, adjunct faculty might not be routinely connected to the SOE via computer, more often the prime means of communication in SOEs.

Several of the contingent faculty interviewed expressed the ambiguity of feeling alienated from the inner workings of the university but nonetheless strongly supportive of its mission and dedicated to its students. In a related news item, adjuncts recently demonstrated industrial solidarity in Chicago when they refused to cross the picket line of the faculty union, and were summarily dismissed (Bradley, G. (2005), but this is a situation unheard of at the two SOEs represented in this small sample.

### *Summary*

The increasing use of adjuncts in Schools of Education affects the quality of programs because the demands on the adjuncts exceed the scope of their perceived knowledge and responsibility. Without clear role definitions, adjunct weaknesses (e.g., lack of knowledge of university and program expectations) and program weaknesses (e.g., poor articulation between

and among individual courses) magnify each other; overshadowing the collective strengths. In order to strengthen the infrastructure of various SOE programs, we have to recognize the complications of maintaining a system that does not clearly define or intentionally cultivate the roles and expectations concerning one of its key components: adjunct faculty members.

The adjuncts are not the weak links in the system. However, the lack of common understanding of the role of the adjuncts suggests that the academic system itself is precarious. The full time faculty want and need additional, non-teaching support from the adjunct faculty, while the adjunct faculty wish to maintain their pristine role solely in the classroom. Additional departmental communication and/or expectations of service to the department or participation in departmental governance may discourage adjuncts because these extra responsibilities are seen as burdensome and distracting. University (as opposed to SOE or departmental) expectations assume that all faculty, including adjunct faculty, participate in academic administrative life.

As mentioned in the title, the problem is not with adjuncts but with the system. The systemic stress appears to lie within the need to reconcile the demographic and logistical realities of adjuncts with the democratic ideals of the institution and its core faculty. Tolstoi's (188?/) insights ring true: Although all systems are vulnerable in the same way, all systems require particular solutions that are specific to their contexts. It remains for the SOE leadership to analyze the interacting elements and facilitate effective communication and participation, beginning with a close monitoring of all decisions affecting and affected by adjunct faculty. Of course, the dynamics of leadership in a complex organization is a much broader topic than the differences among full- and part-time faculty.

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## APPENDIX

## Guiding Questions for Faculty Interviews

1. Qualification: What is your highest degree? i.e., MA MS PhD EdD
  - What is the degree in?
  - Where is it from?
  - When was it awarded?
2. Are you full time or part time faculty?
3. What is your connection to K-12 schools, i.e. teaching full time or administrator or retired..
4. What are your thoughts about the status of the School of Education?
  - a. Within the University.
  - b. Within your professional community.
5. What courses do you teach?
6. What exactly do you think makes you qualified to teach the courses you teach?
  - c. What education and training makes you uniquely qualified?
  - d. What real world experience makes you an expert?
7. What is the connection between the courses you teach and the larger programs and certification requirements that your students are committed to?
8. What supports and what interferes with the quality of your teaching?
  - e. What is your personal criteria for quality teaching?
  - f. What do most of your students think of your teaching?
  - g. What does the School of Education think of your teaching?
9. What nonteaching activities are you involved in with the SOE? i.e., Field supervision, Committees, Policies and syllabi development, Scholarship, Presentations, workshops, Responding to invitations to participate, Professional development
10. How do you think nonteaching activities are related to teaching quality?
  - h. To what extent do service and administration tasks influence teaching?
  - i. To what extent do scholarship or research tasks influence teaching?
11. Describe the communication between you and the School of Education and how this communication influences a) your adjunct faculty activities, and b) the school of education decisions.
  - j. How do you receive information about School of Education concerns?
  - k. What information do you use?
  - l. What information influences what you actually do?
  - m. Who do you communicate with in the SOE, how do you communicate with that person, and what do you communicate about?
12. We're interested in the different ways faculty, both adjunct & full time, are members of the professional school of education.
  - n. What makes you a member of the professional community of the SOE?
  - o. How do you think students see you as a faculty member?
  - p. How do you think other SOE faculty at {...} see you as a faculty member?
  - q. How are you seen as a faculty member by Lesley faculty outside the school of education?
  - r. What difference do you think faculty status makes to you doing your job here?
13. What are your thoughts about your faculty status?
  - s. Would you prefer to teach more or fewer courses?
  - t. Would you prefer to be a full-time lecturer or tenure-track faculty?
  - u. Would you prefer no change in teaching but a change in the way you and the school of education work together?
14. Our last question... Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about faculty involvement?