

Fulltime faculty perceptions of leadership in adjunct faculty to maintain Franciscan identity

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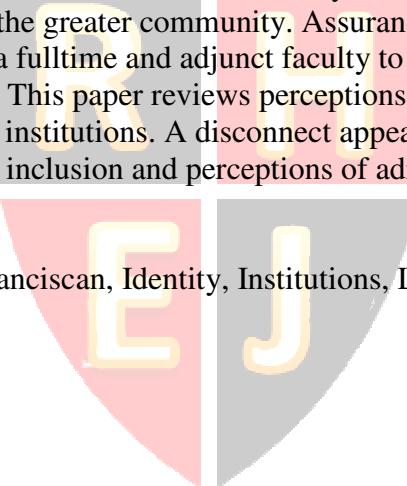
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of fulltime faculty regarding the leadership capability of adjunct faculty in institutional governance (and identity). In the current economic climate, institutions of higher education are continuing to expand the use of adjunct faculty. For private institutions, the mission identity of the institution is the distinguishing factor branded to the greater community. Assurances of mission and brand recognition must be delivered via fulltime and adjunct faculty to ensure continued viability of private colleges and universities. This paper reviews perceptions of faculty leadership to continue the brand in Franciscan institutions. A disconnect appears between the perceptions of faculty regarding adjunct faculty inclusion and perceptions of administrators regarding adjunct faculty.

Keywords: Adjunct, Faculty, Franciscan, Identity, Institutions, Leadership,



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of fulltime faculty regarding the leadership capability of adjunct faculty in institutional governance and identity in Franciscan colleges and universities. Franciscan colleges and universities are private institutions and therefore receive less funding from federal or state sources as a percentage of income than institutions that are state affiliated. This financial model requires Franciscan institutions to utilize faculty for administrative functions and requires a large contingent faculty to control costs and therefore keep tuition as low as possible. Couple these items with a decreasing presence of Franciscan religious employees on Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities (AFCU) campuses and it may be apparent that the Franciscan mission on which our institutions have been built is being lost to financial efficiency.

In order to combat the possibility of mission identity loss, leadership in this area is needed from all faculty including fulltime lay faculty, adjunct faculty, and religious order employees. In order to strongly integrate the Franciscan mission, one must first understand the perceptions that fulltime faculty have about adjunct faculty. Once the perceptions are quantified, a plan can be developed to improve the perception of fulltime faculty regarding adjunct faculty leadership capabilities if necessary. Secondly, if fulltime faculty perceptions of adjunct faculty leadership capabilities improve, a protocol can be developed to include adjunct faculty in leadership of mission integration into courses taught by adjunct faculty. Finally, mission and ministry administrators will need to support adjunct faculty and fulltime lay faculty in their capacity as mission leaders.

Ultimately, the integration of the Franciscan mission consistently throughout the curriculum at all Franciscan institutions will develop a strong brand that can be marketed universally thereby strengthening the integration of Franciscan leaders in our society.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Critical budget shortages and an overworked fulltime faculty have created opportunities in higher education for private citizens to function as part-time college or university instructors. Many individuals located in the professional community such as business and school districts alike, have taken advantage of this chance to enter the world of academe (Wickun & Stanley, 2000).

Adjunct faculty are becoming a larger portion of all college and university faculty, nearly 48 percent as reported in the 2005 NCES Digest of Education Statistics, their importance to the success of their institutions is evident, their plight is deplorable. This condition is outlined well in “We’re So Glad You Asked: Maryland Adjuncts Speak Out on Their Status, Needs, and Opinions” by Linda Martinak, Rik Karlsson, Richard Faircloth and Pamela Witcher. “We think that with your education you will be able to understand the complexities of our sentiments – that you are completely invaluable and yet expendable. It is, after all, the human condition. And we are in the humanities” (Martinak, et al, 2006).

What has made the adjunct faculty so valuable to the institution is not only the economic savings they bring to the institution but their expertise as well. Classes are able to be covered over a wide area of subject matter and topics, at a relatively reasonable cost by individuals that bring reality and on-the-job experience to the classroom. This is a winning combination for any collegiate classroom (Martinak et al, 2006).

For the purpose of this paper adjunct faculty are defined as “faculty who are hired on a contractual basis to teach one or more classes during a given period of time and who typically do not receive a fulltime salary or benefits from the college in which they teach” (Martinak et al, 2006).

The State of Adjuncts Today

Nationwide 48% of the coursework in the first two years of college and university education is taught by adjunct faculty (Leatherman, 1997). Adjuncts have been called “The New Faculty Majority” (Gappa, 2000). In community colleges across the country more than 60% of the faculty members are adjunct instructors, with 77% of the adjuncts having jobs outside the world of academe (Gappa, 2000). There are wide differences with respect to the type of degrees held by fulltime faculty versus adjunct faculty. In a study reported by Gappa, 71% of full-time faculty held terminal degrees while only 25% of the adjuncts do so (Gappa, 2000). Faculty development activities were varied with little consensus in terms of format and value to the adjunct or their students. Although there was little that institutions had in common for faculty development activities it was universally felt that institutions needed to develop stronger programs in this area due to the ever increasing numbers of this type of an employee (Martinak, 2006).

Individual disciplines also use adjunct faculty in different proportions. The three disciplines with the largest percentage of adjunct faculty, according to Leslie (1998) are fine arts (50.9%), business (46.5%) and education (45.3%).

In addition, adjunct faculty serve in several categories of college/university personnel, such as research assistants, part-time faculty, fulltime faculty outside tenure lines, graduate assistants, and post-doctorate fellows.

The central problem of contingent academics is not the people who fill the positions, as most of these individuals come to the job as highly qualified for their positions. The problem lies in the value of adjunct work, its lack of support structures, and the constraints on academic freedom for the faculty holding such positions. According to the American Association of University Professors, because faculty tenure is the only secure protection for academic freedom in teaching, research, and service, the declining percentage of tenured faculty means that academic freedom is increasingly at risk (AAUP, 2008).

In addition, adjunct faculty does not participate, for the most part, in faculty governance, not even in basic discussions about curriculum, which clearly represents a substantial limitation on their functioning as faculty. At the same time, declining enrollments and financial considerations have caused higher education institutions to employ an ever-increasing number of adjunct faculty members (Kuchera & Miller, 2008).

With respect to adjunct faculty, they are not required to be involved in research relative to their area of subject expertise, they are not involved in advising students in any formalized manner, they are not included in faculty governance, and their continued employment is completely dependent upon student enrollment (Kamps, 1996; Wegner, MacGregor & Watson, 2003). To further aggravate the problem for private institutions, such as the Franciscan colleges and universities, adjunct faculty may offer little or nothing to enhance and celebrate the Franciscan mission of the institution other than possibly advocating for the mission by being an excellent role model in their dealings with their students.

On the other hand, adjunct professors who are perfecting their craft in their respective professions bring a rich experience to the classroom. They apply theory learned in the classroom to “real life” experiences (Beem, 2002). There is no doubt that students who are preparing for the world of work can benefit from being taught by professors who can blend well theory and practice (Beem, 2002).

Adjunct faculty teaches in colleges and universities for many reasons. Some of those reasons would include the ability to pass on their knowledge from their daytime jobs onto their students, to possibly keep busy after retirement, and still others would hope to use these positions as a stepping stone to their becoming fulltime professors (VanderMeulen, 2008).

Although adjunct faculty will continue to be a need for all colleges and universities in the future there will continue to be problems associated with their use. A few of these issues are outlined by Wickun & Stanley (2000). They include the lack of teaching experience in the classroom. It is a major weakness that must be addressed. In most instances, it takes several years for an adjunct faculty member to become proficient in teaching at the collegiate level. Secondly, the lack of departmental support is another weakness of the adjunct system, particularly at large universities. The adjunct faculty member typically has no office, no campus phone and no job description. In many instances the only contact with the institution is a mailbox and a copy of the previous syllabus for the course. Additionally, at private institutions that pride themselves in their mission and values, such as a Franciscan college or institution, there is little mention of the fact that those values are to become part of the classroom experience. Finally, regardless of their dedication to their classes, the low salary of adjuncts can create animosity. The attitude of adjuncts can be influenced by the wide gap between their “expertise” and their low level of remuneration, especially when they consider the lack of respect they often receive from the fulltime faculty.

According to the AAUP there are several other costs associated with the increasing number of adjunct faculty in higher education institutions (2008):

Student learning is diminished by reduced contact with tenured faculty members, whose expertise in their field and effectiveness as teachers have been validated by peer review and to whom the institution has made a long-term commitment. Faculty governance is weakened by constant turnover and on many campuses by the exclusion of adjunct faculty from governance activities. Inequities and physical distance among potential colleagues undermine the collegial atmosphere of academic institutions and hamper the effectiveness of academic decision making. The integrity of faculty work is threatened as parts of the whole are divided and assigned piecemeal to instructors, lecturers, graduate students, specialists, researchers, and even administrators.

The role of adjunct faculty in higher education is continuing to evolve. Based on The Role of Adjunct Faculty in Higher Education by William G. Wickun and Rock E. Stanley, written in 2000, adjunct faculty are significant players in the delivery of instruction at many colleges and universities throughout the U.S. with more than 40% of the credit hours earned taught by adjunct faculty. Therefore it is extremely important that institutions improve their assimilation and participation of adjunct faculty in the educational program of their institution. Adjunct faculty will continue to be hired in order to meet the needs of the current instructional and budgetary shortfalls. The current climate provides a realistic opportunity to apply an ongoing

quality improvement program. There are many ways in which the use of adjunct faculty could be improved.

Any steps taken to improve the quality of the instruction provided by adjunct faculty should be proactive. College and university administrators, deans, and department chairs should explore every possibility to improve the role and use of adjunct faculty.

In the coming years, higher education is more than likely to increase even further its reliance on adjunct faculty. As a result, these faculty members will have an even greater impact on student learning. It is therefore the responsibility of the institutions that employ them to insure the effectiveness of adjunct faculty in contributing to the teaching-learning process and the mission of the colleges and universities. To do otherwise is to threaten the academic vitality and the integrity of the programs of these institutions (Elman, 2003).

Currently, there is little or no research in the area of adjunct faculty at private institutions, such as the Franciscan colleges and universities with respect to how they address the mission of the institution. As a result, this was an area that needed further study and was the purpose of this paper.

METHODOLOGY

This study was design as a relationship study. The primary purpose of a relationship study is to identify the causes and effects of important phenomena. This type of research design is especially useful for exploratory studies (Borg & Gall, 1989). This design allows analysis of relationships between several variables simultaneously. The results are reported even though there may or may not be any theoretical basis to justify their inclusion (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Institutional Review Board

The proposed research design and questionnaire was submitted to the Alvernia University Institutional Review Board on May 7, 2008 and assigned proposal number 0508-122. The board approved the project on May 7, 2008 and sent a “Notification to Investigator” of said approval.

Survey

The questionnaire was designed to solicit responses to a series of statements designed to determine the perception fulltime faculty have regarding the inclusion of adjunct faculty in institutional governance and the perceived leadership capacity of adjunct faculty in institutional governance in Franciscan colleges and universities. The survey instrument requested the participant to respond to 22 statements utilizing a 5-point Likert scale design. The instrument included three open ended questions which provided the participant an opportunity to add additional information regarding adjunct faculty participation in their institution’s governance process.

For analysis purposes, the survey questionnaire, with the demographic information request form, was divided and grouped into four sections. Section one requested responses to Likert scale statements regarding the adjunct hiring process, orientation to the institution, and professional development. Section two requested responses to Likert scale statements regarding the adjunct’s faculty role in governance which included familiarity with the faculty handbook

and any policies relating to the inclusion of adjunct faculty in the handbook, inclusion in department and faculty meetings, the depth and breadth of inclusion in faculty meetings, compensation or rewards, and the ability to vote or to hold office on faculty committees. Section three requested responses to Likert scale statements designed to gather information about expectations of adjunct faculty to include: the ideal level of participation and interaction with fulltime tenured and tenure-track faculty, their desire and willingness to participate in the governance process. Section four requested trait and characteristic information about the respondent to include: position (primary subject area, employment status, and schedule), gender, age and highest academic achievement.

Population and Sample

The population selected to participate in the survey are employees of member institutions in the Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities or AFCU. The 20 member institutions range in size from large and established universities, to junior colleges, to small newer colleges. The schools are dispersed from coast to coast throughout the United States. As member institutions all however, are characterized by their Franciscan values and support Catholic higher education. The mission of the AFCU is to provide a forum for dialog and to foster and facilitate collaboration among its members in which member institutions subscribe (www.franciscancollegesuniveristies.org).

Of the 20 member institutions nationwide, 14 schools were represented at the 2008 AFCU Symposium held on the campus of Alvernia University located in Reading, PA. Institutions participating in the symposium were geographically represented with the exception of schools located along the west coast. The survey was distributed to all 200 participants; some of whom did not serve in a teaching capacity.

Reliability

A Cronbach alpha test of reliability was performed on the variables to determine the validity and reliability of the data collected for the study. Utilizing SPSS 16.0 software, the test revealed a Cronabch alpha score of .74. Typically a score of .70 or higher is acceptable for social science inquiry utilizing quasi experimental design (Nunnally 1978).

RESULTS

All data was coded and entered into a database. SPSS software provides a tool to perform statistical procedures specifically tailored to the social sciences (SPSS, 2008). Upon completion and verification of coded data, the appropriate statistical procedures were performed. The data output was then analyzed and the results are revealed within the paper. All original data and coding keys have been preserved.

The typical respondent is a female between 46 and 55 years of age and has been in higher education for 11 to 15 years. The typical respondent has a doctoral degree and is in a non-tenured position teaching undergraduate students in a traditional day program. They are not seeking a tenure track position but would like to participate in the governance process.

An evaluation of the Likert scale questions has revealed the following general beliefs regarding adjunct faculty at Franciscan universities. The ability of adjunct faculty to express their opinions is only partly true. In addition, the communication loop in keeping adjunct faculty informed is only experienced on a limited basis. These results are confirmed through the belief expressed that adjunct faculty are too busy to participate in the decision making process at their institution.

Respondents indicated that they believe adjunct faculty lack the knowledge of governance regarding their ability to participate in the process. Although attendance is sometimes requested at department meetings, decision making participation at the department level is not consistently sought. There is strong belief among respondents that their institutions have no model of inclusion for adjunct faculty in the decision making process.

Interestingly, the idea that adjunct faculty will have an opportunity for fulltime tenure track employment if they interact with tenured faculty is not widely accepted as true by adjunct faculty. Additionally, respondents believe that adjunct faculty opinions are not often sought for scheduling. Respondents also indicated that adjunct faculty is not compensated for participation at faculty meetings and they have little to no input in their schedules and they do not have voting privileges in faculty council/senate meetings. Furthermore, adjunct faculty is not encouraged by fulltime faculty or administration to participate in the governance process.

While the respondents indicated that adjunct faculty could impact the decision making process, faculty committees typically do not include adjunct faculty. Respondents indicated that perhaps they should be included. To do this would require institutions to change meeting times to accommodate adjunct work schedules, which the respondents indicated does not occur. Respondents indicated that fulltime faculty is not willing to fully embrace adjunct faculty in the governance process.

It is partly true that respondents believe faculty leaders in governance represent the interests of all faculty including adjunct faculty. Respondents also indicated that participation of adjunct faculty will improve adjunct faculty conditions and that adjunct faculty representation could be handled through a representative group.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that currently there is little encouragement from faculty or administration to include adjunct faculty in the governing process of Franciscan institutions. Meanwhile there is some support for adjunct faculty members to attend department meetings. It appears as if adjunct faculty is only consulted regarding specific curricular needs within departments.

The study revealed that adjunct faculty may have their work place concerns better addressed if they are represented at faculty council/senate meetings by a representative specific to adjunct faculty. For this process to work an attitudinal change in fulltime faculty and administration is needed.

Implications

In private Franciscan institutions adjunct faculty is a key component to financial viability. In addition adjunct faculty typically brings professional experience to the classroom that

enhances the education of students. Adjunct faculty tend to be absent from student advising, academic governance and student life events.

As Franciscan colleges continue to compete in an increasingly competitive market, the Franciscan brand must be developed and implemented in all classes to ensure students understand the significance of a Franciscan education. Under current and future financial constraints, adjunct faculty will continue to play a vital role in the success of Franciscan institutions.

To ensure a growing and recognizable brand, full-time faculty needs to embrace adjunct faculty and recognize their contributions to the institution. Furthermore, it will be necessary for fulltime faculty to help adjunct faculty understand the importance of delivering a Franciscan education. To accomplish these goals, faculty leadership must aggressively pursue appropriate mission and ministry training for adjunct faculty. In addition, the assigning of a “Franciscan” mentor to help implement the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition into each course syllabus should occur. Finally, with the importance of developing the Franciscan brand for the survival of the Franciscan colleges and universities at stake, remuneration to those involved should be provided at adequate levels.

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