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Abstract

This paper aims to further explore the impact of need and culture as they relate to orientation, training, development, and administrative policies on regional university adjunct faculty. The use of adjunct faculty has risen considerably over recent years making their university experience more relevant in today's higher education climate. Adjunct faculty express the desire for orientation, training, and professional development. In addition, adjunct faculty find administrative policies extremely isolating in nature as they struggle to develop more meaningful relationships with other faculty, administrators, and students. While adjunct faculty have vast industry experience, they often lack extensive experience in higher education. Considering that adjunct faculty have such a tremendous impact on college students, how they feel about their higher education experience is of great concern. Adjunct faculty effectiveness suffers when they do not receive adequate orientation, training, and development. When adjunct faculty are isolated from the university due to the structure of administrative policy, they become less committed to the overarching goals of the organization and thus less committed to students.

Introduction

Since adjunct faculty hiring has been on the rise for several years, more attention should be given to adjunct faculty impact on students. Budgetary concerns at higher education institutions bring about an increase in the hiring of adjunct faculty (Curtis et al., 2016). Adjunct faculty receive fewer benefits and less pay than their full-time colleagues (Bakley & Brodersen, 2018) making the utilization of adjunct faculty more cost-efficient than employing full-time faculty (Gluckman, 2017). With the funding deficit that regional universities experience, when compared to their state counterparts, adjunct faculty are even more important (Docking & Curton, 2015). Community settings and small class rosters make the regional university atmosphere more personal which provides students with a unique experience (Docking & Curton, 2015). This sense of community is a draw for many potential college students.

College students are directly influenced by adjunct faculty (Mueller et al., 2013). Mueller et al. (2013) found that students learn less and are less fulfilled by their learning experience when they are instructed by adjunct faculty as opposed to full-time faculty. At regional universities, student engagement with faculty is more common because of smaller class sizes which perpetuates personal interaction. Whether that engagement is positive or negative has a direct impact on degree completion (Price & Tovar, 2014).

Adjunct faculty are subject matter experts but generally have less higher education experience and pedagogical understanding than their full-time counterparts (Lockhart-Kenne & Potvin, 2018). Rogers (2015) found that adjunct instructors lack training and development. Since students suffer academically, socially, and emotionally without proper support in class (Thomas et al., 2016; Hogan et al., 2013), training and development for adjunct faculty are crucial. While Ferencz and WGU (2017) found that adjunct faculty are motivated by community and organizational culture, other work and life responsibilities make it difficult for adjunct faculty to participate in university activities (Mueller et al., 2013) which puts community and organizational culture at a distance.

Adjunct faculty have such a profound impact on students; their effectiveness is crucial to the core mission of the regional university (Mueller et al., 2013). University administrators have a key role to play when it comes to creating organizational buy-in from adjunct faculty (Bastedo et al., 2016). For these reasons, adjunct faculty must be a focus of interest for university administrators. While there is a plethora of research regarding adjunct faculty, little to none concentrates explicitly on how need and culture affect regional university adjunct faculty.

Additionally, adjunct faculty often feel disconnected from both the university and the department with which they are professionally associated (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2014). Unfortunately, faculty orientation and training programs are often inadequate (Carlson, 2015) exacerbating this issue. In a study conducted by Carlson (2015), participants reported receiving less than five hours of orientation, with over half receiving less than two hours of training. Reports on communication and training levels were even more disheartening, with respondents feeling least informed about changes in course and school policies, as well as curriculum alterations (Carlson, 2015, p. 6). Sousa and Resha (2019) suggest that part of the problem is that orientation and training initiatives are typically designed by full-time faculty and administration, who may have limited knowledge of the resources necessary for adjunct faculty transitioning from the private sector.

Kouzes and Posner (2017) argue that effective communication of policies and organizational changes should be a top priority for administration, as neglecting this process can be detrimental to the organization. Proper orientation and training could serve as a distinct method for administration to forge stronger connections between adjunct faculty and the university (Carlson, 2015; Slade et al., 2017). Establishing a cohesive culture among constituents binds these employees to the organization's mission and vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), ultimately benefiting the students.

Research Focus

Adjunct faculty feel uncertain about their status (Bakley & Brodersen, 2018) while the utilization of adjunct faculty has grown in recent years (Curtis et al., 2016). When employees at any organization feel linked to the institution, the natural momentum toward the organizational mission, vision, values, and goals is substantially boosted (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Unfortunately, adjunct faculty are inherently out of the loop when it comes to communication from administration and full-time faculty (Bastedo et al., 2016). The isolating nature of this phenomenon negatively impacts adjunct faculty and in turn, the connection between adjunct faculty and the organization is degraded (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The problem is there is little to no literature on the impact of

need and culture on regional university adjunct faculty. Insufficient orientation, training, and professional development, as well as isolating administrative policies cause a disconnect between adjunct faculty and the institution.

Method

The purpose of this paper was to delve deeper into the impact of need and culture on regional university adjunct faculty. Maslow’s human motivation theory (1943a, 1943b) was utilized in this paper on regional university adjunct faculty. For humans, motivation involves a need-based hierarchy and to understand any aspect of a human, it is necessary to consider their whole being (Maslow, 1943a; Maslow, 1943b). The current paper explores the thoughts and feelings that regional university adjunct faculty have about their higher education experience as it relates to the need for orientation, training, and development and to the importance of feelings of belonging that arise from a strong organizational culture.

Themes

The themes of need and culture were the focus of this paper. There were 42 instances of “need” for orientation, training, and development, and 19 instances of “culture” referring to administrative policies and isolating nature, identified during data analysis (Purdum, 2020). The instances were sub-categorized further into more defining classifications.

Table 1. Themes

Themes	Codes	Instances
Need	Non-existent/minimal	25
	New to field	8
	Differing student dynamic	6
	Discipline-specific	3
Culture	Administrative policies	10
	Isolating nature	9

(Purdum, 2020, p. 75)

When asked about how orientation, training, and professional development influenced their confidence in their skills and abilities, the participants denoted 25 times that all components were lacking at the university (Purdum, 2020). The participants desired effective orientation and training for those entering higher education as well as discipline-specific professional development for all adjunct faculty (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty see a need for training within their specific disciplines and a need for professional development to better serve today’s diverse student population (Purdum, 2020).

Feelings of isolation developed when adjunct faculty were not included in communication from administration, department heads, deans, and other faculty (Purdum, 2020). While isolation is an issue, some adjunct faculty noted

opportunities may not be utilized for various reasons such as busy schedules and lack of interest (Purdum, 2020). Logistics played a role in feelings of isolation for some adjunct faculty as they do not live near campus making it difficult to participate in university activities (Purdum, 2020). In addition, many adjunct faculty teach night courses when there are fewer full-time faculty and administrators on campus (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty noted when they had the opportunity to interact with full-time faculty and administration, the encounters were positive (Purdum, 2020). Prohibitive administrative policies caused adjunct faculty to feel isolated and undervalued (Purdum, 2020).

Discussion

Need

The feedback from adjunct faculty regarding their orientation, training, and professional development is overwhelmingly indicative of a significant gap in support and resources provided by the university. This deficiency is particularly concerning given the pivotal role that adjunct faculty play in the university dynamic. Kouzes and Posner (2017) found that proper orientation, training, and professional development are necessary for employees to feel committed to the organization.

Non-existent/Minimal

Adjunct faculty felt that the orientation, training, and professional development they received was non-existent or minimal (Purdum 2020). While most indicated they received no orientation as part of their onboarding, one new adjunct faculty member specified that even though they were already working at the university in a different capacity, they received no formal orientation for adjunct teaching (Purdum, 2020). Others experienced specialty hiring training such as sexual harassment awareness training even though they did not receive proper orientation (Purdum, 2020). A few received learning management software training which consisted of training videos that were watched on their own time rather than formal training in a classroom-type setting (Purdum, 2020).

The absence or minimal nature of orientation for new adjunct faculty members is a clear detriment to their ability to acclimate into the university community. Orientation serves as a crucial introduction to the institution's culture, policies, and resources (Richard et al., 2022). Without this foundational knowledge, adjunct faculty may find themselves navigating unfamiliar territory without the necessary tools to excel or even survive in their roles.

The case of the adjunct faculty member who added adjunct teaching to their role within the university is particularly telling. Even with prior experience at the institution, they were left without a formal orientation specific to their adjunct position (Purdum, 2020). This oversight not only fails to acknowledge the unique demands of adjunct teaching, but it also neglects to recognize the potential for contribution that this faculty member could bring to their new role, the department, and the university.

The misallocation of training resources is also of concern. While some adjunct faculty did receive specialty training, such as sexual harassment awareness training, it is alarming that such critical topics were addressed

without broader orientation efforts (Purdum, 2020). This approach can lead to a misunderstanding of the university's values and goals, potentially undermining the effectiveness of the training.

The mode of delivery for certain training, particularly learning management software, raises further issues. While the provision of training videos can be a valuable resource, relying solely on this format neglects the benefits of interactive, in-person instruction. Classroom-based training, even via virtual platforms, offers opportunities for immediate feedback, hands-on practice, and collaborative learning, all of which can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the training and the adjunct experience (Fuller et al., 2017).

New to Field

The absence of formal college-level educator training for some adjunct faculty members, especially those with little to no prior teaching experience, presents a significant challenge within the higher education environment. This challenge is particularly evident when considering the diverse backgrounds of adjunct faculty, many of whom have pursued careers in the private sector before entering the realm of higher education. While these individuals often bring valuable industry expertise and professional skills to the classroom, they may find themselves unprepared to navigate the complexities of college-level teaching. Higher education teaching requires a different skill set altogether. Teaching in higher education requires an understanding of pedagogy, curriculum development, student engagement, assessment strategies, and classroom management even for adjunct faculty. These skills are not typically acquired in a corporate or industry setting.

Providing adjunct faculty with access to ongoing professional development opportunities is crucial. These opportunities can include conferences, workshops, seminars, mentoring programs, and resources on pedagogy and best practices in higher education. Such initiatives can help adjunct faculty acclimate to the demands of the classroom.

Differing Student Dynamic

Adjunct faculty indicated that if they received any professional development, which was rare, the training did not focus on the diverse student dynamic of today's college population (Purdum, 2020). The regional university student is atypical in that they often have families and work lives outside of school. These responsibilities put extra strain on college students. Effective college-level teaching often revolves around a student-centered approach, where instructors must tailor their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of students. Adjunct faculty who lack formal training may struggle to adapt their instructional methods to effectively engage and support a diverse student body.

Current college classrooms are more diverse than ever before, encompassing a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives (Bastedo et al., 2016). Effective teaching requires an understanding of this diversity and an ability to create an inclusive learning environment. If professional development lacks emphasis on diversity and inclusion, faculty may struggle to connect with and support students from varied backgrounds. Professional

development should include adaptive teaching methods that support this diversity.

Discipline-specific

The need for discipline-specific professional development was a common theme among adjunct faculty (Purdum, 2020). They experienced some professional development, but none focused on their teaching discipline. Adjunct faculty felt that discipline-specific professional development would be a tangible benefit to them and for their students (Purdum, 2020). The demand for discipline-specific professional development among adjunct faculty underscores an imperative opportunity for improvement in higher education. While adjunct faculty occasionally receive some form of professional development, it is strikingly deficient in addressing the unique pedagogical requirements of their specific teaching disciplines. This omission leaves adjunct faculty feeling inadequately equipped to provide the highest quality education in their respective fields.

Each academic discipline possesses its own set of content knowledge, teaching methodologies, and best practices. Emerging technologies, research, and methodologies require continuing education for all faculty. Without discipline-specific training, adjunct faculty may find it challenging to convey the material effectively or incorporate the most relevant information into their courses. Discipline-specific professional development enables adjunct faculty to explore innovative instructional techniques, develop specialized assessments, and design curricula that align with the standards of their field. This, in turn, translates to a more engaging and impactful learning experience for students (Fuller et al., 2017).

Culture

Culture was a relative theme that emerged. The university culture is complex and unique in that, for centuries, the university has been the bedrock for people striving for increased knowledge and meaningful social impact (Gorzelay et al., 2021). Higher education institutions need administrative policies that support adjunct faculty and help propel their teaching goals. Employees who feel supported are more successful in their professional roles (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Administrative Policies

Many of the adjunct faculty saw administrative policies as a hindrance to positive organizational culture (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty felt frustrated that certain policies were in place keeping them from teaching more credit hours (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty teach on a semester-by-semester contract basis and are unable to prepare their courses in advance as they often receive their semester course assignments just days before the semester begins (Purdum, 2020). This has a direct impact on students' learning and experiences.

Administrative policies limited the advancement of adjunct faculty into full-time positions. Some adjunct faculty members complained that even though they desired to serve on academic committees, they were not permitted to do so (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty found this restriction to be very off-putting as they have valuable insight to offer (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty were not involved in curriculum development or textbook adoption

(Purdum, 2020). This is a disservice to students as an adjunct faculty member may be the only instructor teaching a particular course. In addition, adjunct faculty desired more opportunities to attend academic conferences to improve their curriculum vitae but were disappointed that the university does not financially support this initiative (Purdum, 2020).

Isolating Nature

Many adjunct faculty found the university culture to be very isolating in nature (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty have little to no opportunity to engage with other adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, department heads, and university administrators (Purdum, 2020). Adjunct faculty seek to be included in the day-to-day conversations and activities within the department, and long to build relationships with other adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, department heads, and university administrators (Purdum, 2020). Additionally, adjunct faculty desire to be included in making decisions, especially when they are directly affected (Purdum, 2020). They seek communication about policies and activities within their specific department as well as communication about campus-wide activities (Purdum, 2020).

Adjunct faculty felt they had no voice with full-time faculty and were excluded from the department team (Purdum, 2020). Because they teach minimal credit hours, adjunct faculty are limited in their ability to engage with other faculty and students (Purdum, 2020). Restrictive administrative policies and feelings of isolation resulting from issues within the organizational culture lead to decreased employee morale (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this focused examination sheds light on the critical role that adjunct faculty play at the regional university and the profound impact they have on students' academic experience. Adjunct faculty have a strong desire for improved onboarding to include more effective orientation, training, and professional development. Adjunct faculty are desperate for stronger organizational culture including greater interaction with administrators and other faculty to keep feelings of isolation at bay.

Addressing the issues highlighted in this paper is of paramount importance for regional university administration because of the negative impact on adjunct faculty. Correcting these problems would increase adjunct faculty effectiveness and consequently student experience through a richer and more fulfilling community. University administrators must prioritize the well-being of adjunct faculty through a more concerted effort to supply them with the tools and support they need to thrive in the higher education setting.

Recommendations

Our recommendations for university administrators are to provide thorough orientation at onboarding, develop consistent training practices, offer robust professional development opportunities, and solidify organizational

culture. A formal assessment of adjunct faculty needs should be the starting point. Formal orientation should be offered in both virtual and in-person options at times convenient for adjunct faculty, given they are likely to have other employment. Additionally, providing an adjunct faculty handbook including a job description with detailed responsibilities along with a list of university resources will aid in student experiences by providing readily accessible information for adjunct faculty.

Continued training and professional development opportunities should be implemented. The university should offer training and professional development on campus, and arrange off-campus opportunities such as workshops, conferences, and seminars for adjunct faculty. Regularly scheduled departmental meetings, which include adjunct faculty, will allow professional growth in the higher education setting as well as provide an opportunity for adjunct faculty to engage with full-time faculty and administrators. Engaging activities are necessary to alleviate the isolating nature for adjunct faculty. Recognition of adjunct faculty, whether it be for years of service or excellence in education, will give them a sense of belonging. Activities designed specifically to include adjunct faculty would increase morale, tying them to the university community. These activities could be as simple as a potluck gathering or a meet-and-greet scheduled at a time when adjunct faculty are able to attend.

University administrators should consider organizing faculty mentors to help guide and support adjunct faculty. When adjunct faculty have a specific point of contact for assistance, they do not feel so isolated. Instead, they feel supported and valued. Faculty mentors should be assigned to adjuncts immediately after they are hired and a system of regular communication and collaboration should be implemented. A review of administrative policies is in order. University administrators should revise policies to support all faculty including adjuncts. While it may not be appropriate for adjunct faculty to serve on academic committees, there are other ways to include them and show that their input is valued. For example, surveys and focus groups could be structured to include adjunct faculty opinions.

Research shows that employees are more effective in their professional roles when they feel seen and valued (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Offering orientation, training, professional development, inclusive administrative policies, and engaging activities is critical. These improvements would support adjunct faculty and provide necessary tools and training for successful teaching (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

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