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Part-Time Faculty: Identifying the Trends and Challenges

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THE trend toward short-term, non-tenure track appointments or part-time employment has become increasingly common in institutions of higher education in recent years. Prior to the mid-60's such faculty arrangements were considered to enhance regular teaching by providing specialized and expert instruction from professionals in other fields. Today, a new role for part-time instructors has emerged. Pressured by financial uncertainties, forecasts of declining student enrollments, and restrictive federal aid policies, institutions of higher education have increased their reliance on part-time faculty for full-time instruction. Currently, 38% of college and university faculty are hired on a part-time basis (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; Kelly, 1992). Combine with this the predicted boom in community colleges and the expansion of life-long learning centers which heavily utilize part-time instructors; part-timers will dominate higher education in the future (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; Robinson, 1989; Kelly, 1992; Mydans, 1995). The trend toward use of part-time instructors across the nation in higher education is also reflected in most departments of communication (Robinson, 1989). In spite of this trend, the role of part-time instructors in academia has received little attention (Biles & Tuchman, 1986; Mathis, 1979). The focus of this paper is to consider the scope of the problem, identify the characteristics of part-time instructors, and assess the effects of part-time appointments on the profession. Some suggestions for meeting future challenges are also offered.

DEFINING THE NATURE OF PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Before attempting to address the issue of part-time employment, it is useful to acknowledge the definitions that have guided past researchers. Normally, part-time instruction has meant all faculty employed to teach less than the full-time teaching load. Of course, this may

vary from one institution to another depending upon the full-time equivalent. However, the relationship remains constant; part-time instructors teach less than their full-time colleagues. Various labels have been applied to such appointments, including instructorships, adjunct faculty, visiting professors, and guest lecturers. The categories of part-time instructors have been described and documented at length in multiple publications (Biles & Tuchman, 1986).

Several scholars have defined the relational aspect of part-time employment as a more critical variable than the number of hours spent in the classroom. Robert M. Smith (1980) commented: "All faculty who have a tenuous appointment and less than a reciprocal career commitment with the institution can be considered part-time. It is the psychological, not the economic commitment between the person and the institution that makes a difference in their relationship" (p. 61). In addition to the demographic data concerning part-time employment, it is important to recognize that the relational aspects of part-time employment also merit examination.

Within academia, the overall trend toward employing part-time instructors began in the late 1960's and early 1970's as retiring full-time instructors were replaced by part-time instructors (Finkelstein, 1985). In 1970-1971 full-to part-time faculty ratios stood at 3.5 to 1. The number of part-time instructors increased steadily so that by 1982-1983 the ratio stood at 2.1 to 1 (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). The shift in junior colleges and community colleges is even more dramatic. Part-time instructors are now in the majority, constituting approximately 67% of all community college faculty. This trend is expected to continue as more full-time faculty members leave academia and are replaced by part-timers (Mydans, 1995).

Another striking feature of part-time employment is that a majority of part-timers at all levels (approximately 38.7% to 52%) are women (Myers, 1984; Robinson, 1989). A common explanation is that women have more difficulty than men finding full-time employment (Finkelstein, 1985; Roberts, 1995).

Accompanying the overwhelming presence of women among part-time instructors, it is not surprising to find that most (91.0%) are unranked or outside the normal channels of academic advancement, including instructors, lecturers, assistant instructors, adjuncts, visiting professors and other job classifications. Few (19.7%) hold terminal degrees in their fields; most of these moonlight or are semi-retired professionals (Finkelstein, 1985). Women are much more likely to hold part-time positions than full-time employment. In the typical four-year institution, women account for 36% of the part-time positions and only 27% of full-time employment (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). In addition to their overwhelming presence among part-time faculty, women are disproportionately represented at the community college level and at less prestigious four-year colleges. They are less numerous at major universities and especially scarce at major research institutions (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; Finkelstein, 1985; Graybeal, 1989; Lipset & Ladd, 1985). Most are found in four traditionally overcrowded, gender stereotyped fields—the performing arts (including art, drama, and music), foreign languages, health-related professions, and English (Finkelstein, 1985; Lipset & Ladd, 1985).

It is difficult to find large sets of data on part-time employment in departments of communication because incomplete or irregular records are the rule (Robinson, 1989). However, given the national percentages of part-time faculty in academia, the total number of part-timers in departments of communication may be as high as half of all faculty members. Women probably dominate these ranks.

Although dated, more concrete data is available through examination of the overall profile the discipline. For example, in a 1981 survey of 949 members of the Speech Communication Association, Thrash and Jensen found that 33 male respondents and 83 female respondents were employed part-time compared to 233 full-time males and 211 full-time females (Thrash & Jensen, 1981). This ratio is significantly higher than the national average of men to women in part-time employment and also higher than the average number

of women to men in full-time employment. At the time of this survey the numbers of men and women in the discipline were approximately equal. Membership in the Speech Communication Association is currently approximately 65% male and 35% female (Cooper, Stewart, & Friedley, 1989).

Examination of other variables reveals that the status of women in departments of communication is highly consistent with the national profile. Significantly more females than males are found in the lower ranks of instructor and lecturer; more women than men hold temporary or part-time positions; more women than men are represented at the lower end of the salary range. Conversely, more men than women are in each of the upper salary ranges and more men than women hold terminal degrees (Campbell, 1985).

CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

There are various reasons that women are most often found in the lower ranks of part-time faculty. Many researchers argue that discrimination based on gender is rampant and identify the communication discipline as a strong bastion of chauvinism. Others argue that women, because of pervasive, insidious socialization pressures "self-select" to follow husbands or become part of the under-employed (Finkelstein, 1985). One writer even suggests that men and women play sexually related dominance rituals that result from "memory traces from deeply primitive existence" (Rieke, 1982). In any case, it is clear that women continue to hold the lowest jobs at the least prestigious institutions with the poorest rates of compensation.

The reasons that women dominate part-time instruction are often inferred from the general characteristics of women as faculty members in all ranks. They exhibit those qualities and behaviors that are most often associated with marginal employment in higher education. Among the most common conclusions about women in the ranks of faculty are these:

1. Race is less detrimental to the rate of compensation or faculty status than is gender (Finkelstein, 1985).
2. In spite of legal sanctions, evidence exists of tokenism (e.g. jobs reserved or set aside for women and minorities) and different criteria for evaluating women and minorities in hiring and on the job (Finkelstein, 1985).
3. Women faculty spend more time teaching and much more time teaching undergraduates (Finkelstein, 1985; Lipset & Ladd, 1985).
4. Nearly two-thirds of African-American faculty teach only undergraduates; African-American women have higher teaching loads than African-American men.
5. Neither African-Americans nor women spend much time in research (Finkelstein, 1985).
6. Women participate less actively in professional organizations and form fewer professional ties than men (Finkelstein, 1985).
7. Men are represented more heavily in published research and grantsmanship than women. The disparity is greater in the humanities than in the sciences (Finkelstein, 1985; Lipset & Ladd, 1985; Cooper,

Stewart, & Friedley, 1989). Women are less likely to undertake pure research which is most significantly associated with high research productivity (Finkelstein, 1985).

8. These differences between men and women begin relatively small and gradually increase to a peak at mid-career. The gap narrows somewhat by the twentieth year after receiving the Ph.D. or terminal degree (Finkelstein, 1985; Hickson, Stacks, & Amsbary, 1989; Pearson & Trent, 1986).

Many reasons have been suggested for the current status of women in the lower ranks of faculty. Some of these characteristics certainly apply to the general population of part-time instructors. Enforced mobility when the spouse takes another job, immobility due to the spouse's employment, and parental and marriage obligations are among the reasons part-time faculty often find themselves at a disadvantage in the full-time job market (Mangan, 1989; Roberts, 1995). It is clear, too, that part-time faculty like female faculty members as a whole often exhibit less professional activity, lack collegial networks, and engage in teaching more often than in research.

FUTURE TRENDS

What does the future promise? Only one thing is certain, the changes will be dramatic. Vice president of the American Council on Education, Terry W. Hartle concluded, "We're living through the biggest change in the financing of public higher education since the rapid expansion in the late 1960's" (Honan, 1995). Predictions concerning the outcomes of these fiscal restraints are diametrically opposed. One view affirms that part-time faculty will increase dramatically following the overall trend toward reliance on temporary workers in the broader job market (Feder, 1995); the other argues that they will become a much smaller segment of the faculty. In order to understand how these opposite conclusions were reached, the changing nature of education into the twenty-first century must be examined. Most indications are that education will be influenced by these trends:

1. Money pressures will continue to loom large and, in most views, will become even more severe inducing "the most radical reshaping of public higher education since its rapid growth in the 1960's" (Honan, 1995). Bowen and Schuster (1986) articulated the consequences for faculty at the beginning of this fiscal constriction almost a decade ago, "The financial outlook is less favorable than at any time since 1955, and the conditions and expectations of faculties are correspondingly bleak" (p. 61).
2. The shortfall in funding, in turn, will place a heavier burden on students via increased tuition. Eamon Kelly, President of Tulane University in New Orleans, blames basic economic forces which pressure university budgets, contributing to the continual rise in tuition (Daniels, 1989). Tuition will rise proportionately across university and two-year colleges because of the underlying economic factors influencing higher education as a whole. Publicly supported two and four-year colleges and universities in New York, Florida, North Carolina, and California have already announced 1995 tuition increases ranging from 10 to 75% (Honan, 1995).

3. The faculty pool will shrink, particularly in some disciplines. The faculty shortage may be felt most at community and junior colleges which have come during the 1960's to rely on the over-supply of faculty for four-year institutions (Daniels, 1989). The most recent data reveals that the biggest shortfalls will occur in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in communication (Fiske, 1989; Chesebro, 1989).
4. The number of students requiring remedial assistance in basic skills such as oral and written communication, math, and critical thinking will rise (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; Honan, 1995). Although smaller numbers of ethnic minorities are enrolling in universities, the United States has continued to attract increasing numbers of international students (Gouran, 1989). Institutions may be forced to shift scarcer resources into remedial programs to retain educationally disadvantaged students (Lipset & Ladd, 1985). This burden will further strain budgets.
5. By the year 2020, it is estimated that 35% of the total American population will be composed of minority members, mainly African-Americans and Hispanics (Attinger & Cramer, 1989). In spite of this, the minuscule number of minorities who pursue graduate study will further aggravate the scarcity of minority faculty members (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; Finkelstein, 1985; Black attendance, 1989). The number of African-American students attending college has dropped steadily (Wingert, 1990). Since 1985, only 26% of African-American high school graduates attended college. This number is down from 34% in 1976. Overall, minority college enrollment expanded slightly from 1980-1986 because of the influx of Asian and Hispanic students (Attinger & Cramer, 1989). If this downward trend continues, even greater disparities in the representation of minorities on faculties will occur (Bowen & Schuster, 1986).
6. Pressured by images of their future bank accounts, students will continue to vote with their feet and pursue degrees with direct job applications. Business, computer technology, and similar disciplines will prosper at the expense of the traditional arts and sciences (Bowen & Schuster, 1986).
7. Overall student enrollments in colleges and universities will begin to decline by about 15.5% through 1996 and then will rise by about 14.3% between 1996 and 2011 (Mydans, 1995). The beginning of the gradual downturn in student enrollment has been evident since 1980 (Bowen & Schuster, 1986).

IMPLICATIONS

Two dramatically different predictions of future trends have resulted from this data. First, pressured by falling enrollments and declining student populations, institutions will be forced to cut faculty members. Largely non-tenured, short-time faculty members including

the part-timers as well as those in the lower ranks of the faculty will be first to go (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). This has strong implications for women who compose large segments of the part-time faculty; they will undoubtedly be cut in larger numbers. The overall representation of minorities and women among faculty will be severely diminished. Women and minorities will continue to be severely under-represented at the highest levels in higher education and will lose ground attained during their influx into the lower academic ranks during the 1960's and 1970's. According to this scenario, the faculty of the late 1990's and early twentieth century will be an entrenched, largely male, white, and aging population.

The second forecast is quite different. Given the need to achieve flexibility of staffing in a time of uncertain and rapidly shifting enrollments and financial support, institutions will shift to greater use of part-time faculty. The expansion of the part-time labor pool will grow in direct proportion to the gaps left in the tenured faculty ranks by attrition. While this scenario is vastly different than the first one, it holds the same bad news for part-time instructors and women. It is probable that the number of faculty members will decline gradually and faculty composition will change from stable, male, and full-time to transient, female, and part-time. The percentage of part-timers will continue to grow as institutions brace themselves for substantial retrenchment. In this case, it will be once again a buyer's market. Women and minorities, recruited into graduate schools in the 1960's and 1970's, will outnumber the shrinking pool of jobs and will be driven into part-time teaching. Academic institutions, through no fault of their own, will be caught in the squeeze between increasing costs and decreasing enrollments. They will face an oversupply of qualified employees and take sensible advantage of the situation (Budget-cutting, 1995; Biles & Tuchman, 1986; Daniels, 1989; Mydans, 1995).

In either scenario, the role of part-time instructors and women in higher education will continue to be marginal. Pushed out of full participation on faculties and shunted into lower ranks, part-time instructors will be responsible for the bulk of classroom instruction with minimal professional security and limited opportunities to establish research agendas to advance their careers.

EFFECTS ON THE PROFESSION

If there is divided opinion about future demand for faculty, there is even more widespread disagreement about the impact of part-time instruction on higher education. Views range from the claim that part-timers have undermined academic excellence to the counter argument that the only difference between part- and full-time faculty is the rate of compensation (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). Effects on the profession can be observed at the institutional level and in the personal effects on the individual part-timer.

Whether the profession has generally complied with the 14 enforced affirmative action guidelines at regular faculty ranks can be argued (Pearson & Trent, 1986). However, in advertising and hiring for part-time faculty positions, many academic institutions may not rigorously follow these guidelines. Part-time faculty are hired "based on a combination of availability, teaching competency, willingness to accept relatively low compensation for services rendered, institutional needs at the moment, and academic credentials" (Biles & Tuchman, 1986, p. 16). Often, the demands for flexibility and other institutional pressures are great enough to make affirmative action policies a secondary concern.

The long-term impacts on the quality of education may vary with the pool of potential part-time employees. With the current state of the labor market, large numbers of individuals are readily available, employers can be more selective (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). Unfortunately, they are also freer to treat such faculty with disregard if so inclined (Biles & Tuchman, 1986; Mydans, 1995). Because part-time faculty are more likely to be geographically restricted, employers may exercise a monopoly in a local market.

The evolution of the part-time instructor phenomenon has been a rapid one. As a result, the use of part-time instructors has grown without much guidance, mushrooming in an atmosphere of benign neglect. Frequently, the attitude of the institution is simply one of expediency. Relatively little time or emphasis is placed on development of part-time faculty and practically no institutional commitment is made to such faculty. It is not surprising that part-time faculty have become invisible in our midst.

Not only does the part-time faculty member suffer neglect at the institutional level, but the full-time faculty member may not welcome her in the department. In response to a study identifying the major problems facing higher education in the decades ahead, the proliferation of part-time instructors was rated among the most serious problems. Fully 80.2% of faculty polled expressed strong concerns about the number of part-time employees in higher education (Graybeal, 1989). Most thought their institutions relied too heavily on part-time faculty and that their numbers should be reduced in the interests of academic excellence (Bowen & Schuster, 1986).

On the other hand, part-timers often saw themselves as contributing significantly to the educational process. In one survey, fully 49% thought they could teach upper division and graduate courses as well as full-time faculty (McMahon, 1980). Considering this clash between the perceptions of full and part-time faculty members, it is understandable when the part-time faculty member does not find a acceptable niche among her full-time colleagues.

In departments of communication, part-time faculty are most frequently used to teach the basic courses. In this capacity, part-timers come into contact with thousands of undergraduates. While this releases full-time faculty to teach upper division courses, the ultimate result may be that the basic service courses are perceived by the institution, the department, the part-timer, and the student as less important than upper division courses (Dick, 1982).

In addition, the part-timer, realizing that she may be an expedient solution to a short-term problem, has an understandable response of minimal commitment to the institution (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). Since relatively few researchers have taken the time to ask them, other effects on the part-timer are more elusive. Generically, the effect on women has been documented: Men's aspirations and confidence rise during their college years and employment, women's decline (Hall, 1985). Exceptions exist, of course, but the overall effect of the relationships among faculty members may undermine the educational process.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The reliance of institutions of higher learning on part-time faculty has chiefly evolved in an atmosphere of benign neglect. Biles and Tuchman (1985) conclude, "With the exception of the work of an American Association of University Professors (AAUP) committee, few formal documents have been available to provide a framework to guide institutions in integrating their part-timers into an academic work setting" (p. 2). The problems associated with shifting composition of faculties may continue unless active steps are taken to control and direct the trends or, at least, to come to terms with them.

Since women comprise such a large proportion of part-time instructors, special attempts should be made to adapt to their professional development needs. Research on characteristics of effective faculty development programs is a very recent phenomenon, so available suggestions are currently limited (Guskey, 1988). And, many of the proposals for women as part-time faculty members stem from research on development programs for full-time members of the academic community. Critical survival skills for women are often neglected, either by the women themselves or by their colleagues and institutions and the challenges facing part-time faculty differ from those affecting full-time faculty.

A number of immediate steps can be taken at the individual level to enhance the role of the part-timer and make her a more integral part of the faculty community. And, while it may

seem like common sense, increasing the part-timer's sense of control may have direct impact on self-esteem, commitment, and classroom effectiveness. Increased responsibility and limited control are key factors that increase job stress, depress productivity, and restrict personal fulfillment (Fowler, 1989; "Vital Statistics," 1989). The extent to which we hold part-time faculty responsible for our courses, yet do not allow them to vote on issues pertinent to their classrooms, choose their own textbooks, and participate in course improvement, we are increasing job-related stress. The lack of such minimal security has been demonstrated to affect faculty productivity directly (Blackburn, 1979).

In addition, the psychological impact is exploitation of those who are subject to control as well as devaluation of their work and worsening relationships their superiors (Kipnis, 1984). To the extent that we can increase the amount of control and free choice available to part-time faculty, we can expect decreased disruptions in managerial relationships and increased teaching effectiveness. This gives credence to the argument that it is the psychological commitment between the person and the institution that makes a difference in their relationship (Smith, 1980). Some of the part-timer's dissatisfaction with higher education stems from the relationship to the university rather than in the work performed (Smith, 1980). The long term solution to this problem, providing powerful role models for women, selecting administrators who are sensitive to the needs of part-time faculty members, and providing a stronger voice in decisionmaking for part-timers, would benefit all faculty members (Blackburn, 1979; Guskey, 1988).

Key in encouraging sense of community is establishing an early relationship with the part-time faculty member (Smith, 1980). Faculty contact in the first years of teaching is critical for launching a productive career (Blackburn, 1979; Mathis, 1979). This also helps the department to assess needs and establish rapport. Most strategies for improving the role of the part-time instructor depend upon a positive relationship established early.

Rudimentary changes can increase the sense of collegiality through which the department communicates its commitment to faculty. Concern can be expressed behaviorally through orientation sessions or workshops, for example, to increase time management. The part-time faculty member can be given greater control of environment, office mate selection, preferred teaching times, and even information about parking or campus maps (Biles & Tuchman, 1986; Taylor, 1986). The results may stem, not from the specific actions, but from the demonstration of concern about the welfare of part-time instructors that is expressed by these actions. David A. Harris, President of St. Louis Community College, summarizes the problem:

Because of the lack of appropriate and well-implemented staff development programs, colleges fail to make the most of the diversity offered by part-time faculty. Staff development programs should be mandatory for part-time faculty and institutions should make allowances by contract for part-time faculty involvement (Dick, 1982, p. 30).

Mentoring and networking are also realistic responses to the problems plaguing part-timers, especially women. Historically women have failed to network or choose mentoring relationships as well as men and minorities. Prodded by institutions and departments, they can be encouraged to do so. The goal of mentoring and networking is both to establish ties and sources for creativity and research, and also to enhance the sense of inclusion and self-worth for the part-timer (McMahon, 1980). Much material on mentoring-networking programs for women such as the Rowe sponsor arrangement, the Weaver buddy system, and the HERS career cooperatives is readily available (Gillespie, 1987; Lazarus & Tolpin, 1979; Pearson & Trent, 1986; Rieke, 1982). In particular, full-time colleagues do not encourage part-time instructors to undertake research (McMahon, 1980).

They do not establish research mentoring relationships between full and part-time faculty that benefit the university community. Mentoring and networking should also include the undergraduate woman. For the long-term, it is especially important to support young women in their exploration of faculty careers, especially in nontraditional, less crowded academic disciplines.

Finally, feedback and open lines of communication are critical because women and minorities, in particular, do not receive the mentoring and other support in traditional institutions (Kilborn, 1995). At first, these may have to be artificially induced, for example, by assigning part-time faculty offices among full-timers or by scheduling interaction meetings (Dick, 1982). However, it is important to recognize the value of part-timers' ideas and presence in the institution and structure channels for their contributions (Biles & Tuchman, 1986; Guskey, 1988). Faculty growth contracts (nonbinding and individual) are also ways to focus faculty attention on teaching improvement (Pfnister, Solder, & Verroca, 1979). Attention to the importance of teaching in the institution may encourage part-timers to become more involved, thus opening the channels of interaction with other faculty.

CONCLUSION

Since the early 1970's, the composition of faculty in higher education has changed dramatically. Increasingly, part-time instructors have come to dominate higher education in roles that have shifted from occasionally providing an outside specialty to regularly replacing full-time faculty members. The trends in employment of part-time faculty members reflect the attempts of institutions of higher education to cope with the financial and demographic crises of the past twenty years. The challenge of the future is to integrate part-time faculty, tapping their talents and energies, while providing them with collegial support and a positive relationship to the institution.

Based on current trends, scholars offer two vastly different views of the next twenty years. Both views predict that part-time faculty will continue to inundate faculty ranks and suffer the indifference of academic institutions and faculty colleagues. In order to enhance the quality of education and adapt to the trends of the future, we need to apply what we know about part-time faculty development and to develop their potential as educators. Ultimately any step that encourages positive interaction among faculty, in turn, improves the quality of the educational experience for everyone.

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