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Industry Adjunct Faculty: The X Factor

By C. Keith Harrison
UCF Forum columnist
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Experts in the field provide many important elements to higher education.



Marketer Reggie Saunders engages students in an online class with real-life innovation stories, such as his Jordan sneaker activation with Justin Timberlake at a Super Bowl in Minnesota a few years ago.

Adjunct faculty represent 57 percent of university instructional employees nationally.

What often gets overlooked by some, however, is the value this demographic adds to many stakeholders, most importantly the student academic and professional-development experience. But there are many important investments that adjuncts bring to higher education.

The bottom line is that adjunct faculty from the corporate real world help us bridge theory and practice in a very important way.

Adjuncts from industry are subject-matter experts of best practices. While theory drives practice, practice brings life and experience to theoretical frameworks that too often sit in peer review journals gathering dust on shelves.

Practitioners have lived the workforce realities that students eagerly seek to learn about and apply to their future opportunities as they pay their dues and eventually move up the career ladder.

Adjuncts also have the opportunity to recommend and hire our students for internships via the classroom access and interaction with today's college students.

Knowledge for knowledge sake is great in theory but in terms of practice, college students usually come to campus to ultimately graduate and land a job.

Adjuncts from the industry create this synergy which is a win/win.

Finally, adjuncts facilitate experiential learning in terms of real-world experience projects, case studies from benchmarks during their career wins, and access to their organizational network during on-site visits to their locations. Just in Florida alone this has included students and faculty spending a day or more at the Orlando Magic, NASCAR, Orlando City Soccer, EA Sports and many others from Tampa to Miami to Jacksonville.

Industry adjuncts give us access and this leads to success.

The following illustrates some collaborative efforts between the industry and higher education with adjuncts and full-time faculty on various campuses across the United States. This snapshot shows the great impact hiring and collaborating with the industry adjuncts can have on our students and the curriculum.

Classes with Master Teachers Part 1: Team Teaching.

- Actress and entrepreneur Tyra Banks and Professor Alison Kugler (Stanford), "Personal Branding"
- Artist Bun B (UGK) with Professor Anthony Pinn (Rice University), "Religion and HipHop Culture"

- Artist T.I. with Professor Melva K. Williams (Clark Atlanta University), “The Business of Trap Music”
- Reggie Saunders (Jordan Brand) and Professor C. Keith Harrison (UCF) “The Role of Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Sport and Entertainment”

Tyra Banks teaches a class at Stanford University.
Classes with Master Teachers Part 2: Solo.

- Jay Riola (senior executive at the Orlando Magic) teaches our DeVos graduate course on sport data analytics.
- Jemele Hill (entrepreneur and writer) taught our undergraduate sport business media and technology course three times from 2012 to 2014.
- Guest speakers with experience teaching at UCF that I am working on becoming adjuncts either solo or to team teach all senior executives: Troy Vincent (NFL), Laura Gentile (ESPN), and Howard Wright (technology executive).

All three of these outstanding leaders are also former college athletes at the University of Wisconsin, Duke University, and Stanford University. We want the best in front of our UCF students.

In the final analysis, adjuncts matter and will always be needed. There are also many faculty who pay their dues by starting out as an adjunct. Professor Scott Bukstein started this way, and 12 years after beginning, he is an associate instructor and director of UCF’s sport business management undergraduate program.

I also started as an adjunct many years ago and respect adjuncts to the fullest and the value they bring to the intellectual table.

They are an important factor. Our X factor.

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