
Successfully Integrating Part-Time Faculty Into The Community College: Former Adjuncts Speak

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Many post-secondary and adult ESL programs in the United States rely on a growing contingent of part-time faculty to provide all levels of English instruction. According to a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, adjunct instructors comprised 69% of the teaching faculty in two-year colleges in 1997, (Leatherman, 2000), and the trend has been to hire increasing numbers of adjuncts. The degree of training, mentoring, and evaluation of these faculty members, so important for maintaining instructional quality and continuity, varies across institutions. In fact, TESOL, one of the international organizations of ESL professionals, recently issued a policy resolution regarding the status of part-time faculty (Segota, 2000). As former adjunct, and now full-time ESL instructors, we offer a model for an ongoing supervisory program for an urban two-year college that has experienced explosive growth in ESL enrollment, thereby necessitating the hiring of numerous adjunct faculty.

ESL enrollment at this particular community college has skyrocketed in recent years. In 1991, total enrollment was 1,154 students across three semesters, spring, summer and fall, taught by two full-time instructors and several adjuncts; by 2000, that number had grown to 4,214 students. Therefore, since 1997, eight full-time faculty members have been hired, seven of whom were former adjunct teachers in our program. As former part-time teachers ourselves, aware of the assimilation problems we had experienced, we were asked to create a program that would include orientation, training, and ongoing evaluation for adjunct faculty. The program now in place is still in progress as we experiment with what works and what doesn't. What follows is an attempt to share with others, in a spirit of dialog, efforts to meet the needs of part-time ESL faculty at our institution. The problem, we realize, is worldwide.

Formerly, there was a systematic training program. Prospective teachers were interviewed, hired and given samples of course outlines, syllabi, course objectives, tests and quizzes, and a booklet of rules of the institution, all by the Chairperson of the Department of International Languages. Instructors were encouraged to observe other classes and levels of ESL, as well as to tutor students for a nominal wage through the Tutorial program at the community college. Some time from the 8th to the 15th week

of classes, the instructors were observed by a full-time ESL instructor, usually a volunteer, and students were given course evaluations which they answered anonymously. The results of both evaluations and recommendations were discussed with the teacher. If the evaluations and observations revealed serious problems, the department chair met with the teacher. In most cases, the instructors were retained; in very few others, it was decided that the teacher did not and/or would not adhere to the goals of the ESL program, and these teachers were not rehired.

The move toward a more comprehensive supervisory program began when an ESL coordinator, one of the full-time faculty, was delegated additional program duties as a specialized workload assignment. The new position entails interviewing, hiring, scheduling, training and evaluating the adjuncts, who usually number about 20. The coordinator and volunteer assistants developed a comprehensive supervisory program that would function as both evaluation and staff development for the ESL part-time teachers.

The first phase of the program is a comprehensive orientation before classes begin. In a two-and-a-half-hour session, textbooks and other course materials are distributed as well as a booklet, containing samples of various forms the teachers are required to be familiar with. School and departmental procedures are discussed, such as finding a substitute in case of absence, room changes, assigning written homework, having materials printed, etc. Instructors also learn where they can find work spaces with telephones and computers, places to meet with students, and where to retrieve messages from students. Other aspects of the orientation include teaching guidelines (assigning written homework, adhering to the curriculum and finishing the book). Adjuncts are also given a one-on-one training session on how to use the computerized language lab and how to integrate the language lab into their curriculum.

After the formal orientation, teachers are assigned mentors from the full-time faculty, who volunteer because they want to maintain a high quality ESL program. Although "mentor" is not quite the right word since these faculty function as mentors and coaches, as well as evaluators, this is the term we have chosen to use. The mentors discuss issues such as curriculum, objectives and classroom management, and are encouraged to stay in contact with their adjuncts to answer any questions that the adjuncts may have. Mentors may also conduct a classroom observation four weeks after the semester begins. The evaluation focuses on the positive aspects of the instruction rather than on the negative as we realize that an efficient teaching program involves cooperation among all faculty (Chilton, 1999). The mentor may discuss recommendations with the teacher, such as using the blackboard more, soliciting answers from all class members as equally as possible, giving written homework assignments, controlling talkative groups, adhering to the curriculum guidelines and

semester schedule and, believe it or not, learning the students' names. The mentors strive to maintain consistency in the evaluation process while offering instructors candor in the evaluations since omitting constructive criticism over time will hurt the teacher's jobs prospects (Franke, 2000). Since some teachers need more guidance and explanations than others, the discussions are not regularly scheduled, but many of the mentors prefer to contact the adjuncts at least once every two weeks, especially if the new adjunct instructor appears to be having difficulties. This also provides feedback to full-time teachers and the department chair on special trouble areas that the ESL program could improve upon.

At four week intervals throughout the semester, informal Saturday afternoon meetings are held, and all adjuncts are encouraged to attend. The goal of these encounters is to share experiences, problems, materials, questions, and doubts. We believe these meetings are valuable tools for integrating adjunct instructors into the college environment for two reasons. First, it is an opportunity for the ESL coordinator to ensure that classes are progressing at an appropriate speed. Since everyone is under pressure to cover the textbook materials in order to meet course objectives and ensure course outcomes, it is essential that instructors stay focused and not fall behind. Second, such a meeting gives adjuncts an opportunity to meet each other and the full-time faculty in an informal setting. Adjuncts sometimes feel like second-class citizens, ignored by their departments, underpaid by the college, and generally unappreciated by the full-time faculty. When a department takes the time to interact with its adjuncts, the rewards can be great. Mentoring and meetings are an important step toward making adjuncts feel like part of a team, and the college as well as the students will benefit from this.

Four weeks before the end of the semester, the mentor conducts a final classroom observation to see if the recommendations have been followed and if the teachers have followed the curriculum, (so that students will have the skills necessary to advance to the next level of ESL instruction). At the risk of waxing poetic, the goal of the training program is to provide an anchor for instructors so that they don't feel abandoned within a system they don't understand and they can easily find people they can trust to discuss their challenges with. For example, some ESL classes, especially the lower-level, may have relatively high dropout rates of 50% or more. This has been especially pronounced when the college has offered free tuition twice during the past three years. The drop-out rate is the result of many factors from lack of student commitment to a change in work hours or family situation. However, instructors of these classes may feel discouraged and blame themselves until they realize that there may be mitigating circumstances for a low retention rate.

At the end of the semester, the adjuncts must also advise students about what classes to take next. That means they should be familiar with the levels and disciplines

within the ESL program so that students obtain the skills to advance from one level to the next or possibly skip courses. Most important is an understanding of the “bridge” writing course to freshman composition because students must obtain faculty referrals because they have advanced beyond the ESL program and can succeed in regular college classes, where there is a majority of native-English speakers. Adjuncts are counseled on how to evaluate their student’s proficiency levels (i.e., not being fooled by a disparity between speaking, listening and writing abilities). For example, we have found that students who have attended a U.S. high school tend to have advanced speaking skills and knowledge of slang and idiomatic terms, but their writing ability lags far behind their conversational skills. Some teachers not familiar with this phenomenon may assume the student is at a more advanced English proficiency level.

Recommendations

Although the more formal training and evaluation program appears to be effective in seasoning and retaining good instructors, we are still adjusting the program on the basis of feedback we receive from the adjuncts and their students. We also have a wish list of what would enhance the program *if* we had the resources. Top priority is paying adjuncts for the workshops and adding two or three more paid sessions throughout the semester. This would give all full-time and adjunct faculty time to air problems and to make suggestions for improving the whole ESL program. Most important would be a series of staff development sessions focusing on using World-Wide-Web-based technology to enhance classroom instruction (Kamhi-Stein, 1999).

Since continuing education is important, sending adjuncts to conferences would make them feel a more integral part of the profession and expose them to a wider variety of teaching methods and materials. The community college used to have a grant program that paid the travel and conference fees for some of the adjuncts who applied. The participants would submit a report with information and handouts from the sessions they deemed most valuable, and the reports were then published in a booklet and distributed to the various post-secondary and adult education programs in the state. However, this grant program has been limited to include only those educators who work with adults who have not yet earned high school diplomas.

Whether or not we obtain resources to further develop this adjunct training program, the ESL faculty and administrators are committed to the continuation and enhancement of this cooperative mentoring/evaluation approach. As former adjunct faculty ourselves, we recognize the need for promoting two-way interaction and a cycle of feedback that can only enhance instruction.

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