PART-TIME FACULTY AND UNDERGRADUATE INSTRUCTION: EXPLORING INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTS

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INTRODUCTION

The last 30 years have brought about dramatic changes in the composition of the American professoriate. Between 1970 and 2003, the number of part-time faculty increased by 422%, while full-time faculty increased by only 71% (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Even with the rapid proliferation of part-time appointments, few have studied the impacts that these appointments have had on colleges and universities. Several scholars (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993) have asserted that part-time faculty are as effective in delivering instruction as their full-time counterparts, but only recently have researchers begun to conduct empirical research on the effects of part-time faculty on undergraduate education. Recent studies have found a negative relationship between the number of part-time faculty members on a campus and graduation rates (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Jacoby, 2006). Others (Umbach, in press) suggest that, compared with their full-time peers, part-time faculty interact less frequently with students, spend less time preparing for classes, and have lower expectations of their students.

The proposed study seeks to expand this body of research by focusing on the relationship between faculty appointment type (part-time versus full-time) and instructional practices and commitment to teaching. Relying on social exchange theory and psychological contracts research (see Blau, 1964; Kalleberg, 2000; Pearce, 1993), this study asks the following questions:

1. To what degree do part-time faculty members differ from their full-time peers in their instructional approaches and commitment to teaching?

2. What effect does proportion of part-time faculty on a campus have on the instructional approaches and commitment to teaching of both full-time and part-time faculty?

3. To what extent can other institutional characteristics explain differences in instruction?

SUMMARY OF STUDY

This study uses full-time and part-time instructional faculty in the 2001 HERI Faculty Survey. Unlike many national data sets of college faculty, the HERI faculty data include a series of questions related to instruction, as well as a comprehensive set of control variables. Because I am interested in both the individual and institutional effects on instruction, I employ a series of hierarchical linear models (HLM).Using HLM overcomes the problems associated with complex multilevel data by simultaneously estimating equations for both individual and institutional effects.

I use three factor composites representing instructional practices as dependent measures. The first is a nine-item construct (α = .77) that represents *active learning* techniques and includes measures such as frequency of class discussions and use of cooperative learning. The second measure, goal of educating the *whole student*, is a nine-item factor composite (α = .88) that includes questions that assess the level of importance faculty place on goals such as helping to develop personal values and preparing for responsible citizenship. The third measure represents inclusion of *diversity* in instruction and is a two-item construct (α = .92) that consists of measures of whether a faculty member requires readings on racial/ethnic issues and women/gender issues. I also model three single-item measures that are proxies for commitment to teaching: *time spent preparing* for class; *time spent advising*/counseling students; and participation in a *teaching workshop*.

In addition to part-time status and proportion of part-time faculty at an institution, I include a variety of independent variables of both faculty characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, highest degree earned, academic discipline of department, number of courses taught in fall term, years since highest degree, age, age squared, salary, and salary term) and institutional attributes (Carnegie classification, sector, urbanicity, undergraduate headcount, and minority serving institution status).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the level two models of the institutional instructional and commitment averages and the part-time slope differential. The part-time differential indicates that, compared with their full-time colleagues, part-time faculty use active pedagogical techniques less often, place less of an emphasis on educating a well-rounded student, include diversity in classroom instruction less frequently, spend less time preparing for class, spend less time advising, and are less likely to have taken a teaching workshop.

Table 1. Summary table of institution-level models of college averages and part-time differentials of instructional practices and commitment to teaching

	Active learning		Whole Student		Diversity		Preparing for class		Advising students		Teaching workshop	
Model of institutional averages												
Intercept	0.003		0.028		0.018		0.041	*	-0.013		0.060	***
Doctoral	-0.099	*	-0.123	+	-0.093	*	-0.247	***	-0.410		-0.300	*
Master's	-0.034		0.059		-0.052		-0.110	*	-0.047		0.127	
Community college	-0.171	**	0.051		-0.043		-0.090		-0.212	*	0.456	*
Other institution type	-0.091		0.254	*	-0.148		-0.226	+	-0.417	***	0.145	
Bachelor's institutions (reference group)												
Private	0.018		0.183		-0.047	+	-0.053		-0.064		-0.062	
Urban	-0.054		-0.095	*	0.022		-0.027		0.042		-0.026	
Suburban	-0.076	*	-0.058		0.009		0.011		0.054		-0.116	
Rural (reference group)												
Minority serving institution	-0.039		0.057		0.043		-0.101		0.096	+	-0.270	+
Size	-0.001		-0.008		-0.013		-0.036		-0.014		-0.065	
Proportion part-time faculty	-0.010		-0.024		0.014		-0.088	***	-0.055	+	-0.105	*
Model of the part-time differential												
Part-time differential	-0.092	**	-0.064	**	-0.070	**	-0.508	***	-0.568	***	-0.682	***
Doctoral	-0.038						0.129		-0.003		-0.314	+
Master's	-0.033						0.042		-0.047		-0.443	*
Community college	-0.182						-0.286	*	-0.117		-0.610	*
Other institution type	-0.137	+					0.220		0.532	***	0.930	***
Bachelor's institutions (reference group)												
Private	0.026						-0.173	*	0.017		-0.033	
Urban	-0.065						0.021		0.024		0.049	
Suburban	-0.036						0.043		0.122		-0.005	
Rural (reference group)												
Minority serving institution	-0.002						0.144	+	0.102		-0.007	
Size	0.049						0.013		0.037		0.090	
Proportion part-time faculty	-0.003						0.011		-0.060	+	-0.042	

Note: ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<.10

With one exception, coefficients represent effect sizes, or a standard deviation change in the dependent variable as a result of a one-unit change in the independent variable. Because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable teaching workshop, the model was run using logistic multilevel regression model and the coefficients represent log odds.

In addition to the variables listed in the table, the model includes the following level one controls: gender, race/ethnicity, highest degree earned, academic discipline of department, number of courses taught in fall term, years since highest degree, age

I did not model the part-time slope coefficient for *whole student* and *diversity* because these effects did not vary significantly between institutions.

The findings offer mixed support for the negative effects that a high percentage of part-time faculty have on a campus. It seems that the proportion of part-time faculty negatively influences the average institutional commitment to teaching but has little or no effect on instruction and the part-time commitment differentials.

The models also provide insight into institutional differences in instructional practices and commitment to teaching. As the part-time differential models suggest, the effect of being part-time on instruction varies little between institutions. However, the effect on commitment to

teaching that results from being in a part-time appointment does vary between institutions. In general, part-time faculty members at Community Colleges are less committed to teaching than are faculty at Baccalaureate Colleges. The institutional average models indicate that faculty members at Doctoral Universities use the teaching practices studied here less frequently and are less committed to teaching than faculty members at Baccalaureate Colleges.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

These findings have important research, policy, and practice implications. As administrators attempt to balance efficiency and effectiveness when deciding who should deliver instruction on their campuses, they would be wise to consider the impact part-time faculty have on undergraduate education. Gappa & Leslie (1993) have suggested that colleges and universities should develop a campus-wide plan for the use of part-time faculty. The evidence presented in this study should be a part of the discussion when developing such plans.

Policy makers also might consider the negative effects of contingent appointments when allocating funds to higher education. Sharp declines in public funding in recent years have forced colleges and universities to seek more inexpensive ways to deliver instruction and to rely on short-term employment arrangements to maintain flexibility in their human resource decisions. Clearly, the negative impact of the use of part-time faculty is an unintended consequence of budget cuts, but it is a consequence that should be considered when policy makers weigh issues of efficiency and quality.

While this study identifies some deficiencies among part-time faculty, it is important not to lay blame entirely on faculty in these appointments. Faculty in part-time appointments earn low wages, receive little support for professional development, and work in environments that often marginalize them. Given these work conditions, it should surprise few that part-time faculty display a lack of commitment and perform less effectively than their full-time peers. Institutions would be wise to consider ways to support part-time faculty, particularly in ways that relate to delivery of instruction.

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