

**ADJUNCT FACULTY PERCEPTION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

**Okema S. Bowers**

**Dissertation**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of Doctor of Education**

**Regent University**

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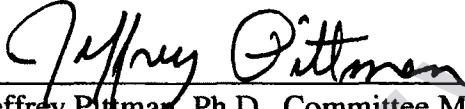
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Okema S. Bowers

The dissertation has been approved for the degree of Doctor of Education

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Donald Finn, Ph.D., Committee Chair  
Associate Professor, School of Education  
Regent University  
4/10/13  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeffrey Pittman, Ph.D., Committee Member  
Associate Professor, School of Education  
Regent University  
4/8/13  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kimberly Bovee, Ph.D., Committee Member  
4/8/13  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
M. Gail Derrick, Ed.D.  
Interim Dean, School of Education  
Regent University  
5/30/13  
Date

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive study was to investigate the adjunct faculty's perception of professional development and support services offered and needed at Tidewater Community College, a multicampus community college. This study involved adjunct faculty only. A survey was created and contained 58 survey questions. The majority of these were Likert-like items based on a scale from *Strongly Agree*, indicating a very important need or value for the adjunct, to *Strongly Disagree*, indicating a not important at all level of perceived value. In order to determine if other factors influenced the perception of professional development or support services, other questions asked for demographic information, such as education level, age, number of years in the professional field, and discipline/department. Except for education level, each of the independent variables accepted the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between adjunct faculty perception of institutional supports and the professional development and support services offered in terms of the independent variables. Findings from this study indicated that adjunct faculty perceived that professional development and support services are significant in improving their teaching and important to their role and success. Adjuncts want to better serve students and connect with the institution. Orientation and mentoring are highly regarded and requested to help integrate adjunct faculty into the college. The data indicated that adjunct faculty members want professional development that meets their specific instructional and student-centered needs that is offered during more accommodating times. The current professional development offerings are not well-attended and do not seem to meet the specific needs of this adjunct population. It behooves the administration to further

investigate what is currently being done to support adjuncts and to address a means to improve the delivery and execution of all institutional supports. While this study provides useful information related to one community college, it is important that each community college examine closely its personal investment relative to the institutional support it provides to adjunct faculty members.

PREVIEW

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Gary Evans, Jr., my mother, Debra Harper, and my siblings, Shanda and Devin Harper. I am thankful for your love, encouragement, and lifelong support of all I have endeavored to accomplish. Gary, thank you for being the best son a mother could have. From birth, you have inspired me to be better. It is my goal to expose and demonstrate to you all that life has to offer if you trust and believe in God. Ma, I am so thankful that you are here to celebrate this accomplishment with me. You planted seeds and prayers long ago that are being manifested now. Thank you for being a parent and not allowing me to settle. Shanda and Devin, your love is known, shown, and felt. I pray that as your “big sister” I have helped to guide you to greatness and been a source of courage and focus in all you undertake.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my pastor, Dr. Melvin O. Marriner, and the entire Grove Baptist Church family. I have grown in faith and knowledge because of the wonderful teaching and guidance you have provided. I am a better student, teacher, minister, and servant leader because of the many growth opportunities Grove has afforded. To the Genesis 212 Adult Liturgical Dance Ministry, thank you for your prayers, calls, emails, and many nights of sharing. Your support has been immeasurable. You all are the wind beneath my wings.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Terrence. Your desire to obtain your degree pushed me to finish this work. You encouraged me to stay focused and to do what I needed to do, so I could do what I wanted to do. I truly appreciate your support and love.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The higher education landscape has changed dramatically over the past 30 years as more individuals, organizations, and community stakeholders have embraced the value of a more educated and labor-prepared society. Higher education institutions have witnessed drastic enrollment growth that has surpassed previous records and caused educational leadership to take a scrutinizing but imperative look at how they function and serve students. Of the higher education institutions, public community colleges have experienced the most growth, with record number enrollment increases. “At community colleges across the country, dislocated workers returned for retraining, traditional-age college students reexamined their options, and institutions were asked to do more with less fiscal support” (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009, p. 5).

Between 1970-2009, enrollment in 2-year public institutions increased by 305%. In the fall 2010 reporting of college enrollment, 2-year colleges had 43% of undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting institutions (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). The expansion of enrollment and program offerings in community colleges has driven the rise in using adjunct faculty to expand program and course offerings, diversify, increase scheduling options, and decrease institution costs. Between 1970-2009, the number of part-time faculty increased by 583%, while full-time faculty increased by only 98% (NCES, 2011). In the fall of 2009, part-time faculty comprised 70% of community college faculty by head count (NCES, 2011). These increases in enrollment and adjunct faculty hiring have primarily resulted from a need to respond to economic downturns, increased organizational closings and restructuring, and

an ever-increasing need to have a better educated, technically trained workforce. Given the cost savings, instructional impact, and crucial role in fulfilling the institutional mission, community colleges will continue to endeavor to meet the educational and training needs of society and hire adjunct faculty.

The increasing use of adjuncts in higher education has implications that weigh perhaps most critically on community colleges, where almost 43% of the nation's undergraduate students are enrolled (NCES, 2011). As postsecondary institutions rely more heavily on adjuncts to deal with funding issues, growing enrollments, and the diversity of requested topics and industry needs, a clear process must be in place for training, mentoring, and supporting these essential faculty members (Clark, Minton, & Andree, 2006). Just as students are required or strongly encouraged to attend orientation and workshops to best acquaint them to college and collegiate expectations, adjuncts should be given the same welcoming guidance, with continual support and integration into the college. From the first contact with the college, all efforts should reflect a professionalism that is supportive of the need for part-time faculty (Burnstad & Gadberry, 2005). Adjuncts should be guided through the educational ropes by a seasoned colleague to help ensure their success. Also providing learning and reflection activities that create opportunities for implementation in the classroom will enhance adjunct instruction and integration in the learning process. Institutions that identify what is necessary for adjunct success will enhance student learning via support for teaching.

### **Background and Significance**

Research has demonstrated that adjunct faculty lack teaching support, mentoring, orientation, and professional development opportunities within their departments or

throughout the community college (Jackowski & Akroyd, 2010; Meixner, Kruck, & Madden, 2010; Murray, 2002; Scott, 2010). The problem of fully integrating part-time faculty into the academic life of an institution is particularly crucial for community colleges for two reasons. First, community colleges employ a significantly higher percentage of adjunct faculty than any other segment in postsecondary education. Second, because they are teaching institutions, community colleges must be focused on the instructional ability and quality, not just the content knowledge, of all faculty members (Wagoner, 2005). Adjunct faculty, in large numbers, assist in representing the college to students and stakeholders. Alfred (2003) took a poignant position when he wrote,

Adjunct faculty are the largest payroll group in our colleges by headcount and our reliance upon them is increasing. Yet, we pay them poorly, provide them with marginal support, and barely connect them to the institution. Office space and a computer are a luxury, as are most other basic amenities. We do not effectively orient part-timers to our values, invest in their development, or evaluate their performance. For a group that is a primary point of contact with the institution for many students, how can we place much trust in their work and provide such a shabby response to their needs? We are expecting a lot from people we are unwilling to invest in. (p. 20)

Considering that adjunct faculty have such a significant presence in community colleges, it is crucial they are supported so they are prepared to effectively teach students (Diegel, 2010). As representatives adjunct faculty should be prepared, resourceful, available, and supported in order to properly relay the mission and goals of the college, while also preparing students to pursue and conquer their personal quests. James and Binder (2011-

2012) advocated,

With new part-time faculty it may be necessary to provide development of teaching skills as not all practitioners may have strong teaching skills...the diverse population (diverse in age, ability, socioeconomic status, race, and culture) in community colleges requires particular understanding and teaching skills. (p. 25)

Allowing adjuncts to teach without proper guidance and preparation and expecting them to fulfill the obligations of the college at the same level as full-time faculty demonstrates a lack of care and foresight from the leadership and is a short-sighted formula for ineffectiveness and stagnant development.

Adjuncts are often placed in a position with no teaching or training background, orientation to the uniqueness of the community college and its population, or ongoing professional development. Often in the culture of the community college, adjunct faculty members are expected to perform their duties without a complete understanding of the institutional mission or values, without some of the necessary tools to be successful in the classroom, and without proper training on classroom management techniques (Bosley, 2004). Most adjunct faculty bring numerous skills and resources with them to the community college and classroom, making them well-qualified and a valuable resource. Identifying the professional development needs, opinions, and observations of adjunct faculty is a foundational premise for community college leadership to help create and implement programs, policies, and services to advance the effectiveness of this growing population. If the community college fails to inquire and address the needs of adjunct faculty, this group may falter and not have the ability to contribute effectively in the

classroom or the college.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the adjunct faculty's perception of professional development and support services offered and needed at one multicampus community college. This study focuses on adjunct faculty only. The results of the study will be used to advance the support, professional development needs, and offerings for adjunct faculty. The study will also have leveraging impact on adjunct policies and practices for college leadership.

### **Research Questions**

1. What current professional development and support services have been made available to and used by adjunct faculty?
2. What are adjunct faculty members' perceptions of the quality of current professional development and support services?
3. Do adjunct faculty perceive additional support (professional development and support services) will improve their teaching performance?
4. What additional professional development and support services would adjunct faculty like to have offered to them?

### **Definitions**

**Adjunct faculty (also known as part-time) member.** Refers to higher education faculty members who are not on a tenure track and who are assigned to teach less than 12 hours per semester on a temporary, semester-by-semester, contract (Baron-Nixon, 2007, p. 17; Hinkel, 2007, p. 6).

**Community college.** A postsecondary institution of higher education that offers

certificates, associate degrees, transfer credits, and workforce education.

**Full-time faculty.** Refers to faculty members assigned to teach at least 12 hours a semester on a 9 or 12-month contract (Hinkel, 2007, p. 7).

**Institutional support.** Any support, services, programs, or activities provided by the college in an attempt to facilitate or improve faculty execution of his or her tasks (Hinkel, 2007, p. 7).

**Perception of support.** For the purpose of this study, perception refers to how adjunct faculty see, feel about, or distinguish the professional development offerings and support services at the college (Bergmann, 2011, p. 14).

**Professional development.** Those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve student learning (Guskey, 2000, pp. 16-17).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

This study is based on several assumptions. First, adjunct faculty want to be supported and receive professional development to advance their teaching skills, support the students, and feel integral to the community college community. Second, the college is positioned to offer the support services and professional development suggested and needed. Third, the participants will accurately and truthfully complete the survey. Finally, the survey will accurately measure the perceptions of professional development and support services provided to and requested by adjunct faculty members.

#### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations that cannot be controlled by the researcher include whether the adjunct is new to the college and has no experience or basis of comparison of support



services or professional development. Additionally, different departments have different leadership styles, cultures, expectations, and activities for faculty members. The department or curriculum in which the adjunct faculty member teaches may impact the perception of support and services. Furthermore, whether the adjunct faculty member teaches at other community colleges or institutions, or is employed full time outside of the academic arena, could also prove limiting to the study because he or she may not be concerned with support, mentoring, or professional development opportunities. Lastly, the adjunct faculty member may work in other capacities for the college and may be biased in his or her responses.

This study is delimited to adjunct faculty members only who are currently employed at Tidewater Community College (TCC). Second, this institution is a multicampus community college in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Generalizations will not be made from the results of this study because it is only representative of one community college. Third, the research was planned to be conducted during the fall 2012 academic semester. Therefore, the findings and results from this time period may or may not necessarily generalize to other future time periods.

### **Significance of the Study**

Seeking the input of adjunct faculty members demonstrates respect for their needs and concerns regarding their part in the overall success of students, the institution, and the community college mission. The purpose of this study is to identify the necessary components to justly and effectively enhance the professional development and support services provided to adjunct faculty. The study can help identify areas in which community college administrators can focus their adjunct faculty policy and practice

efforts, offer suggestions on how institutional support for adjunct faculty can best be created to meet the needs of adjuncts, and preserve and enhance the quality of instruction that adjunct faculty bring to their students. The study is significant in that it will provide information and recommendations to assist TCC and other community college administrators in future planning as well as assess their adjunct faculty policies, procedures, and practices.

PREVIEW

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Today's Community College**

Community colleges have long been the center of educational opportunity. This American invention places publicly funded higher education at close-to-home facilities that welcome all who desire to learn, regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience. With over 1,100 community colleges—public and private—nationwide, they are a thriving and stable force, as they meet the educational and workforce needs of the traditional and nontraditional student and nation (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2011). As Twombly (2005) stated, “Real teaching is what community colleges do, and student learning is the goal” (p. 432).

On July 14, 2009, President Obama introduced deserving accolades and challenges for community colleges as he proposed the American Graduation Initiative that would invest in community colleges and help American workers obtain the skills and credentials needed to succeed. The initiative ushers in new innovations and reforms to expand and strengthen opportunities at America's community colleges. This initiative is one part of two national goals set to make America the highest producer of college graduates in the world by 2020. President Obama's \$12 billion plan to increase the number of community colleges is expected to produce an additional 5 million graduates. In addition, the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act includes \$2 billion over 4 years for community college and career training. These resources will help community colleges and other institutions develop, improve, and provide education and training (“White House Host Summit,” 2010-11).

The Obama administration also announced Skills for America's Future, a program designed to improve industry partnerships with community colleges and build a nationwide network to maximize workforce development strategies, job training programs, and job placement. The idea behind the new initiative is to "make it easier to join students looking for jobs with businesses looking to hire . . . putting community colleges and employers together to create programs that match curricula in the classroom with the needs of the boardroom" ("White House Hosts Summit," 2010-11, p. 17). This initiative challenges community colleges to improve, expand, and appraise the delivery of services to students and constituents while also heightening the accountability of this group to all stakeholders. With such expansive and robust initiatives, community colleges will be forced to reevaluate all components and stakeholders in the production of graduates. Even as states struggle to survive in the face of sharply declining financial resources, the notion that community colleges can play a significant role in doubling the number of college completers is championed by virtually every community college leader (O'Banion, 2011).

### **Economic Downturn and Community Colleges**

After the economic downturn of 2008, community colleges experienced a 15% increase in student enrollment (AACC, 2012). Many Americans found a need to retool and retrain to better prepare for the competition of the workforce as well as needing an affordable means of getting an education. The economic downturn and accompanying job loss, coupled with the relatively low cost of attending a community college, have made these institutions a primary destination for many students seeking to earn a degree and prepare for a career (Worth & Stephens, 2011). Between 2010-2011, community colleges

cost on average \$2,713 compared to \$7,605 per academic year for 4-year colleges (AACC, 2012). The community college has become an attractive and affordable alternative to self-empowerment and improvement for many.

Okpala, Hopson, and Okpala (2011) examined the impact of the recession on community college funding, community college student support services, and student enrollment in North Carolina's community college system. The study consisted of 42 community college personnel and 65 five students selected from eight community colleges across the state. Results of the study reveal that the economic crisis has resulted in severe cuts in student support service, especially in the area of counseling and advising. While the current crisis has created an overwhelming increase in student enrollment, it has also resulted in a decrease in community college full-time faculty. In a study to examine the impact of the recession on community college funding, community college student support services, and student enrollment, 42 community college personnel (25 teachers, 12 administrators, 5 support service personnel) and 65 students were selected from eight community colleges across the state of North Carolina. The survey data revealed that the budget crisis has resulted in severe cuts in student support services and that the number of faculty involved in student support services has declined significantly. One community college employee indicated that there is an erosion of quality, especially in the basic education arena with the use of unqualified part-time faculty. Overall, the analysis concluded that there is fear of further budget cuts and its implication to the quality of teaching and learning at community colleges (Okpala et al., 2011).

Even with additional funding from the federal government, difficult economic

times and state-funding cutbacks continue to challenge community colleges, even more so than in the past, to meet these and other greater demands with shrinking resources (Pearch & Marutz, 2005). In an effort to partner with the American Graduation Initiative and assist financially with the burdening costs of needed improvements, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation introduced its new Completion by Design initiative, which will award \$35 million in grants over the next 5 years to groups of community colleges to devise and implement new approaches to make the college experience more responsive to today's student, with the goal of dramatically increasing graduation rates ("White House Hosts Summit," 2010-11). "To create successful pathways, community colleges will have to redesign existing policies, programs, practices, and the way they use personnel in order to form a new seamless, integrated system that begins in our high schools...and follows through to completion" (O'Banion, 2011). These initiatives and collaborative efforts are designed to place community colleges in the forefront as pioneers in the continuous improvement of our graduates and nation.

### **Increased Use of Adjunct Faculty**

As budgets decline and enrollment increases, the increased use of adjunct faculty in institutions of higher learning remains an active topic. Since the 1970s, when use of adjunct faculty was at a minimum, debates, research, and discussions regarding the role, effectiveness, and continued use of adjunct faculty have echoed in the halls of higher education. What is not debated is that adjunct faculty play a vital part in the effective continuation of learning and instruction in colleges and universities around the nation. The understanding of adjunct faculties' significance and value to an institution is integral to student success and overall college development. Using adjuncts allows institutions to

offer a more diverse curriculum and to alter the curriculum to meet the needs and desires of the student population. Adjuncts have a special ability to bring life to ideas with interesting and often contemporary examples, while also representing enrichment, diversity, scheduling flexibility, short-term contractual obligations, and a degree of economic savings (D. Green, 2007; Wallin, 2005). Adjunct faculty bring diversity to the institution, along with enthusiasm for teaching and professional and personal experience, allowing colleges to maintain close ties with business and industry by employing their representatives to teach in appropriate subject areas. Practicing professionals who come to the classroom as adjunct faculty bring a currency and real-world perspective that many full-time faculty, long removed from business and industry, if they ever were involved, may lack (Wallin, 2004). Most colleges and universities could not function efficiently or effectively without adjuncts playing an active role in the institutional delivery system. Lyons (2007) wrote,

Adjunct faculty provide expertise in critical courses that perhaps no full-time member on staff possesses; their evening and weekend availability enable institutions to expand class schedules to serve the evermore time- and place-challenged students; their passion for sharing their expertise enables students to achieve more effective real-world perspectives; and they do it for often embarrassingly modest remuneration and with a shameful lack of support. (p. 1)

### **Adjunct Faculty Relevance in Community Colleges**

Higher education institutions of all types, research universities, 4-year colleges, community and junior colleges, and vocational and trade colleges employ large numbers of part-time faculty. The 2010 National Survey of Part-time/Adjunct Faculty revealed

that one in three (33%) of part-time adjunct faculty worked at public 4-year institutions, one in four (26%) worked at private 4-year institutions, and a significant proportion (41%) worked at 2-year colleges (AFT Higher Education, 2010). Strom-Gottfried and Dunlap (2004) indicated that diminishing funding for higher education, larger student enrollments, and the downsizing of tenure-track faculties have led to an increased use of adjunct faculty. Milliken and Jurgens (2008) noted several reasons for the increase, including (a) there are larger financial gains to colleges and universities in relation to tuition and faculty salary ratios, (b) use of adjunct faculty is a cost-effective way for departments to provide quality instruction to a greater number of students, (c) Hiring adjuncts can release tenured faculty from teaching responsibilities and allow for increased research and/or administrative responsibilities, and (d) adjunct faculty allow programs to offer additional courses beyond that which full-time faculty teach (Banachowski, 1996; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; V. Smith, 2007). Although proportions may vary among types of institutions, the general trend and reasons for proliferation of the use of part-time faculty are quite similar (Baron-Nixon, 2007, p. 3). Due to their numbers and sphere of influence (i.e., basic, core, and specialized professional courses), part-time faculty possess real potential to influence the quality of education locally and nationally (Baron-Nixon, 2007, p. 1). Adjuncts bring real-time, real-world experience and knowledge into the classroom. Their experiences allow them to engage students in the day-to-day happenings of the industry. Adjuncts have a connection and serve as liaisons to business and industry partners, which allow institutions to foster community relationships to assist students with internships and job placement opportunities. Oftentimes, adjuncts are more flexible with scheduling for nontraditional students who may need night, weekend, and/or