

WHITE PAPER: POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF SHIFTING FROM FULL-TIME CAREER FACULTY TO PART-TIME ADJUNCT FACULTY

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In its strategic plan, *Leaders to Serve the Nation*, the United States Naval Academy makes clear that academic excellence is a necessary pillar for supporting the Academy's vision of being a premier educational institution. The plan indicates a need to "Employ appropriate teaching methods. . . . Provide an outstanding civilian and military faculty and[p]rovide opportunities for faculty and staff to remain leaders in their respective disciplines and in the latest teaching methods."¹ To support this aspect of the vision, the plan states that it is necessary to "[a]ttract, develop, and retain faculty [members]. . . who exemplify the highest professional standards and who educate, enrich and inspire a talented and diverse Brigade."² This objective is justified by the impact of the faculty on the development of the Brigade of Midshipmen and the faculty role in ensuring academic success. The pillar of academic excellence and the mission requirement to develop midshipmen should be at the center of any discussion regarding the ratio of part-time adjunct faculty to full-time career faculty.

Part-time adjunct faculty have long had a place within higher education, and are a quickly growing segment of the professoriate.³ Historically, part-time adjunct faculty members have been heavily employed by community colleges and in professional programs/schools. However, in the last two decades, the use of adjuncts has increased at colleges and universities more generally and for a variety of reasons ranging from managing financial shortfalls, larger-than-expected enrollments, and the creation of new programs that are not yet fully staffed. There can be positive aspects of increasing the part-time adjunct to full-time faculty ratio; however, any such change needs to be thoughtfully planned in order to mitigate the risks to operations, outcomes, and mission.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PART-TIME ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBERS AT THE NAVAL ACADEMY

While it is difficult to comprehensively characterize⁴ a "typical" part-time adjunct faculty member, at the Naval Academy there are common themes that define their work and their working environment. Part-

¹ United States Naval Academy, "Leaders to Serve the Nation U. S. Naval Academy Strategic Plan 2020." Accessed 14 May 2018: usna.edu/StrategicPlan/_files/docs/USNA-Strategic-Plan.pdf

² United States Naval Academy, "Leaders to Serve the Nation U. S. Naval Academy Strategic Plan 2020." Accessed 14 May 2018: usna.edu/StrategicPlan/_files/docs/USNA-Strategic-Plan.pdf

³ Kezar, Adrianna, Daniel Maxey, and Judith Eaton "An Examination of the Changing Faculty: Ensuring Institutional Quality and Achieving Desired Student Learning Outcomes," CHEA Occasional Paper, 2014. Accessed 1 APR 2016: chea.org/pdf/Examination_Changing_Faculty_2013.pdf.

⁴ Monks, James. "Who are the Part-Time Faculty?," *Academe*, 2009, July-August. Access 1 APR 2016: <http://www.aaup.org/article/who-are-part-time-faculty#.Vv6kifkrJmM>.

time adjunct faculty members at the Naval Academy are focused exclusively on teaching; there is no institutional requirement for scholarly work nor any expectation of institutional service, and part-time adjunct faculty should not serve as formal advisors nor should they be expected to engage in mentoring activities. Their on-again, off-again short term contract status makes it unrealistic to expect them to maintain disciplinary currency in terms of both content and best pedagogical practices. Additionally, for those part-time adjunct faculty who have separate employment outside of the Naval Academy, they may lack sufficient time to develop as effective teachers, and they have very little incentive to genuinely learn and embrace our Naval Academy mission and unique requirements. Rather, it is to their advantage to be as efficient as possible by limiting their contribution to the Academy, both in terms of the content they teach and the support they provide for students. To be fair, there are adjunct faculty members who have taught at the Academy for multiple semesters and who have demonstrated a great commitment to the education of midshipmen. However, if the number of part-time adjunct faculty members increases, this commitment, of necessity, will decrease, especially if the institutional goal is to opportunistically (and perhaps for financial reasons) replace full-time career faculty positions with a contingent labor force of part-time adjunct faculty.

IMPACT OF RELIANCE ON PART-TIME ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBERS

Research has shown that significant reliance on part-time adjunct faculty members results in substantial negative results for an institution because:

- It can be educationally detrimental to the students that they teach;⁵
- It disadvantages the adjunct faculty members themselves as instructors;⁶ and
- It overburdens the shrinking number of full-time faculty with non-teaching tasks necessary to maintain the academic program and the institution.⁷

A DETRIMENT TO STUDENTS

Research has shown that reliance on part-time adjunct faculty members has been found to negatively correlate with high retention and graduation rates.⁸ In particular, course schedules that are “adjunct heavy” during a student’s first year correlate with lower persistence and graduation rates. The implication is that each one-percent increase in part-time adjunct faculty reduces the graduation rate by 0.14 percentage points.⁹ There are many possible reasons for this, including a lack of integration into and support for the full scope of institutional activities, a lack of sufficient teaching experience and

⁵Ehrenberg, Ronald G. and Liang Zhang. "Do Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty Matter?," *Journal of Human Resources*, 2005, v40 (3,Summer), 647-659. Accessed 1 APR 2016: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w10695.pdf>.

⁶ See footnote 3.

⁷ Kezar, Adrianna and Daniel Maxey. "Adapting by Design: Creating Faculty Roles and Defining Faculty Work to Ensure an Intentional Future for Colleges and Universities." A report from the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, 2015. Accessed 31 MAR 2016: [https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/DELPHI%20PROJECT_ADAPTINGBYDESIGN_EMBARGOED%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/DELPHI%20PROJECT_ADAPTINGBYDESIGN_EMBARGOED%20(1).pdf)

⁸ See footnote 3 and Jacoby, Dan, "Effects of Part-Time Faculty Employment on Community College Graduation Rates," *Journal of Higher Education* 77 (2006), 1081–1103. Counter examples exist in specific fields.

⁹ Harris, D. & Goldrick-Rab, S. "The (Un)Productivity of American Higher Education: From "Cost Disease" to Cost Effectiveness." University of Wisconsin at Madison, La Follette School Working Paper No. 2010-023, 2010. Accessed 01 APR 2016 <http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/images/publications/workingpapers/harris2010-023.pdf>

effectiveness, and a lack of professional development opportunities to remain current in the field and to learn pedagogical best practices, and therefore to remain engaging and effective in the classroom.

The temporary nature of part-time adjunct positions reduces their integration within and (consequently) support for the greater mission of the Academy. Part-time adjunct faculty members are less likely to be aware or even supportive of important Academy expectations, such as academic reserve periods, movement order protocols, multiple marking periods, MAPRs, etc. Even more important, adjunct faculty may also be less aware of the institutional mission and the support available to midshipmen (MDC, CAE, Writing Center, extra/co-curricular activities, etc.).

The effect of this lack of experience, integration, and time is compounded because these same part-time adjunct faculty members are frequently concentrated in foundation (core) courses that comprise much of the first year of a student's education. The negative correlation between the number of courses taught by part-time adjunct faculty and student retention may be due to the use of this transitory labor pool at the very point when students most need intrusive mentoring from instructors who should be knowledgeable of their institution's mission and the resources available, and who can devote both time and enthusiastic energy to mentoring those students.

DISADVANTAGES TO ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBERS AS INSTRUCTORS

Adjunct faculty members potentially face many challenges in terms of integration into the institutions at which they teach.¹⁰ From the outset, short term or "semester by semester" hiring reduces the likelihood of adjunct faculty having full access to faculty teaching and learning support sessions in which they become familiar with resources for themselves and for their students. Short term contracting of adjuncts also results in a lack of time for course preparation, thereby resulting in a diminished quality of instruction. Adjunct faculty frequently are not able to engage in high impact practices (like project-based learning), due to insufficient time to prepare, nor are they as likely to be able to provide students with opportunities for integrative activities that create meaningful connections between students and their learning. They may also be unable to offer sufficient office hours/extra instruction at times when midshipmen are available and may not have the time to meet with students for mentoring, conducting capstone and other research projects, or to contribute to the assessment of student work and program effectiveness. A greater strain on institutional resources can be expected as multiple part-time adjuncts are typically hired behind a single full-time position, thereby resulting in a greater number of individuals for department administration and technical staff to support. Finally, because part-time adjunct faculty have little or no access to peer mentoring and professional development opportunities, they can complicate the faculty adoption of new pedagogical practices that inform and improve course development and the attainment of learning goals.

¹⁰ See footnote 3.

DISADVANTAGES TO THE REMAINING FULL-TIME MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY AND STAFF

It is unrealistic to believe that the employment of part-time adjunct faculty members to replace the teaching responsibilities of career faculty members will not shift both teaching and non-teaching labor to others. Career faculty are responsible for many non-teaching duties that are necessary to maintain an academic program and the institution itself. If not managed by full-time career faculty, these responsibilities either will need to be outsourced to other employees or will result in decreasing support to students; for example, the faculty play a crucial role in providing advising, mentoring, and extra-instruction to students. If part-time adjunct faculty are not available to fill these roles, then increasing numbers of professional advisors and tutors will need to be made available to fill this unmet need. At the Naval Academy, experienced career faculty are responsible for the currency and continuous improvement of the academic curriculum, professional peer mentoring, academic leadership, and fulfilling service roles ranging from the Admissions Board to the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee to Faculty Reps for varsity / club sports and ECAs. Many of these responsibilities may simply be left vacant, but as a matter of institutional integrity, not all can be allowed to become permanently inactive. The career faculty ultimately will become overburdened with these additional important responsibilities. The end result is a cohort of part-time adjunct faculty who limit their institutional contributions, and a full-time career faculty cohort who become over-committed in supporting the institution to make up for that deficit, but in the end become less effective themselves due to the excessive workload.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR STRATEGICALLY EMPLOYING PART-TIME ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBERS

The most appropriate places for hiring adjuncts are in niche areas in which it is desirable or even necessary to have specialists not normally available as full-time, permanent hires (e.g. Law for the Junior Officer courses taught by professional JAGs) or practicing experts who can provide value beyond what normally can be found within the full-time academic ranks (e.g. former NASA astronauts, NSA cyber experts, or former high ranking government officials).

CONCLUSION

Changes to the part-time adjunct to full-time career faculty ratio can, if they are carefully planned, enhance learning opportunities or manage short-term shortfalls in staffing or finances in order to mitigate risks to operations, outcomes, and mission. However, poorly planned increases in the contingent faculty labor force carries substantial risks with regard to the long-term quality of midshipmen education due:

- a lack of integration into and support for the full scope of institutional activities including knowledge of demands on and resources for midshipmen,
- insufficient teaching experience and effectiveness, and
- an inability to maintain currency in the field based on a lack of professional development experiences.

Furthermore, increasing the proportion of part-time to full-time faculty results in increased demands on the remaining full-time career faculty. Career faculty must provide oversight and support of short-term contract employees while having increasing concentration of responsibility for maintaining the academic program and meeting Yard-wide service obligations. Ultimately, widespread and opportunistic/unplanned use of part-time adjunct faculty disadvantages students and mission-centered institutions alike. Shifting the professorial ranks from full-time career to part-time contingent labor needs to take place strategically while carefully considering the effects on student learning and mission attainment.