

Towards a Deeper Understanding of Community College Part-Time Faculty: Perceptions of Role and Expectations

Kemah Eugene Paul Washington

Under the direction of Audrey J. Jaeger - Leadership, Policy and Adult and Higher Education



Community colleges increasingly employ PTF to provide economic relief from rising full-time faculty costs and allow for a more agile faculty with respect to an ever-changing, global society. (Bettinger & Long, 2006; Eagan & Jaeger, 2008a; Eagan & Jaeger, 2008b; Jacoby, 2006; Umbach, 2007).

Because recent studies have linked an overreliance on PTF at community colleges to negative student outcomes such as student attrition, a deeper understanding of PTF is necessary. (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2008)

Few studies have examined how community college PTF come to understand the roles and responsibilities associated with being members of the academy (Twombly & Townsind, 2008; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2003; Wallin, 2007)

◀ THE PROBLEM

SO WHAT???

PTF are the future of American higher education. Community colleges teach nearly half of all undergraduate students in the US (11.5 million). PTF account for more than 70% of the community college faculty corps nationwide. (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010)

Talented students require talented teachers. If the US is to lead in the global knowledge economy, we must produce knowledgeable, skilled students. To produce knowledgeable, skilled students, we need knowledgeable, skilled faculty.

We know very little about community college PTF... Why do PTF teach? What motivates PTF their performance? How do we best support PTF and facilitate their development? Understanding PTF will enable the creation of better policy and improved practice.



METHODOLOGY

Qualitative (Instrumental) Case Study

Site: North Carolina Community College (NCCC)
Sample: Purposful sample of 12 NCCC PTF specific to 3 disciplines (Arts & Humanities, Computer Sciences, and Health Sciences) and from 4 PTF sub-groups (aspiring academics, career enders, freeway flyers, professionals, experts, & specialists; Gappa & Leslie, 1993)

Data Collection: 12 interviews (Primary); 8 participant observations, document Analysis, & tag cloud analysis (Secondary)

Data Analysis: Open-coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) in conjunction with the literature

ROLE PERCEPTION AND UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY COLLEGE PTF EXPECTATIONS

Research Question

How do NCCC PTF members come to understand what it means to be a faculty member?

Analytical Framework

Gappa and Leslie's (1993) define PTF as "those individuals who are temporary, nontenure-track faculty employed less than full-time." (pg.3) the authors identified four types of part-timers: 1) aspiring academics; 2) professionals, specialists, and experts; 3) those transitioning into retirement; and 4) freelancers.

Rieple (1987) suggests that the extent to which one becomes familiar with the cultural, instructional, and organizational norms of an institution and their profession, directly impacts how they view their organizations and the roles they play within them.

Blau's (1964) social exchange theory offers that in order to understand social interactions, one must consider the context in which they occur (i.e., NCCC). Moreover, in order for these exchanges to occur, institutions must have something its PTF want; likewise PTF must be willing to work to secure these resources.

Findings

1. PTF overwhelmingly pointed to positive graduate school experiences (e.g., great professors, TA experience) when considering how they learned what it means to be a faculty member.
2. PTF reported that previous years of teaching also informed their perceptions of what it means to be a faculty member at NCCC.
3. PTF believe interactions with other NCCC faculty and department heads play a role in how they come to understand the roles and duties of adjuncts.
4. Participants of this study also point to NCCC culture, policy, and practice as indicators of role and faculty expectations.
5. Among the participants of this study, aspiring academics appear to be socialized in much more traditional ways than professionals, specialists, and experts.
6. There was noticeable stratification between PTF teaching heavy course loads (3 or more classes) than those teaching only one or two classes. PTF teaching heavy course loads cite their graduate school experiences as being the single most influential factor how they understand what it means to be a faculty member. This same group also reported being more connected to and with other department faculty.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PTF: WHEN STEREOTYPES & SELF-PERCEPTIONS COLLIDE

Research Question

What do PTF feel it means to be a faculty member at NCCC?

Analytical Framework

Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner and Cain (1998) consider two themes in their theory of the self and identity: culturalism and constructivism. [Figured worlds >> Positionality >> Self-Authoring]

Self-concepts are formed and regulated by situationally adopting others' perspectives of the self (*Mead, 1934*). One such consequence of this phenomenon is the application of cultural stereotypes and prejudices to the self, or self-stereotyping (*Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990; Hinkley & Andersen, 1996; Sinclair, Hardin, & Lourey, 2006; Steele, 1997; Vaux, 2008*).

Stereotype threat occurs when an individual's behavior can be interpreted in terms of a stereotype, thus substantiating the stereotype (*Steele, 1997*). Moreover, *Latroja et al. (2010)* suggest self-stereotyping and stereotype threat is most common amongst low-status group members (as in the case of PTF).

Findings

1. PTF made hard distinctions between their roles as adjuncts and their roles as college instructors. When asked, "Can you describe the term PTF?" participants used terms and phrases like "adjunct", "someone who teaches part-time", "less than faculty", and "cheap labor". However, when asked, "Can you describe what it means to you to be a faculty member at NCCC?" most participants (9 of 12) self-identify as instructors, educators and conveyers of real knowledge.
2. Participants positioned duties within the figured world of NCCC (closely aligning duties with adherence to policy and regulations. Yet, when asked to describe their roles at NCCC, PTF positioned roles within the figured world of an educator or instructor.
3. PTF buy into the notion of a stereotypical adjunct. Of the themes that emerged from the data, PTF believe that "doing the minimum" to get by, not interacting with students, and spending inadequate time preparing for class are behaviors associated with most adjuncts. Participants also commented that typical adjuncts are 1) full-time workers who teach to supplement their salaries; 2) second-class faculty; 3) not expected to be knowledgeable of campus culture; and 4) do not have roles outside of the classroom.
4. A number of themes amongst the data that lend themselves to stereotype threat: 1) PTF report being underpaid; thus PTF underperform to levels they perceive being comparable to their salaries; 2) PTF report a lack of orientation to the campus NCCC and cultural norms; thus PTF make few, if any attempts to become knowledgeable of campus buildings, resources and extracurricular activities; 3) PTF report being mis- or under-informed of the policies and regulations NCCC and their respective departments; thus PTF adopt a reactive rather than proactive approach to understanding, implementing and enforcing policy; 4) PTF report their departments rarely involve them in departmental communications, decisions, and meetings; thus PTF withdraws from any activity, communication or duty not associated with the classroom; 5) PTF report a lack of commitment from NCCC; thus PTF fail to commit to NCCC; and 6) PTF report feeling undervalued and invisible; thus PTF develop a "doing the minimum to get by" approach to instruction.

HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGES IMPACT PTF ROLE PERFORMANCE

Research Question

What do PTF feel facilitate or hinder the fulfillment of roles at NCCC?

Analytical Framework

Gappa and Leslie's (1993) define PTF as "those individuals who are temporary, nontenure-track faculty employed less than full-time." (pg.3) the authors identified four types of part-timers: 1) aspiring academics; 2) professionals, specialists, and experts (PSEs); 3) those transitioning into retirement; and 4) freelancers.

Blackburn and Lawrence's (1995) theory of faculty role performance and achievement informed the roles individual (e.g., demographics, socialization and environment properties (e.g., institutional culture, organizational structure, etc.) play in motivating faculty and impacting performance.

Fairweather's (1996) conceptualization of faculty reward structures explains the interrelatedness of institutional policy and practice with faculty performance.

Findings

1. Institutional norms associated with the hiring of PTF play a role in the motivation and performance of faculty. Positive hiring experiences left PTF feeling sure of themselves with respect to their value, competencies, and abilities. However, negative experiences during the hiring process leave PTF with feelings of anxiousness, and a sense of being unprepared and under-informed.
2. Participants overwhelmingly feel NCCC needs to do more to train and facilitate PTF success. While there were no noticeable differences amongst PTF sub-group or academic discipline, in example after example participants point to not only a lack of resources, but not knowing all of the resources available to PTF members.
3. Nearly all (10 of 12) PTF interviewed feel that outside of teaching because they "love to teach," there are few incentives at NCCC for adjuncts to do more.
4. The participants of this study have accepted the fact that they are paid unequally as compared to full-time faculty. As such, they look to other institutional incentives such as, being assigned office space, getting "first dibs" on teaching future courses, and recognition from their departments as motivators for performance.

Reinforcing an educator as opposed to "adjunct" mentality amongst its PTF, NCCC can facilitate the socialization of more skilled, more engaged, and more committed PTF. (Blau, 1964; Kezar & Sam, 2011; Wyles, 1998)

In the figured world of NCCC, PTF are positioned by others as invisible, cheap labor; thus PTF struggle with who they believe they are in relation to who others say they are. As a result, PTF appear to "live down" to NCCC expectations. (Holland et al., 1998; Levin & Shaker, 2010; Steele, 1997)

PTF are competent and committed, but they are not receiving the support they feel they need to succeed from the institutions at which they are employed. (Gappa and Leslie, 2002; Wallin, 2007; Washington, 2011)

NCCC does not invest in the development of its PTF to the extent it expects them to be skilled teachers, knowledgeable of policies and procedures, and aware of campus resources. (Jacobs, 1998; Kezar & Sam, 2011; Wallin, 2007; Washington, 2011)

NCCC can foster positive student outcomes -- via better policy and improved practice -- by rectifying the circumstances under which part-time faculty are hired and under which they work. (Jacobs, 1998; Jaeger & Eagan, 2007; Kezar & Sam, 2011; Wallin, 2007; Washington, 2011)