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ABSTRACT

Despite what institutions and departments are doing to make adjunct instructors feel valued and a part of the college community, there are always two groups: the full-time faculty and the adjuncts. To feel valued, what an adjunct instructor might need more than a mentor, a name tag, or even a raise in pay, is to be considered a professional equal by full-time faculty. An adjunct instructor at Saginaw Valley State University first felt like a professional equal with the full-time English faculty during calibration sessions for a grading project where full-time faculty, adjuncts, and a teaching associate discussed differences in grades assigned to the same paper. It is ironic that while adjuncts are viewed as underminers of quality education, the departments they work for often have no set standards for the adjuncts to uphold. Perhaps the most important thing that can be given adjuncts is a sense of belonging to a group of educators dedicated to furthering quality education through staff interaction. Staff calibration sessions, in which department standards are discussed, established, reviewed and revised, can forge such a professional link between full- and part-time faculty. (RS)

Writing Standards: Linking Part-Time and Full-Time Instructors

Judith D. Moehs

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An adjunct instructor who has been teaching mathematics at Saginaw Valley State University for over five years said to me recently, "I don't know about you in English, but for all the time I've been teaching here, I've never felt like I belonged." Now perhaps you're thinking an English adjunct would never have cause to say this, especially one in your department, and as I speak you're mentally listing all you've been doing to make your part-time staff feel they are valued and an important part of your college community. Indeed, your list is long if the literature available on what a few colleges and universities have been doing is reflective of your department. You've been setting up mentoring programs, which pair full-time faculty with adjuncts in order to help the part-time instructor with such things as course objectives and instructional techniques, and which may involve discussion of assignments, a review of the type of feedback the adjunct gives students, and observation of the adjunct's class performance. You've been having orientation sessions for adjuncts, conducting workshops and seminars, printing adjunct handbooks and newsletters, putting adjunct names on mailing lists, and holding social events for them now and then (Campbell & Mayo-Wells, 1985; Carson, 1988). A community college in Arizona has gone so far as to give its adjuncts "engraved copper embossed name tags" to wear while teaching and attending school functions (Walter, 1990). Some of you ask adjuncts for input concerning courses and curriculum and invite them to be members of select committees (Talbott, Davis, & Cetone, 1988). And you are concerned by and are trying to address issues initiated by the Wyoming Resolution - adjunct salaries and working conditions, and the establishment of procedures for hearing adjunct grievances

(Talbott, Davis, & Cetone, 1988).

All of these efforts on behalf of adjuncts have merit, and I speak from personal experience when I say this. I more or less adopted Dr. Phyllis Hastings as a mentor my first semester teaching composition at SVSU and was forever popping into her office to discuss a concern or to use her as a sounding board for a new idea. At an orientation for SVSU adjuncts this past fall, I learned that people I had been passing in the halls on a regular basis were adjuncts such as I. (I also learned there was a Xerox key available to adjuncts in the evening - one not locked up like most others at 4:30, when secretaries leave for the night.) Last semester the chairman of the English Department conducted a forum for English adjuncts on syllabus preparation. This offered us an opportunity to learn what colleagues were doing in their classes. And working conditions for adjuncts at SVSU have just improved one hundred percent, for after a four-month struggle with red tape, we no longer have to share office space with work-study students. However, if you take a close look at what institutions and departments are doing to make adjuncts feel valued and a part of their college community, you will notice there are always two groups: the full-time faculty and the adjuncts.

"Mentor" means "wise advisor." Mentors advise adjuncts who are...not so wise? Some adjuncts have PhDs. Most have master's degrees. Some might argue that "positive peer review by full-time faculty [makes] part-time faculty feel good about their contribution" (Campbell & Mayo-Wells, 1985, p. 9), but it's no secret that the word "adjunct" is often equated with the word "questionable" and that the real reason for establishing mentor programs is to insure quality instruction from adjuncts. Orientations? Are they not usually <u>adjunct</u> orientations as opposed to orientations for full-time faculty and staff? Name tags? I have never seen full-time faculty wear them while teaching at their own institution. And adjunct salaries will probably never reflect the time most part-time English personnel devote to their students and course preparation.

Let me suggest that, to feel valued, what an adjunct

instructor might need more than a mentor, a name tag, or even a raise in pay (though one would be very nice, I assure you) is to be considered a professional equal by full-time faculty. Now if you just gasped and the "no way" sign is flashing in your head, may I remind you that at many colleges and universities, English adjuncts teach more than half of the composition courses offered (at SVSU the percentages were 68.4 for Fall 1990 and 54.3 for Winter 1991), and the expertise of many tenured PhDs and DAs who teach composition is literature or literary analysis, meaning that they have had to "learn" how to teach writing the same way most adjuncts have had to learn - by trial and error. I certainly see professional equals here.

I feel at home in the English Department at Saginaw Valley. I earned my master's degree at SVSU and was on a first-name basis with many of the English professors before joining the staff. I serve on the department's Writing Issues Committee and believe I have something to offer. I have also interacted with SVSU staff and administrators to improve working conditions for adjuncts at the university. But it was during the calibration sessions conducted as part of Phyllis Hastings' Winter 1991 grading project that I first felt like a professional equal with the full-time English faculty, and it was very nice, indeed.

During the course of the project, three sets of papers were graded by the seven-member grading team (three tenured faculty, three adjuncts, and one teaching associate). The papers were those of our students, but no instructor read his or her own students' papers. Each paper was read by two graders. If grades differed by one or more, the paper was given a third reading. Part of the purpose of the project was to look at writing standards and develop reliable grading. This called for the grading panel to develop a rubric and establish a set of anchor papers for the second and third sets of papers to be graded. To establish project standards, each participant was given six sample papers to read and rank, two at a time, prior to the actual grading. Ranking was done without discussion, and grades were written down on slips of paper and handed to Phyllis, who charted

them on a large sheet of paper on the wall. When grades for a given paper all fell within the B range, for example, not much discussion was needed for us to reach a consensus of opinion. But when grades ranged from A to D, as they occasionally did, it was evident discussion was needed. And discussion there was: the part-time and full-time faculty and TA, in random order, defending a grade, explaining a grade, acknowledging the merits of another's point of view on a grade - in short, listening to and learning from one another as professional equals do and should. (Any hesitancy on the part of adjuncts to speak up, for fear we wouldn't know the "right" answers, was quickly overcome, for we found that the tenured faculty and TA didn't know the "right" answers either.)

Every member of the grading panel, at some time or another during these calibration sessions, raised or lowered his or her grade as a direct result of comments made by other panel members, regardless of title. At these calibration sessions I spoke and was spoken to as a professional equal, and I learned far more than I ever would have from a mentoring discussion on grading policy or a workshop put on by "those who know" for "those who are learning." For you see, this was no "dummy run." This was the real thing. These grades were going to count.

Much of the literature I read regarding adjuncts depresses me. As a group of educators, we seem to be tolerated only because we are inexpensive and readily available. We are considered a threat to full-time faculty and underminers of quality education. Yet when hired, sometimes after the semester has already begun, we are given little more than a neatly typed course description, a textbook, an assortment of syllabi to look through, a smile and a handshake before being pointed in the direction of our classroom. What we are not given, we who are most often "on the front lines introducing students to university education" (Talbott, Davis, & Cetone, 1988, p. 687), is a clear understanding of our department's standards. It is truly ironic that while adjuncts are viewed as underminers of quality education, the departments we work for often have no set of standards for us to uphold.

Perhaps lack of common grading criteria in an English department is understandable. When portfolio team grading was introduced to freshman composition courses at the University of Cincinnati on a trial basis, there was concern on the part of some participants that their standards, developed over years of teaching, might have to change if they were different from those of their colleagues (Roemer, Schultz, & Durst, 1991). But when the pilot was over, participants were enthusiastic about the project and one said, "We need to continue to work out group standards and carefully define criteria which everyone will abide by" (Roemer, Schultz, & Durst, 1991, p. 462). Bi- or tri-semester staff calibration sessions would make adjuncts aware of what they can and should expect from students, subject department standards that do exist to periodic scrutiny and review, and possibly force a few departments to take a good hard look at how they define quality education.

Because my husband teaches in the Chemistry Department at Saginaw Valley, I was invited to attend the appreciation dinner given this winter for the department's part-time staff. In his welcoming speech, the department chair said that because adjuncts get paid so little, treating them and their spouses to dinner was the "least the department could do." For an adjunct staff usually composed of scientists with full-time jobs and prestigious titles and salaries, perhaps an appreciation dinner is both the least and the most a science department can do. But in English departments where, as at SVSU, most adjunct instructors don't have full-time jobs with imposing titles, perhaps the most important thing that can be given them is a sense of belonging to a group of educators dedicated to furthering quality education through staff interaction.

Staff calibration sessions, in which department standards are discussed, established, reviewed and revised, can forge a professional link between full- and part-time faculty, ensure that adjuncts are demanding college-level work from their students, and make certain that no English adjunct will ever have cause to say, "I've never felt like I belonged."

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