

Impact of Working Conditions on Faculty Teaching: Analysis of Full-Time Tenure Track and Part Time Non-Tenure Track Faculty

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Abstract: The following exploration examined the impact of working conditions on faculty teaching for full-time faculty and non-tenure track faculty within an academic department at a large Midwestern university to determine whether employment status and working conditions potentially impacted student learning outcomes. Questions asked of participating faculty focused on factors related to, or influencing, teaching that may improve or hinder student learning. Factors such as available resources, interaction with department administrators and other faculty, job satisfaction, work-life integration, and mentorship were explored through written surveys and one-on-one interviews. Twelve faculty, out of a target population of 33, provided insight as to concerns or issues they felt impeded or supported teaching efforts. Although the exploration contained a small sample size, department administrators implemented changes to address faculty concerns to reduce “disconnects” and issues mentioned by faculty members. Primary changes occurred around part time faculty input on curriculum development and interactions with department administrators and full-time faculty. While still ongoing, initial feedback is positive and indicates faculty are adapting to the changes. Further work is necessary to examine individual feelings of worth and value, as well as exploring actual student learning outcomes across courses.

Keywords: Working conditions, part-time faculty, job satisfaction, and faculty status.

The purpose of this exploration was to examine the impact of working conditions on faculty teaching for full time faculty and non-tenure track faculty (NTTF). Specifically, questions were posed to ascertain whether resources, or lack thereof, potentially hindered student learning outcomes, especially in the context of employment status. The hypothesis was that a “disconnect” existed between part time faculty and full-time faculty (FTF) within the department that resulted in varying curriculum focus, an array of student learning outcomes, and lack of course scaffolding.

The focus on NTTF resulted from research indicating that part time NTTF are subjected to working conditions or environments that potentially hinder the ability to teach effectively (Champlin & Knoedler, 2017), thereby impacting the educational outcomes for students (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Johnson & Mejia, 2014). Compared to full time faculty (FTF), NTTF are paid less, do not receive health benefits, often lack access to professional development, and face employment insecurities based on department needs and student enrollment. For the purposes of this exploration, a small academic department at a large Midwestern university was reviewed. At the time of this review, the department employed five FTF and 23 NTTF, with an undergraduate enrollment of 540 students. The NTTF taught approximately 73% of the required 15 core courses within the undergraduate major. Many of

the courses taught by NTTF were introductory courses where faculty support and mentorship were crucial.

For the NTTF, 82% are part time (i.e., one to two courses per semester) while 17% are employed full time (one clinical faculty member who teaches four courses per semester and three staff members). The trend for using part time NTTF to teach is not specific to this department. In 2012, Kezar and Maxey reported on new faculty hires, indicating three quarters of new hires are part time or non-tenured track faculty. Of those in non-tenure track positions, 74% are employed part time (Yakoboski, 2016) with 26% employed full time. Similar to others (Kezar, 2013; Yakoboski & Foster, 2014), this department uses part time faculty in response to budget restraints, cost savings, course release time, new course offerings, online education courses, or minors and certificates that demand a skillset often met by part time faculty expertise.

Kezar and Maxey (2012) point to this increasing use of NTTF as creating an environment that may not be conducive to optimal student learning. Although NTTF may be motivated to teach, NTTF often have less access to resources, difficulty with logistical issues such as the time a course is taught, parking on campus, navigating learning management systems (i.e., Canvas), and a designated location to keep teaching material and equipment.

In addition, part time faculty are hired to teach and often receive little to no interaction with department faculty or staff (hence the “disconnect”). Preliminary discussions indicated NTTF work in a silo, developing course material based on previous syllabi and modifying the course to fit individual expertise, without taking into consideration student learning objectives developed for the program. This has resulted in “curriculum creep” in which the original intent of the course is no longer recognized in the learning objectives, as well as full time faculty teaching entirely different material for the same course.

To comprehend the impact of these type issues, this exploration examined the current environment within the department, along with scrutinizing variables such as job satisfaction, resource availability, and department interaction that may affect student learning outcomes. For this study, NTTF refers only to those faculty teaching one to two courses per semester on a part time basis. Any reference to tenure track faculty (TTF) includes both tenure track faculty and the clinical faculty member since clinical faculty can achieve rank and promotion based on years of service and accomplishments.

Assessment methods

The initial survey was administered in spring 2019 with follow up one-on-one interviews taking place in May 2019. The written survey asked all faculty (TTF and NTTF) to provide pertinent demographic information, expertise area, years of experience, reason for teaching, and other questions. The results were used to assess factors such as (but not limited to): time for teaching (e.g., is the individual working full time and teaching part time?), teaching experience, subject matter expertise, and geographic proximity to students. Further, individual interviews were held with seven faculty, at which time faculty were asked questions regarding job satisfaction, suggestions for improvement, assessment methods, and current teaching practices. This project took place over the 2019 calendar year and received Institutional Review Board approval.

Data analysis

Interviews were analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative software management program developed by QSR International. NVivo allows for importation, management, coding, and analysis of unstructured data. Coding can occur following a grounded theory method in which various researchers separately

code and extract key themes from transcribed data. Coding discrepancies are resolved through discussion and validated through NVivo's inter-rater reliability function.

Results

Of the potential 28 faculty in the target population, 21 faculty accessed or opened the survey; 12 completed the survey, nine faculty exited without completing the survey. The 12 respondents included nine part time faculty (i.e., teaching 1-2 courses per semester) and three full time faculty. The part time faculty group was represented by one staff member, two doctoral students, and six adjunct faculty members. Demographically, the group included 10 females and two males with a predominantly white population (9) with two Black or African American respondents and one Asian/Pacific Islander, with a mean age of 44 (28-67 years range). Overall, faculty members possessed five doctoral degrees and seven masters' degrees in disciplines such as health sciences, kinesiology, nursing, and gerontology. Respondents had taught in higher education anywhere from 2 to 30 years, with five of the respondents teaching 15 or more years and three of the respondents teaching less than three years.

When examining the reasons faculty wanted to teach, the answers were varied, although the overall consensus was that faculty wanted students to "grow and have a passion for knowledge" or "conveying meaningful information to students with regards to their lives." Interestingly, the majority of the respondents used the word "love" in describing their feelings toward teaching. This was iterated in comments such as, "I love working with students, to share and to learn," "I love helping the next generation reach their potential," "I LOVE IT! I enjoy sharing information and experiences that can directly impact quality of life," and "I love the interaction with students and sharing my experience with others." On a different note, one faculty member stated, "My ultimate goals for teaching is to help society, to build up a better society and since I have the skills, education, and opportunity I think teaching will help me to reach that goal."

A portion of the administered survey addressed the impact various factors have on faculty members' performance (Table 1). Respondents were asked to use the scale of 1-100 with 1 being "highly negative" and 100 being "highly positive" to rate how each of these factors impacted their ability to perform their job.

Table 1: Factors affecting faculty performance.

Factor	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Departmental faculty collegiality	12	80.8	14.5	50	100
Departmental administrative support	12	83.4	17.2	50	100
Work/life integration	11	71.8	24.2	30	97
Mentorship	11	70.3	22.8	40	100
Interactions with students	11	80.0	22.1	40	100
Available resources	12	79.6	18.7	30	100

Faculty were further asked to rate how valued they felt as a faculty member in the department using a scale of "1" (not valued) to "100" (highly valued). Twelve faculty responded, with a mean of 78.8 (SD 16.4, 50-100 range). Faculty were also asked to consider how they perceived their current workload impacting student learning outcomes. Respondents were provided a Likert scale with the choices of "No influence," "Little influence," "Neutral," "Somewhat influential," and "Highly influential." Of the 12 respondents, one chose "Little influence;" two stating "Neutral;" six felt workload was "Somewhat influential," and two felt workload was "Highly influential" in impacting student learning outcomes.

Using the same Likert scale of “No influence” to “Highly influential,” respondents were asked how departmental policies and practices impacted their performance and ability to create a positive learning environment for students. Again, all 12 respondents answered, with one choosing “No influence;” two stating “Neutral;” four responding “Somewhat influential,” while five faculty chose “Highly influential” for policies and practices impacting student learning outcomes.

A review of two General Education courses offered in the department showed little variance between NTTF and TTF outcomes, with the average final grades between 79.5% and 89.7% (see table xx). Both of these courses are prerequisites for the department degree, as well as serving as a General Education elective option within the university.

Table 2: Comparison of student outcomes by faculty status.

Course	Term	Year	Faculty status	Final Score Mean	Max score	Min score	Std. Dev	N
#1	Fall	2018	NTTF	89.5	100	67.58	7.56	46
#1	Fall	2018	NTTF	80.9	92.9	34.37	13.01	25
#1	Fall	2018	TTF	84.5	94.6	14.5	11.91	44
#1	Fall	2017	TTF	82.5	97.6	35.16	13.38	48
#1	Fall	2017	NTTF	89.7	100.6	52.57	9.62	29
#2	Fall	2018	NTTF	80.2	95.0	0	17.81	46
#2	Fall	2018	TTF	79.5	101.3	0	18.47	48

At the end of the online survey, faculty were asked if they would like to participate in a one-on-one interview to further explore factors leading to student learning outcomes. Of the 12 participants, seven agreed to an interview. Sessions were set up in a private room with both investigators present. Sessions were audio taped to ensure accuracy in responses; no personal or demographic information was obtained from respondents. Instead, participants were asked a series of questions on satisfaction, resources, teaching ability, and interaction. The goal was to explore factors contributing to, or hindering, the faculty member’s impact on student learning.

When asked about their current satisfaction with teaching in the department, the majority of those interviewed reported positive satisfaction with the department and university citing such attributes as autonomy, staff support, and faculty meetings as contributing to overall satisfaction. However, when asked about factors hindering or reducing teaching satisfaction, faculty mentioned several items focused on curriculum and interaction with other faculty as reasons for dissatisfaction.

For example, faculty mentioned that they often did not understand how their particular course fit into the overall degree program or what the goal of the course was in relation to the degree. This lack of discussion as to the course purpose, development, or structure was felt to impede progress. “I am guessing about how to teach,” mentioned one participant.

In addition, faculty felt they could not reach out to other faculty to discuss course content. Many of the participants lamented that they “did not know what other instructors are doing,” or asked the question, “What are other faculty teaching in similar courses?” This was a similar theme by other faculty, who asked the question, “What is being taught in a previous course?” Faculty were concerned that students often came to a class unprepared or unskilled in fundamental skills, which the faculty member expected them to have learned in an earlier course. Faculty then spent time teaching or reviewing prerequisite skills needed for the current course.

This time spent on reviewing resulted in frustration for faculty, who wanted to know “what other faculty are teaching so I can build on this.” This was evident in previous answers, when faculty were asked questions about onboarding. One faculty member stated, “There was no guidance or input when starting. I was given a syllabus, which I revised to fit my teaching style.”

This connection to other faculty was mentioned again when asked about resources. Faculty mentioned they would like to have an opportunity to talk with other faculty, although one participant commented that the “separate faculty meetings for NTTF and TTF creates a disconnect between faculty members; NTTF perceive themselves to be of “lesser” value.”

When asked about other resources, the majority of faculty stated they felt they had adequate resources to perform their job, although many mentioned the physical proximity as being a deterrent, especially for those faculty living in another state. In addition, faculty mentioned interest in webinars or other teaching sessions, in which they could watch tutorials or attend technology sessions to learn new teaching methods. Specifically, several faculty asked for a list of campus resources for students that provided them with information without having to search the university website. Since many of the NTTF are not on campus, they are unfamiliar with the location and availability of many campus resources. For TTF, two mentioned the requirements for research output and the strain this imposed on learning new technology methods.

When discussing “teaching ability” with participants, questions focused on how departmental practices affected faculty ability to create a positive learning environment along with suggested changes from the department to support their efforts. A couple of participants mentioned students in response to this question, stating aspects such as how to respond when several students were not submitting assignments, quit showing up to class, or not responding to emails. “There has to be a culture somewhere that they’re either afraid to talk to professors about things going on or people just don’t care if they submit things or not” remarked one faculty. Other faculty focused on department requirements as impeding teaching ability, mentioning ongoing assessment requirements and policies as “time-consuming” and “focusing on tasks other than teaching.” One participant stated that policies, practices, and expectations should be clearly outlined in a faculty contract prior to beginning work as a NTTF member.

When asked about other department policies related to interactions that may affect teaching ability, the majority of participants responded they were highly satisfied and felt an “open, supportive, and positive environment” existed. Others disagreed, stating they did not feel “connected in any way” to others in the department. Still others mentioned the physical separation of the small department in relation to other departments within the school as creating isolation and further disconnect.

Faculty suggested incorporating an “in-service” in the curriculum or within faculty meetings to allow faculty to work together, learn new skills, and develop course materials. NTTF also asked for stronger advocacy in school faculty meetings for NTTF inclusion.

Finally, participants were asked how valued they felt as a faculty member in the department. Although one faculty member did not feel valued, the majority of those participating in the one-on-one interview (as well as their response to the same question on the survey) indicated a high level of satisfaction with the department. Although faculty expressed the need for change and more interaction, they felt the past year had produced changes that were on track to include faculty and address many of the concerns expressed.

Discussion

Developing a project examining faculty perceptions is challenging, especially when couched in the premise of eventual student outcomes. While it was stressed to potential participants that the focus was on external factors related to teaching that may influence or hinder student learning, casual

conversations with colleagues indicated individuals were leery of questions measuring individual impact. This may have contributed to the low response rate, although time to complete a survey and participate in discussion may have also contributed.

Regardless, the exploration served to provide insight as to current department policies and concerns. Given that the curriculum is key to student learning outcomes, the dissatisfaction expressed about the curriculum and faculty interaction is pivotal. A review of course objectives conducted fall 2018 indicated varying learning objectives in sections of identical courses resulting in the same course being taught differently between NTTF and TTF. This “curriculum creep” resulted in different sections of identical courses being taught with opposing or contrasting learning outcomes, therefore dimensioning overall degree expectations.

Results from the analysis asking faculty to rate whether specific factors were negative or positive (Table 1) showed that faculty rated administrative support as the most positive (mean 83.4) while the lowest rating occurred with “mentorship” (mean 70.3). Since it is administrative support that engages regularly with NTTF on matters such as pay, schedules, and contracts, it is not surprising this was rated toward the higher end of “positive.” Mentorship, on the other hand, which often occurs between faculty, scored the lowest, which can be indicative of the separation of TTF and NTTF who do not physically work within the department. It may also speak to the lack of interaction between faculty on developing and teaching similar courses. At the same time, “work/life integration” also scored lower, which could reflect the overall work load both TTF and NTTF experience in an academic setting.

While the overall scores on the various factors were positively rated (i.e., >70 on a 1-100 scale), there was also a lack of average high scores in terms of positive factors. When viewing the data separately for TTF and NTTF, four NTTF rated various factors between a 30 and 50 versus TTF, with only one respondent rating a factor between 30 and 50. On the other hand, five of the nine NTTF rated at least one factor as highly positive at 100, while none of the TTF rated any factors that high.

Interestingly, the snapshot of outcomes for general education courses were similar, although to analyze reasons would be speculation based on work/life responsibilities. Rather, the question became, are there differences in the content and expectations for the courses that are significantly different? As can be seen in Table 2, the outcomes for two general education courses were very similar. For the first general education course, the sections were taught by one TTF and two NTTF, with little discourse between the instructors on course content. For the second general education course, both were taught by NTTF and TTF who worked closely to ensure similar content and obtained similar outcomes. Overall, student final grades were within the same range, indicating little variability between teaching outcomes of NTTF and TTF.

Unfortunately, the small number of faculty participating in this exploration made it difficult to compare the two faculty groups. Yet, the feedback was indicative of the “disconnect” hypothesized in this exploration. Faculty themselves spoke to the need for more interaction and discussion to ensure student success. It was also speculated that TTF would rate factors more positively than NTTF, although it was NTTF who rated many factors “highly positive.” This needs continued exploration as NTTF are often the subject of attempts to improve practices.

Solutions to problem

The results of this analysis served as an impetus to strengthen and improve faculty resources and interactions within the department. The intent was not only to indirectly improve student success, but to ensure all faculty members understood and felt valued for their contributions to the department

mission. Steps taken to make these changes included the following, which were led by the department Undergraduate Program Director and Program Coordinator in conjunction with faculty input.

Focus on curriculum and course development

- Identifying a “primary faculty member” for each course, with a list of instructors teaching additional sections. Primary faculty members (whether TTF or NTTF) are responsible for major course concepts and directions, making sure to adhere to program objectives and degree outcomes. Other faculty members teaching the course collaborate with the primary member via email and teleconferencing calls to ensure consistency and course adherence to the curriculum. Instructors are encouraged, and welcome, to suggest changes and modifications but understand the core requirements of the course are subject to degree specifications.
- Revising Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) with input from NTTF and TTF
 - Once updated, requiring faculty to include and link PLOs on syllabi to specific assignments.
- Creating a five-year assessment grid with targeted courses for data collection to allow faculty insight as to when specific courses are assessed.

Focus on improving interaction

- Monthly meetings with NTTF, both in-person and via Zoom teleconferencing. Since several adjuncts work in different states, offering a digital meeting form was imperative. Meetings were recorded for those unable to attend.
- Monthly NTTF meetings included:
 - Overview of available resources for faculty
 - Teaching strategies and instruction on available technology in online courses
 - Information from student advisors on deadlines, student issues, and resources
 - Opportunity to ask questions and discuss student or course issues
- Offering one-on-one Zoom or in-person meetings for those who wanted to learn a new strategy, review assessment requirements, or discuss issues
- Offering all faculty the opportunity for a peer evaluation, either within a face-to-face course or online
- Inviting NTTF to student events, faculty panels, and faculty/student luncheons

Focus on policies and procedures

- Developing a concise contract for NTTF that includes specific responsibilities and expectations for part time work
- Creating forms for specific student issues (e.g., incompletes) with specific steps and actions to follow

Efforts are still underway, but the steps mentioned above have proved helpful and are beginning to open dialogue and conversations. Initial feedback from faculty is positive, with a noticeable increase in faculty attendance at monthly meetings and student events. Curriculum efforts have eliminated prior discrepancies in different sections of identical courses and faculty are working in teams to revise and develop content each semester. A shared Box folder provides critical resources

to help faculty work with students and respond to student issues. Yearly academic contracts are provided to NTTF based on willingness to teach and expected enrollments for the academic year; contracts specifically outline roles and responsibilities in terms of curriculum development, assessment reports, and monthly meetings.

The next step is to conduct a similar exploration in another academic year to determine if perceptions of individual value and worth changed. Further work on student learning outcomes across different sections of identical courses would serve as a mechanism to examine faculty impact on learning outcomes. Similar work, such as that conducted by Figlio, Schapiro, and Soter (2015) could explore the impact of NTTF faculty on student desire to take another course in the same subject or continue in the degree program. Figlio et al. (2015) found students were more apt to take additional courses, with better outcomes, when the instructor was a NTTF.

Conclusion

To increase student retention and graduation rates, and effectively prepare students for graduate professional program acceptance, faculty must be unified in department efforts. This requires all faculty to work collaboratively, provide pertinent input, understand the goals of the department, and acknowledge the needs of students to ensure optimal student outcomes.

While this exploration was small in stature, it provided tremendous insight into how to structure and revise department policies to embrace the contributions of all faculty, taking into consideration the unique needs of differing roles. Although there is considerable work to be accomplished, this project has resulted in positive changes that continue to be tweaked and revised. The overall goal is to continue working on strategies to reduce any continued “disconnect” between faculty members and improve faculty perception on the worth of their contributions.

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