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AC 2007-1356: TRAINING FOR ADJUNCT FACULTY

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Training for Adjunct Faculty

Abstract

Professor, teacher, instructor, faculty member –all are cherished and incredibly important titles at any university. At the same time, every full-time faculty member knows that it took time to become a good teacher and that training and mentoring shortens the required train-up period. Members of the Civil Engineering Department Heads Council Executive Committee (DHCEC) have indicated that the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) ExCEED Teaching Workshop is a must have tool for developing new faculty. So why do we thrust a syllabus into the hands of adjunct faculty and wish them well – while it appears that some type of orientation training is warranted for all full-time faculty? This paper examines the topics that should be covered in such training. The results are based on a survey of existing civil engineering department heads and an examination of the training already available through universities and professional societies.

I. Introduction

Almost every civil engineering program will need part-time or adjunct faculty at some time to meet the constantly changing teaching requirements within a program. The need for adjunct faculty may be due to the sudden departure of current faculty, position cuts or unfilled positions due to budget issues, the need to cover new topics such as those associated with the new Body of Knowledge (BOK)¹ being instituted in the near future, faculty buy-out for research, or by design such that the number of authorized faculty does not meet the required number of instructors to cover the current course load. Some adjunct faculty teach in a department as part of the full-time faculty, many times without a doctorate or any research requirements, while others teach for a couple of years until the shortage is filled or they teach only as required. However, these faculty are influencing students daily, for good or bad, and in some cases they have a greater influence on the students since many are the current industry professionals that most of our graduates aspire to become.

Most schools require adjuncts to teach subjects that full-time faculty do not want to teach - lower level courses where the enrollments are the largest. Since retention of engineering students is critical in the freshman and sophomore year, it appears that there is a need to ensure these students are taught by trained educators. This paper will address the need for adjunct faculty training, the current availability of such training, and a list of the most important topics that need to be covered as determined by a survey of current civil engineering department heads. Providing adjunct faculty training is being considered by the ASCE Committee on Faculty Development.

II. How many programs have Adjunct Faculty training?

Of the 21 department heads that responded, only two schools had anything resembling training for their adjunct (or similar) faculty – one requires mentoring by the most seasoned faculty in the department and the other requires intense faculty training on teaching for any

and all faculty.² The school that requires training for all faculty requires an ExCEED like teaching workshop for all faculty.

Of course a few schools that have no formal training for their adjunct faculty do have some resources available to support the professional development of the entire faculty. Some have a faculty handbook or instructor guide books that cover basic principles. Others rely on the University Center for Teaching Excellence. Some look for natural interaction between adjunct and regular faculty (however, many times adjunct faculty teach evening classes while full-time faculty teach during the day), and some department heads meet with adjuncts on an informal basis to assist with issues such as grading, textbooks, rules, etc. One school looks for experienced adjunct faculty who have been through their program with requisite field experience, but they still take the time to talk to adjunct faculty employers and have them teach a sample class. Another program offers mentorship by the most experienced teachers, but not on a formal basis.

For a number of schools, the only real feedback to adjunct faculty occurs with the end-of-course student evaluations or when a problem or issue arises. At that point, the school may ask a tenured faculty member to observe the class and meet with the students and the instructor to resolve the issue. If they cannot resolve the issue, they may not rehire the adjunct faculty member who has probably put a lot of effort and time into developing the content of the course. It seems that many of these problems could be avoided if the adjunct faculty had some basic teacher training. Although similar methods are used with tenure-track faculty, tenure-track faculty usually get 3-6 years before a final decision is reached and today many are being sent to workshops like the ExCEED Teaching Workshop to avoid these types of problems.³

A web search on the phrase “adjunct training”, yields 460 hits. Many of these focus on training that is not necessarily certified training. A web search on the phrase “adjunct faculty training”, yields 230 hits that are for adjunct faculty training programs at the community college level where as much as fifty percent of their faculty are part-time faculty.⁴ Some even require certification within a two year time period if the person wants to continue teaching at their school.⁵ Several firms and institutes offer training for adjunct faculty⁶, while schools like Texas A&M Commerce⁷ offers adjunct training on their web-site where the link connects to the Stanford University web-site⁸ that provides topic coverage by Award-Winning Teachers on Teaching. The topics included: case method teaching, controversial subject matter in the classroom, course design, critical thinking, discussion leading, diversity issues in the classroom, engaging and challenging students, general teaching effectiveness, introductory courses, large courses, lecturing, mentoring students, service learning, simulation, Socratic method, teaching in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering, team teaching, technology, and testing. Many schools have some of these similar topics listed on their web pages for adjunct and/or full-time faculty as well. In some cases a lecture is actually available on line, but specific software is needed to observe the class (a school focused web-site). The concept of actually seeing the performance of superb teaching rather than just reading about it is critical to improving, but in this case, the improvement has to be accessed from a site and digested individually. A preferable approach would provide the knowledge to the individual within a learning community to allow fuller understanding.

Because an adjunct faculty member is such an important position and there are so many important areas in which an adjunct faculty member usually lacks experience, the necessity for training becomes apparent. There are several venues available for such training. Universities can provide their own training.^{9,10} A typical university has a sufficient number of excellent faculty to make such training worthwhile and the training can be tailored to support the specific policies, capabilities and priorities of that specific university. A key component of any training program would be having the new teachers actually practicing major components of excellent teaching with a mentor, in front of a mock class or with real students.¹¹ Professional societies can prepare more general training that will be applicable for all adjunct faculty. The ASCE Committee on Faculty Development is currently considering such an initiative.

III. What should adjunct training include?

A survey was sent to all Civil Engineering Department Heads² asking what training is most needed to be included in Adjunct Faculty training. The question was open-ended rather than multiple choice. There were 21 responses and the feedback was sorted into the general categories cited below. The topics are listed in order of priority along with the number of responses for each topic.

Most popular topics (number of responses)

Encourage student interaction	(7)
Class design/organization to include review material and time for students to participate in the learning process	(6)
Handling difficult students	(6)
Handling student interaction	(5)
Course syllabus (outlines, objectives, notes)	(4)
Designing homework, exams and reading assignments	(4)
All ExCEED topics	(4)
(ExCEED topics include: demonstration classes, principles of effective teaching, communication skills, learning objectives, lesson organization and board notes, learning styles, interpersonal rapport, non-verbal communication, course syllabus and exams)	

Multiple response (2 or 3 responses)

Class administration
 Being prepared for class
 Grading and fairness issues
 How students learn
 Electronic media and teaching aids
 Assessment of student learning
 How to communicate with students (dos and don'ts)
 Same as full-time faculty
 Alternate teaching techniques (most Adjunct Faculty only familiar with lecture format...)

Single response topics

Practice what they are taught in the training
Stick to teaching plan
Importance of providing accurate and timely feedback to students
Bloom's taxonomy

A majority of the most essential topics involved course and student management. While four asked for the coverage of course syllabus topics, one department head noted that there is no need to cover course syllabus (outlines, objectives, course notes) since most schools are requiring adjuncts to teach established courses and will share the content with them. The authors are not sure that this is a standard practice in most places where faculty think their course notes are their own intellectual property. It appears that the list of topic coverage, noted by four department heads should closely follow the topics offered in the ExCEED Teaching workshop to full-time faculty. In fact, most of the other listed topics are part of the current ExCEED Teaching Workshop. The ideal solution would be for adjunct faculty to attend an ExCEED Teaching Workshop; however, most adjunct faculty already have full-time jobs limiting their availability, are paid low wages for teaching and most department budgets cannot support the cost of sending adjuncts to a week long workshop.

IV. How should Adjunct Faculty training be provided?

The survey queried current department heads asking, "In what format do you think this training would be most effective (workshop, web-based, video streaming seminar, other)?" The most common response was either "web-based" or "streaming video" so that the learning process is more interactive. The other responses included:

- Workshop (however distance and time an issue, but more interactive)
- Video-tape – no required time slot
- CD course
- Handbook to go with the web-based and/or video streaming for later reference
- Faculty members must teach practice classes to implement the training they receive under the gaze of a mentor

It is obvious that some type of training, either at the university or professional level, is needed. The training should be delivered in manageable segments to allow participation based on the very busy schedules of the adjunct faculty that usually already have full-time jobs. The tougher part is how to make it interactive which comes out time and again as the most effective training method. You would hope that an evening time slot would work, but many adjunct faculty classes are offered late afternoon or in the evening. Possibly multiple offerings each week would work or a Saturday when normally no classes are offered.

Currently many major universities are not providing formal adjunct faculty training, while a number of community colleges are. This trend makes sense since such large portions of faculty at the community college level are part-time faculty. Quite possibly adjunct faculty training at the major universities could be offered by the local community college. Perhaps

the professional society could provide the interactive training at multiple times to meet the varied schedules of our adjunct faculty who hold such critical positions in our universities.

VII. Conclusions

The department, college, and university must ensure their students receive the best education possible. This effort now includes faculty training for their full-time faculty using workshops like the ASCE sponsored ExCEED Teaching Workshop. With increasing numbers of adjunct faculty assuming the teaching responsibilities at both major universities and community colleges, faculty training for adjunct faculty is warranted. The teacher is faced with a myriad of issues that range from classroom management to managing and motivating the students in the classroom while trying to consider the varying learning styles and teaching modes. Those hired to teach the nation's college students often have no experience in many of these important areas. While some adjunct faculty manage to learn their skills through a variety of means, training is extremely useful to speed up the process. Some community colleges currently offer training, while others require certification. Many are wrestling with the best method to provide the training. For those trying to decide if they should provide training or funding for training, hopefully this paper will suggest the types of topics that might be included based on existing training programs and a survey of current civil engineering department heads.

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