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Examining Effective Teaching Practices in Higher Education

Toni Paoletta, Cleveland State University

Abstract: Contingent faculty represent the largest instructional group in higher education today, yet few receive any andragogic training prior to teaching. Does this impact their effectiveness in the classroom?

Keywords: Effective Teaching, Contingent Faculty, Faculty Development

Introduction

Contingent faculty lacking the necessary andragogic training to teach adult students effectively are negatively affecting student achievement and student learning in higher education. Literature suggests that higher education institutions that primarily use contingent faculty to teach introductory classes may be negatively affecting student retention and graduation rates (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Scott & Danley-Scott, 2015). Contingent faculty are mainly hired due to their subject matter expertise while tenured faculty are mainly hired due to their research agenda. Most join the higher education faculty rank as untrained, novice educators who lack the teaching knowledge to teach adult learners effectively (Goldstene, 2015; Street, Maisto, Merves, & Rhodes, 2012). If contingent faculty are untrained and thereby unfamiliar with effective teaching practices, what strategies are they using to teach and assess student learning appropriately? The purpose of this roundtable discussion is to discuss an in-progress research study that will design an instrument to help better understand the perceived effective teaching practices of faculty in higher education and will be used to determine if faculty rank influences these practices.

Literature Review

Higher education in the United States, has evolved over the centuries since the early colonists arrived on America's soil. The professoriate is no exception. Prior to 1900, colleges employed low numbers of professors who were supported by numerous tutors. The Morrill Act of 1862 established Land Grant Colleges which further transformed higher education and the professoriate by increasing the number of colleges and professors. This led to the formation of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915 which began the practice of ranking instructors. While professor rank, title, and curricular focus evolved in higher education, the actual practice of teaching in the higher education classroom and the preparation for faculty to teach largely remains unchanged (Brubacher, 2017; Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Historically, professors and tutors who formed the early professoriate were not educated to be teachers. Tenured faculty and contingent faculty have varying experiences in learning how to teach as most faculty tend to teach the way they were taught. To help mitigate this deficiency in teaching knowledge, universities have instituted new faculty development programs and faculty orientation programs. These programs are primarily for new full-time faculty, not part-time contingent faculty (Lindbeck & Darnell, 2008; Robinson & Hope, 2013). To date, there no formal record of effective teaching practices used by faculty. The primary teaching method used remains the lecture method. While there are many effective teaching frameworks that discuss effective teaching methods in various contexts, none specifically address effective teaching practices in higher education. As institutions of higher education move to focus on quality assurance in teaching and learning, it is important to have an instrument

to identify the effective teaching practices in use by higher education faculty (Neary, 2016; Santisteban & Egues, 2014).

Methodology

The aim of this in-progress research study is to develop an instrument to examine the factors that underlie effective teacher practices of higher education faculty as perceived by faculty in higher education; classroom management strategies, assessment of learning strategies, adult learner facilitation strategies and understanding of adult learning theory. These four areas of effective teaching have been selected due to the impact each has on effective teaching in the higher education classroom environment as a result of the literature review and by adapting the ACUE's Effective Practice Framework© (ACUE's Effective Practice Framework©, 2017) and the Adult Education Teacher Competencies (LINCS Adult Education Teacher Competencies, 2015) outlined by the American Institutes for Research (American Institutes for Research, 2019).

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