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Tell Me What You Want: Contracts with Community College Adjunct Faculty Members and Potential Supplemental Benefits to Increase Satisfaction

Kimberly Ann Page¹

Introduction

During the first decade of 21st century, community colleges experienced a decrease in funding from state and local appropriations (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2014). In the same period, community college enrollments increased (CCCSE, 2014). To balance their budgets, public community colleges increased their dependence on adjunct faculty members and expanded their use to the highest level in the century-long history of community colleges (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014). As the number of adjunct faculty members increased, so did their tendency to unionize and bargain for improved working conditions (Berry & Savarese, 2012).

Although, hiring additional adjunct faculty members reduces instructional costs, there are disadvantages to relying too heavily on adjuncts. Research has shown that as the number of adjunct faculty members employed at community colleges increases, negative events occur: student graduation rates fall; student retention drops; and students are less likely to transfer (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Smith, 2007). These results may partially be the due to the dissatisfaction of adjunct faculty members with their wages, healthcare benefits, access to full-time positions, and lack of job security (AFT Higher Education, 2010; Benjamin, 1998; Hoyt, 2012; Kramer, Gloeckner, & Jacoby, 2014).

The purpose of the study was to explore supplemental benefits that might be offered to adjunct faculty members at community colleges to increase their satisfaction and to determine which benefits are suitable for inclusion as provisions in their contracts. Supplemental benefits are defined as low-cost items that promote job satisfaction in contrast to the major benefits of wages, healthcare, and pensions.

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Satisfaction for Adjunct Faculty Members

The theoretical framework for the study was based on Herzberg's two-factor theory. The theory postulates that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not a continuum and are not opposite one another, but are two separate issues (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959/2010). Satisfaction has been found to increase as the result of internal factors, such as meaningful work, responsibility, recognition, and advancement and growth opportunities; whereas, dissatisfaction stems from external factors, such as wages, job status and security, policies, supervision tactics, and interpersonal relationships (Herzberg, 1968). When adjunct faculty members are satisfied with their working environment, the quality of their teaching improves (Gappa, 2000).

Bolman and Deal (2008) rephrased Herzberg's work into three motivators for employees: make work meaningful and worthwhile, establish personal accountability, and provide constructive feedback. In the academic environment, several motivating factors for faculty have been identified: recognition, performance evaluations, orientations, professional development, and job flexibility (Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Roueche, Roueche, & Milliron, 1995; Waltman, Bergom, Hollenshead, Miller, & August, 2012).

Benefits Desired by Adjunct Faculty

Adjunct faculty members working at community colleges are often given little consideration (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). It is typical for adjunct faculty members to receive only the textbook, a room number, and a class roster prior to meeting their students for the first time (Wickun & Stanley, 2007). Adjunct faculty members have commented that they were often given no formal orientation either to their colleges or to their courses. (Hoyt et al., 2008; Wickun & Stanley, 2007).

In studying the perceptions of adjunct faculty members, Diegel (2010) found that they consider themselves as "second class citizens" in six important areas: appointments, support services, communications with peers, governance participation, compensation, and job security. Although adjunct faculty members described themselves as being satisfied with their teaching experiences, they are dissatisfied with other aspects of their jobs, such as schedules and salaries (Hoyt et al., 2008). A study of benefits desired by adjunct faculty at public community colleges in Colorado found wages to be the most important item, followed by access to materials, teaching support, and communication (Skaygo, 2007). These and other studies have shown there are factors, besides major benefits, that are important to increasing the satisfaction and decreasing the dissatisfaction of community college adjunct faculty members.

Barriers to Increased Benefits for Adjunct Faculty

Employee benefits are costly and continue to rise significantly each year (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014). With tight operating budgets available at community colleges, limited funds exist to increase benefits for adjunct faculty members (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2014). But because adjunct faculty members spend less time on campus giving feedback to students and on preparation than do full-time faculty (CCCSE, 2014), investing even slightly more benefits to adjuncts could help to alter these outcomes.

Contracts with Adjunct Faculty

The purpose of collective bargaining agreements is to structure commonality between labor and management with respect to wages, benefits, and working conditions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Once agreements are reached, the resulting physical documents, the contracts, express the legal rights and duties of each party (Corbin, 1952). In the New England states, collective bargaining discussions between public employees and management are permitted as the means for securing fair wages, benefits, job security, and hiring practices (Henkel, 1980). Adjunct faculty members at community colleges desire all these features.

Methodology

The intent of this descriptive qualitative study was to identify supplemental benefits that motivate community college adjunct faculty members, and that should be included in contracts without being fiscally burdensome. Dissatisfied faculty negatively impact teaching and adversely affect student learning (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Gappa, 2000; Jacoby, 2006). Therefore, it is in the best interests of community college adjunct faculty members and administrators, and the students, to use all possible means to increase satisfaction of the teaching force.

The study used three data collection techniques: contract reviews ($N = 6$); interviews with key informants ($N = 8$), adjunct faculty representatives and community college presidents, and with elite informants ($N = 7$), state human resource administrators; and a reflective questionnaire for the human resource administrators. Each technique yielded information regarding what supplemental benefits might motivate adjunct faculty members and increase their satisfaction without adding undue costs to already strained community college budgets. The study also explored the potential barriers to including supplemental benefits within the contracts for community college adjuncts.

New England was used as the research site because statewide contracts with community college adjunct faculties prevail in this region. Although the inquiry was conducted in a single geographic area, the results should prove useful to community college adjunct faculty leaders and administrators in other regions because the findings apply to universal issues.

To anchor the study, one major research question with three subsidiary questions was employed. What supplemental benefits for community college adjunct faculty members should be included in contracts?

- a. What supplemental benefits appear most frequently in existing contracts for community college adjunct faculty members?
- b. What supplemental benefits are recognized as ones that motivate community college adjunct faculty members and increase their satisfaction?
- c. What barriers, including contract inclusion, are associated with providing supplemental benefits to community college adjunct faculty members?

Summary and Interpretation of Principal Findings

Six themed categories were identified as potential motivators for increasing community college adjunct faculty satisfaction: recognizing seniority, instituting meaningful evaluations, improving communications, expanding professional development, managing teaching assignments, and providing academic amenities.

Recognizing Seniority

The term *seniority*, or longevity in service, is often used in contract negotiations in relation to increased pay and advancement, and is a mandatory bargaining issue in all states (Cassel, 2014). As a mandatory topic, when seniority is discussed in negotiations, resolution must be reached (Cassel, 2014). However, only in three of the six New England state contracts, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont, did the negotiators decide that seniority status resulted in additional pay for adjunct faculty members. In four states, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, seniority status gives priority to requests by adjuncts regarding teaching assignments. However, in New Hampshire, although seniority was discussed, agreement was reached not to recognize seniority for adjunct faculty members in the contract.

Consistent with the literature, adjunct faculty members want job security and recognition to be awarded to those who have worked longer and for seniority to be a discriminator in pay with higher remuneration going to those who have taught for several years (Baron-Nixon, 2007; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2005; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt et al., 2008). This view was exemplified in the

study by the adjunct faculty representatives, who stated that they desire financial recognition for adjuncts with committed service; they do not want all adjuncts to receive the same compensation, regardless of years of service. Because finances are an issue for community colleges, the ability to fund higher pay for senior adjunct faculty members may be difficult, but other means of recognition related to length of service can be instituted.

In all six New England states, adjunct faculty members are allowed to request the courses they prefer to teach with senior adjuncts given priority choice under contract provisions in four states, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Completing the course preference forms does not guarantee adjunct faculty members the courses they request, but when honored, adjuncts gain a sense of control over their schedules, which is a motivator (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959/2010).

Contracts in four of the New England states granting long-term adjunct faculty members seniority, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island also provided that their teaching performance is evaluated as qualified or satisfactory. This wording allows the community college administrators some measure of control to ensure that only competent adjuncts achieve seniority status. Using performance evaluations, as the basis for determining seniority, also makes it incumbent upon the contract negotiators to specify the parameters for qualified or satisfactory ratings and to make sure the evaluations are meaningful.

Instituting Meaningful Performance Evaluations

Only in Vermont was specific performance criteria included in the contract. Performance evaluations, if poorly executed, create dissatisfaction and, thus, are not motivators. However, if the evaluation processes includes recognition of achievement and feedback intended to increase quality performance, these actions can act as motivators (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959/2010). In addition, performance evaluations can cast light on the areas in which adjunct faculty members need further education and can help to determine what professional development should be offered to them (Diegel, 2010; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Siddiqi, 2015; Stephens & Wright, 1999). Evaluations can also be a means of communication among the adjuncts, administrators, and students about the goals the institution has met and those that need improvement (Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Siddiqi, 2015; Stephens & Wright, 1999; Wallin, 2004).

There are many incentives for community college adjunct faculty members and administrators to negotiate around the issue of meaningful performance evaluations, because both sides see the advantages of improving the evaluation processes. Through meaningful evaluations, adjunct faculty members can gain feedback that is motivating and administrators can

weed out ineffective adjuncts, who are detrimental to students. Thus, it is in the interest of all concerned to negotiate and apply meaningful evaluations.

Improving Communications

Research on communications in higher education is not new. Journal articles that discuss communication problems in higher education give a wide breadth of suggestions for improvements: provide policy manuals, show up and talk, use social media, write professional emails, and post news items on bulletin boards (Cooper, 2012; Hekelman, Glover, & Galazka, 1992; Jacobson, 2016; Minich & Sipes, 1997). Roueche et al. (1996) concluded that at community colleges more interactions and communication between the full-time faculty and adjunct faculty members resulted in greater integration and job satisfaction among the adjuncts. Similarly, another study showed that trust increased when adjunct faculty members understood the college issues, as well as full-time faculty and students do (Goldhaber, 1972). Adjunct faculty members also want someone with whom they can have ongoing communications, such as full-time faculty members who can answer questions and provide informal mentoring (Diegel, 2010; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Spaniel & Scott, 2013). These communication suggestions are examples of good practices, but not all the suggestions should be negotiated into the adjunct faculty contracts.

Gappa (1984) recommended that effective orientation for and communication with adjunct faculty members should include handbooks. Preparing and distributing handbooks and/or policy manuals to all adjuncts is a widely advocated suggestion and can assuage dissatisfaction when a manual can provide answers to questions (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Hurley, 2006; Messina, 2011).

Expanding Professional Development

Community colleges are institutions of higher education and, as such, it is incomprehensible to suggest that faculty members have reached their maximum level of learning. Yet, only two New England states, Connecticut and Vermont, have provisions in the contracts to provide funding for adjunct faculty members to attend professional development activities. Both the literature (Bosley, 2004; CCCSE, 2014; Diegel, 2010; Gappa, 2008; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2005; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Merriman, 2010), and the study results highlight that professional development is needed to improve the teaching performance of adjunct faculty members.

Like many community college systems, Massachusetts provides internal professional development to full-time faculty members and invites the adjuncts faculty members to

participate. However, in Massachusetts and across the country, community college administrators have stated that although adjunct faculty members are often invited to attend the same professional development activities offered to the full-time faculty, adjuncts rarely come (CCCSE, 2014; Roueche, Roueche, & Milliron, 1995). This finding contributed to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation's characterization of adjuncts as last minute hires, who have little access to orientation, mentoring, or professional development (CHEA, 2014).

Gappa (2008) suggested that professional development should meet the specific needs of the faculty. Thus, new adjunct faculty members should receive orientations that cover their campuses and departments, and the resources, effective teaching strategies, and classroom management tools available to them (Diegel, 2010; Gappa, 2008). Hurley (2006) concluded that effective professional development for adjunct faculty members should include a handbook, orientation, in-service workshops, and mentoring. Another study by Messina (2011) found it was important for adjunct faculty members to be able to network with other adjuncts. Because many adjuncts have other jobs apart from teaching, their schedules reflect the necessity for offering professional development activities at alternative times, which are convenient for them, such as Saturday seminars and online programs (Messina, 2011).

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959/2010) found new learning opportunities and on-the-job training were motivators for employees. Bosley (2004) specifically stated professional development was a motivator for adjunct faculty members at community colleges. The timing and presentation of the professional development activities can be a barrier to adjunct faculty attending; however, this barrier can be ameliorated through coordination with adjunct faculty (CCCSE, 2014).

Managing Teaching Assignments

All six New England contracts have provisions that allow adjunct faculty members to state which courses they prefer to teach, but none guarantee that the preferences will be granted. Another benefit related to teaching assignments is the funds granted to adjunct faculty members under course cancellation policies. Four state contracts, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, provide partial payment for adjuncts, if assigned courses are cancelled within a given period, prior to the class start date. The payments differ depending upon the state and the cancellation date, but serve as recognition of the time and effort expended in preparation for cancelled classes. Recognition is a motivator, which has long-term effects on employee attitudes; partial payments can lessen the dissatisfaction with course cancellations.

Providing Academic Amenities

Two New England states, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, include some academic amenities in adjunct faculty contracts. The other states may provide academic amenities, but these are not listed in the contract. One adjunct faculty representative stated just as payments for services to adjuncts vary among the community colleges within his state, academic amenities also differ widely from campus to campus. Academic amenities are not motivators; however, inconsistencies in amenities given to adjuncts reflect unequal work conditions, which cause dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Management should ensure that the academic amenities available to adjuncts are consistent among colleges and departments within the state, because consistency can lessen dissatisfaction among adjunct faculty members.

Conclusion

The six categories of supplemental benefits found in the study, recognizing seniority, instituting meaningful performance evaluations, improving communications, expanding professional development, managing teaching assignments, and providing academic amenities, can motivate adjunct faculty members or can lessen their dissatisfaction. The more satisfaction adjunct faculty members derive from their work, the more motivated they become (Herzberg, 1968; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959/2010). Because adjunct faculty members represent the majority of the instructors at community colleges, students are highly impacted by adjuncts' motivation and struck by their dissatisfaction (CCCSE, 2014b; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Gappa, 2000; Jacoby, 2006). Therefore, it is incumbent on community college administrators to examine means for increasing the satisfaction of this significant segment of the teaching force.

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Items Included in Northeastern States Adjunct Faculty Member Contracts

Contractual Provisions	CT	ME	MA	NH	RI	VT
A. Duration	2007-2016	2015-2017	2013-2016	2013-2016	2015-2018	2010-2014
B. Major Benefits						
1. Payment						
a. Payment by credit hourly rate	Course rate & increase for advanced degree	Credits teaching but pay varies at each college	Credits teaching & students enrolled	Credits teaching	Credits teaching	Seniority & credits teaching
c. Payment dependent upon:	Degree	No	Experience	Experience	No	Experience
2. Health Care Benefits	No	ACA	No	No	No	No
3. Retirement-IRA	No	No	No	457(b) plan	No	Can participate TIAA- CREF
C. Supplemental Benefits						
1. Seniority						
a. Seniority determination	24 credits over 5 semesters & qualified	Teach 5 courses over 3 academic years & ranked as qualified	5 courses taught over 3 consecutive years & rated satisfactory	No	Number of credit taught from time of being an adjunct	Number of credit hours taught on each campus
b. Advantage of seniority	Level of pay increases with seniority- will be assigned 1 course to teach	Can request course with priority granted to most qualified senior	Level of pay increases with seniority- can also request course	No	Course preference granted over less senior adjunct.	5 Levels of pay grade determined by amount of seniority
c. Tuition waiver & seniority	In seniority pool, granted for self, spouse, child	No	No	No	No	After 5yr-granted for self, spouse, child

Contractual Provisions	CT	ME	MA	NH	RI	VT
2. Performance Evaluations	Periodic evaluation by employer, may be student or staff	May be done to assess qualifications, by students, faculty, or administrator	Students every semester, chair before reach seniority, forms part of contract	Students every semester, chair evaluate at discretion.	Department may do each year. Students every class. Criteria in contract.	Student every semester, Dept. chair as schedule, Dean once every 4 years
3. Communication						
a. Appointment letter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
b. Invite to faculty meetings	No	No	Must attend mandatory meetings & paid \$40- one per session.	Required to attend department meetings or get information	No	No
4. Professional Development	\$25,000 for state, given on pro rata basis	Paid minimum \$50 for required training	Individual colleges provide	No	No	\$140 each adjunct. Rises each year.
5. Teaching Assignments						
a. Course preference	Seniority pool for one course per semester	Can request course if have seniority	Can request a course	Can request course through form	Can request course through form; assigned by qualification, seniority, & availability	Prior semester must fill out and return - no guarantee or preference is given
b. Notification of class cancellation	No	7 days priority to find new course, 10% of pay	7 days prior to start- \$225	10% pay, if 3 days or less- 20% pay	No	30 days or less- 7.5%, After class start date- 15% pay
c. Faculty governance	No	No	No	No	No	Can participate
6. Administrative Amenities						
a. Email access	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Contractual Provisions	CT	ME	MA	NH	RI	VT
b. Sample course syllabus	Adjunct faculty must provide syllabus to dean 2nd week of class	No	Adjunct faculty will provide to department & sample given to adjunct	Adjunct faculty will provide syllabus	No	No
c. Telephone access	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	If available & practical
d. Copier/printers access	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
e. Office supplies	No	No	1 st week- must notify college if supplies needed	Yes	No	No
f. Secretarial assistance	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
g. Course textbook	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
h. Office	No	May request	No	No	Yes	College will ask if needed
i. Computer access	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
j. Place to secure valuables	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
D. Grievance Procedures	4 steps	5 steps	3 steps	3 steps	4 steps	3 steps
1. Dismissal	For cause	Remove w/o notice, unless have seniority	For cause	For cause	For cause	For cause