

Temps and Adjuncts in a Revenue-Driven Paradigm: A Positive Prototype

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The use of non-tenure-track teaching appointments is on the rise throughout higher education in the United States. This is especially true in broadcast education programs because of four key factors: (1) the shortage of Ph.D. holders in the field due to the relatively small annual output of doctoral graduates; (2) the skimming off of terminal degree holders by industry; (3) the temptation to cede lower-lever, lower-prestige production and performance courses to local media practitioners; and (4) institutional mandates to trim costs by hiring instructional personnel at lower salary and benefit levels.

What can be lost under such conditions is a commitment to effective and consistent teaching and curriculum delivery. This is a particular danger when the cost factor becomes the driving force in temporary and adjunct utilization. Central Michigan University has just implemented a budget restructuring system in which departments are primarily responsible for covering all instructional costs (including salaries and benefits) via tuition and fee revenue. This paradigm would seem to promote an even greater reliance on transient teachers at the expense of faculty stability and instructional quality control. There is also an inherent danger that such staff possess inadequate educational credentials for the pedagogical tasks to which they are assigned. Nonetheless, as this paper will explore, it is possible to develop and expand a quality program under such a revenue-driven paradigm; and a program that is mutually beneficial to non-tenure-line personnel and the curriculum they service.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Before proceeding further, it is important to define four key terms as they will be utilized in this article.

Adjunct: An on- or off-campus professional granted non-tenure continuing (but non-tenured) faculty rank who teaches an occasional course, sometimes without compensation.

Per-Course Temp: An off-campus person hired and paid on an as-needed, per-class, term-by-term basis.

Full-Time Temp: A salaried, benefit-receiving faculty member holding academic rank and teaching a full schedule of courses; may receive successive, multi-year contracts, but the position is not tenure-track.

Revenue-Driven Paradigm: A fiscal management system in which the unit receives directly the tuition it generates but must largely cover costs of instruction from this revenue stream.

Some campuses may use these terms differently or have different labels for what they describe. But once you are aware of how the terms are employed here, it should not be difficult to translate them into the nomenclature appropriate to your home campus.

THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The heightened visibility of the tenure/non-tenure track issue stems from several factors. First, as many broadcast education administrators have discovered, it is becoming more and more difficult to recruit terminal degree-holding faculty. In fact, the Broadcast Education Association's 2000 convention featured a panel entitled, "Surviving the Sellers'

Market: Administrators' Perspectives on Searching for Faculty in the Red Hot Field of Electronic Media Education." Kosicki and Becker (1998) found that there are more than 400 openings annually for mass communication faculty. Yet at most, 150 new doctorates are conferred in a given year. While some of these vacancies are caused by a veteran teacher creating one opening by moving to fill another, this does not eliminate the shortfall; particularly as some of the new PhDs are industry professionals who pursued their advanced degree to enhance their non-academic careers. Other degree recipients use this new credential to enter the industry rather than seek out permanent faculty rank. This means relatively few candidates for tenure-track slots. Guterman and Gibbs (2000) discovered that, while the mean number of applicants for broadcast education faculty positions was 20, many searches yielded pools only in the single digits. And this number reflects all applicants including those who did not possess the needed degree qualifications for a tenure-track hire. Therefore, even positions administratively approved as tenure-track may be filled by temporary hires.

A second reason for the increase in non-tenure-track appointments is the propensity of some programs to cede lower-level production and performance courses to local media professionals. For one thing, industry "pros" possessing expertise in these areas are relatively easy to find; even in the small markets where it is often the most difficult to attract terminal degree holders. In addition, regular faculty often view such courses as more time-consuming, lower in prestige, and least likely to generate promotion-assisting publications. This attitude is usually accompanied by a feeling that beginning studio courses neither call upon nor demand Ph.D.-level training.

While the first two causes for increased non-tenure-track hiring arise from the nature of our field, the third cause applies much more universally to all disciplines. As higher education moves to trim expenses and mirror the 21st-century compulsion for fiscal efficiency, there is a natural tendency to cut the labor costs that often make up from 80-90% of an institution's budget. Hiring per-course temps is a great dollar saver. The stipend for teaching single courses is almost always substantially less than what would have to be paid if these courses were aggregated into full-time positions. At \$4,000 per course, for example, four sections could be staffed for \$16,000 while even an inexperienced full-time instructor teaching those same four courses would make a mean salary of \$31,282 (Orlik, 1999). In addition, full-time faculty receive some sort of benefits package. Per-course independent contractors usually do not.

Per-course hiring also provides an easy way of reconciling supply and demand. Individual sections can be added as needed, and deleted when not needed without having to pay staff for teaching less than full classes. Little wonder then, that the number of part-time faculty has mushroomed. A study released in 2000 by the United States Department of Education and reported by Leatherman indicates that in 1970, only 22% of the professorate worked part time. But by 1997, this proportion had escalated to 42.5%. Charles B. Reed, the California State University System's chancellor, has supported the idea of bringing the proportion of part-timers into even closer proximity with that of full-timers. "In the future, we're going to need more flexibility in our personnel policies, rather than less," stated Reed (Leatherman, 2000).

This incentive for such "flexibility" also flows from the fact that, while tenure-track faculty on many campuses are unionized, per-course independent contractors enjoy no such collectivized protection. Though even full-time temporaries usually lack such representation, their full-time status at least provides a better compensation package.

THE REVENUE-DRIVEN PARADIGM'S IMPLICATIONS

A situation in which a unit's tuition production is expected to cover its personnel costs would seem only to exacerbate the use and economic exploitation of non-tenure-track teachers. By paying as little as possible to per-course temps, a department easily can make money on its sections. This generates surplus tuition revenue that can go to meeting senior faculty salaries and/or buy more equipment and supplies. However, the downside of such a procedure is that there is high potential for the serious erosion of faculty stability, interaction, and curricular consistency. Per-course temps have no incentive or contractual requirement to participate in curricular design, work on faculty committees, advise students, or understand (let alone advance) departmental goals and culture.

Yet, even with (or because of) the RDP's business-inspired model, it is possible to create, at the department level, an operating system that is mutually beneficial to non-tenure-line personnel and the curriculum and students they serve. As Central Michigan University embarked on this new budget model, CMU's Broadcast & Cinematic Arts Department sought ways to make it work for, rather than against, the building of a stable, unified, and collectively involved department.

OVERARCHING GOALS

The Broadcast & Cinematic Arts Department (hereafter referred to as BCA) had no choice in the selection of the revenue driven paradigm. Central Michigan University's upper administration had decided on this course of action and every unit of the campus became subject to it. With the inevitability of this new system, the department decided it would do whatever it could to make the model work, and to make it work to accomplish two overarching goals—one defensive and one offensive:

- (1) Implement the new budget process without compromising department curricular and personnel policies (a defensive goal).
- (2) Implement the budget in a way that would actually champion conditions for, and enhance departmental loyalty among, temporary faculty (an offensive goal).

To accomplish the first goal, and have any chance of succeeding at the second, BCA had to fashion an operational plan. As a result of intensive analysis that took into account current procedures and the impact of the new fiscal protocol on them, five staffing strategies were isolated and reaffirmed:

(1) Projective Course Scheduling Management

This strategy requires estimating the number of classes and class sections to be mounted over the next four years, keeping in mind (a) current and projected student demand; and (b) studio, laboratory and mediated lecture hall space limitations. Four years is a time-frame that tracks well with tenure-track faculty contracts (which, at CMU, are written in two-year packages) as well as corresponding to the typical length of time spent by a student cohort on the campus. From these projections, based both on past trending and future Admissions Office estimates, a determination can be made as to the number of full-time faculty positions required to meet this demand.

(2) Balanced Position Profiling

Once course scheduling needs have been projected, this workload can be divided into discrete faculty positions, keeping each position as narrowly tailored as possible. All department faculty, both tenure-track and temporary participated equally in this process.

Because BCA had long been philosophically committed to hiring only on a full-time basis, every member had a vested and focused interest in the well being of the unit. The department's belief was, and is, that part-time appointments economically exploit the employee and provide neither the familiarity nor the expertise required for these faculty to meaningfully engage in department direction-setting.

The process and result of collective position profiling gives each faculty member (tenure and temporary alike) a sense of ownership and focus pertaining to the area of the curriculum for which each will be responsible. Individual research and creative agendas consequently can be evolved and tailored to course development objectives. As much as possible, however, position profiles need to be evolved pedagogically, without initial reference to existing staff. Once the total position blueprint has been derived, all existing faculty then can request which particular position they wish to fill. With everyone doing this at once, there is much less chance of one person being seen as "going after" someone else. Many times, existing teaching responsibilities are reaffirmed in the preferences. When they are not, a request for change by one faculty member can often be paired with the request for changes by others. Fine-tuning of profiles, including the shifting of individual courses, will usually resolve remaining preference issues.

With both tenure-track and temporary faculty participating in the process, everyone's expertise is engaged and everyone's enthusiasm marshaled for the curricular segments over which they will have charge. Unassigned profiles then become the basis for new colleague searches. If projective course scheduling has been conscientiously done, the revenue-driven paradigm will make these new searches possible.

(3) Uniform National Search Procedures

An advantage of the revenue-driven paradigm is that new full-time temporary positions can be created relatively easily. If positive tuition-revenue forecasts can be documented for the Dean (and the Dean's financial assistant) a new slot can be immediately authorized. There is no need to get approval from upper administration. (In later years, after the position has proved its financial viability, a request can be made to the Provost to convert it to tenure-track status.)

Once the new temporary position has been agreed to, it is important to conduct a national search, thereby broadening a quality applicant pool and validating that the selection of temporary faculty is considered as important as the search for tenure-track teachers. While temporary candidates usually will not be required to possess a terminal degree, a national search does help to insure that they will, at least, have a Master's degree—and one directly related to our field. In this as in other staffing aspects, it is important to minimize the tenure-track/temporary distinction as much as possible. These are institutional personnel categorizations. They need not become departmental curricular or operational obstacles.

Although they are more expensive, conducting a national search for a temporary position means the unit recruits the best possible candidate. In addition, by conducting this national search "up front," it becomes possible later to shift the incumbent to tenure-track status if the position is converted and without the expense of a further search. This can pay additional benefits in reaching affirmative action goals. It is often difficult for rural institutions like CMU to attract terminal-degree holding affirmative action candidates. But national searches for temporary slots heighten the chance of finding high-quality, M.A.-holding females and minorities. With the financial underpinning a full-time temporary slot provides, these staff can be encouraged to pursue the doctorate on a part-time basis. This

is very much a "grow your own" approach where the department nurtures valued colleagues toward doctoral attainment. This further strengthens the case for the eventual conversion of their positions to tenure-track.

The upper administrators of today seldom will allow a unit to have all of its faculty slots encumbered as tenure-track. However, adding full-time temporary positions increases the size of the unit, making it possible eventually to possess more tenure-track lines without rising above whatever tenure-line percentage ceiling is enforced on the campus. It must be stressed, however, that the key to success is the specification and recruitment of full-time positions. Part-time (usually per-course) slots make it hard to justify even regional searches and add instructors who understandably have little or no commitment to the department's long-term advancement.

In situations where occasional odd-course coverage by part-timers is unavoidable, it is preferable to use adjunct (as we earlier defined the term) rather than temporary personnel. Often, the adjunct is a full-time employee elsewhere on the campus (perhaps at the public broadcasting or media services facility) who has a career investment in the institution's future. Even if the adjunct comes from off-campus, their continuing title as adjunct academic is a prestigious designation that encourages at least some measure of department loyalty. Such adjuncts may often be retired academics or media professionals who enjoy this continuing relationship with their life's work.

(4) Systematic Teaching Evaluation

The evaluation of a full-time temporary's teaching should demand the same respect and attention as the evaluation of tenure-track faculty. Students don't pigeonhole faculty as temporary or tenure-track; in fact, they often are completely unaware of these distinctions.

Instead, students categorize staff as effective or ineffective teachers. The critical mass of students served by a full-time temporary demands the department's full-time attention to that person's teaching.

Therefore, BCA mandates peer visitation teams for tenure-track and temporary faculty alike, devoting the same time to helping instructors from both employment categories to improve their effectiveness in the classroom or studio. Student Opinion Surveys are uniformly demanded from all sections and their results monitored and discussed with every faculty member. As is the case with tenure-track staff, the visitation team reports and Student Opinion Survey results constitute key data in the reappointment decision-making process.

Such procedures demonstrate the department's commitment to the pedagogical development of all its faculty and, over time, result in shared teaching improvement that enhances department performance and attractiveness to students. Such attractiveness means increased enrollments, not only from new majors, but from non-majors in the department's service courses. Under the revenue-driven paradigm, this accrues more money for the unit and the possibility of additional faculty slots.

(5) Inclusive, Participatory Membership

Tenure-track and temporary teachers can be melded into an effective team despite contractual barriers. Central Michigan University tenure-track faculty are unionized. As did previous contract documents, their 1999-2002 Agreement excludes temporary faculty from participation in formal personnel proceedings related to promotion and the granting of tenure. Short of this legal prohibition, however, BCA's own departmental bylaws invest full-time temporaries with full participatory and voting rights in such areas as curriculum, facility use policies, position profile modifications, operational decision-making and priority setting, as well as opportunities for summer teaching. Temporaries also enjoy the

same eligibility for professional travel and research support, as do their tenure-track colleagues. Further, in initial salary-setting negotiations with the administration, BCA works hard to see that temporaries are paid comparably with tenure-track faculty of similar experience and educational credentialing.

In other areas, the department takes responsibility for creating internal compensatory mechanisms to externally imposed mandates. For example, university policy requires that temporary faculty have higher teaching loads than tenure-track professors. Though it adheres to this regulation, BCA mitigates its discriminatory nature by relieving temporaries of the advising duties that it requires of every tenure-track professor. From a work-hour standpoint, this restores temporary and tenure-track faculty to load equity.

SUMMARY

Certainly, the revenue-driven paradigm's profit-incentive business model poses a potential threat to both instructional quality and professional morale. But BCA believes this danger can be minimized by creating a departmental climate in which tenure-track and temporary faculty are equal partners with equal stake in the success of the educational enterprise. And we have found that, through implementation of five key staffing strategies, a revenue-driven paradigm can actually serve to enhance, rather than inhibit, initial and long-term career opportunities for temporary faculty. This includes the right of the temporary faculty member to choose between pursuit of the credentialing for a tenure-track slot or continuation of temporary employment on a long-term basis.

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