Instructional Needs of Part-Time Community College Instructors

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Abstract

The recent economic down-turn and the loss of employment across the country has resulted in increased enrollment at the post-secondary level as displaced workers earnestly attempt to acquire new skills in order to obtain employment. Community Colleges are one such place displaced workers are seeking to improve their skills as evidenced by increased enrollments across the country. Legislation has also been proposed to increase their funding as a result of this enrollment.

Part-time instructors account for nearly 67% of the faculty at the community college level (Christensen, 2008) but the literature indicates this faculty often lacks the necessary curriculum development, instructional, and assessment skills to adequately address the needs of the students in general and the newly displaced adult learner in particular.

The author explores the pertinent needs of the part-time faculty and offers recommendations.

Introduction

Within the literature on aspects of postsecondary and higher education, concerns about the non-traditional student arose following World War II as veterans entering college would alter the standards of higher education (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). The term 'non-traditional' stands in contrast to the perception of a 'traditional' student, the latter being one who typically enters post-secondary education as a full-time student directly upon graduation from high school. Thus, in American culture, a 'traditional' student is enrolled full time, 18 to 24, unmarried, and moved directly from their parents' home to campus (Macari, Maples, & D'Andrea, 2006). In contrast, a non-traditional student is one who enters postsecondary education from significantly different circumstances, which may include variations in age, life roles, and patterns of attendance (Macari, Maples, & D'Andrea, 2006). In the mid-1980's, Selman and Wilmoth (1986) described the current student population as older, more consumer conscious, and is concerned with the marketability of knowledge and skills. By the mid-1990's, Reese (1994), noted that nearly two-thirds of learners in higher education are non-traditional either by age, life roles, or attendance patterns. Adult students, therefore, have different characteristics than younger learners that the community college instructor must acknowledge.

As major providers of post-secondary education programs, community colleges have a significant responsibility to educate these individuals. Adult learners may be attending college for the first time and for a variety of reasons. They do, however, bring realistic, practical goals for their education and valuable life experience to the community college classroom, according to Brookfield, Knowles, and Lawler (as cited in Howell, 2001). Because of the increases in community college enrollment, there has also been an increase in the use of part-time faculty to help meet the demand. According to sources in Lei (2007) regarding community college programs, "….part-time faculty provides virtually half of all instruction" (p. 148). Another source indicated two-thirds of the faculties at technical and community colleges are part time (Twombly & Townsend, 2008; Wallin, 2004).

One incentive for community colleges to use part-time instructors include that there are economic advantages such as flexibility and cost savings as well as their ability to offer current knowledge and skills in their occupational area of expertise and the willingness to teach during nontraditional hours and at off-campus sites (Lei, 2007). According to the Association for Career and Technical Education (CTE) (Bragg, 2001), CTE is now a "major enterprise within the United States' P-16 education system" (p. 73). Additionally, the United States Congress, through the 1992 H. R. Res. 2936, (Zinser & Hanssen, 2006) stated "Two-year colleges are a major contributor to higher education and have become the largest pipeline to postsecondary education in the United States" (p. 4).

Community colleges continue to have a crucial role in preparing the current and future workforce, specifically in Career and Technical Education (CTE) and adult learning. More than half of college attendees are over the age of 25 (Peterman, 2002a) and in 1997 nearly a third were age 30 or older (Howell, 2001). It should be noted, 28% already have a degree (Flynn, 2001). The instruction provided and instructional methodology skills possessed by instructors in community college are crucial to meeting the demands of adult learners in the community college setting.

Flynn (2001) recommended that "community colleges should acknowledge, not ignore, the privatization of education… and...should develop knowledge of, and contact with, national professional organizations that recommend performance outcomes in specific fields to help local industries comply with national standards…" (p. 11).

The competencies of community college instructors are critical as more nontraditional students and adult learners seek postsecondary education. Those competencies include evaluation of learner performance and delivery of instruction, effective communication and presentation skills, learner motivation skills, technical acumen, teaching methods, and program development, among others. Competencies of community college instructors and the quality of instruction delivered are crucial to the foundational development of the students and equates to continued success of the students to be successful upon entry (or re-entry) into the job market, meet the workforce requirements of industry, and seek continuing education. Additionally, there are more firms turning to private training companies and developing their own training divisions to meet their needs (Carter, 2000). Community colleges cannot ignore this fact. Peterman (2002b) stated that community colleges will be responsible for educating an even larger proportion of adult students in postsecondary education. Peterman indicated that because the needs and learning styles of nontraditional students differ from those of younger students, effective teaching practices leading to academic success for this population must be implemented.

Significance of the Problem

Community colleges are facing some challenges as they continue to deal with increased student enrollment, under-prepared students, a more diverse student body, decreased budgets, and heavy workloads (Alfano, 1993). According to one study of 2-year and 4-year private and public institutions by Boyer, Butner and Smith (2007), part-time faculty taught 67% of the remediation courses at a two-year college and had a heavier workload without the benefit of teaching assistants as found at four-year institutions. As a result of these two findings, the two-year colleges required the best faculty who employ a wide variety of teaching methods and are dedicated to their students' success (Boyer et al., 2007). Olson (1994) stated that the existence of programs that prepare technical trainers or two-year technical instructors are few. Bartlett (2002) pointed out that a skill base for CTE faculty is needed for those who have not had a formal teacher preparation program which includes the basic content of curriculum development, instruction planning, teaching and learning styles, and assessment and evaluation. Their conclusion was that without such a program, faculty will not have a chance to further their professional development.

In the area of Career and Technical Education (CTE), Bartlett (2002) stated that the fastest growing occupations in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (2000-2001) are careers that exist in CTE. As a result, there is a need for educators in this field who can train students by having (themselves) the competence in the vocation as well as competence in the field of teaching and learning.

As the downward slide of the economy continues and more job layoffs occur (Sampson, 2008), it is possible that more adult learners will turn to community and technical colleges for training and education in a new vocation. As a result of these

economic consequences, it is a realistic expectation that enrollment will increase. According to Sampson (2008), current record enrollments in two-year colleges are being attributed to the tough economic times and, as a result, the colleges are experiencing increased demand for their workforce training programs. The faculty at these institutions must acquire additional professional development in order to address the learning needs of these displaced adult workers and place the emphasis on learning rather than teaching. Moltz (2008) stated the search for part-time instructors with the same credentials as their full-time counterparts presents a challenge for the colleges.

Wallin and Smith (2005) identified instructional activities important to the success of faculty in technical colleges. These included the preparation of effective instructional materials, the utilization of hands-on learning strategies, and utilization of instructional techniques that develop higher order thinking. Wallin and Smith (2005) noted that seminars addressing these faculty issues should be offered for faculty development. Teaching concerns identified by three community college presidents, according to Wallin (2003), included concern about their faculty who were experts in their respective subject areas but did not know how to teach, manage time in the classroom, or prepare a course outline or syllabus. This study, through a review and examination of the current practices, methods, knowledge, and research, will attempt to identify the relationship between instructor competencies in instructional design, teaching assessment, and teaching methodology and evaluation.

For community colleges to be effective contributors to the process of learning and teaching, building the skill and proficiency of its instructors is paramount (Galbraith & Shedd, 1990).

Instructional Methods and Design

Instructors, according to L'Angelle (1985), are expected to promote the education and training of students in such a way that they can further develop their own creativity, intellectual ability, and career development. This facilitation of learning is done through the development of learning activities which enable the student to learn best and pursue their goals. Isaeva (2007) viewed the instructor's competencies as:

A unique system of the individual's professional and personal knowledge, abilities, and qualities, all combined with an attitude of humane values toward other people, with a creative approach to work, a constant striving toward personal and professional improvement, to be utilized in order to master pedagogical situations, and in the process to create new aims of activity, phenomena, and objects of culture that make it possible to achieve new quality in social relations. (p. 35)

Barr and Tagg (1995) described the faculty member as being more like a coach that designs the game plan (instruction) but also creates new plans that generate better learning for the students. Along with the creation of better learning environments for the students, the instructor should also have received instruction in instructional methodology in order to develop critical thinking skills (Ediger, 1999b; Galbraith & Shedd, 1990) and higher order thinking skills (Wallin & Smith, 2005) in their students. The studies did not indicate that the instructors had received this training nor did the studies indicate the

methods used to develop these skills. Abdallah (1996) stated that the instructional methods used must foster active learning processes in the learner**.** To support that notion, Keim and Biletzky (1999) found in their study of part-time community college instructors that among the most frequently used teaching methods were lecture, class discussion, written feedback and methods of engaging critical thinking.

As reported regarding a study by Benjamin (as cited by Lei, 2007), many part-time faculty members were found to use less challenging instructional methods and in a related study by Brown, it was also found that many lack the instructional background and experience that enable them to manage the classroom and inspire learning (Sandford, Belcher, & Frisbee, 2007). The lecture method, according to MacKlem (2006), is a poor way to pass on information and is an outdated form of learning; however, adjunct instructors, more so than their full-time counterparts, focus more significantly on it, according to Lei (2007). Galbraith and Shedd (1990) found that community college instructors were teaching in the manner in which they liked to learn with no regard for appropriate instructional strategies. In spite of this, Rifkin (as cited in Outcalt, 2000) stated that part-time instructors also expressed higher expectations for their students.

In a study by Schuetz (2002) of part-time and full-time faculty, the author stated that classes conducted by part-time faculty were less likely to use additional instructional methods such as guest lecturers, films or taped media, participation in laboratory experiments, or be encouraged to utilize computers or the Internet as compared to full-time faculty. Part-time faculty, according to Schuetz (2002), were three times less likely than their full-time counterparts to use group activities, team assignments, and collaborative techniques to enhance student learning as part of their instructional repertoire. Eagan (2007) stated that group projects and term papers may be assigned less frequently by part-time faculty due to course or field content not lending itself to this type of assignment.

According to Schuetz (2002), instructional practices outside the classroom were found to be lacking. Schuetz stated that part-time faculties were less likely than their full-time counterparts to have developed extracurricular activities for their students, prepared for use in the classroom a replicable or multimedia program of instruction, and spent no time planning instruction. Furthermore, in the past three years from the date of the study, part-time faculties were less likely to have made a revision to their syllabus or teaching objectives.

Teaching Methodology and Adult Learning Theory

A three-year study of the impact of technology on the workforce and its ramifications for postsecondary career and occupational programs was conducted in the state of Illinois and funded by the Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education through the Illinois State Board of Education (*"Teaching Techniques"*, 1991). The project concluded with a guidebook, *Teaching Techniques for Part-Time Community College Instructors,* to help them apply contemporary learning and teaching techniques in the classroom.

The handbook stated that while most of the part-time faculties are experts in their resident fields, they have had very little training or experience in teaching (*"Teaching Techniques"*, 1991, p. 4). This was consistent with prior findings by Selman and

Wilmoth (1986), who stated that the majority of the part-time technical college instructors have other responsibilities outside of their field of teaching. Although technically competent in their area of expertise, most of the instructors have not had any formal education or preparation in teaching techniques or theory to teach the content effectively (Reese, 1994; Selman & Wilmoth, 1986; Wallin, 2003).

A study conducted by Fugate and Amey (2000) stated that individuals entering the profession of teaching with no previous instructional experience had immediate needs for development of teaching skills. Most of the faculty believes that some kind of educational preparation would have been beneficial prior to assuming an instructional position (Kozeracki, 2005). Murray (2001, 2002) stated that basic teaching strategies are frequently not covered in graduate school, however, those few that were able to participate in student teaching felt better prepared. In a study by Phoenix (1998), the author stated that the research results support the findings that research and education will improve college teaching and that prospective college teachers need education on teaching methodology and theory. In comparison, Sandford et al. (2007) indicated in their study of occupational education officer's perceptions of part-time faculty's teaching skill that the faculty needed help identifying student's learning characteristics as well as appropriate and alternate ways to teach to accommodate different learning styles.

Knowles (as cited by Kember, Kwan, & Ledesma, 2001) viewed Andragogy as a set of assumptions regarding adult students which could be used to guide practice in the teaching of adults. Kember et al. (2001) stated that "many teachers of adults have little, if any, familiarity with the specialized literature on adult teaching and learning" (p. 393).

Bartlett (2002) pointed out that career and technical educators must not only be experts in their technical field but must also be experts in the area of teaching and learning [andragogy]. Part-time faculty often lack an understanding of the concepts associated with the teaching and learning styles of a community college student body consisting of older adult learners (Sandford, Belcher, & Frisbee, 2007). In a study by Galbraith and Shedd (1990) of community college instructor skill and proficiency, it was found that over 53% of the part-time faculty and 44% of the faculty as a whole had not received training in adult education. In addition, the instructors were teaching in the manner in which they wished to learn, without considering the diversity that exists among adult learners.

Flynn (2001) stated, in regard to classrooms populated by diverse students that a college instructor's teaching repertoire must be flexible and that the instructor must draw on a range of teaching styles for effective learning and teaching. Sperling (2003) acknowledged that, at Middlesex Community College, each year's class is represented by more than 55 nationalities, making for a very diverse student population. A study by Olson (1994) included adult teaching methods as one of 14 core competencies needed by post-secondary instructors and technical trainers. Part-time instructors, according to Schuetz (2002), "tend to have less total teaching experience, teach fewer hours per week at the responding institution, use less innovative and or collaborative teaching methods, and interact less with their students, peers, and institutions" (p. 44).

Are part-time faculty grounded in learning theory? Sperling (2003) stated that most instructors have not formally studied the areas of learning styles, moral and human development, cognitive theories or intellectual growth taxonomies. Comparatively,

according to Reese (1994), university and college faculty on the whole, have received little formal education or training in any of the following areas important to teaching: (a) adult learning theories; (b) alternative strategies; (c) communication or presentation techniques such as using voice, body language, and visual aids; or (d) the use of modern technology as teaching tools. Quality teaching is the result of informed and proficient educators (Reese, 1994). The author concluded, however, that "Learner-centered teaching and collaborative learning are the result of faculty who empower their learners to take responsibility for their own learning; and, where success in the classroom is perceived to be a mutual process of exploring relevant content" (p. 25). Reese asserted that more teachers need to embrace the learner-centered philosophy and become adept at facilitating learning to learn and self-directed learning through alternative strategies. This is done through institutions of higher education assisting their faculty in the change process through organized faculty development activities. In comparison, Bragg (2001) noted that "Highly flexible learner-focused approaches to teaching and learning….need to be developed to address the needs of learners who engage in vocational education" (p. 9).

Assessment and Evaluation Techniques

Galbraith and Shedd (1990) stated that "community college instructors need to acquire skills in assessing the needs of the learners. A needs assessment should identify the gaps between the learner's current and desired proficiencies…." (p. 4). Barbazette (2006) defined needs assessment as "the process of collecting information about an expressed or implied organizational need that could be met by conducting training" (p. 5). Angelo (as cited in Rouseff-Baker & Holm, 2004) described classroom assessment as "the systematic and on-going study of what and how students are learning in a particular classroom" (p. 30). Bartlett (2002) stated the ability to assess students is a critical element to address when preparing postsecondary CTE community and technical college faculty. Boettcher and Conrad (as cited by Lei, 2007), declared that the instructor can assess the learning styles of their students by administering a learning style inventory or by asking them how they [perceive] they learn best.

Rouseff-Baker (2002) stated that the use of student assessments by faculty at Parkland College are used to address learning needs and processes as well as to share ideas and strategies for instructional improvements. The assessment process, according to Rouseff-Baker and Holm (2004) is a cohesive framework in a feedback loop, consisting of the following elements: plan, teach, assess, analyze, respond, and adapt. In regard to CTE faculty preparation and content, Bartlett (2002) suggested that comprehensive assessment tools could be designed to determine their needs for entry into the field. Green (2007) stated "It is critical that part-time faculty members be clear about student outcomes and course objectives and include appropriate assessment and feedback. Encouraging adjuncts and helping them understand that assessment and feedback are teaching tools is important" (p. 36). With the majority of the teaching falling on faculty at two-year institutions, it is imperative they have the skills necessary to meet the demands of teaching methodology and assessment, according to Boyer, Butner and Smith (2007).

Recommendations

Further studies should be conducted into the specific instructional and teaching methodologies that part-time faculty possess, determine the breadth of knowledge that exists among part-time faculty in assessment and evaluation of student outcomes, and to determine the effectiveness of faculty development programs on part-time faculty. More specifically, the study should include Knowles' adult learning theory model and the faculty's grasp of this concept and the affect it has on the student population, the extent faculty members are versed in the area of preparing written and performance evaluations prior to their first instructional encounter at the community college or technical college level, and the use of proven Instructional Systems Design (ISD) models to guide them in their instruction and curriculum design.

Conclusions

Part-time community and technical college faculty need to be trained in instructional methodology that includes those skills that will enable them to engage their students in critical thinking and higher order thinking skills. Being exposed to a variety of instructional methods will enhance the learning environment and motivate students to learn as well as enable the instructors to improve upon their own instructional competencies. Quality instruction in class will lead to quality learning for students.

In order for effective instruction to occur, instructors needs to have acquired training and have mastered competency in teaching methods and adult learning theory. Knowles' model of androgogy is the most appropriate for adult learning in the community college classroom setting; however, a wide variety of teaching methods needs to be available in order to reach a wide variety of learning styles that exist among today's learners. A number of studies have espoused of the benefits of student engagement and learner-centered instruction.

Assessment can take on many forms within the instructional and educational process. The literature suggests there is a need for part-time faculty to be better prepared to assess learning outcomes within the classrooms in which they teach. Their assessment practices may be in the form of testing, observation, and feedback against industry standards or course objectives or both. Through assessment, instructors can then make adjustments as necessary to meet the learning outcomes of the students.

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