

**Faculty Dimension Feedback
California State University-San Marcos**

Dear Dilcie, Jacqueline, Peter, Judith, Gerardo, Cynthia, Graham, Marie, and Pamela,

I have read your outstanding report on the Faculty Dimension and have a number of observations to share with you. A central problem that you identify is what I fear may be an overuse of adjunct faculty to teach in the first year. I was aware of a study done recently at Florida Atlantic University which found that first-year students who took 75% or more of their courses from adjuncts were less likely to be retained to the sophomore year. But there is a new, even more persuasive study that was cited in the April 4, 2008 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. I decided to do a copy/paste for you; the article is inserted below:

From the Chronicle issue dated April 4, 2008

Keep Adjuncts Away From Intro Courses, Report Says

By DAVID GLENN

First-year college students are significantly more likely to drop out if their high-stakes "gatekeeper courses" are taught by part-time instructors, according to the findings of a study presented here during the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association last week.

The paper is the latest in a long parade of studies suggesting that part-time instructors can be detrimental to students' well-being.

"As more and more part-timers are hired, we've reached a point where budgets are moving faster than the research can tell us what the impacts are," said Audrey J. Jaeger, the new paper's lead author, in an interview. "We should pause for a moment and take a look at what's going on."

Ms. Jaeger, an assistant professor of higher education at North Carolina State University, has been examining the effects of part-time instruction for several years. Most previous studies of the topic have looked at a single institution or at aggregated national data. But in her new study, which she conducted with M. Kevin Eagan Jr., a graduate student at the University of California at Los Angeles, Ms. Jaeger examined four public four-year universities in a southeastern state to see if she could find common patterns.

Working with transcripts of roughly 30,000 students who enrolled in the four universities between 2002 and 2005, Ms. Jaeger and Mr. Eagan looked closely at first-year "gatekeeper" courses. Like other scholars, Ms. Jaeger and Mr. Eagan

define a gatekeeper as any large introductory class (enrolling 90 or more students) that must be passed in order to move forward in a course sequence. Biology 101 and Chemistry 101 are the classic models, but the study also included, for example, English classes that count toward general-education requirements.

They found an unhappy pattern: If gatekeeper courses were taught by part-time adjuncts, lecturers, or postdoctoral fellows (which occurred from 8 percent to 22 percent of the time, depending on the institution), those students were significantly less likely to return for their sophomore years. That pattern was consistent across all four universities.

An Accessibility Issue

Interestingly, Ms. Jaeger and Mr. Eagan did not find that courses taught by graduate assistants or by full-time non-tenure-track instructors had any negative effect. Partly for that reason, Ms. Jaeger suspects that the most important factor is students' inability to talk to part-time adjuncts about their course work.

"Adjuncts are often trying to patch together a living, running back and forth between three different campuses," Ms. Jaeger said. If they don't have office hours and can't often be found on campus, she continued, their students are likely to become frustrated or disengaged with the course material.

That theory reinforces findings in a paper that appeared last year in *The Review of Higher Education*. Paul D. Umbach, an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Iowa, mined data from the National Survey of Student Engagement to examine the roles of part-time and contingent faculty members. Such instructors, he found, generally report spending less time preparing for class and less time interacting with students than do their full-time colleagues.

During last week's panel, Ms. Jaeger and Mr. Eagan urged institutions to consider assigning part-time instructors to smaller, advanced courses, rather than to large, introductory courses populated with first-year students who might be vulnerable to dropping out.

The two scholars both emphasized that they don't mean to criticize adjuncts. "We're not blaming part-time faculty," Ms. Jaeger said during the panel discussion. "We're actually putting the onus on institutions of higher education to support part-time faculty."

Such support, she said, might include "more office space, more places to gather, more resources that would allow them to give support to students outside the classroom."

Another member of the conference panel made a more explicit plea for colleges to reverse the trend toward part-time hires. "Could administrators be shown a cost-

benefit analysis that might demonstrate that the money they save by hiring these people is outweighed, or even overwhelmed, by the revenue they lose when students drop out?" asked Leonard L. Baird, a professor of higher education at Ohio State University who is executive editor of *The Journal of Higher Education*.

Ms. Jaeger says she sees a need for small-scale, qualitative research about how adjunct faculty members spend their time and how they interact with students. In any case, the topic isn't going to vanish. According to federal statistics, the share of part-time faculty members at American colleges and universities rose from 22.1 percent in 1970 to 47.6 percent in 2005.

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Because of shrinking budgets, this is an issue that isn't going away any time soon. And I think we need to be careful not to fault the adjuncts themselves, many of whom are doing an excellent job in the classroom. I absolutely agree with your observation that you really must focus on including adjunct faculty in whatever opportunities you make available to regular faculty for training and support, and I might add knowledge about the various services at CSUSM that are available to help first-year students. Adjuncts have become "the face of the University" to new students, not only at CSUSM, but at many, many other colleges and universities in the U. S.

I hope that CSUSM will consider ways to get tenured/tenure-track faculty involved once again in teaching first-year students. I note your statement that some departments still rotate faculty through LDGE courses, and I think that's a good idea. I certainly understand the issue of needing senior faculty to teach increasing numbers of upper-level courses, but there has to be a way to continue to involve some senior faculty, some of the time, in teaching/interacting with new students. Several years ago, the University of Georgia obtained Lilly grant funding to bring senior faculty back into first-year classrooms and involve them in faculty development activities. I don't know whether funding would be available to support such an initiative from the Irvine Foundation or another California-based funder, but it might be worth investigating.

As you noted, there are other ways that senior faculty can interact with new students: welcoming them to the major, working with advisors, and through events that combine the social and the academic. At NC State University, about 800 students begin their academic experience in the "first-year college" (FYC), a unit designed for students who are still exploring majors. FYC sponsors a dinner each month with a faculty member who introduces students to his/her academic interests and information about majors. Faculty from across the NC State campus also teach a "first-year inquiry course" that is part of the general education curriculum. First-year inquiry courses focus on a variety of academic topics, many of them tightly related to a discipline, but all courses use a common teaching methodology: "inquiry guided learning." Here is the web link if you are interested in learning more about this:

<http://www.ncsu.edu/firstyearinquiry/index.html>. By the way, First-Year Inquiry includes its own “reward” for the most outstanding instructor.

You have developed excellent action items that, I hope, will gain traction within the larger university. Some of these have significant resource implications, others can be done immediately with little, if any, extra funding.

Your action item #2 tells me that a central issue for you is how you might go about organizing to bring more coherence to your first-year efforts, both in and out of the classroom. Although this is technically the task of the Organization Dimension committee, I’m glad to see that you are addressing this issue and hope you will offer the Organization committee your suggestions. I don’t know whether there are those on campus who would take issue with this recommendation. But I hope you will continue to explore exactly what form this “office or position” might take. Many campuses in the FoE process have found a lack of responsibility and organizational coherence to be a central issue that negatively affects the success of first-year students.

You have done a superb job in responding to this Dimension. I hope you will keep me apprised of ways that the FoE process serves as a catalyst for changes at CSUSM. I don’t want to lose touch with you at the end of this process!

As always, please let me know if you have questions about any of my comments.

Best wishes,

Betsy

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