

Accessible Support for Adjunct Faculty in Developmental Education

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Education and instruction take a learner beyond mere learning. Instruction is an effort to assist growth (Bruner, 1966). At colleges and universities, those who are doing the instructing of the most fragile of learners are often adjunct faculty members. Developmental studies departments at many colleges and universities are staffed by high percentages of adjunct, or part-time, faculty, many of whom have other jobs and professional obligations. A concern voiced by many of these faculty members has been that they do not feel as though they are included in such things as departmental communication and college-wide professional development opportunities. Many adjunct faculty members have continually expressed that they do not believe that they are integrated with the faculty that make up developmental studies departments, but are, rather, just part-time employees who are not part of a team. In addition, adjunct faculty generally believe that vital professional development opportunities, available to full-time faculty, were either off-limits to them or are not targeted toward the specific demands encountered by those for whom time on campus is limited. Department chairs and other campus leaders were often accused of leaving out adjunct faculty in many department communications. As a result, adjunct faculty report feeling less supported and much less a part of the department in which they work than their full-time colleagues.

In the spring of 2010, a program evaluation on developmental education at Florida SouthWestern State College, then known as Edison State College, was completed through The National Center for Developmental Education by Barbara S. Bonham, Hunter R. Boylan, and Patty Levine-Brown. In their evaluation report, the assessors remarked that “interviews with adjunct faculty indicate that very little training is provided in the areas of classroom procedures and teaching strategies,” and that several adjunct faculty members stated that there had been no training in developmental education practices (Bonham, Boylan, & Levine-Brown, 2010).

This study involved the adjunct faculty who teach developmental students at Florida SouthWestern State College, which serves students at four campuses in Southwestern Florida. This college was established in 1962 and is the thirteenth largest community college in Florida. It served 25,027 students during the academic year 2009-2010, one in four of whom received financial aid.

Twenty-two percent of the students are enrolled as full-time and seventy-eight percent are part-time. Fifty-nine percent of Florida SouthWestern State College’s students are enrolled to attend classes at the Lee Campus in Fort Myers, Florida; 17% are enrolled to attend classes at the Collier Campus in Naples, Florida; 12% are enrolled at the Charlotte Campus in Punta Gorda, Florida; 3% are enrolled at the Hendry/Glades Center in LaBelle, Florida; and 9% of the college’s students are enrolled in FSW Online. At this college, typically, 32% of the overall student population is enrolled in one or more developmental course.

Adjunct faculty in the Department of Developmental Studies at Florida SouthWestern State College each typically teach two or three sections of their discipline each semester, requiring them to be on campus between two and four days each week. Many adjunct faculty members have full-time jobs at elementary, middle, or high schools in addition to their teaching assignments at the College. Of the adjunct faculty who participated in this, 40.4% reported having taught twenty-five

years or more, 44.6% reported having taught ten to twenty-four years, and 14.9% reported having taught less than ten years. 10.6% of the respondents reported having earned a doctorate degree, and 6.4% reported having earned a specialist, or Ed.S., degree. Of the 47 respondents, 83% indicated having a master's degree.

Faculty who teach developmental students must have sufficient background knowledge, teaching skills, and attitudes to ensure that their instruction is of the highest quality (Boylan & Saxon, 2012). In an effort to improve professional development opportunities, communication, and support of adjunct faculty at four campuses of the college, this study involved the implementation of a series of workshops aimed at adjunct faculty, an addition of online adjunct faculty guides and resources, increased communication with all faculty by means of a weekly memo highlighting successes, events, and upcoming dates pertinent to all faculty, and augmented availability of the faculty chairperson of Department of Developmental Studies through frequent informal adjunct faculty meetings at all four campuses across the college's district.

A full sample of the population of employed adjunct faculty in the Department of Developmental Studies at the college was given questionnaire surveys, administered through online email links, in August 2011 and in April 2012, as means of collecting quantitative and qualitative data on their individual perceptions and needs pertaining to faculty support and professional development opportunities for adjuncts at the College. Questions using a Likert scale were used to obtain quantitative data, and open-ended questions were used to acquire qualitative data from the respondents.

The results of the pre-program survey served to provide base-line data for this study.

Prior to distribution, the pre-program survey was field-tested for validity. The survey contained questions using a Likert Scale, as well as open-ended questions, in order to provide both

quantitative and qualitative data in order to triangulate the results. The survey was sent to the full population of 64 adjunct faculty members, on four campuses of the college, who were assigned to teach one or more sections of classes in the Department of Developmental Studies during the fall semester, 2011. There were 47 respondents, or a 73% rate of participant return. Of the respondents, 23.4% indicated the discipline area in which they taught to be developmental writing. Nineteen point one percent of the respondents indicated that they taught developmental mathematics and 27.7% of the respondents indicated that they taught developmental reading. The largest percentage of the population, 29.8% of the respondents, indicated teaching EAP, or English for Academic Purposes. Though not strictly a developmental discipline, EAP falls under the broad continuum of developmental education and is considered a developmental discipline at the college. The responses were college-wide with 17% from the Charlotte Campus in Punta Gorda, Florida, 25.5% from the Collier Campus in Naples, Florida, 4.3% from the Hendry/Glades Center in LaBelle, Florida, and 53.2% from the Lee Campus in Fort Myers, Florida.

In the pre-survey, 72.7% of respondents stated that they agreed that “there are pertinent professional development opportunities available for adjunct faculty; in the post-survey, 95.8% of respondents stated that they agreed that “there are pertinent professional development opportunities available for adjunct faculty.” In answering open-ended questions in the pre-program survey, respondents noted that times and venues of professional development opportunities did not fit in with their schedules. Many indicated that locations and times should vary, and several asked that workshops be repeated and be offered at varying times, one of the suggestions that was, indeed, implemented. Comments to the same open-ended question in the

post-program survey included similar responses, even though quantitative data showed more positive perceptions of adjunct faculty development after the implementation of the program. In responding to the pre-program online survey questionnaire, 75% of the population stated that they agreed that input from adjunct faculty is sought concerning decisions made about curriculum. A total of 83.3 of those responding at the end of the study, after the implementation of increased professional development opportunities and support, indicated they agreed. In response to the statement, “There is adequate support for adjunct faculty at this institution, 65.1% of the respondents agreed when surveyed prior to the implementation of the increased adjunct support; after the implementation of the increased adjunct support, 87.5% responded that they agreed. Results from the survey research show positive results pertaining to this objective of strengthening adjunct faculty support through communication. Adjunct faculty responded that through being included in all departmental communication, they felt more valued and more supported. In responding to questions on a Likert scale on the pre-program survey, 75% of respondents indicated that they agreed that “input from adjunct faculty is sought when decisions are made concerning curriculum.” In the post-program survey, 83.3% of respondents agreed with the same statement. On the pre-program survey, 65.1% of respondents agreed that “there is adequate support for adjunct faculty at this institution.” On the post-program survey, 87.5% of respondents agreed with the same statement. In responding to a question regarding feelings and perceptions about working as an adjunct professor in the Department of Developmental Studies at this college, 91.3% indicated feeling either extremely positive or very positive on the post-program survey, compared with 86.4% on the pre-program survey.

How faculty view their roles as professional educators in relation to developmental education is vital to the ultimate success of the developmental learners (Farmer & Barham, 2001).

Developmental studies departments at many colleges and universities are staffed by high percentages of adjunct, or part time, faculty, many of whom have other jobs and professional obligations. A concern voiced by many of these faculty members has been that they do not feel as though they are included in such things as departmental communication and college-wide professional development opportunities. Many adjunct faculty members had expressed that they did not believe that they were integrated with the faculty that make up developmental studies departments, but were, rather, just part-time employees who are not part of a team. In addition, adjunct faculty generally believed that vital professional development opportunities, available to full-time faculty, were either off-limits to them or are not targeted toward the specific demands encountered by those for whom time on campus is limited. Department chairs and other campus leaders were often accused of leaving out adjunct faculty in many department communications. As a result, adjunct faculty had reported feeling less supported and much less a part of the departments in which they work than their full-time colleagues. This study showed that increased opportunities for professional development, increased communication, and ease of availability of guidelines and departmental materials have had a positive effect of the overall perceptions of adjunct faculty members as evidenced by the data collected on the post-program survey.

Much of the literature states that while many adjunct developmental educators are knowledgeable of the theories that guide their academic disciplines, many admit to lacking training in the theoretical foundations of developmental education. Many do not perceive that there are professional development opportunities in developmental education (Higbee, Arendale, & Lundell, 2005). Developmental educators are faced with diversity on many levels; the

importance of a working knowledge of theoretical perspectives is especially relevant in creating the necessary environments for the unique needs of these student groups (Higbee, 2005; Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006; Gabriel, 2008).

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations include:

- Consistent communication with all faculty – full-time as well as adjunct – is essential for maintaining a positive professional atmosphere where all members feel valued and are perceive themselves to be vital members of the department.
- Adjunct faculty teaching developmental students benefit from training on the principles and practices of developmental education.
- Faculty professional development that is targeted at the specific needs of adjunct faculty should be a part of the College’s professional development offerings.
- Developmental faculty at all campuses across the district should have regular access to departmental leadership for support and guidance.
- All faculty must have opportunities to give input on departmental decisions, whether they are adjunct or full-time members of the department.
- Adjunct faculty should be included in all departmental functions.

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