

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Use of Adjunct Faculty Members in Classroom Teaching in Departments of Pharmacy Practice

Nancy Fjortoft, PhD, Thy Mai, and Susan R. Winkler, PharmD

Midwestern University Chicago College of Pharmacy

Submitted February 9, 2011; accepted April 28, 2011; published September 10, 2011.

Objective. To determine trends among departments of pharmacy practice regarding use of adjunct faculty members for classroom-based teaching and to assess departmental support provided to these faculty members.

Methods. Chairs of pharmacy practice departments in US colleges and school of pharmacy were contacted by e-mail and asked to complete an 11-item electronic survey instrument.

Results. Chair respondents reported an average of 5.7 adjunct faculty members hired to teach required courses and 1.8 adjunct faculty members hired to teach elective courses. Compensation averaged \$108 per lecture hour and \$1,257 per 1-credit-hour course. Twenty-five percent of the respondents expected to hire more adjunct faculty members to teach required courses in the upcoming year due to curricular changes, faculty hiring freezes, and the shortage of full-time faculty members. Only 7% of respondents reported that they provided a teaching mentor and 14% offered no support to their adjunct faculty members.

Conclusions. Departments of pharmacy practice commonly use adjunct faculty members to teach required and elective courses. Given the pharmacy faculty shortage, this trend is expected to increase and may be an area for future faculty development.

Keywords: adjunct faculty, faculty, teaching

INTRODUCTION

Nationally and across disciplines, colleges and universities are providing instruction to students through the increased use of part-time and/or adjunct faculty members.¹ While some institutions grant part-time faculty members full faculty rights that include voting privileges and employee benefits, other institutions define part-time faculty members as adjunct faculty members who are hired as “seasonal” employees or independent contract labor to teach specific courses for a set dollar amount and do not receive any employee benefits. This paper concerns the latter group, part-time adjunct faculty members who are paid as independent contract labor and not defined as employees of the institution.

The increase in the use of adjunct faculty is controversial. Critics claim that the use of adjunct faculty members negatively affects the institution, students, and other faculty members. Adjunct faculty members are less likely to participate in faculty governance and therefore have little input into policies and decisions that may affect them.² The use of adjunct faculty members in the class-

room may negatively affect student learning due to the lack of the adjunct faculty members’ presence on campus for regularly scheduled office hours. Adjunct faculty members may not be provided with space or financial incentives to have office hours, and as a consequence, may not be available to students. Individually, adjunct faculty members may suffer from lack of teaching support and concerns about job security. For example, classes may be cancelled at the last minute, leaving adjunct faculty members with an unplanned loss of income.³

Others see advantages to the use of adjunct faculty members. There may be cost savings to the institution from using adjunct faculty members. In 2001, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources reported that full-time faculty members were paid an average of \$2,674.00 per credit hour, while adjunct faculty members at the same institution were paid an average of \$592.00 per credit hour.⁴ These figures include only salary and not benefits. Although full-time faculty members are also engaged in scholarship and service, for many institutions, teaching is the primary mission and therefore the use of adjunct faculty members may be a more economical approach to delivering instruction. Employee benefits are not typically paid to adjunct faculty members,

Corresponding Author: Nancy Fjortoft. E-mail: nfjort@midwestern.edu

which is another institutional cost savings. Supporters of the use of adjunct faculty members for teaching see significant advantages in student learning by bringing “real-world” experience into the classroom.⁵ Finally, adjunct faculty members may prefer part-time or adjunct status to enable them to meet other professional or family goals and obligations. A 2010 national survey of part-time/adjunct faculty members reported that part-time/adjunct faculty members are almost equally divided into those who prefer their status and those who would prefer a full-time teaching position.⁶ Some part-time faculty members reported increased satisfaction as they were able to concentrate fully on teaching and not the scholarship and service components required of full-time faculty members.⁷ Adjunct/part-time medical school faculty members preferred their part-time status so that they could spend more time with family or pursuing other professional obligations.^{8,9}

There are little data available on the use of adjunct faculty members in colleges and schools of pharmacy. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) has annually collected demographic data on full- and part-time faculty members for decades. However, there appears to be no regular collection of data on the use of adjunct faculty members in colleges and schools of pharmacy, in particular, in departments of pharmacy practice.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were to examine: the extent of use of adjunct faculty members for teaching in departments of pharmacy practice and whether this trend is increasing; what types of courses adjunct faculty members are teaching; and what support is provided to them.

METHODS

A list of pharmacy colleges and schools and pharmacy practice department chairs was developed using the AACP 2008-2009 roster of colleges and schools of pharmacy.¹⁰ Colleges and schools that had not yet graduated students were omitted from the study as they were likely still recruiting faculty members and building their full complement of pharmacy practice faculty members. There were 102 colleges and schools, but 7 did not have information regarding a department chair of pharmacy practice available on their Web site, leaving a study population of 95 pharmacy practice department chairs.

A survey instrument was developed using SurveyMonkey (Survey Monkey, Palo Alto, California). Questions were developed to collect basic demographic data on the college and the department, to assess the use of adjunct faculty members and predictions for future use, and to determine whether any support services were available to adjunct faculty members. The questionnaire included 11 forced-choice and fill-in the blank items. Two of the 3 investigators and 1 additional faculty member who

was not involved in the study pilot tested the survey instrument to ensure the clarity of questions and ease of use of the online process. Some minor changes were made to the survey instrument after the pilot test. For the purpose of this study, adjunct faculty members were defined as individuals assigned to classroom-based teaching (eg, lecture, laboratory, workshop) who were paid on a contractual basis and not regular employees of the institution. Survey participants were asked not to include adjunct or volunteer faculty members who only precepted students on pharmacy practice experiences. A cover letter was developed and e-mailed with a link to SurveyMonkey.com to all identified chairs of pharmacy practice. Twelve e-mails were returned as undeliverable so the contact information was updated and a second e-mail was sent to those college/schools. Two of the 12 follow-up e-mails came back undeliverable, leaving a viable sample of 93. A reminder e-mail was sent to all nonrespondents 3 weeks after the initial e-mail was sent.

The data were imported into an Excel spreadsheet and frequencies were calculated. Omitted responses to individual items were excluded from the analysis. The study was reviewed and approved by Midwestern University Institutional Review Board.

RESULTS

Forty-six department chairs completed a survey instrument for a response rate of 49%. The demographic data of the colleges and schools of pharmacy and departments

Table 1. Characteristics of US Colleges and Schools of Pharmacy Responding to a Survey on Adjunct Faculty Members

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Type of institution, No. (%) | |
| Public | 26 (66.5) |
| Private | 20 (43.5) |
| Average class size, No. (range) | 125.2 (70-250) |
| Pharmacy practice faculty, No. (range) | |
| Full-time | |
| Tenure track | 9.7 (1-43) |
| Non-tenure track | 15.6 (2-70) |
| Part-time | |
| Tenure track | 0.1 (0-2) |
| Non-tenure track | 3.5 (0-100) |
| Faculty clinical hours/week, No. (range) | |
| Full-time | |
| Tenure track | 10.57 (1-33) |
| Non-tenure track | 22.90 (1-41) |
| Part-time | |
| Tenure-track | 4.15 (1-20) |
| Non-tenure track | 14.20 (1-36) |

of pharmacy practice that responded are described in Table 1. The majority of respondents were from public schools, with an average class size of 125 students. Department size and composition varied.

The use of adjunct faculty members in the classroom appears to be common in the survey respondents' institutions and is described in Table 2. The average number of adjunct faculty members hired to teach required courses per year was 5.7 and the average number of adjunct faculty members hired to teach elective courses was 1.8. Compensation averaged \$108 per lecture hour and ranged from \$0 to \$300.00. Adjunct faculty members were paid an average of \$1,257 per 1-credit-hour course and payments ranged from \$0 to \$3,750. Almost 25% of the respondents expected to hire more adjunct faculty members to teach required courses in the upcoming year. This appeared to be driven largely by curricular changes, faculty hiring freezes, and the shortage of faculty members.

Most departments that responded to the survey supported their adjunct faculty members by offering campus

orientation, access to library resources, and secretarial support. Only 7% provided a teaching mentor and 14% offered no support to their adjunct faculty members. A full description and frequencies of the type of support offered to adjunct faculty members by responding departments is in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

Use of adjunct faculty members to teach required courses and some elective courses was common, and most department chairs who responded to the survey anticipated that the level of use of adjunct faculty members will remain the same or increase. The reasons provided for use of adjunct faculty members ranged from curricular revisions, hiring freezes, and shortages of faculty members, to increases in student enrollment.

The number of colleges and schools of pharmacy continues to increase. There were 120 colleges and schools of pharmacy listed on the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education Web site in 2010, with a number of other colleges and schools in the planning stages.¹¹ Given the

Table 2. Use of Adjunct Faculty in Departments of Pharmacy Practice and Salary, Trends, and Types of Support Provided (N=46)

| | Public | n | Private | n | Private + Public | Total ^a |
|--|----------------|----|-----------------|----|------------------|--------------------|
| Adjunct faculty teaching, No. (Range) | | | | | | |
| Required courses | 6.5 (0-35) | 22 | 4.4 (0-30) | 19 | 5.7 (0-35) | 41 |
| Elective courses | 2.4 (0-17) | 22 | 1.2 (0-8) | 19 | 1.8 (0-17) | 41 |
| Compensation, \$ Amount (Range) | | | | | | |
| Per lecture | 119.2 (0-300) | 13 | 105.4 (0-250) | 12 | 107.50 (0-300) | 25 |
| Per one unit course | 879.2 (0-3750) | 12 | 1680.8 (0-3750) | 13 | 1257.0 (0-3750) | 25 |
| Hiring frequency of adjuncts to teach required courses compared to previous year, No. (SD) | | | | | | |
| More | 5 (21.7) | 23 | 5 (26.3) | 19 | 10 (23.8) | 42 |
| Less | 2 (8.7) | 23 | 3 (15.8) | 19 | 5 (11.9) | 42 |
| Same | 16 (69.6) | 23 | 11 (57.9) | 19 | 27 (64.3) | 42 |
| Hiring frequency of adjuncts to teach elective courses compared to previous year, No. (SD) | | | | | | |
| More | 2 (9.5) | 21 | 1 (6.3) | 16 | 3 (8.1) | 37 |
| Less | 3 (14.3) | 21 | 1 (6.3) | 16 | 4 (10.8) | 37 |
| Same | 16 (76.2) | 21 | 14 (87.5) | 16 | 30 (81.1) | 37 |
| Types of support for adjunct faculty members, No. (SD) ^b | | | | | | |
| Campus orientation | 4 (17.4) | 23 | 9 (47.4) | 19 | 13 (31.0) | 42 |
| Access to library resources | 18 (78.3) | 23 | 17 (89.5) | 19 | 35 (83.3) | 42 |
| Secretarial support | 13 (56.5) | 23 | 11 (57.9) | 19 | 24 (57.1) | 42 |
| Office space | 7 (30.4) | 23 | 6 (31.6) | 19 | 13 (31.0) | 42 |
| Teaching mentor | 3 (13.0) | 23 | 0 (0.0) | 19 | 3 (7.1) | 42 |
| Teaching assistant | 4 (17.4) | 23 | 1 (5.3) | 19 | 5 (11.9) | 42 |
| None | 4 (17.4) | 23 | 2 (10.5) | 19 | 6 (14.3) | 42 |

^a Omitted responses to individual survey items were considered nonresponses rather than 0; therefore, the number of responses for some items is less than 46.

^b Multiple selections were allowed.

concern within the academy regarding the shortage of faculty members, it is reasonable to expect the use of adjunct faculty members to increase.¹² How this will affect the overall quality of pharmacy education remains to be seen.

The level of support provided to adjunct faculty members by the responding colleges and schools varied. Few department chairs reported providing a teaching mentor to their adjunct faculty members. This survey instrument did not solicit any data on individual adjunct faculty members; therefore, the skill level of these individuals is unknown. However, we can speculate that these individuals are not experienced teachers; thus, this may be an important area for future development in terms of faculty support.

Several natural questions arise from this study. Are adjunct faculty members adequately prepared to teach? If not, how can schools assist in their development? Is student learning affected by the use of adjunct faculty members? How is the institution as a whole affected by the use of adjunct faculty members? This study was intended to provide a baseline for further study on this issue.

This study was not intended to represent all colleges and schools of pharmacy but to explore an area of faculty use that has not been previously studied in pharmacy education. Therefore, the reader should not interpret the results of this study as indicative of all US pharmacy practice departments. It is not clear whether nonresponders to the survey did not respond because they did not use adjunct faculty members or due to other reasons such as time constraints. However, the results suggest that the use of adjunct faculty members may be increasing in the departments that responded and the impact of this warrants scrutiny. The term *adjunct faculty members* may have different meanings and uses across the variety of institutions surveyed. While we attempted to be clear in our description of adjunct faculty members in the survey instrument, some respondents may not have carefully read the definition, declined to complete the survey instrument, and thereby reduced the response rate.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of adjunct faculty members in the classroom is common in pharmacy practice departments. Some de-

partments of pharmacy practice at the colleges and schools surveyed plan to increase the use of adjunct faculty members for classroom-based teaching. Should this trend continue, it warrants careful review and further study.

REFERENCES

1. Almanac of Higher Education 2010. Increasingly, faculty members are part-time and nontenured. *Chron Higher Educ.* August 22, 2010. <http://chronicle.com/article/Graphic-Increasingly-Faculty/124091/>. Accessed August 15, 2011.
2. Banachowski G. Perspectives and perceptions: the use of part-time faculty in community colleges. *Comm Coll Rev.* 1996;24(2): 49-62.
3. Curtis JW, Jacobe MF. AAUP statements and reports on contingent faculty. American Association of Universities Professors. 2006; 6-8. <http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/F05FF88E-B2A8-4052-8373-AF0FDAE060AC/0/ConsequencesAnIncreasinglyContingentFaculty.pdf>. Accessed June 21, 2011.
4. Bettinger EP, Long BT. Do college instructors matter? The effects of adjuncts and graduate assistants on students' interests and success. *NBER Work Pap Ser.* <http://www.nber.org/papers/w10370>. Accessed June 21, 2011.
5. Banachowski G. Advantages and disadvantages of employing part-time faculty in community colleges. *Eric Digest.* 1997-01-00.
6. AFT Higher Education. A national survey of part-time/adjunct faculty. *Am Acad.* 2010;2(3):3-15.
7. Parrott TM, Grabinski CJ, et al. Part-time faculty and gerontology programs: dilemmas and solutions. *Gerontol Geriatr Educ.* 2007; 27(4):69-83.
8. Socolar RR, Kelman LS, Lannon CM, Lohr J. Institutional policies of US medical schools regarding tenure, promotion, and benefits for part-time faculty. *Acad Med.* 2000;75(8):846-849.
9. Levinson W, Kaufman K, Bickel J. Part-time faculty in academic medicine: present status and future challenges. *Ann Intern Med.* 1993;119(3):220-225.
10. American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy. Roster of professional staff and faculty 2008-2009. Alexandria, VA: American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy; 2008.
11. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education Frequently Asked Questions. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education. <http://www.acpe-accredit.org/deans/faqs.asp>. Accessed June 21, 2011.
12. Patry RA, Eiland LS. Addressing the shortage of pharmacy faculty and clinicians: the impact of demographic changes. *Am J Health-Syst Pharm.* 2007;64(7):773-775. <http://www.ajhp.org/content/64/7/773.long>. Accessed August 15, 2011.