

2005 Best Employment Practices For Part-time Faculty

Taskforce Report and Recommendations

I. Participants

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II. Background

Part-time instructors bring unique skills and expertise into workforce preparation and academic classrooms. Employing part-time instructors allows colleges to offer more classes, when and where students need them and the ability to respond to emerging student, community and business needs. However, low salary levels, variable working conditions and over-reliance on part-time faculty have contributed to staffing concerns in Washington State and nationally - as colleges and universities absorb greater numbers of students without appropriate funding.

Responding to this concern, the 1996 Legislature adopted provisions requiring an audit of part-time faculty compensation and employment practices and the identification of "best practices" related to part-time faculty employment. A Taskforce was established, the best practices listed and recommendations made to the college districts, State Board and Legislature. Updates were reported in 1997 and 1998.

Through adoption of Engrossed Senate Bill 5087, the 2005 Legislature renewed its commitment to understand and improve part-time instructors working conditions by directing the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to convene a taskforce to review and update the best employment practices report completed by a 1996 Taskforce. Specifically, the legislation directed:

In performing the review and update of the audit, the task force shall focus on the employment of part-time faculty, and shall include the following issues in its deliberations: Salary issues, provision of health and retirement benefits, the implications of increased reliance on part-time

rather than full-time faculty, the implications of workload definitions, and tangible and intangible ways to recognize the professional stature of part-time faculty.

The task force shall report its findings to the state board, local governing boards, and other interested parties by December 1, 2005. The report shall include recommendations on a review of the status of the set of best practices principles for the colleges to follow in their employment of part-time faculty developed in 1996. The state board for community and technical colleges shall adopt and periodically update a set of best practices principles for colleges in the community and technical college system to follow in their employment of part-time faculty. The board shall use the best practices principles in the development of each biennial operating budget request. The board shall encourage and, to the extent possible, require each local governing board to adopt, revise, and implement the principles.

Representatives to the Taskforce were requested from and appointed by the stakeholder groups identified in the legislation. Taskforce members met regularly from summer through fall 2005 - focusing on understanding the assignment, reviewing data and the 1996 report, and updating the principles. This report summarizes the Taskforce findings and recommendations.

Early in their deliberations, Taskforce members developed a shared understanding of the assignment: To develop the best part-time faculty employment principles. These overarching principles serve as a guide to local collective bargaining negotiators, state board members, trustees and Legislators as they make decisions and agreements affecting instructors' work lives.

As the Taskforce approached its assignment, members recognized that:

- **Recommendations affecting salary, benefit participation, “faculty mix” or other high cost reforms require support and action by the Legislature, State Board or other overseeing state agencies.** Insufficient funding coupled with rising student enrollments have evolved into an over-reliance on a low paid, part-time teaching workforce. Reversing this trend requires significant funding.
- **Solutions affecting salary schedules and working conditions are subject to local collective bargaining and decision making.** Identifying local influences, prioritizing and developing strategies to address desired changes are more effectively accomplished through local college decision making. Through local negotiations, strategies implementing the principles will inevitably differ between colleges.
- **Improvements in salaries, benefit participation and working conditions have occurred since the 1996 survey and report.** While more needs to be done, the report should recognize improvements.

III. Best Employment Principles

This section lists and describes the “best practice principles” identified by the Taskforce. Many of these principles are in place, in some locally defined form, at one or more college districts. Improvements made since the 1996 study, considerations and implementation strategies are also noted.

Best Practice 1: Salary. Part-time faculty should be paid a rate equal to that paid full-time faculty having the same qualifications and experience for doing the equivalent instructional and non-instructional work.

Description: Similarly qualified instructors should be paid the same rate when performing the same work. This recommendation also recognizes the instructional and non-instructional components of an instructor's workload. Decisions on work assignments, the monetary value of those assignments and the relative value of education/experience occur through local bargaining.

Progress:

Improving part-time faculty salaries has been and continues to be a top priority for the two-year college system and the Legislature has shown a commitment to equity funding.

The Legislature appropriated and/or authorized expenditure of \$36.1 million of additional funds to increase part-time faculty salaries during past four biennia (since 1996).

Part-time salaries have increased over 37% since 1998.

Consideration:

Chronic under funding of the system has resulted in an over-reliance on lower salaried part-time faculty. Part-time instructors are currently paid, on weighted average, 57% (FY 2004) of the full-time faculty average salary.

Recommendations to the Legislature:

Increase salary funding to an amount based on the presumption that all students are taught by instructors paid the full-time faculty rate. This requires significant funding (approximately \$115.5 million for the first biennium) and a commitment by stakeholders to continue strong, effective and determined advocacy for this goal.

Recommendations to Local Negotiators:

Though collective bargaining, develop part-time faculty pay rates and/or schedules comparable to full-time rates/schedules, including increment systems that recognize education and experience.

Based on funding improvements and through collective bargaining, develop pay rates for additional assignments made to part-time instructors, such as curriculum development, participation in college governance, office hours and/or student advising.

Take full advantage of funding or other legislative options made available to benefit part-time faculty.

Best Practice 2: Benefit Participation. Eligible Part-time faculty should receive all state mandated benefits, and college provided employee benefits proportionate to those received by full-time faculty.

Description: As college and state employees, part-time instructors should have the same access to employee benefits as provided to full-time faculty, proportionate to assigned workload where appropriate. Examples of state mandated benefits include retirement plans, health and leave benefits and the dependent care program. Locally defined employment based benefits may include parking, professional leave and tuition waivers.

Progress:

Since 1996, there have been significant improvements in the rate and maintenance of part-time instructor participation in:

- Retirement Plan Benefits – The eligibility threshold for participation in the State Board sponsored retirement plan was lowered in 1999 from 80% to 50% of full-time.
- Health benefits – Participation in health care benefits have increased through workload calculations and have been extended to summer.
- Sick leave – Part-time instructors earn sick leave at a rate proportionate to their workload and are eligible to participate in the Attendance Incentive and Shared Leave programs.
- Pay dates – Through local bargaining, part-time instructors can receive paychecks on the same dates as full-time instructors.

Consideration:

Agreements have been made through collective bargaining that do not provide for sick leave accumulations to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Uneven part-time instructor work patterns sometimes result in the loss of health care benefits – even for career part-time instructors.

Recommendation to the Legislature and Health Care Authority:

Establish a principle and provide funding that allows career part-time instructors' to average workload accumulated over an academic year to maintain participation in health care benefits.

Recommendations to Local Negotiators:

Review sick leave and pay date options and negotiate solutions that provide these benefits to part-time instructors on a basis comparable to full-time instructors.

Consider maintenance of established benefit eligibility in making workload assignments to part-time instructors.

Best Practice 3: Faculty Mix. The ratio of full- to part-time faculty at each college district should be based upon program and student need. The funding necessary to improve services to students through increasing courses taught by full-time faculty should be provided by the Legislature.

Description: There are a variety of program- or student-driven reasons for employing part-time instructors, including accessing special industry expertise, offering courses at community extension sites or in the evening, and responding to emerging industry or community needs. However, a strong core of full-time faculty is essential to maintaining a high quality educational environment. The lower salaries paid to part-time instructors allow college districts to offer additional courses to meet state enrollment demands at the funding level provided by the Legislature. While the classroom experience is comparable to that offered by full-time instructors, over-reliance on part-time instructors affects the level of support services afforded to students and increases the non-instructional responsibilities assigned to full-time instructors (i.e., advising, review and development of curricula and programs, accreditation review and maintenance, faculty hiring and evaluation, governance, etc.).

Progress:

The two-year college system studied the ratio of full- to part-time faculty in 2001 and determined that, if funded by the Legislature, the college districts would add 361 full-time instructors – increasing the percent of courses taught by full-time instructors by 12%. A budget request to begin this conversion was developed and submitted to the Legislature.

Through collective bargaining or Trustee policy, faculty mix issues have been considered at several college districts when determining course assignments and staffing levels.

Consideration:

The lack of legislative funding for the faculty “mix” issue has stymied any improvement in the ratio of part- to full-time faculty.

Recommendation to the Legislature:

Provide quality funding to improve the ratio of full- to part-time faculty.

Recommendations to the College System:

Continue requesting funds to increase the percentage of courses taught by full-time instructors. Stakeholders should actively support this request.

Continue requesting special funding for new positions in high-demand fields that require a full-time position to attract and retain instructors from industry.

Recommendation to Local Negotiators:

Consider student and program needs and the goals established as part of the 2001 study in making teaching assignments.

When possible, increase the percentage of courses taught by full-time instructors consistent with College District goals identified in the Faculty Mix Study.

Review research addressing the impact of over-reliance on part-time faculty on student success and retention to inform decision making about appropriate levels of full- and part-time faculty staffing.

Best Practice 4: Initial Recruitment and Selection. Part-time faculty should be initially selected through a structured professional process that is based on the same or similar criteria as applied to full-time faculty.

Description: One of the first steps taken to ensure a high quality classroom experience occurs in teacher selection. The initial selection of part-time instructors should be undertaken with attention comparable to that taken in the selection of full-time instructors.

Progress:

Through a web based job bank, part-time instructors may review full- and part-time teaching opportunities in their field of expertise and post contact information to receive job announcements in their areas of interest.

Consideration:

Last minute or emergency hiring of part-time instructors, while not always avoidable, affect the classroom experience for students – as the instructor becomes familiar with the curriculum, text book and develops lesson plans while conducting classes.

Recommendations to Local Negotiators:

When possible, avoid emergency hiring of part-time instructors.

If circumstances do not allow for a structured selection process, implement a more rigorous evaluation and feedback process during the instructor's first quarter of employment.

Develop a job-based screening process that applies the same or similar criteria used in hiring full-time faculty.

Best Practice 5: Job Security. Upon successfully completing a review period, regularly employed part-time faculty should achieve a form of job security.

Description: Most part-time instructors are employed on quarter-to-quarter contracts that provide college districts the flexibility needed to adjust to evolving student and community needs. However, a number of part-time instructors teach the same classes at the same college, quarter-after-quarter. The limited employer commitment, translates into personal planning difficulties for and a limited commitment by the instructor – resulting in insecurity and turnover.

Progress:

Through local bargaining, several college districts have developed forms of job security applicable to a part-time instructors meeting certain locally defined criteria, including multi-quarter or annual contracts and priority hiring systems.

Consideration:

While there appears to be a core of part-time instructors that regularly teach, college districts are reluctant to commit to employment beyond one quarter – citing fluctuating enrollments, difficulty in tracking instructor work patterns and a need to retain flexibility.

Recommendations for Local Negotiators:

Develop tracking systems that accurately capture part-time instructor work patterns.

Review part-time instructor work patterns to identify instructors with a history of re-appointments and consider providing early, multi-quarter or annual appointment contracts.

Develop a review process and period that assesses the competence of part-time instructors and, if passed, confers an enhanced status that provides a greater level of job security through multi-quarter contracts, priority hiring lists, right of first refusal, designation as “Associate Faculty,” etc. A structured review process resulting in enhanced job security and improved teaching/accountability, also removes any stigma related to being selected through a process less rigorous than applied to full-time instructors. In addition to specifying criteria for inclusion, the negotiated system may address how names are removed for non-performance.

Through collective bargaining, develop provisions that compensate, through a salary or stipend payment, the preparation work completed by a part-time instructor whose class is canceled just prior to or after a quarter begins.

Include the names of part-time instructors, who have passed a review process, in quarterly class schedules.

Best Practice 6: Performance Review. Part-time faculty should be evaluated using comparable criteria, standards and procedures which are applied to evaluate full-time faculty.

Description: Colleges use performance evaluations to ensure instructional quality and to provide feedback to instructors. While all colleges have some form of evaluation process applicable to part-time instructors, many rely on anonymous student evaluations.

Progress:

Through bargaining, agreements have been reached to provide some form of evaluation and feedback process ranging from reliance on student evaluations to elaborate processes that include mentors, self evaluations and committee evaluations.

Considerations:

Reliance solely on student evaluations may cause instructors to set less challenging class requirements to avoid the impact low student evaluations may have on future reemployment – potentially making rehiring more based on popularity than teaching quality. In addition, student evaluations provide limited feedback and no guidance on how to improve.

Recommendations to Local Negotiators:

If student evaluations are relied upon, create broader criteria for use in re-hiring decisions.

Use multiple indexes of performance in periodic reviews, including self evaluation, peer evaluation, small group evaluations, etc.

Mentor or separate from employment part-time instructors who do not successfully complete the review process or who receive poor evaluations.

Include part-time instructors who have successfully completed the review process and exhibit teaching excellence in teaching awards available to full-time faculty.

Best Practice 7: Professional Development. Colleges should assist part-time faculty to identify and address their development needs in ways which are accessible and affordable.

Description: Continued professional development, in the instructor's field and in teaching, translates directly into greater success in the classroom for students and the instructor.

Progress:

Part-time instructors participate in the fee waiver program available to State employees on the same basis as full-time instructors.

Since the 1996 study and through local decision making, part-time instructors may have access to a variety of training opportunities and funds, participate in the development of faculty training opportunities, and receive pay for participating in training.

Consideration:

Limited funding for professional development activities affects all instructors but has a greater impact on part-time instructor participation.

Recommendations to Local Negotiators:

Continue to develop, fund and/or expand training opportunities in ways that are accessible and motivate part-time instructor participation.

Assist part-time instructors receiving multiple quarter or ongoing contracts to create a professional development plan.

Through negotiations and in accordance with state law, provide access to professional leave on a comparable basis to full-time instructors.

Involve part-time instructors in the planning of professional development activities and schedule events at times and places that part-time faculty could conveniently attend.

Assign experienced part-time instructors as peer reviewers to newly hired part-time faculty.

Best Practice 8: Support Services. Part-time faculty should be treated with the same professionalism as full-time faculty and provided the necessary support services to do their jobs.

Description: Support services include access to computers, telephone/voicemail, clerical support, copying, office space, storage space, parking, etc. Due to space and cost limitations, part-time instructors are often required to share office facilities (office space, telephones, and computers). Enhancing an instructor's ability to store and retrieve teaching related materials on-site eases difficulties in transporting materials, saves time, creates continuity and enhances instruction.

Progress:

Since the 1996 study, colleges report improvements to part-time instructor access of college support services, including shared office space, e-mail/voicemail accounts, clerical support, etc.

Parking is available on same terms as for full-time faculty.

Consideration:

While there are many new buildings on college campuses, office space remains limited, causing more part-time instructors to share space and affecting their ability to have private student conferences.

Recommendations to Local Negotiators:

Provide part-time instructors access to office or conference space that affords the ability to confer with students in a way that protects the student's privacy. .

Access to college provided computers and the ability to have password protected storage of teaching related documents helps instructors stay connected and eases the burden of transporting.

Provide part-time instructors access to secure storage for student files and classroom related materials.

Best Practice 9: Communications. Part-time faculty should be afforded easy access to communications from the college and have the means to communicate with the college community.

Description: Good and consistent communication ensures part-time instructors are aware of college policies, practices and expectations. It also helps instructors feel included in and connected to the college
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community. Due to the variety of part-time instructor work patterns and locations, use of a variety of communication tools will ensure the information reaches its audience.

Progress:

Colleges have developed a variety of information sharing tools specifically designed for part-time instructors, including handbooks, policy and benefit notices, orientations and e-mail accounts.

Part-time instructors have assigned mailboxes and/or receive mail delivery that in many cases is comparable to that provided to full-time instructors.

Consideration:

While improvements have been made, part-time instructors still experience difficulty in receiving college communications and services – especially during evening and weekend classes.

Recommendations to Local Negotiators:

Provide letters of intent or appointment prior to the start of classes to allow for adequate preparation time.

Invite and compensate part-time instructors' attendance at college events such as opening day ceremonies, divisional meetings, professional development activities and/or graduation.

Hold meetings specifically for part-time faculty about issues that concern them.

Provide part-time instructors information about full-time position openings within their college districts.

Develop information sharing tools that ensures off-site and evening part-time instructors have access to the same information available to instructors who teach on campus during the day.

Best Practice 10: Best Practices Report. The best practice principles should be used in making state and local decisions and agreements affecting part-time faculty. The "Part-Time Faculty Best Practices Report" will be published and distributed to all college presidents, human resources directors, trustees, and local faculty union presidents. At least annually, each college should conduct a review of their actions related to achievement of these best practices.

Description: In SB 5087, the Legislature recognized that improvement has been made since the initial work of the 1996 best practices Taskforce and that additional progress needs to be made. Distribution of these recommendations and an annual review will help "institutionalize," update and bring focus to part-time faculty issues.

Recommendations to the State Board:

Post the principles on your web site.

Create an online reporting tool that tracks improvements made each year.

Recommendation to Local Negotiators:

Create a Best Practices committee to develop and oversee implementation strategies.

IV. Conclusion

Steps to address issues caused by reliance on a low paid, part-time teaching workforce are time consuming and require a long-term commitment by the state colleges, unions and Legislature. While Washington State has been a national leader in the improvement of part-time faculty salaries and working conditions, significantly more needs to be done.