

Recruiting, Orienting, & Supporting
**ONLINE ADJUNCT
FACULTY:**

A SURVEY OF PRACTICES

Authors:

Andrew J. Magda, Russell Poulin, and Dr. David L. Clinefelter



LEARNINGHOUSE®
Your Online Education Partner



wcet

Recruiting, Orienting, & Supporting Online Adjunct Faculty

A Survey of Practices

A joint project of WCET and The Learning House, Inc.

Andrew J. Magda

Russell Poulin

Dr. David L. Clinefelter

A number of individuals contributed to the project.

The authors would like to thank the survey participants who agreed to participate in brief interviews about their practices. Their contributions were immensely helpful in providing insight and color to successful practices in supporting online adjunct faculty.

Thank you to several WCET members who read initial drafts of the survey. They provided excellent guidance in keeping this project focused on uncovering successful practices. Thank you to Mollie McGill, Emily Wheeler, and Victoria Loudon for reviewing early drafts of this report and to Cali Morrison for her help in distributing the survey.

Suggested citation: Magda, A. J., Poulin, R., & Clinefelter, D. L. (2015). *Recruiting, orienting, & supporting online adjunct faculty: A survey of practices*. Louisville, KY: The Learning House, Inc.

November 2015

Copyright ©2015 by The Learning House, Inc. and WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies.
All Rights Reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	3
Introduction and Key Findings	4
Section One: The Utilization and Growth of Online Adjunct Faculty	6
Definitions	6
How Adjunct Faculty Are Being Utilized	6
What Adjunct Faculty Are Teaching	6
Change in Percentage of Online Adjunct Faculty in the Last Year	8
Level of Customization Permitted in Courses Taught by Online Adjuncts	8
Limits on the Number of Courses Taught by Online Adjuncts	10
Minimum Enrollment for Online Courses	10
Section Two: Hiring Practices for Online Adjunct Faculty	11
Hiring Responsibilities	11
The Advertising of Open Positions	12
Turnover of Online Adjunct Faculty	13
The Interview and Selection Process	14
Section Three: Responsibilities and Expectations for Online Adjunct Faculty	15
Written Policies on Expectations for Interacting With Students Online	15
Evaluating Online Adjunct Faculty Members	16
Determining Faculty Satisfaction and Needs	16
Section Four: Training and Support for Online Adjunct Faculty	17
Technical Support and Tools for Online Adjunct Faculty	17
Training and Professional Development for Online Adjunct Faculty	18
Conclusions and Recommendations	21
Conclusions	21
Recommendations	23
In Conclusion	25
Methodology	26
Partners	27
Appendix: Survey Results	28
References	36

INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

In the summer of 2015, The Learning House, Inc. and WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) conducted a survey of 202 deans, directors and provosts at two- and four-year higher education institutions who were familiar with the online learning practices at their respective institutions. The goal of the survey was to gather information around the hiring, expectations, policies and support of adjunct and part-time faculty members for online courses. We used the Babson Research Group (2015) definition for online learning, in which 80% or more of the course had to be delivered online. Following the survey, in-depth follow-up interviews were conducted with eight participants from the survey. Where possible, we sought to identify successful practices from which others might learn.

Adjunct faculty members have been a key component in the exponential growth of online programs over the past decade. According to U.S. Department of Education surveys, distance education enrollment continues to grow (WCET, 2015), while overall, higher education has seen multiple years of declining enrollment, with the latest data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2015) showing that college enrollments declined close to 2% over the past year. Despite the decline in enrollment, the number of adjunct faculty continues to rise, performing duties in both face-to-face and online programs. These adjunct faculty have been critical in enabling institutions to grow or scale their online operations.

The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012) reported that 75.5% of faculty members at two- and four-year institutions were in “contingent positions” off of the tenure track. Of this large group, 70% were part-time or adjunct faculty members, making roughly half of all instructors in higher education in 2011 an adjunct or part-time faculty member. Clausen and Swidler (2013) predicted that this population would continue to grow in size and proportion. Our survey similarly found that more than half of institutions reported that their adjunct population that teaches online has grown over the last year. The percentage of adjunct faculty members who teach partially or only online is an increasingly significant group, contributing to the tremendous growth of online education.

With such a large population, and one that is continuing to grow, we feel it is vital for institutions to better understand this diverse group. Key findings include:

1. **One-size-fits-all policies.** Policies that were designed for on-campus adjuncts were frequently applied to those who are teaching online. Surprisingly few have written policies in place for how often faculty members are expected to interact with students (74%), nor do they have written policies for when they must respond to student inquiries (42%), or have policies on how often they are to hold office hours (76%). However, interviews showed that some institutions have put extensive thought into such policies.
2. **Increasing responsibility and flexibility for adjuncts teaching online.** Online adjunct faculty are often given responsibility for course design (31%), and there is a large percentage of customization permitted in the courses they are instructing (21% allow total customization).

3. **A fundamental divide among institutions about how adjunct faculty can develop online courses.** Institutions are largely divided into two differing philosophies over whether to use a “master course” (the institution develops the course) or “full development/customization” (the faculty member develops the course) for online courses taught by adjunct faculty. Only about a quarter (23%) of institutions allow minimal or no customization.
4. **Professional training and development not guaranteed.** Although our survey found relatively high levels of technical and instructional design support for online adjunct faculty (84%), professional development and training requirements varied considerably. Responses from institutions note that online adjuncts are often allowed to participate in similar training offered to all faculty members; however, this training often is face-to-face or offered on campus.
5. **Recruiting the same for online and on-campus adjuncts.** Given the advertising and screening methods used, online adjuncts are hired in the same way on-campus adjuncts are.

This report seeks to benchmark policies and procedures that colleges are using in supporting their online adjunct faculty. We hope that these data, and the recommendations that follow, will help inform and guide higher education institutions toward best practices in recruiting, orienting and supporting adjunct faculty for online courses, as well as benchmark their current operations against a larger sample. The authors would like to note that these data are representative for the 202 institutions that responded to the survey and may not represent the entire higher education universe. Key data points are represented graphically in the body of this report, and the full results of the survey are represented in the appendix.

SECTION ONE: *The Utilization and Growth of Online Adjunct Faculty*

Definitions

The definitions and formal classification for “online” education and “adjunct” faculty can vary greatly across institutions. To assist in narrowing the variability, the following instruction was placed at the beginning of the survey:

When thinking of “online” education, please use the Babson Survey Research Group/Online Learning Consortium, formerly Sloan-C, definition of 80% or more of the course being taught online. When thinking of adjunct faculty, please include individuals who teach part time at your institution, including retired faculty and staff or administrators who teach courses in addition to their full time assignment.

How Adjunct Faculty Are Being Utilized

Recent statistics collected by the U.S. Department of Education show that, in fall 2013, one in eight higher education students took all of their courses online, and one in four took at least one online course. Despite the significant number of courses being taught online, institutions report that less than one-third (31%) of the courses taught by adjunct faculty members over the last 12 months have been fully online courses. When both online and face-to-face courses are reviewed, less than half (43%) are taught by adjunct faculty.

What Adjunct Faculty Are Teaching

The top 10 fields of study taught by online adjunct faculty cover a wide array of subject areas, from business to English language and literature. It appears that online adjuncts typically teach general education courses, allowing full-time faculty to teach the major, core-program courses. In fields where institutions may not have a full online degree program (such as English), using an adjunct may allow the institution to offer all its general education courses online without drawing resources from departments that do not offer full degrees online.

Figure 1.1 - Top 10 Disciplines Overall Using Online Adjuncts

Discipline	Percent of All Institutions
Business	35%
English	29%
General Studies	24%
Education	22%
Psychology	20%
Nursing	15%
Mathematics	12%
Sociology	10%
Criminal Justice	10%
Communications	9%

Figure 1.2 - Top 10 Disciplines Using Online Adjuncts, by Public and Private Institutions

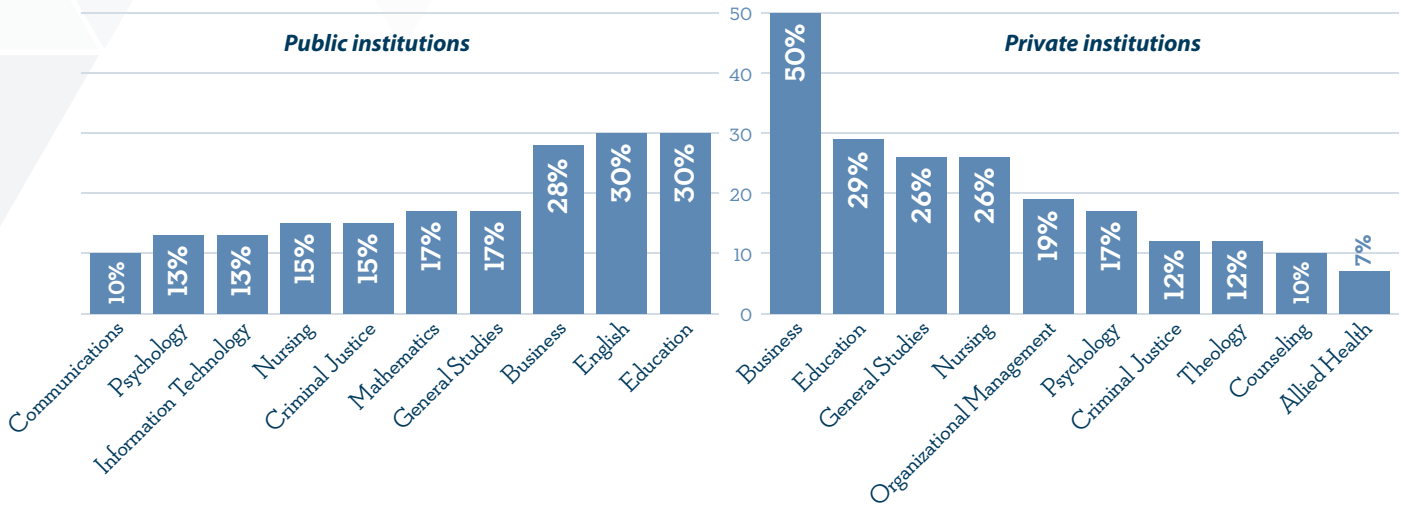
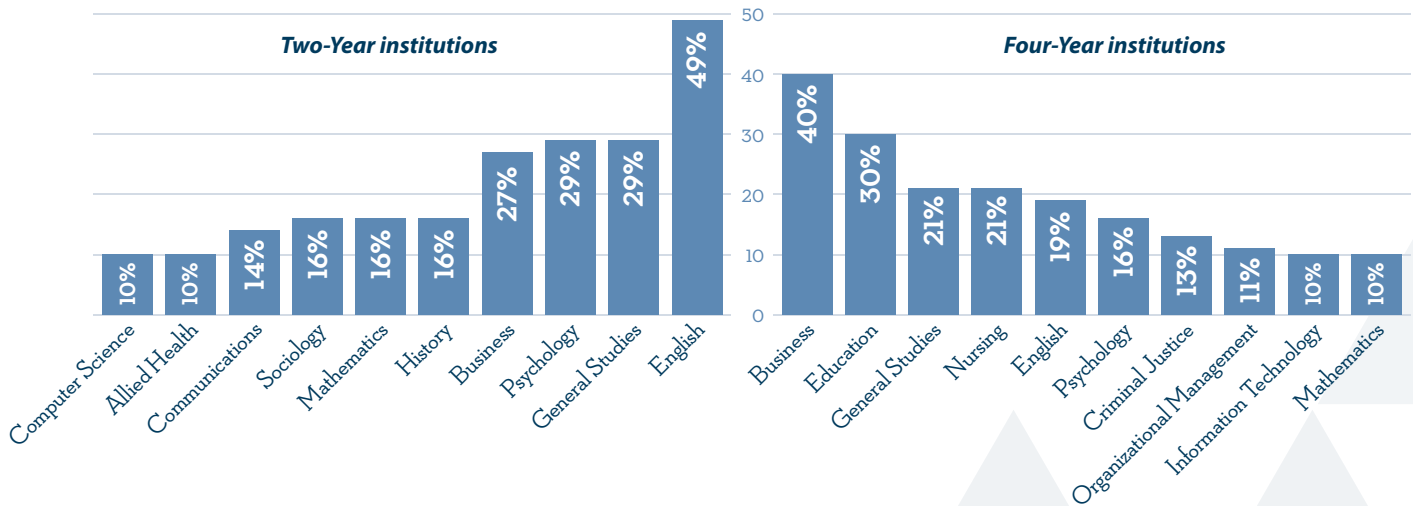


Figure 1.3 - Top 10 Disciplines Using Online Adjuncts, by Two-Year and Four-Year Institutions

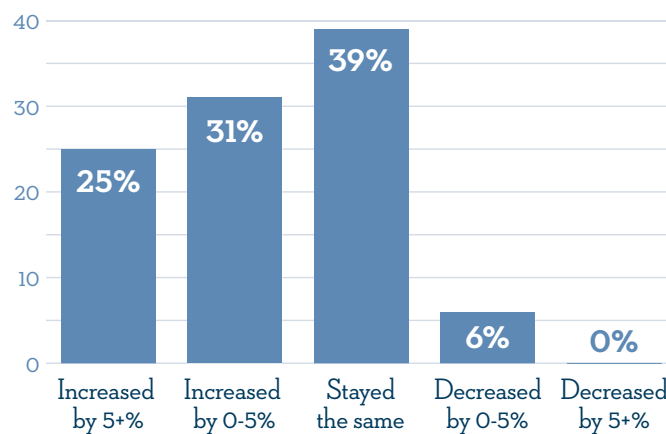


Change in Percentage of Online Adjunct Faculty in the Last Year

The number of online adjunct faculty members is increasing steadily at institutions, even as overall higher education enrollments have been declining for the past four years. During 2015, 56% of institutions report that the percentage of adjunct faculty that teach online has increased at their institution, and 25% report that this number has increased by more than 5%. This growth trend appears universal at all institution types.

Figure 1.4 - Growth in Online Adjunct Faculty Over the Past Year

In the past year, has the percentage of adjunct faculty who taught online only:



Level of Customization Permitted in Courses Taught by Online Adjuncts

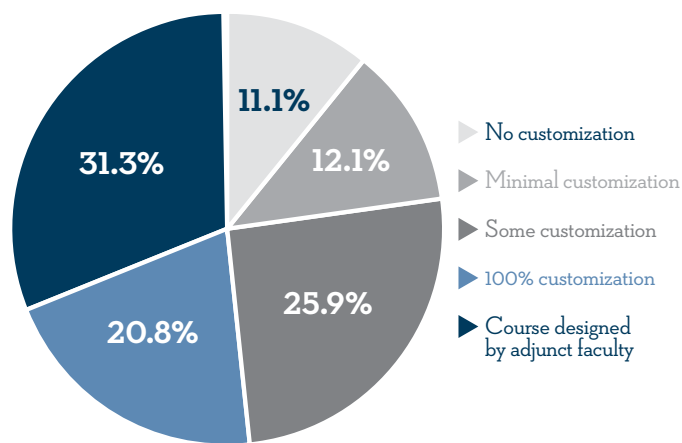
Survey results indicate that adjunct faculty develop the courses they teach nearly one-third of the time, with an additional 20.8% having complete control to add or edit the course content and resources. It appears, then, that more than half the time, adjuncts are able to develop their own content for courses. There is some difference by institution type; private institutions are less likely to allow online adjunct faculty members to have full control over customizing courses.

Although these numbers seem to indicate that online adjunct faculty have a substantial amount of freedom to customize courses, institutions may still have concerns over intellectual property rights and academic freedom rights. Likely, the trend of allowing online adjunct faculty members to develop their own content is a holdover from policies with on-campus faculty members, who often are teaching their own, unique version of a course.

▲ From a community college on the master course: "Many faculty are happy to be handed the complete package. Ninety-nine percent of them change only the dates, and some add study guides for the students."

Figure 1.5 – Percentage of Online Adjunct Faculty by Level of Online Course Customization

Thinking of the online courses you offered over the last 12 months in which adjunct faculty were employed, what percentage were: Note: “Customization” is defined as the ability to alter or add content, assignments, case studies, quizzes, assessments and other instructional resources.



These results show the size of two diametrically opposed philosophies in the utilization of adjunct faculty:

1. **Master Course.** The institution develops the materials, structure and assessments for the courses. Adjunct faculty may add resources or other supplemental materials but cannot change the essential elements of the course. Proponents say this approach offers better quality assurance and more instructional design elements (videos, simulations) in the course and ensures that the online program is scalable. This approach can alienate faculty who would prefer more customization ability. In interviews, an administrator at an institution that uses a full development model said that the institution had moved away from paying faculty to develop courses on a “work-for-hire” basis in which the institution owned the course design. She said her faculty like creating their own courses. An administrator at a master course institution said that its faculty are pleased that they do not have to spend countless hours creating the course and can focus on teaching.
2. **Full Development/Customization.** Adjunct faculty are expected to develop their own course based on a standard syllabus or are given course content that they are allowed to change completely. Some interviewees said that their institutions are limited to this option by faculty or union contracts. The benefits of this approach include providing full academic freedom to the faculty and allowing faculty to conduct the class using methods with which they are comfortable. The drawbacks are that faculty often do not have the instructional design knowledge or support to create the classes, so there can be greater variability in quality. Another drawback may be with the scalability of programs. If a program seeks to enroll a large number of students, it will be more difficult to do so if resources are spent on repeatedly developing the same course.

▲ *A four-year private university on using the master course model: “We want little variation in what the student experiences. Faculty cannot change a course, but in discussions they can recommend additional resources.”*

Approximately a quarter of survey respondents (23%) say that their institutions allow for minimal or no course customization. Over half of respondents expect the adjunct faculty person to design the course or allow for complete customization. The decision on which philosophy to use lays the groundwork for many other policies and relationships between the institution and adjunct faculty person.

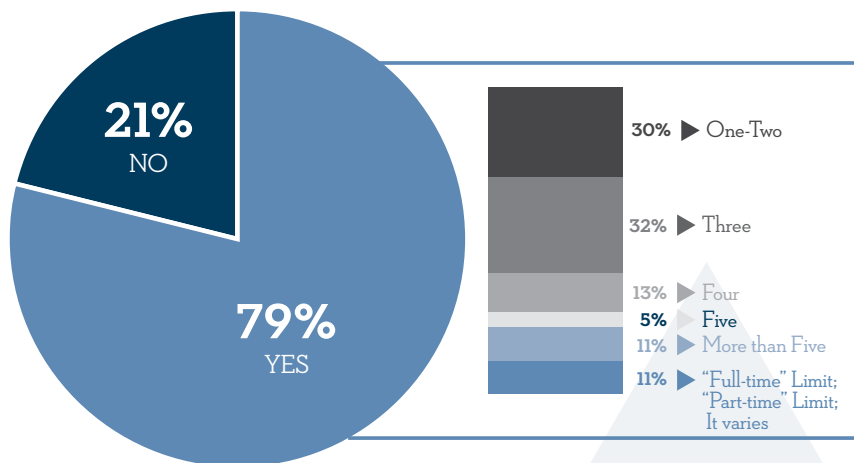
Limits on the Number of Courses Taught by Online Adjuncts

More than three-quarters of institutions have limits on the number of courses that an online adjunct faculty member can teach in a semester. The actual number, however, varies from institution to institution and even from department to department. Sixty percent limit adjunct faculty to teaching only two to three courses per semester. A staggering 29% limit adjunct faculty to four or more courses, which raises concerns over what is considered “full-time” status for these part-time instructors. Perhaps these institutions were not as concerned about having to pay benefits or set higher limits for reasons that we did not uncover.

In interviews, the impact of offering benefits and providing full-time status was clear. Almost every leader interviewed reported that their institution had precise calculations of how many courses an adjunct faculty member could teach before triggering the need to calculate benefits. We found examples where public institutions that are part of a system had to coordinate with other institutions in the system to assure that the total number of courses did not trigger the need to pay benefits to an adjunct faculty member. We also uncovered another example where an institution did not allow faculty to teach more than 14 credit hours per term, to avoid full-time benefits.

Figure 1.6 – Limit on the Number of Courses Online Adjunct Faculty Can Instruct in a Term

Do you have a limit on the number of courses that an individual online adjunct faculty member can teach in a term?



Minimum Enrollment for Online Courses

An additional area of variance can be seen when asking about the number of students needed in an online course before it will be canceled due to low enrollments. Twenty-three percent report needing between one and five students, while 51% require between six and 10 students.

SECTION TWO: *Hiring Practices for Online Adjunct Faculty*

Hiring Responsibilities

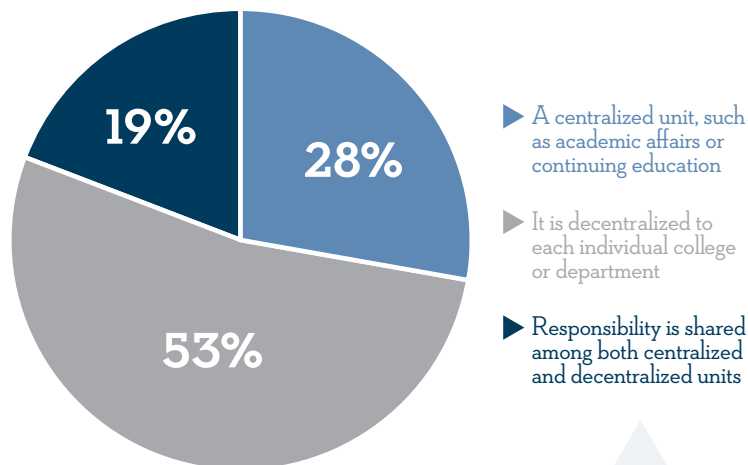
The top reasons for hiring adjunct faculty members appear to be:

1. The flexibility adjunct faculty provide institutions to address enrollment changes term to term
2. Cost-effectiveness

Flexibility is especially relevant for online courses, as institutions can more easily add sections of an online course if necessary, whereas an on-campus course has limitations of physical space and class times. Private institutions are more likely to note the advantage of using practitioner faculty as instructors compared to public four-year institutions.

More than half of responding institutions leave the hiring of online adjunct faculty up to the individual college or department, with just over one-quarter using a centralized unit. Seventy-two percent of public four-year institutions have a decentralized system compared to 47% at private institutions. Forty-three percent of two-year institutions have a decentralized system compared to 58% of four-year institutions. Some institutions were too decentralized in their hiring and support of adjunct faculty to even respond to our survey, we learned as we disseminated the survey and conducted the follow-up interviews.

Figure 2.1 – Responsibility for Hiring Online Adjunct Faculty
Who is chiefly responsible for hiring online adjunct faculty?



The decentralization of hiring may lead to inconsistent hiring practices in terms of advertising and screening of applicants between departments within a single institution. An additional concern is having faculty teach multiple courses for multiple departments in a single term, especially given how carefully part-time and full-time statuses are calculated. If human resources systems are not connected across a large university, the institution could unwittingly be out of compliance in providing full-time benefits.

The Advertising of Open Positions

Advertising for open positions for online adjunct faculty primarily occurs on the institutional website, closely followed by word of mouth. External advertising, such as industry publications or adjunct matching services, does not occur nearly as frequently. With 69% of institutions reporting 0 to 10% turnover in online adjunct faculty, it appears exterior channels are not critical to filling open positions.

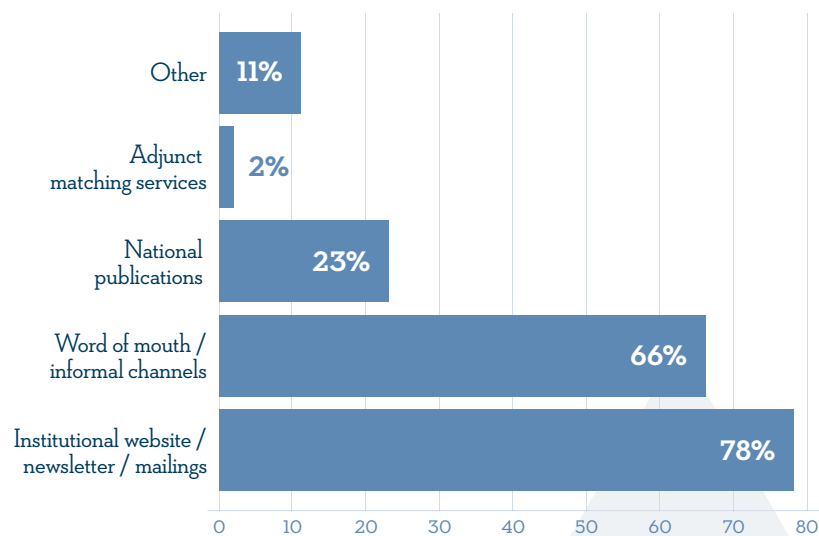
Many interviewees reported that they often have a file of applications on hand and do not have a need to advertise regularly. If the institution has a good reputation in the local community, adjunct faculty want to work there and may see it as an opportunity to get noticed for future full-time openings. Potential faculty often know to keep checking the institutional website for new openings. Institutional personnel also reported making good use of their word-of-mouth networks when openings occur.

Some of the institution respondents who were interviewed said that they tended to stay relatively local in hiring adjunct faculty. One institution is forbidden to use faculty outside the state due to state human resource regulations. For other institutions, because they can fill their needs locally, they do not actively recruit in other states for online adjunct faculty.

One rural institution with programs in specialized health-related disciplines found the need to use *Inside Higher Ed*, Monster.com and professional associations for recruiting. Due to the niche that the institution serves, national advertising for faculty positions was more critical.

Figure 2.2 – Advertising Methods for Open Online Adjunct Faculty Positions

How did you advertise available online adjunct faculty positions (check all that apply)?



Turnover of Online Adjunct Faculty

As noted above, the turnover of online adjuncts is low, with 69% of respondents reporting 10% turnover or less per year.

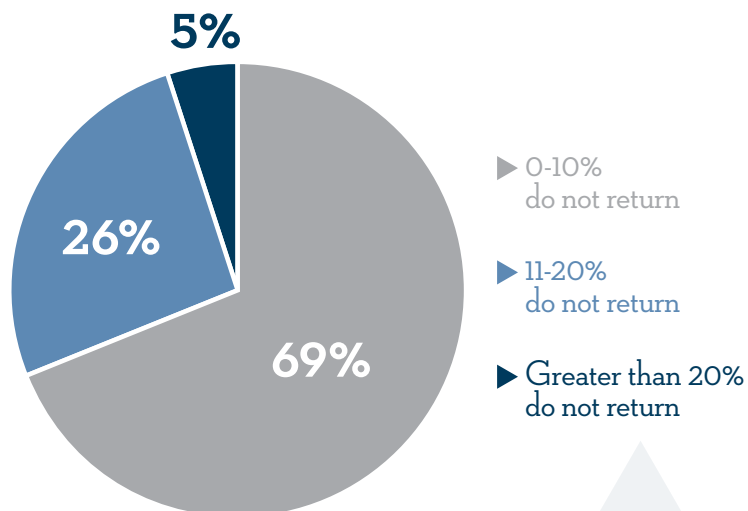
Institutional personnel note that offering training opportunities as well as strong support services can help retain online adjunct faculty term to term. Specifically, one institution reported sending out a monthly email with these opportunities listed as a way to entice online adjunct faculty to continue to serve the institution.

In the interviews, several respondents prided themselves on keeping turnover low. They cited the high costs of turnover in both training and reputation. One institution said that they likened themselves to a nice hotel that serves you so well that you never want to leave.

▲ *From a rural university after discussing its difficulties in finding faculty for face-to-face courses: “We have no issues in finding online faculty. If they don’t have a Ph.D., we don’t consider them because there are so many out there. We can be more selective.”*

Figure 2.3 – Year-to-year Turnover Percentage for Online Adjunct Faculty

What is your best estimate of the year-to-year turnover of online adjunct faculty you employ? Turnover is defined as those who taught last year who are no longer teaching for you this year, regardless of reason.



The Interview and Selection Process

The interview process is rigorous. In addition to checking if their highest credential is valid and calling their references, more than three-quarters of institutions conduct an in-person interview with their online adjunct faculty. Thirty-nine percent conduct a video interview. A little more than 70% conduct a phone interview.

Figure 2.4 – Applicant Screening Techniques Used for Hiring Online Adjunct Faculty

What process(es) do you use to screen applicants (check all that apply)?

Answer	Percent
Verification of highest degree from degree-granting institution	83%
In-person interview	79%
Call references	78%
Telephone interview	72%
Background check	68%
Video interview	39%
Central human resources or other administrative office screens applicants first	35%
Standard set of written questions	31%
Teaching sample, e.g., video of synchronous session or transcript of discussion forum	27%
Writing sample	14%
Assignment as teaching assistant with a veteran instructor	10%
Other, please explain	7%

SECTION THREE: *Responsibilities and Expectations for Online Adjunct Faculty*

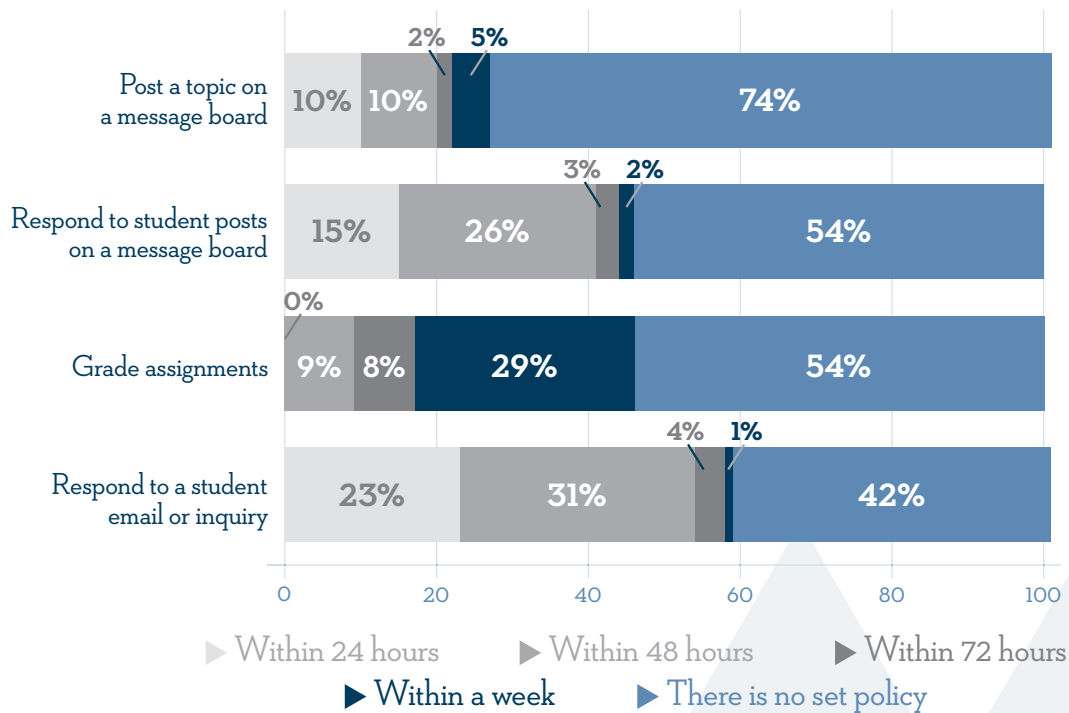
Written Policies on Expectations for Interacting With Students Online

A significant proportion of institutions do not appear to have written policies for how often online adjuncts are expected to interact with online students. Public institutions are significantly more likely to not have set policies for the time needed to respond to a student’s post (67% of four-year public universities do not have a policy, while 38% of private institutions do not have a policy), respond to a student’s email (49% and 29%, respectively) or grade their assignments (64% and 43%, respectively).

In interviews, it was revealed there may be additional expectations of faculty that were not asked about in the survey question. For some institutions, faculty expectations can be set only through faculty contracts or union negotiations. A representative of one institution reported developing “guidelines” and expectations that are used to evaluate faculty performance. Another respondent said that his institution had no policy, but it has expectations that are detailed in the faculty contract, the course proposal, the institution’s faculty handbook and the statewide faculty-staff collective agreement. It is unclear how many survey respondents claimed not to have an “official policy,” but their institutions have hosts of formal or informal expectations of their adjunct faculty.

Figure 3.1 – Written Policies for Course Interactions During Online Instruction

What is your written policy for online adjunct faculty for them to:



Policies on Turnaround Time

In an interview, a leader of a competency-based education (CBE) program said that program pays close attention to the turnaround time for grading tests and assignments. Given the individualized pace of CBE programs, it is important that assessments not hinder students’ progress.

Policies About Office Hours

Seventy-six percent of institutions do not have a set written policy around adjunct faculty holding office hours. Even with only 24% of institutions requiring a set number of office hours, the number of hours required appears to vary by type of college. Although public and private four-year institutions do not significantly differ on requiring that adjunct faculty hold office hours, there is variability in the number of hours required; public institutions requiring office hours tend to require fewer hours than private institutions. Two-year institutions are more likely to require three hours or less of office hours compared to four-year institutions, where 30% note that the set number varies.

In an interview, a leader of one institution said that it does not require office hours at set times, but does require the faculty to provide opportunities for students to ask questions. Faculty have flexibility in how to construct those opportunities.

Evaluating Online Adjunct Faculty Members

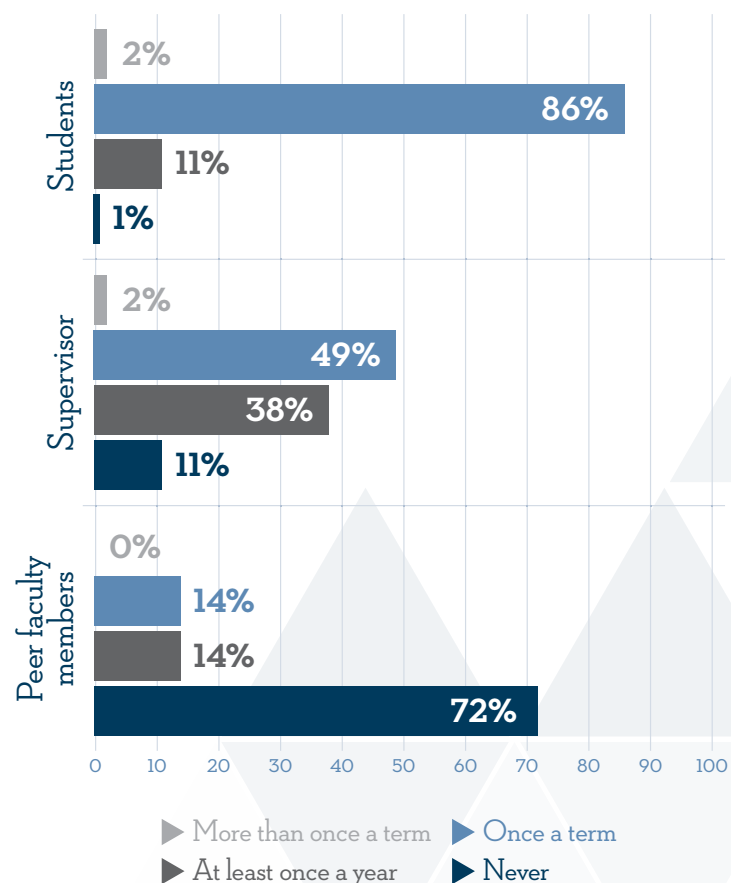
Online adjunct faculty members are being evaluated for their performance even though there are not necessarily written policies or strict guidelines regarding expectations to interact with and respond to students. Evaluations often come from students and supervisors once a term. Reviews by peer faculty members are rarely used with online adjuncts. Private institutions are more likely than public four-year institutions to require that supervisors evaluate online adjunct faculty at least once a term (59 to 41%, respectively). It is concerning that 11% report that faculty are never evaluated by a supervisor, because quality cannot be measured and faculty are not given a chance to improve.

Determining Faculty Satisfaction and Needs

Online adjuncts are surveyed for their satisfaction and training needs, though many institutions admit these surveys are not regularly disseminated: 50% of institutions survey online adjunct faculty on their overall satisfaction with the institution, and 63% survey online adjunct faculty on their training needs.

Figure 3.2 – Policies for Formal Evaluation of Online Adjunct Faculty

How often do the following individuals formally evaluate your online adjunct faculty?



SECTION FOUR: *Training and Support for Online Adjunct Faculty*

Technical Support and Tools for Online Adjunct Faculty

Institutions note the importance of offering robust support services for online adjunct faculty and link it to a positive impact in retaining these faculty members term to term.

Overall, technical support appears widely available at the responding institutions, with 35% offering it for faculty who teach online on a 24/7 basis and an additional 35% offering it on a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule with some evenings and weekends included. Private institutions lead the way in offering support, with 45% indicating they offer 24/7 support compared to 27% of four-year public institutions. This level of technical support, as well as instructional design support, is vital given the large percentage of online adjunct faculty who are customizing or developing their courses each term.

More than three-quarters of institutions offer online adjunct faculty tools to help with student identity issues as well as instructional design support. Although not significantly higher, it does appear that four-year institutions are slightly more likely to offer instructional design support compared to their two-year counterparts.

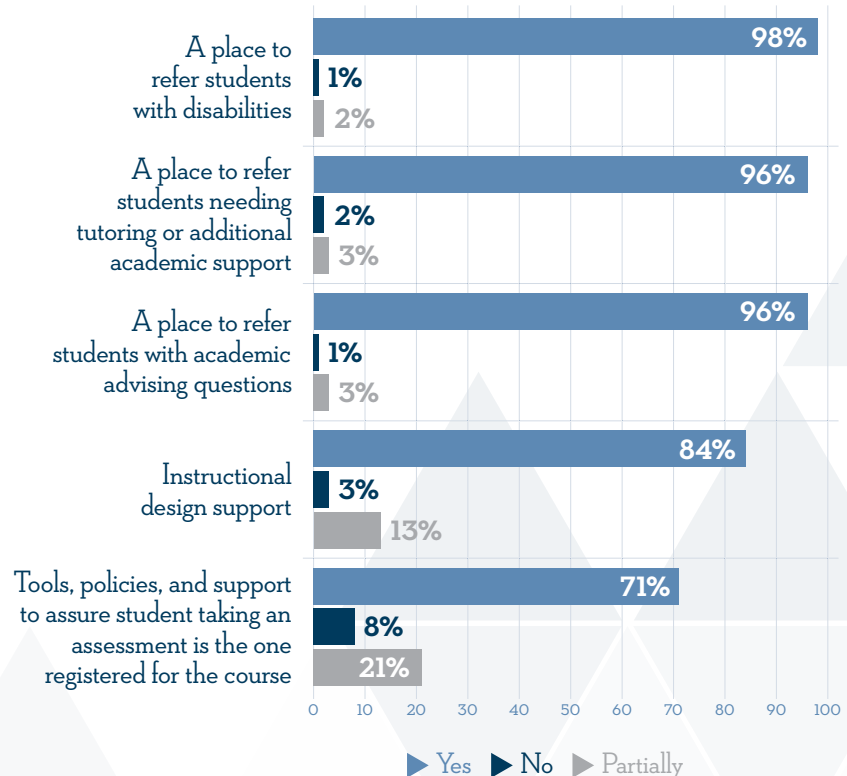
Support services that faculty can refer students to for assistance are very common; tutoring, disability and academic advising services are nearly universally offered at all institution types.

One surprising data point is that only 71% of institutions have tools, policies and support to ensure that the student taking an assessment is the one registered for the course. To help curb cheating in tests and assignments, having such safeguards in place has been required since 2011 by the Department of Education for institutions offering federal financial aid. Perhaps these institutions have met the minimal federal requirements, but have not provided additional assistance to curb cheating. Institutions are expected to ensure they are in compliance with federal, state, and accrediting policies and regulations.

▲ *From a four-year public university: "Have a robust support system for faculty. It is easier to retain a faculty member than it is to get a new one."*

Figure 4.1 – Available Support Services for Online Adjunct Faculty

Which of the following support services are available to support online adjunct faculty?



Training and Professional Development for Online Adjunct Faculty

The majority of institutions require adjunct faculty to participate in some training prior to teaching their first classes at the institution. Key to interpreting this question may be the word “require.” Due to contract restrictions or local culture, requiring training might not be possible. At those places, training may be highly recommended and often attended, but cannot be “required.” We cannot say for sure.

If we focus on what is required, we observe that there are potential holes in the preparation of adjunct faculty to teach online:

1. **Orientation to academic and student policies. Sixty-two percent of respondents required training on these policies**, indicating that more than one-third do not provide clarity on these matters. Unless faculty obtain this information through other means, there is the possibility of a disconnect on how to respond in policy matters.
2. **Orientation to the institution’s support services. Sixty-one percent required training on these services.**
3. **Training on the institution’s technologies. Forty-seven percent require self-paced training and 31% require instructor-led training.** Although this indicates that 78% of institutions require training on technology, which does not take into account any overlap between self-paced and instructor-led training, the number is likely lower, with many institutions offering both options.
4. **Training on effective online teaching methods. Thirty-five percent require instructor-led training and 26% require self-paced training.** Again, although this seems to indicate that 61% of all institutions require training, it does not take into account any overlap, and the real number is likely lower. Given the number of institutions indicating that they expect faculty to develop or fully customize their courses, these percentages are surprisingly low.
5. **None. Although the 9% response of “none” seems small, it is disconcerting.** This implies that about one out of 11 institutions do not require any essential training for online faculty. We did not probe for the reason. If they recruit only faculty who are already experienced, that might work, but they would still be unfamiliar with institutional policies.

Two individuals (from different institutions) said that they require all faculty teaching the same course to meet prior to the start of the term. At that meeting, they discuss the syllabus, expectations for the course, assessments, other details for teaching the course and how the course fits into the overall academic program. The institutional leaders felt that this meeting created a joint understanding of expectations and support systems. Experienced faculty helped answer questions of those new to the course. For one institution, the faculty lived locally and came to campus for a face-to-face meeting. Another institution employs a nationally dispersed faculty and uses online meetings. Both emphasized the community-building benefits of the meeting and encourage the faculty to maintain contact with one another throughout the term.

▲ *From a four-year private university:
“Anyone who teaches for us goes through our three-week training. If they don’t want to do so, we’re not interested in them.”*

Figure 4.2 – Required Activities Prior to Adjuncts Instructing Their First Online Class

Which of the following describe the activities that you require of online faculty prior to their teaching their first online class for your institution (choose all that apply)?

Answer	Percent
Orientation to the institution's academic and student policies for online students	62%
Orientation to the institution's support services (technology support, tutoring, etc.) for online students	61%
Self-paced training on the institution's technologies (LMS, Web resources) used in online courses	47%
Instructor-led class on the institution's technologies (LMS, Web resources) used in online courses	31%
Self-paced training on effective online teaching methods	26%
Instructor-led training on effective online teaching methods	35%
Other	11%
None	9%

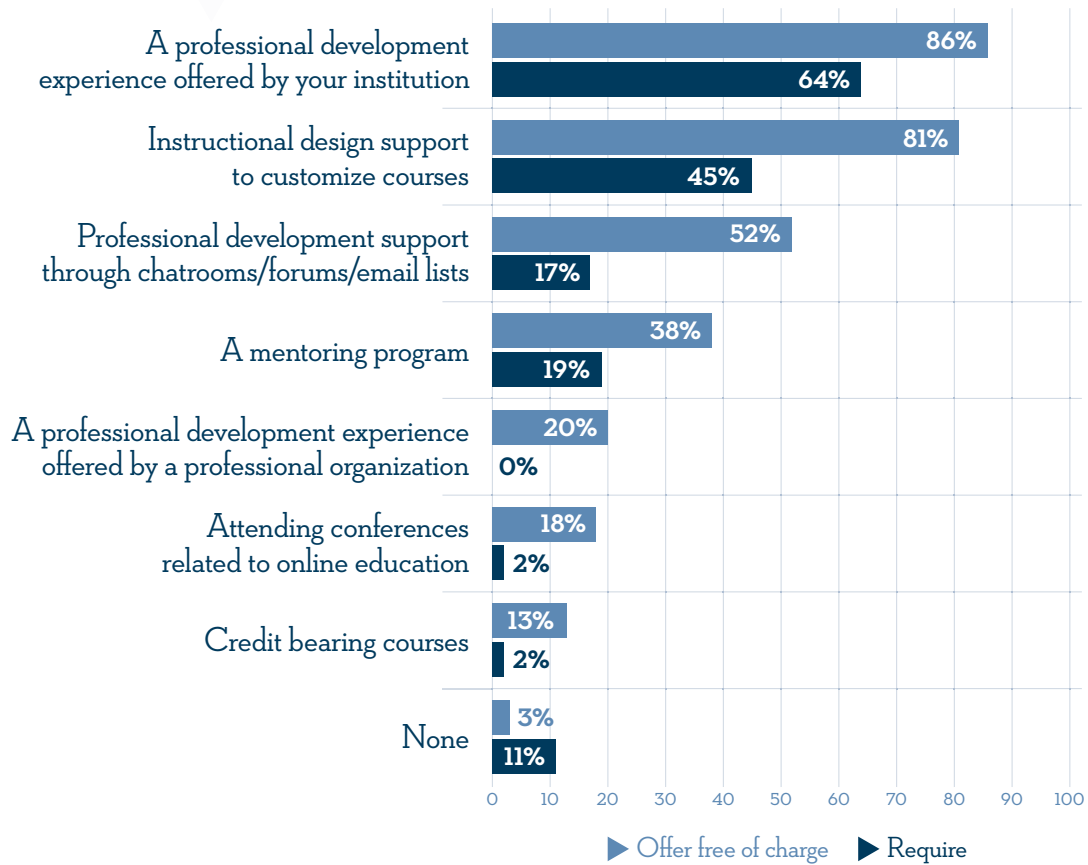
In the interviews, several institutions raised the issue of maintaining ongoing contact with the adjunct faculty. One institution has a virtual room in which faculty could ask questions of each other, share expertise and generally support one another. Another institution, which uses the master course model (in which no customization is allowed), offers an “Edit Log” for faculty to enter suggestions for improvements or additions to the course. The faculty enjoy having the ability to suggest improvements as issues come up while teaching the course. Finally, one institution said that it was cited by its accrediting agency for not following up with adjunct faculty after the initial training and was working to remedy that situation.

When asked about additional ways professional development is offered at their institutions, survey respondents reported that online adjunct faculty receive the same opportunities as on-campus and full-time faculty in terms of professional development. Some institutions offer a free day of professional development. Often these resources are offered on campus with recordings or live virtual sessions available to those who are remote from the campus.

Professional development opportunities, both required and offered free of charge, primarily are offered by the institution itself and do not often require outside organizations. A significant minority of institutions offer — but do not require — channels such as mentoring and online chat services to help deliver professional development opportunities.

Figure 4.3 – Professional Development Activities Offered to Online Adjunct Faculty

What professional development activities do you offer your online adjuncts free of charge, and which activities do you require your adjunct faculty attend?



Note: Respondents could select all choices that applied to their institution.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this survey, and the follow-up interviews we conducted with higher education administrators and leaders, have led us to a number of conclusions about this very important portion of higher education instructors. Online adjunct faculty have been vital to the growth of online education at many institutions, yet many in higher education still struggle with how to orient and support this group. We hope these conclusions provide a baseline of understanding about online adjunct faculty in the United States.

We understand that the responses and practices will vary greatly from institution to institution. A fully online institution will differ from an institution that offers only a handful of online courses. Our goal in creating recommendations is to try to learn from the many practices currently in existence. These recommendations are intended for use by institutional personnel to improve their current practices or avoid unfortunate pitfalls. Readers can determine what might work in their own setting.

Conclusions

First, let us take a look at what conclusions institutions can draw from the data.

1. ***Adjunct faculty serve a significant number of students.*** Institutions rely on adjunct faculty to teach a large percentage of their courses, due to both cost constraints and the need for flexibility. With increased importance, increased attention to the support of faculty who are part-time and may be dispersed is needed.
2. ***There are several advantages associated with the use of online adjunct faculty.*** Adjunct faculty enable flexibility in changing class loads and scheduling classes. Leaders report that online adjuncts are a vital part of their faculty in the load that they carry and can be very open to feedback and training. When they need to do so, institutional leaders have access to a broader pool of candidates because they aren't restricted to people who live locally.
3. ***Employment for online instruction is stable.*** There is low turnover, with many adjuncts teaching term after term for the same institution. Hiring appears to be very local for online adjunct faculty. Leaders noted the strength of their reputation in attracting local adjuncts. This stability helps ensure consistency of teaching quality for students, lowers the costs of recruiting and onboarding new faculty, and helps cement an institution's reputation.
4. ***The demand for adjuncts online continues to grow.*** The percentage of online courses taught by adjuncts is growing, and it is relatively easy for leaders to find new adjunct faculty because there is a plentiful supply.
5. ***Recruiting is often local.*** Rather than extensive search processes, leaders often rely on word-of-mouth and website advertising to identify new candidates. Some leaders reported having backlogs of resumes, as adjunct work is seen as a possible path to full-time employment. Institutions may recruit to a geographically larger region if they have programs in highly specialized fields, are rural institutions without a large local population, or maintain a regional or national footprint in recruiting students.

6. ***There is great variance between institutions in their interactions with online adjunct faculty.*** The wide variety in the expectations for online adjuncts, development opportunities, supervision, ongoing engagement and interaction, and employment policies demonstrates that industry standards have not yet emerged in many of these areas.
7. ***Written policies for interactions with students do not exist at many institutions.*** Approximately half of the institutions we surveyed do not have written requirements regarding adjunct faculty members' responsiveness to student communication and grading. Some answered that they did not have policies but had expectations of faculty that they could not require of them. Faculty need to be clear on the terms of their employment and parameters regarding quality feedback to students. This situation should be remedied, as it can lead to confusion and inconsistency in student experiences across courses.
8. ***Institutions tend to use highly different philosophies for course design by online adjunct faculty.*** Those using master courses allow little or no customization of courses. Those institutions using the full development/customized model expect faculty to create their own courses or allow them to fully customize whatever course materials are supplied by the institution. Institutions report benefits to these models. This choice colors many of the policies and support services that are required to successfully engage online adjunct faculty.
9. ***Pedagogical training is limited at many institutions.*** The majority of institutions provide training on how to use the learning management system (LMS) and information on where to refer students. A minority of institutions provide training on effective online pedagogy. When training is provided, it is typically in a workshop format with remote faculty having access to recordings of the live events.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the survey, as well as interviews with nearly a dozen higher education administrators and leaders, we have developed a checklist of best practices for those institutions interested in making the best use of adjunct faculty for online courses. We understand that each institution will have its own unique situations and therefore these recommendations may not be universally applicable, but we hope the spirit of the recommendations will help guide each institution in its recruiting and utilization of this important segment of higher education.

1. ***Choose a model for course design and fully develop it.*** The choice between a master course model (little or no customization allowed), the full development/customization model (adjunct faculty have nearly full control of content) or something in between is highly dependent on local culture, contracts, policy and leadership. Institutional leaders need to examine their options and select a clear path based upon their local environment. Once selected, implement the training, policies and support services necessary to be successful with that model. To achieve this goal might mean changing institutional policies and contracts. More than half of those surveyed use the full development/customization model. Contracts or policies should not leave institutions unable to require evidence that adjunct faculty members know how to teach online, what student support mechanisms are in place and that they must meet acceptable timelines in student feedback. Once the institution has those abilities, the next step to quality instruction is for it to properly invest in the training, orientations, ongoing communications and services necessary to support the adjunct faculty.
2. ***Set clear expectations for faculty engagement with students.*** The Online College Students 2015 (2015) survey found that one in five online college students cite “inconsistent/poor contact and communication with instructors” as an area of concern they had with online education. Faculty should know how frequently and in what ways they are expected to engage with students, whether it’s by holding formal office hours, committing to responding to emails within a certain timeframe or other practices mandated by the institution. Clearly outlining these expectations will help faculty know the standard to which they are held and ensure a better experience for students.
3. ***Use best practices to select new adjunct faculty, and then provide comprehensive training about the student services provided and online pedagogy in the onboarding process.*** Best practices for faculty selection include background checks, degree verification, standard interview questions about online teaching behavior, samples of course design and teaching samples. Orientation should include directions on how to use services such as libraries, writing centers and student advising. The onboarding process should require initial training about how to use the LMS and other technology used in the institution’s online classes as well as a course on online pedagogy.

4. ***Provide an ongoing system of professional development, training and performance review.*** Institutions should provide ongoing professional development opportunities throughout the year on online pedagogy and course development to ensure established faculty are aware of the latest theories and trends in online education. Institutions note that offering training opportunities as well as strong support services can help retain online adjunct faculty term to term. Faculty should have a method to collaborate and exchange ideas with their peers on online learning best practices. Performance reviews can serve as times where open dialog and conversations can take place and ensure faculty are being provided the training and professional development they require.
5. ***Systematically include adjunct faculty in the life and governance system of the college or university.*** This begins with providing access and encouraging participation by adjunct faculty in department meetings, in-service activities and faculty gatherings. Provision for electronic participation by remote individuals should be standard procedure. It extends to including adjunct faculty members on committees, leading in-service workshops and programs, designing courses, and mentoring junior adjunct faculty members. One interviewee noted that in a recent attempt to organize adjunct faculty for collective bargaining, those who taught on campus supported it, while those who taught online did not, because the online adjunct faculty were given ample opportunity to participate in development activities, expected to perform at a high level, and were significantly involved in the academic life of the unit. This support and engagement helps instill a sense of loyalty and, given the importance of word-of-mouth connections when recruiting new online faculty, can reap dividends for years to come.
6. ***Understand and address internal and external policies that have an impact on your online adjunct faculty.*** Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse. Online programs are required to keep abreast of an admittedly confusing array of institutional, state, accrediting, and federal regulations and policies. Examples include hiring restrictions by geographic region, ownership of intellectual property rights, what content can be customized, assuring that there is faculty-student interactivity within a course, the number of course hours taught before crossing the full-time threshold, tracking the last day of attendance and the requirements for combating academic cheating. Once understood, many of these requirements need to be communicated to faculty. Decentralized colleges face additional challenges. If oversight is not centralized, there at least needs to be some cooperation for institution-wide requirements, such as state authorization, full-time benefits for adjunct faculty or hiring of faculty dismissed with cause by another unit.

In Conclusion

For some of these findings, there is a certain irony to the concerns of some institutional leaders and faculty that online instruction is not of the same quality as its face-to-face counterparts. In the survey, we uncovered many instances in which online faculty do not receive training on how to teach online, policies on faculty expectations are nonexistent, faculty are expected to create their own online courses and the support to do so is inadequate. It is not surprising that students struggle if faculty members are not well-supported.

On the other hand, we heard from many institutions whose responses confirm that they are performing each of these tasks very well. In interviewing leaders from some of those institutions, they were very gracious in giving us examples of their successful practices. How did those institutions get there? The leadership understood the value of investing in training and support services for adjunct faculty.

Online education can be every bit as good as face-to-face education. If institutions continue to use adjunct faculty in large proportions, then the proper tools to recruit, orient and support these faculty are needed.

METHODOLOGY

This survey was designed jointly between The Learning House, Inc. and WCET (WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies) in the spring of 2015. The instrument was also reviewed by several institutional members of WCET before being launched to more than 3,000 colleges and universities across the United States on July 6, 2015. Reminders were sent each week until the survey closed on August 7, 2015. The survey saw a response from 202 institutions, with 142 completing the assessment fully, for a 6.6% response rate and a plus or minus 6.8% margin of error at a 95% confidence level. When reviewing the survey findings, a good rule of thumb would be that a gap of at least 13.5 percentage points is needed for comparisons to be considered statistically significant.

Our survey is equally distributed between two-year schools, four-year private schools and four-year public schools. Thirty-six percent have fewer than 500 full-time equivalent students (FTEs) online, and 51% have over 1,000 FTEs online. Sixty-one percent have fewer than 5,000 students who are not studying online.

Recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data show 41.4% of U.S. institutions are two-year, 30.9% are four-year private, 13.6% are four-year public and 14.1% are four-year for-profit. Our survey had almost no responses from for-profit institutions, and as a result, we had a larger proportion of both four-year private and public institutions and a slightly lower response from two-year institutions.

The survey also asked for leaders at institutions who were willing to provide their contact information for a follow-up interview about some of the topics discussed in the survey. From this pool, we conducted eight in-depth interviews with higher education leaders about their recruiting and utilization of online adjunct faculty as well as the policies that support and govern them.

PARTNERS

WCET (WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies) is the leader in the practice & policy of technology enhanced learning in higher education. WCET is a national, member-driven, non-profit which brings together colleges and universities, higher education organizations and companies to collectively improve the quality and reach of e-learning programs. WCET has a long and successful history in fostering collaborative projects, information sharing, and networking among some of the country's most established and innovative postsecondary institutions.

The Learning House, Inc. through its proprietary cloud-based technology platform helps colleges and universities create, manage and grow high-quality online degree programs and courses. Partnering with more than 75 schools, Learning House enables institutions to efficiently and affordably achieve their online education goals. Services include product development and market research, marketing and lead generation, enrollment management, student retention, curriculum development and management, faculty training and professional development, learning management systems and 24/7 technical support.

Authors:

Andrew J. Magda is the Manager of Market Research of The Learning House, Inc. He leads in the development of custom and large-scale market research studies and assists partner institutions with their research needs. Prior to Learning House, Andrew was a senior analyst at Eduventures and a project manager at the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut.

Russell Poulin organizes WCET's national policy and research activities, edits WCET's *Frontiers* blog, coordinates WCET's research efforts, and works on e-learning consortia issues. He represented distance education in the U.S. Department of Education's 2014 Negotiated Rulemaking process. Previously, he coordinated distance education activities for the North Dakota University System.

Dr. David L. Clinefelter is Chief Academic Officer of The Learning House, Inc. Prior to joining Learning House, he served as Chief Academic Officer of for-profit, online universities Walden and Kaplan, and as President of Graceland University, an early innovator in online education.

For additional information, contact:

WCET

Cali Morrison

Communications Manager

(303) 541-0234

cmorrison@wiche.edu

www.wcet.wiche.edu

The Learning House, Inc.

Katie Savinon

Corporate Marketing Manager

(502) 815-0467

ksavinon@learninghouse.com

www.learninghouse.com

APPENDIX: *Survey Results*

Thinking of the courses you offered over the last 12 months using adjunct faculty, what is your best estimate of the percentage of courses that were:

Answer	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Online only courses	30.64	25.76
On-campus only courses	57.38	27.81
Blended (some face-to-face time replaced with online activities) courses	12.05	14.34

Thinking of the online courses you offered over the last 12 months in which adjunct faculty were employed, what percentage were:

Answer	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Online courses allowing for no customization	11.05	26.37
Online courses allowing for minimal customization	12.09	25.72
Online courses allowing for some customization	25.87	37.01
Online courses allowing for 100% customization	20.77	34.37
Course design is left to the adjunct faculty person to design	31.32	41.38

Thinking of the adjunct faculty you employed over the last 12 months, what percentage were:

Answer	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Adjunct faculty who taught online only	30.03	25.62
Adjunct faculty who taught on-campus only	46.82	30.27
Adjunct faculty who taught both online and on campus	23.31	22.56

In the past year, has the percentage of adjunct faculty who taught online only:

Answer	Percent
Increased by 5+%	25%
Increased by 0-5%	31%
Stayed the same	39%
Decreased by 0-5%	6%
Decreased by 5+%	0%

What are the top three disciplines that use online adjuncts? Select three disciplines from below.

Discipline	Percent of All Institutions
Business	35%
English	29%
General Studies	24%
Education	22%
Psychology	20%
Nursing	15%
Mathematics	12%
Sociology	10%
Criminal Justice	10%
Communications	9%

What is your written policy for online adjunct faculty for them to:

Question	Within 24 hours	Within 48 hours	Within 72 hours	Within a week	There is no set policy
Post a topic on a message board	10%	10%	2%	5%	74%
Respond to student posts on a message board	15%	26%	3%	2%	54%
Respond to a student email or inquiry	23%	31%	4%	1%	42%
Grade assignments	0%	9%	8%	29%	54%

Is there a written policy for online adjuncts to hold online office hours?

Answer	Percent
No	76%
Yes	24%

If yes, how many hours per week?

Answer	Percent
One hour	23%
Two hours	19%
Three hours	29%
More than three hours	7%
It depends	23%

Do you have a limit on the number of courses that an individual online adjunct faculty member can teach in a term?

Answer	Percent
No	21%
Yes, please specify	79%

If yes, how many?

Answer	Percent
One	1%
Two	29%
Three	32%
Four	13%
Five	5%
More than five	11%
"Full-time" limit	3%
"Part-time" limit	4%
It varies	4%

How often do the following individuals formally evaluate your online adjunct faculty?

Question	More than once a term	Once a term	At least once a year	Never
Students	2%	86%	11%	1%
Supervisor	2%	49%	38%	11%
Peer faculty members	0%	14%	14%	72%

Which statement below best describes the availability of technical support services for your online faculty?

Note: Times stated apply to your local time zone. Technical support for adjunct faculty is available:

Answer	Percent
9-5, weekdays only	20%
9-5 weekdays and some evenings	10%
9-5 weekdays, some evenings and weekends	35%
24/7	35%

Which of the following support services are available to support online adjunct faculty?

Question	Yes	No	Partially
Instructional design support	84%	3%	13%
Tools, policies and support to assure student taking an assessment is the one registered for the course	71%	8%	21%
A place to refer students with disabilities	98%	1%	2%
A place to refer students needing tutoring or additional academic support	96%	2%	3%
A place to refer students with academic advising questions	96%	1%	3%

Which of the following describe the activities that you require of online faculty prior to their teaching their first online class for your institution (choose all that apply)?

Answer	Percent
Orientation to the institution's academic and student policies for online students	62%
Orientation to the institution's support services (technology support, tutoring, etc.) for online students	61%
Self-paced training on the institution's technologies (LMS, Web resources) used in online courses	47%
Instructor-led class on the institution's technologies	31%
Self-paced training on effective online teaching methods	26%
Instructor-led training on effective online teaching methods	35%
Other, please specify	11%
None	9%

What professional development activities do you offer your online adjuncts free of charge and which activities do you require your adjunct faculty attend?

Answer	Offer free of charge	Require
A professional development experience offered by your institution	86%	64%
A professional development experience offered by a professional organization	20%	0%
Professional development support through chatrooms, forums or email lists	52%	17%
Credit-bearing courses	13%	2%
Attending conferences related to online education	18%	2%
A mentoring program	38%	19%
Instructional design support to customize courses	81%	45%
None	3%	11%

Do you survey your adjunct faculty for their overall satisfaction at your institution?

Answer	Percent
Yes, at regular intervals	21%
Yes, not at regular intervals	29%
No	35%
Not sure	15%

Do you survey your adjunct faculty on their training and development needs?

Answer	Percent
Yes, at regular intervals	21%
Yes, not at regular intervals	42%
No	29%
Not sure	8%

Who is chiefly responsible for hiring online adjunct faculty?

Answer	Percent
A centralized unit, such as academic affairs or continuing education	28%
It is decentralized to each individual college or department	53%
Responsibility is shared among both centralized and decentralized units	19%

How did you advertise available online adjunct faculty positions (check all that apply)?

Answer	Percent
Institutional website, newsletter or mailings	78%
National publications (Inside Higher Ed, Chronicle of Higher Education)	23%
Adjunct matching services	2%
Word of mouth or informal channels	66%
Other, please explain	11%

Please rank the following reasons why you hire adjunct faculty in your online courses? Note: Respondents ordered their choices with 1 being their top reason for hiring adjunct faculty.

Statistic	It is a cost-effective option	We are unable to fill full-time faculty positions	We improve the quality of education by employing practitioners who are working in the field of study	For flexibility in addressing variations in enrollment from term to term	To fill temporary faculty vacancies	Other, please specify
Mean	2.44	3.57	2.98	2.38	3.89	5.73
Standard Deviation	1.37	1.40	1.49	1.13	1.18	1.05

What process(es) do you use to screen applicants (check all that apply)?

Answer	Percent
Call references	78%
Telephone interview	72%
Video interview	39%
In-person interview	79%
Standard set of written questions	31%
Writing sample	14%
Teaching sample, e.g., video of synchronous session or transcript of discussion forum	27%
Assignment as teaching assistant with a veteran instructor	10%
Background check	68%
Verification of highest degree from degree-granting institution	83%
Central human resources or other administrative office screens applicants first	35%
Other, please explain	7%

What is your best estimate of the year-to-year turnover of online adjunct faculty you employ? Turnover is defined as those who taught last year who are no longer teaching for you this year, regardless of reason.

Answer	Percent
0-10% do not return	69%
11-20% do not return	26%
21-30% do not return	5%
31-40% do not return	0%
41-50% do not return	0%
More than 50% do not return	0%

Is your institution:

Answer	Percent
A two-year public	33%
A four-year public	34%
A private, nonprofit	31%
A for-profit	1%

How large is your institution in terms of online enrollments?

Answer	Percent
Less than 500 FTE enrollments	36%
500 to 1,000 FTE enrollments	14%
1,001 to 3,000 FTE enrollments	28%
3,001 to 5,000 FTE enrollments	9%
More than 5,000 FTE enrollments	12%

REFERENCES

- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2015). *Grade level: Tracking online learning in the United States*. Retrieved from Babson Survey Research Group website: <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/gradelevel.pdf>
- Clausen, J., & Swidler, E. (2013). Academic freedom from below: Toward an adjunct-centered struggle. *AAUP Journal of Academic Freedom*, 4. Retrieved from <http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/files/JAF/2013%20JAF/ClausenSwidler.pdf>
- Clinefelter, D. L., & Aslanian, C. B. (2015). *Online college students 2015: Comprehensive data on demands and preferences*. Louisville, KY: The Learning House, Inc.
- Coalition on the Academic Workforce. (2012). *A portrait of part-time faculty members*. Retrieved from http://www.academicworkforce.org/CAW_portrait_2012.pdf
- National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2015). *Current term enrollment report – spring 2015*. Retrieved from <http://nscresearchcenter.org/currenttermenrollmentestimate-spring2015/>
- WCET. (2015). *Busting the Myth: Distance Education Enrollment Infographic* [Infographic]. Retrieved from <http://wcet.wiche.edu/learn/busting-the-myth-distance-education>

Technical Notes

All percentages in this report have been rounded; therefore, the total percent figure in a table may not add up to exactly 100. Further, if the total percentage is substantially more than 100, it is because the question allowed respondents to choose more than one option.

111015