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Adjunct Faculty: Professional, Competent, Loyal, and Committed: Our Hidden Resource

William J. Husson

When we look around our Jesuit academic world, we oftentimes overlook one of our most valuable resources, our adjunct faculty. At Regis University in Denver the adjunct faculty serve a critical role in the adult learning programs. They are also some of our most loyal and committed professional companions.

What is it that brings faculty members together on a sunny Saturday morning to work for several hours on designing new curriculum? What is it that entices a faculty member to set aside her lunch to meet with a student regarding his problems with Information System Theory. What is that brings hundreds of faculty out to teach until 10 p.m. in the evening, even though most will have to be at their professional jobs by 7:30 a.m. the next morning? It is a unique sense of loyalty and a commitment to the mission and purpose of the university.

We are not talking about those committed faculty who have dedicated their lives to teaching, research, and service. We are talking about the growing cohort of adjunct faculty who labor at their primary professions during the day and commit themselves to teaching adults in the evenings and on weekends. At Regis University's School for Professional Studies (the "School") in Denver, Colorado over 700 working professionals "facilitate" adult degree and certificate programs. These faculty are not the part timers that many of us have been familiar with in past years -- those who fill in when sabbaticals or increased enrollments require short time, part time helpers. This cohort of working professionals is carefully chosen, academically competent, institutionally supported, and thoroughly committed to the mission of the university.

In fact, at Regis we have coined a new term to describe this committed group of professionals. The term Affiliate Faculty better describes our adjunct faculty since they have become the lifeblood of our adult studies divisions and rightly see themselves as partners in developing the mission of the university. However, I am confident that this article will describe countless adjunct faculty serving in Jesuit universities across America as well.

In many ways this group of faculty have developed an intense loyalty to the university that is remarkable. Unlike many of their full time faculty counterparts, these affiliate faculty are more committed to institutional loyalty because their career path is not associated with their teaching. They teach for the love of teaching and the connection to a rich learning community for which they can be contributors.

The process of acculturation begins with a formal assessment process. Since the adult programs division was established some twenty-five years ago, all faculty have been required to successfully complete the faculty assessment.

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These particular Regis programs are designed for older adult learners and are offered in non-traditional, accelerated (time-compressed) formats in evenings and on weekends. The assessment is designed to identify faculty whose skills match the special needs of older adult students. The assessment process is designed using the model developed by AT&T after the Second World War. This model employs the use of multiple people in deciding who should be hired, rather than using a single hiring agent.

Potential faculty forward their resumés to the university for review by the respective programs within the School for Professional Studies (Graduate, Undergraduate, and Teacher Education divisions). The review by senior faculty is focused on determining which candidates bring both solid academic credentials and a diverse professional experiential background. The design of the adult programs at Regis University fosters the use of working professionals who have appropriate academic credentials and institutional fit. Therefore, part time faculty who earn their livelihood by teaching at a number of colleges are discouraged from applying. These so called "freeway faculty" do not fit the model of people working in professional settings and able to mentor adult students by combining both relevant theory and current applied knowledge in the workplace.

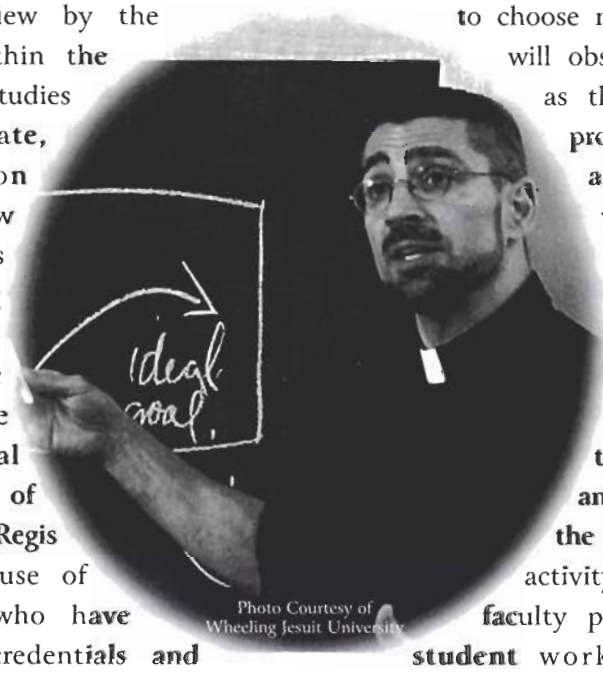


Photo Courtesy of Wheeling Jesuit University

Approved candidates are invited to attend a daylong assessment process, held most often on a Saturday. They are given an overview of what to expect and asked to prepare a sample short presentation to be given to assessors and candidates as an example of their teaching style. They are also asked to prepare a statement of their educational philosophy and a personal response to our institutional mission to be shared during the day. Usually ten to fifteen candidates are invited and five to eight assessors attend in addition to program staff and administrators.

The assessors are current faculty (full-time and affiliate) who have volunteered to help select future faculty for the School. The decisions on who will be selected are left entirely to the faculty assessors, thus allowing the faculty collectively to choose new faculty. Each assessor will observe different individuals as they proceed through the process. The day begins with a group breakfast and ends with a late lunch for the potential faculty members. Four basic exercises make up the day: 1) an interview by a faculty member of the same discipline to determine the validity of the credentials and knowledge depth within the discipline, 2) an in-basket activity allowing the potential faculty person to review written student work and make written comments, 3) a demonstration teaching exercise to determine the candidate's skills in teaching, and 4) a leaderless group exercise where the candidates are asked to meet in a group context and reach consensus in prioritizing a list of difficult contrasting items. When the candidates have left, the assessors spend the remainder of the afternoon discussing the relative merits of each of the candidates. Multiple faculty assessors have observed each candidate in each exercise, and all participate in creating a composite profile. Decisions are often difficult and will most often be framed on credentials,

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facilitation skills, and mission connectivity. Success in the selection process creates a common bond and a unique sense of institutional loyalty among the new faculty who have been chosen to be a part of an exclusive group.

When faculty have been selected, they are then invited to attend an orientation, again using most of the day on a weekend. The orientation is an opportunity for the School to provide insights into understanding the Jesuit Community and its history, to share recent insights into facilitating adult learning, and to present the "nuts and bolts" of how the evening accelerated programs work on a day-to-day basis. The Jesuit presentation is often given by the Rector of the Regis Jesuit Community and affords participants the opportunity to immerse themselves within the ideals, history, and reality of the Jesuits in America today. The university sees in the adult programs the opportunity to further the mission of the Order in creating a rich dialogue of values and critical thinking combined with the extensive experiential background of the continuing students. Following the orientation, many faculty are asked to shadow an experienced faculty member through a whole class session to learn the ropes and be observed by a mentor.

Since a great number of students are now taking their coursework by online distance education, Regis has also devised an online assessment and orientation. The assessment is offered online and takes place over the period of a week. It involves similar exercises to determine both the skills and attitudes of potential faculty. An orientation has also been designed in the online context to familiarize the new faculty with the objectives, goals, and purposes of the university.

Most affiliate faculty are drawn to Regis because it provides an opportunity for them to be involved in a learning enterprise that is changing people's lives. For a variety of reasons our affiliate faculty have chosen careers in business and industry, in social services, and community organizations; but they also relish the opportunity to contribute to their community and higher education by sharing their applied knowledge with students who are eager to learn from experienced leaders in the professional world. The opportunity to teach also provides a stimulus to the affiliate faculty by teaching and networking with a cross section of students involved in all types of work activities. The atmosphere of the adult classroom is energizing and fulfilling. The drive to conduct a class is so great that there have been countless examples of

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courses being taught in adverse conditions such as in the parking lot on a summer evening when a school building was unexpectedly closed, or classes continuing after the session in a local restaurant. Most faculty enjoy talking about the boost they receive, even after a long and tiring day at the office. Many employers encourage their employees with advanced degrees to become active in their communities and see teaching for a university as fulfilling this service.

The role of the affiliate faculty is primarily that of teaching and facilitating learning. The university does not ask affiliate faculty to advise students or to necessarily be active in writing curriculum. Full-time faculty are the primary advisors and curriculum developers within the university. However, many affiliates are superb at curriculum development and course design. These persons are welcomed into the process, and many are active in curriculum committees and course design. The university also fosters loyalty by including affiliate faculty in the governance processes of the School.

Regis University is one of the few universities in the United States that has included adjunct faculty in decision-making roles within councils and committees of the university. The Academic Policy Committee of the School for Professional Studies includes affiliate faculty by design. These faculty serve on a variety of committees and are in decision-making roles that affect the conduct of the School. Participation in the governance process is not required of the affiliate faculty, but those who do so see this as a form of service to the institution.

Affiliate faculty are also encouraged to attend conferences, seminars and workshops. Many have attended the Jesuit Universities' sponsored *Heartlands* and *Western Conversations* events. I recall a group of Religious Studies affiliate faculty who filled up a van and drove some ten hours to Kansas City, Missouri. They enjoyed the conference and even more the conversations driving to and from the meeting. The Dean's Office sponsors $25,000 in grants for faculty and staff to attend conferences, develop research projects and studies, and generally improve their ability to work and teach in the School for Professional Studies. This money is set aside for those faculty and staff who may not be able to receive the funding from regular budget allocations within their departments. Many of these grants are given to affiliate faculty both individually and in small groups working on projects.

Those affiliate faculty who pursue doctoral studies may receive modest support from the university in the form of reduced tuition at several doctoral institutions and a stipend from Regis. Affiliate faculty who wish to continue their studies at Regis University may take classes tuition free. This support has only been available for the last two years and has been warmly received. The faculty member must have taught within the past year and may register only on a space available basis.

The university includes the affiliate faculty in both official and informal gatherings to increase the sense of community and belonging. All affiliate faculty are invited to attend and participate in all university faculty meetings and seminars. There is always a significant number of affiliate faculty in attendance at all these functions, regardless of the time of day that they are held. Affiliate faculty are invited to the president's Christmas party and other university social functions. Each year awards are given within the divisions of the School for Professional Studies for excellence in teaching based on student evaluations. The majority of these awards are given to affiliate faculty. The awards are presented at special receptions held to honor the entire faculty who teach in the School. In addition to an attractive plaque, a special pin is

given, and faculty proudly wear these pins whenever they teach.

Each year the university recognizes the years of service of its employees at a special recognition breakfast for the whole community. Affiliate faculty are recognized at this university-wide function without distinction from the full-time employees. Many have received ten, fifteen, and twenty-year pins in recognition of their service to the university. The president of the university presents the service pins. The affiliate faculty are also invited to participate in the commencement ceremonies. The School pays for any costs associated with the events such as cap and gown rental. Attendance is always substantial, and students enjoy the opportunity to visit with their faculty at the receptions held following the ceremonies. This is especially true for the distance students who have interacted with their faculty online and have never had the opportunity to meet them in person.

Several years ago, the School introduced Service Learning opportunities for the adult students. The affiliate faculty have embraced the concept and are actively engaged in a variety of service learning projects. The Service Learning Coordinator regularly attends faculty meetings and outlines both the concept and suggested applications to the faculty. She works with faculty to integrate Service Learning into their course outcomes. For some years it was thought that the adult students are simply too busy with their studies and family commitments to become engaged in service learning and community service projects. However, we have found that both faculty and students find the time to make a difference. A number of non-profit agencies now regularly depend on community service from our students. One group of faculty and students received a special award this year from the governor's office for their support of the battered women's shelter in Denver.

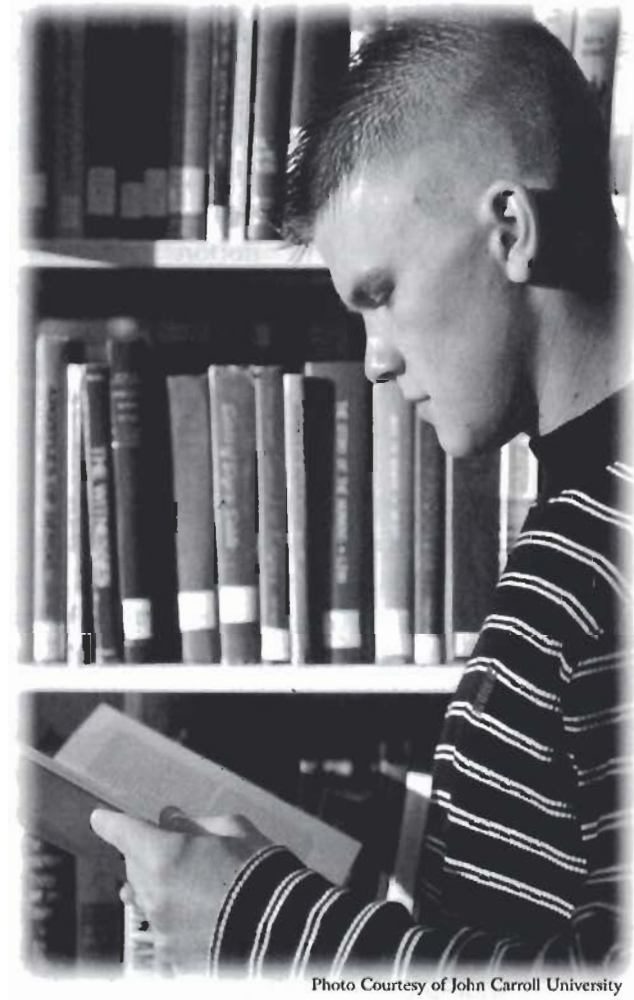


Photo Courtesy of John Carroll University

The affiliate faculty have become the lifeline of the School for Professional Studies at Regis University in Denver. They provide the primary teaching corps for the University's over 15,000 students, and their loyalty to the university is remarkable. The relationship between the university and affiliate faculty is a win-win situation. The university could not operate its programs and deliver its unique educational design without the commitment of this wonderful group of dedicated people. In the same vein, the university provides an opportunity for credentialed professional people to be able to enrich their lives by becoming a part of a vibrant learning community committed to values that transcend the bottom line.

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