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An Appendage or Vital Component?

Adjunct faculty and Jesuit principles: the needs of a neglected majority

By Lynne C. Elkes

The Jesuit tradition embraces respecting and responding to the unique needs of individual persons, as well as helping them to identify and develop the full range and variety of their particular gifts and talents. Among Jesuit institutions there is a consistent emphasis on academic achievement, excellence in teaching, and engaged, meaningful scholarship. The efforts of tenured, tenure-track *and* adjunct faculty are required to meet and exceed the high expectations set by Jesuit tenets.

However, a roadblock to this achievement is the growing need for better support for a substantial sector of the instructional workforce: occasional, part-time, and non-tenure track instructors all of which I will refer to as *adjunct*. Most colleges and universities rely upon adjunct faculty members to offer numerous courses to both undergraduate and graduate students. While this workforce offers universities a means to serve a rapidly growing number of students in a cost-effective manner and expose students to current practitioners, adjunct faculty members do not consistently receive the tools they need to be effective in the classroom.

Moreover, adjuncts often are viewed as an appendage rather than as a vital component of the campus community. Resources and training need to be tailored specifically for adjunct faculty and utilized to increase engagement between adjuncts and other faculty, chairs and academic administrators. Jesuit institutions should be keen to enhance the teaching competence and commitment of adjuncts, improve the classroom experience for students, and more broadly apply the principles of *cura personalis,* discernment, and *magis* to this cohort.

Similar to many of its Jesuit brethren, Loyola University Maryland, my home institution, relies upon adjunct faculty to offer courses to its students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Many per-course instructors teach on a regular basis and bring professional expertise or specialized knowledge while others are on call as enrollments and tenure-track lines change. The latter subset of adjuncts is diverse; many instructors have full-time jobs and teach in the evenings or on weekends, others cobble together classes from different departments and/or universities and still others teach 3-4 classes per semester.

For 17 years I was unaware of Jesuit teachings

To be honest, for most of my 17 years at Loyola as an adjunct faculty member I was unaware of the nature of Jesuit teachings and their relevance to classroom pedagogy. It was only as I became more involved in my current position as director of adjunct faculty training programs that I was exposed to these values in the broadest sense

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and was able to apply them in the classroom, with very positive results. I strive now to bring that knowledge to my fellow adjuncts, in part to better link them to the university community, but also to enable them to view their teaching in a new context.

Learning about *cura personalis* has changed my outlook on how to approach my students and fellow faculty members. The Jesuit concept to honor, care for and educate the whole person by encouraging all members of the college community, students and faculty alike, to strive after intellectual, physical, psychological, social and spiritual health and well-being, is unique in higher education. It is important to create comprehensive programs to support faculty in their path to greater personal growth and development and tenure/tenure-track faculty are regularly encouraged to partake of programming in this area.

Adjunct faculty have in many cases been left far behind in their Jesuit learning curve, as scarce resources are used to support full-time faculty in these difficult economic times. However, it is exactly "these difficult times" that have caused many universities to rely more heavily on a cadre of non-tenure track faculty to fill in gaps caused by a lack of funds or simply an abundance of students. How will Jesuit institutions maintain their uniqueness in the crowded field of higher education if adjunct faculty are not given the chance to incorporate basic Jesuit educational and human values into their roles as mentors and teachers?

The concept of discernment is a crucial piece of the growth and development of the whole person. More specifically, the ability and opportunity to think critically, inform one's conscience, and cultivate habits of ongoing reflection and self-evaluation, form the basis of personal academic growth. Adjunct faculty rarely have the chance to be mentored as is common for tenure/tenure track faculty, or even to reflect on their body of teaching materials. Peer mentoring or portfolio review mentoring workshops for adjunct faculty are appropriate paths to engage and expose this cohort to the ideals that should be developed in all faculty members.

Adjunct faculty, whether they are part-time or full-time, instructors of traditional undergraduates or graduate students in pursuit of professional advancement, tend to be in the classroom because they enjoy the opportunity to share their knowledge with others in a constructive environment. I have found that adjunct faculty at Loyola are driven to succeed and help their students succeed. The idea of *magis* is already at work; the restless pursuit of excellence across the board, and a refusal to be satisfied with

Statue at America House, New York City.

mediocrity. Adjuncts crave the opportunity to better themselves, either in their disciplines or in general pedagogy. Jesuit institutions owe it to this cohort to provide the means to pursue this desire for growth. Some ideas for the promotion of these values are as follows: offering workshops on a variety of topics at convenient times, providing even small amounts of funding for continued study or travel, providing engagement for adjuncts with division deans, encouraging discussion about the role of adjunct faculty in the broader scope of the institution, and creating peer-mentoring opportunities.

Adjuncts crave the opportunity to better themselves

A program that offers adjuncts advanced training in best practices in the classroom, immersion in the application of the university's core values and opportunities for advancement in their own disciplinary study, would increase the level of dedication by adjuncts to their students as well as their overall effectiveness in the classroom. Students taught by enthused, engaged faculty will typically connect better to the material and ultimately be more successful and motivated to continue with their studies.

The establishment of a campus culture that views professional development for adjuncts as equally important to that of its tenured/tenure-track faculty is critical. Through providing adjunct faculty members with professional development opportunities, establishing better communication channels with the broader campus, and underscoring how the institution values the contributions of the adjunct faculty workforce, Jesuit institutions can continue to define themselves as unique, caring organizations dedicated to a community of learners. ■