Annotated Bibliography to Accompany
Changing the Narrative: What the Research Really Says About Adjunct Teaching
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Studies With Student Outcomes


In a study of 43,177 full-time traditional undergraduates at four-year public colleges in Ohio, it was shown that taking courses from adjunct faculty (as vs. tenure-track) during the first semester of college is associated with a higher tendency to drop out of school. This is the case for both undergraduate and graduate students. This association is not found for subsequent semesters. It was also shown that students with high ACT scores are less likely to take courses with adjunct faculty than other students.


This study examines the impact of part-time instructors comparing students with more adjunct instructors to those with more full-time faculty. It finds that students taking an adjunct-heavy course schedule in their first semester are less likely to persist into their second year.


In a study of 42,761 full-time traditional undergraduates at four-year public colleges in Ohio, it was shown that taking the initial course in a particular field from an adjunct instructor (as vs. tenure-track) is negatively associated with taking subsequent courses in the subject. This association holds for strictly academic fields only. With professional fields, those related to specific occupations, the association turns to the positive direction. It was noted that students who take adjunct-taught courses vary systematically from those who take tenure-track-taught courses. Students with higher ACT scores are less likely to sort themselves into adjunct-taught courses.


Using institutional-level data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, this study shows a negative relationship between the proportion of part-time faculty and proportion of community college students attaining a degree. It also shows a negative relationship between the proportion of minority students and the proportion of community college students attaining a degree.

This study uses combined data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS96/01) and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 1995–2000. It shows that institutional expenditure on instruction (proportion of part-time faculty) is not related to dropout rates. However, institutional expenditure on student support has a negative association with dropout rate. More expenditure is associated with lower dropout rates.


Using a national sample of 9,176 undergraduates at not-for-profit four-year colleges from the IPEDS database, it was shown that the proportion of part-time faculty at an institution is not significantly associated with either retention or graduation rates. However, the proportion of disadvantaged minority students did significantly relate to both graduation and retention rates. SAT scores were related to graduation and retention rates. Finally, amount of expenditure on both instruction and student support were related to retention and graduation rates.


This study examined a sample of 15,142 students from a doctoral-extensive institution, 13,588 students from two doctoral-intensive institutions, and 2,000 students from a master’s comprehensive institution. All students had declared majors and were enrolled in gatekeeper courses, introductory courses with at least 90 registered students. Having a course taught by a part-time instructor (as vs. a full-time tenure-track instructor) was associated with lower persistence into the second year. This association was not found for students taught by either graduate students or full-time contingent faculty.


Using a sample of 24,865 students from 107 community colleges, the researchers found a negative association between students’ likelihood to transfer to a four-year institution and their exposure to part-time faculty instruction. Although statistically significant, the effect was quite small. For every 10% increase in students’ exposure to part-time faculty instruction, students tended to become 1.82% less likely to transfer.

Using institutional-level College Board data from 1986 to 2000, IPEDS data, and other Department of Education data, the results show that the proportion of part-time faculty at a college is adversely related to six-year graduation rates. This association is more pronounced for public, four-year master’s level institutions than for other types of colleges.


In a study of 15,662 first semester students at a highly selective four-year college, it was found that having a non-tenure track instructor (as vs. a tenure track instructor) for introductory courses in a variety of field was associated with better grades for the course. The status of the introductory course instructor was also associated with higher likelihood to take the next level course, and better grades in the subsequent course.


In a study of 1,318 intermediate algebra students, it was found that faculty status (full-time vs. part-time) was not significantly associated with either course grades or completion rates. However, student age, student race and student gender did correlate significantly with both outcomes. Additionally, faculty education level (graduate degree vs. no graduate degree) was significantly associated with course grades.


This study utilized data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study 1988 to 2000 data and the 1992 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). They found that among 3398 cases, the percent of tenured faculty did have a small but significant association with rate of transfer from community college to a four-year institution. However, standardized test scores and family income levels were better predictors.


In a study of 451 general education courses in a community college, faculty status (permanent vs. adjunct) was significantly related to course retention (earning a grade of C or above). Students in courses taught by adjuncts were more likely to be retained, although the effect was very small ($\eta^2=.01$). Because adjuncts at this college neither had offices nor were required to hold office hours, it was concluded that faculty-student contact inside the classroom was the main factor in retention.

This study utilized institutional-level data from the IPEDS database from all 1,209 public two-year colleges in the 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico for the year 2001. The ratio of part-time faculty at an institution was found to be significantly negatively associated with graduation rates.


This study employed cohorts of first-time community college students from the California community college system from the 2000 and 2001 academic years. It merged IPEDS institution-level data and student data from the 107 colleges for a final sample of 178,985. Percent of credits completed with part-time faculty had a small but significant association with associate degree completion. A 10% increase in the overall proportion of credits earned in courses taught by part-time faculty members reduced the students' likelihood of earning an associate's degree by 1%. However, GPA, gender, race, and amount of financial aid were better predictors.


This study examined over 90,000 students in six four public colleges and universities ranging from baccalaureate to doctoral. A negative relationship between retention and high levels of exposure to part-time faculty persisted across three of the four institutional types. However, at the doctoral-level institution, it was found that part-time faculty had positive effects on student persistence. Although findings from this study may lend support to decisions to decrease utilization of part-time faculty, it is clear that contingent faculty are not a homogenous group; thus, such a recommendation would be inappropriate.


This study used of five incoming freshmen cohorts at a single four-year institution, resulting in 15,399 unique student cases. The results of the study indicated that as exposure to part-time faculty instruction increased, as measured by the proportion of a student’s first year credits taught by part-time faculty, 1-year persistence was negatively impacted. It was a statistically significant, but small association. For each 1% increase in part-time instruction, students were found to have a 0.4% decrease in the odds of persisting.

The data for the study include 3,911 observations at the student level, 671 observations at the faculty level, and 31,199 student-faculty combinations. There was no association found between faculty status (full- vs. part-time) and student retention. However, the researchers found a significant correlation between faculty status and course grades. Part-time faculty are more likely to assign higher grades. The author argues that this may lead to lowered levels of academic challenge and student motivation to do their best work.


Among 1,056 community college introductory algebra students, those who took the course with a part-time instructor tended to have lower course grades than those with full-time instructors. There was, however, no relationship between instructor status and likelihood to take the intermediate course. Nor was there an association between instructor status and course grades in the intermediate course. For 654 fundamental English students, faculty status did not relate significantly to grades in the fundamental course or likelihood to take the intermediate course. In contrast to the math course results, students who had part-time instructors for the intermediate English course tended to have higher course grades than those with full-time instructors.


This is an anecdotal / qualitative observation from the author’s experience as a higher education columnist and instructor at 6 colleges. It is claimed that the use of adjuncts hurts students due to adjuncts’ lack of accessibility, poor advising, lower expertise and academic standards, grade inflation, and lack of academic freedom. No empirical evidence is offered. This study is reported because it is so often cited as authoritative evidence in other work.


This study is based on a dataset on two- and four-year college students and instructors from an anonymous state, from the years 2005-2010. The results suggest that adjuncts have positive impacts on introductory course grades but negative impacts on subsequent course enrollment and performance. The negative impacts are greater for short-term and part-time adjuncts than for full-time adjuncts and those employed longer-term.

The present study examined employment status of faculty on the success of students enrolled in four, two-course sequences. Using Pearson chi-square and binary logistic regression analyses, it was concluded that employment status of the faculty has no statistical influence on student success as has been previously claimed. These results suggest that community colleges should not assume that hiring more full-time faculty will improve student success and, instead, should possibly consider utilizing funds otherwise allocated to hiring new full-time faculty on the development and compensation of part-time faculty.


This study examined 3787 first year students entering a four-year college in the Fall 200 and Fall 2001 cohorts. Exposure to part-time faculty was divided into 3 categories, from least to most. The researchers found little evidence that exposure to part-time faculty was associated with student retention or achievement. These outcomes were significantly associated with both students’ high school and college GPA.


Among 1,466 community college students, faculty status did not significantly associate with short-term retention. Full- or part-time status did correlate significantly with short-term success (passing course grade), although the effect was quite small. Longer term, faculty status did not significantly relate to either graduation or transfer rates. Student gender and ethnicity were better predictors, particularly for the short-term outcomes.


The study examined four incoming freshman cohorts at a four-year college, from the Fall 1997 through Fall 2000 terms. The researchers divided the amount of experience with adjunct faculty into 4 categories from least to most. When they compared the category with the most experience with adjuncts to the category with the least exposure, there was a negative relationship between exposure to adjuncts and students’ persistence into the second year.

This study drew data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS: 04/09). It employed a multilevel logistic regression model to investigate whether the proportion of part-time faculty is negatively associated with individual student's likelihood of degree and/or certificate completion. Analytical results indicate the proportion of part-time faculty in community colleges is not negatively associated with student's likelihood of degree and/or certificate completion.

This article uses data from the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF-04) to determine if contingent faculty (full-time and part-time) and “permanent” (tenured and tenure-eligible) faculty differ in their use of subject-centered and learning-centered teaching strategies. Across 9,783 faculty at four-year institutions, it was found that part-time contingent faculty are more likely to use multiple choice exams than are other types of faculty. They are also less likely to use learning-centered strategies such as essay exams, term research papers, multiple drafts of written work, oral presentations, group projects, or student evaluations of each other’s work.


Using data from the 1992 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, part-time faculty had fewer classroom instruction hours, non-classroom instruction hours, ratio of non-classroom to classroom instruction time, and number of refereed articles than did full-time faculty. These results held up across all institution types.


This paper documents the results of a qualitative study of student–faculty interactions. Nine focus groups, with a total of 49 students participated. The results indicate that student-faculty interaction is quite limited outside of class hours. Students are often reluctant to initiate contact with faculty for many reasons. Several students indicated a perception that faculty are always busy doing other things, and that this is particularly true of part-time faculty. The researchers conclude the use of part-time faculty contributes to students’ perceptions of lack of faculty availability and presence on campus.


This study examined the GPAs of business students at a small private undergraduate college in the northeast region of the United States over a 20-year period from Fall 1983 through Spring 2003. Grade inflation was found to be endemic, but was more pronounced for courses taught by both part-time and full-time contingent faculty.

This study involved a comparison of data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (20,226 senior students and 22,033 first-year students) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (14,336 faculty members). The researchers found that full-time faculty are more likely than part-timers to emphasize academically challenging activities, to expose students to diverse perspectives in their classes, and to value a variety of enriching educational experiences such as community service and study abroad.


This study is based on the 2000 Center for the Study of Community Colleges. The data of 1,486 faculty were examined. Part-time faculty were less likely than full-time to report that they employed guest lecturers, films or videos, laboratory experiments, or the use of computers or the internet in classes. Part-time faculty were also less likely to report the use of collaborative techniques, such as group activities and projects. Outside the classroom, part-time faculty were less likely to have recently revised a syllabus or teaching objective, prepared an instructional program or extracurricular activity for use in class. Part-time faculty also reported spending less overall time on course preparation.


This study used a sample of 17,914 faculty members from 130 institutions, who had completed the Spring 2004 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement. Part-time faculty were found to use active and collaborative techniques less than full-time faculty. They challenged their students less, and spent less time preparing for class than their full-time counterparts. Part-time faculty interacted with their students less often than full-time faculty. All these associations were less pronounced for full-time contingent faculty than for part-time contingent faculty.