

Out of State but Not Out of Mind. Online, Part-time, and the Grind.

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### Abstract

This paper summarizes the panel session from the instructional technology council's 2022 eLearning Conference held in Las Vegas Nevada, “Out of State but not Out of Mind. Online, Part-time, and the Grind.” The idea behind the panel was to bring together part-time faculty who work for Pima Community College online and from out of state to consider the unique circumstances of remote employment both for the college and for part-time faculty. The goal was to frame a set of inquiry questions to better explore what institutions can do to support online remote faculty and what role those faculty play in distance education programs especially given the context of increased need for institutions to hire and retain qualified online faculty in a post covid landscape. The format of the paper will follow the format of the panel where we pose questions to the group and then some or all of the respondents or everyone answers below. As a group, we have done our best to recall the questions asked by the audience members but they are summarized recollections.

*Keywords:* Flexibility in templated/pre-designed courses, Communication and transparency of employment policies, Strategies for successful professional development opportunities, Inclusive and accessible centered messaging, Burnout/workload

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As we were preparing for the panel we realized that you teach in several different states. How many states do you currently work in? Do you see any significant differences between the policies that colleges have in different states?

EW: I work in Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Indiana, Virginia, Tennessee, and Arizona, while my main position is in Florida. The differences I notice are not what state I work in so much as whether I work for a private or a public institution. Consistently, in private institutions, all of which are "not-for-profit" now due to various fiscal maneuvers, I feel less appreciated, less empowered, and less rewarded. On the other hand, public institutions vary more widely. While many cannot reward me financially any more than the private institutions, I often feel I do have more of a stake in the institution. This comes in many forms, including faculty governance, opportunities to involve myself in course design, and additional opportunities at the institution, which can include course review or professional development.

SH: I agree with Eryka. I don't even think about where the colleges are based for the most part; however, there are significant differences between public and private institutions. However, it's really dependent upon the organizational culture of the institution itself. Bottom line...in some institutions, I feel very supported and appreciated. In others, I don't.

MF: It is particularly challenging to understand and access policy while teaching remotely. For instance, practices and procedures are not always codified, yet there is an expectation to understand and follow them, or they are buried in larger college-wide documents. While this type of institutional knowledge is often readily available and acquired by full-time faculty by virtue of having more extensive access to campus, meetings, events, even passing conversations with colleagues, this is much more difficult to navigate and recognize as an adjunct. As you can likely see from the responses here, it's often a helpful and effective supervisor or colleague that really makes a significant difference.

Outside of pay, what are the most important things you look for when you work? Can you describe policies, practices, or attitudes that make institutions attractive to work for? Ones that push you away? (think... salary, # of classes, flexibility, training, support for students?).

## Out of State but Not Out of Mind.

MF: Some gestures should be a given, such as compensating adjunct faculty for optional activities such as college-sponsored workshops, or required college-directed training. More specifically, Pima Community College has voiced and taken action to commit to the pursuit of equity and social justice and included ample opportunities for adjunct faculty to become involved in these efforts. Lastly, a part-time position should come with the expectation that the faculty has additional responsibilities, and without full-time wages, I would not work for an institution that holds me to a standard that assumes their program is my only professional obligation.

SH: Pay is important, although there are some institutions that have high pay that have equally high expectations of their faculty. There are also institutions that pay low and don't require much of their faculty. So, I think pay is relative and can't just be looked at quantitatively and in a vacuum. However, to me, pay isn't at the top of my list. I think feeling valued, supported, empowered, and respected tops pay for me. A school could pay top dollar, but if I'm not feeling those things from the administration, I will not have a long-term relationship with a school. Those schools that I have taught at for 10, 15, even 20 years are those that know how to make their employees feel special. Work/life balance is critical to me. Also, benefits are very important to me...perhaps even more so than pay.

What types of technical training do adjunct faculty want?

SH: Training that is practical and helps me to do my job more effectively and efficiently is important. My most valued training has been learning the details of educational delivery platforms. I always say that sharing teaching tips for organizing and delivering content would be well received. Function over form is key to me. For instance, having faculty present on how they use Excel and Word (or similar programs) to effectively manage tasks, store their content, etc.

Many of the faculty members here teach from multiple institutions and each institution has its own limit on how many courses a faculty member can teach. What are the limits on how many classes a faculty member can teach effectively?

AS: I just want to jump in on this question as a supervisor of an online department. I think those limits are in place less for workload issues and more for health care benefits issues. We often overload faculty all of the time. The issue isn't whether or not we think they can teach the class effectively but that now we have to pay fringe benefits. Even still, I did have as one of my basic recruitment questions that asked how many classes someone was teaching and how they managed the workload. Adjunct faculty may be the oldest form of the gig economy. And in that work, you've got too much when the food gets delivered cold or not delivered at all. So I think the performance was a key indicator for me. When hiring new online faculty I would mentor them through one class and see how they performed before assigning them multiple new ones.

MF: The question of too many classes points to the darker and more unfortunate reality of contingent work: that adjuncts often have to conceal sacrifices and compromises that are being made in one class in order to accommodate the needs of additional classes. At best there is little support in helping to negotiate these concessions, and at worst they lead to termination. On a

## Out of State but Not Out of Mind.

lighter note, I am entirely (like most adjuncts) enthusiastic about teaching, often finding myself poring over teaching opportunities and saying to myself, "yes, I want to teach all the classes."

SH: I think most of us who have been contract teachers for a long-time are in it because we love it. It involves a lot of patchwork and sometimes can be high stress to please all of our employers at the same time. But I think too that those of us who are the long-haulers have experienced too many classes at least once. After over 20 years of teaching online, I know how to not do this anymore. However, in my earlier days of teaching online, I knew I was overstretched when I had to start cutting corners to meet deadlines. And, for those who are in it for our passion for teaching and serving our learners, that doesn't sit well. So over the years, I have adapted and have learned enough about expectations and the process on a daily basis to make sure that doesn't happen. There's no magic number...every person works at a different pace, skill-set, etc. And, most instructors can teach three sections of one course at a college much easier than one section at three colleges (and the college providing opportunities for three classes usually have more buy-in from their part-time instructors). But I think the administration can really see when a faculty member is overloaded. And that's not exclusive to online work or part-time work. Hopefully, a faculty member is keen enough to not put themselves in that predicament.

What strategies do you have to negotiate the expectations from different institutions and other demands on your time (maybe other job duties, grad school, family, etc.). Has any institution been able to meaningfully support you to help avoid burnout? If so, how?

EW: Like most faculty, part-time or full-time, I thoroughly love designing and teaching my own course. This, however, is an enormous investment in time. Should that course also be delivered online, it requires even more time and effort, as course content needs to be written, supporting assignments created, benchmark assignments designed, tested, and refined, rubrics carefully crafted, and so forth. This is not practical for most adjunct professors who teach numerous courses at numerous institutions, often at the last minute. Thus, the best answer to this is master classes. When institutions offer well-designed master courses to all faculty, part-time or otherwise, adjunct faculty can use that templated course and make it their own. First, it helps assure they are aligning their teaching and the course content with the course objectives, department priorities, and institutional or statewide mandates. Navigating the complexities of numerous departments and the visions that these departments bring to English classes presents me with great stress. Am I doing what the department expects? I don't always know. Some institutions give me full latitude. Others have a prescribed course where I feel like all I am is a glorified grader.

On the other hand, the best institutions offer well-designed courses that have gone through collaborative design and a quality assurance process. They have brought in adjunct faculty voices and continue to be refined with data on student learning and outcomes. When they are redesigned, I and other adjunct faculty are encouraged to participate in the process, and on top of that, some even financially reward me for lending my voice, experience, and effort in creating a better class for the students whom the institution serves.

## Out of State but Not Out of Mind.

Without naming, how have institutions made you feel a part of them? How have they made you feel a part of them?

SH: There is nothing like face-to-face interaction. I know this is not always possible, but it sure does help people bond in a different way. For instance, we just presented at the ITC conference this year and I already feel more connected with my colleagues at Pima. Many years ago, I worked for a school that would invite a portion of their part-time faculty to a retreat. Others could come as well but at their own expense. It was such a great opportunity to meet other online part-timers and network with the administration. Providing opportunities is key.

AS: Adjunct faculty are first and foremost faculty and they bring value to the institution's students in part because of their part-time status. Working for either multiple institutions gives them a better perspective on the discipline or in the industry which gives them that real-world experience. Both of those would be valuable not only in the classroom but also in the design and review process for your online courses. Including them in the department and the college not only shows them that they are valued and respected but also enhances your curriculum and your online classes

### **Final Thoughts**

Part-time faculty, who teach at multiple institutions often have to take very similar versions of the same onboarding training at each institution, think FERPA, cybersecurity, active shooter, sexual harassment, etc.? One of the things that could be helpful for the ITC or an institution like NC SARA is to standardize those trainings so organizations could band together and agree to accept each other's trainings or agreed to accept the common training in lieu of their training. This would reduce costs not only for institutions but also for faculty members.

Here are some takeaways from my colleague's presentation:

- Make policies clear and easily accessible as they often vary from institution to institution
- Collegiality is crucial for not something that edge and faculty typically see when accepting a position. demonstrating humanness in following up or I'm paying for college-directed training- even small amounts- signals respect and value
- work-life balance is critical
- limiting the number of credits faculty can teach has less to do with workload and more to do with paying benefits.
- Consider how might can involve your part-time faculty in the design and review process for your online courses