

Adjuncts: A New Paradigm

by

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When a professional organization seeks vital subject matter expertise, the organization hires consultants. Compensation is market driven but generally comparable to that of full time employees, plus a calculated amount for non-existent benefits, bonuses, and a premium for meeting an immediate requirement. Like consultants, adjunct professors provide subject matter expertise to meet an immediate requirement. As more and more California colleges confront underfunded budgets, rather than engage in the lugubrious procedure of vetting full time faculty, they hire subject matter experts to meet their staffing requirements. Those subject matter experts are known as adjuncts, and employing adjuncts has become a credible response to ever-shifting student needs and a cost-effective solution for maintaining sufficient staffing levels.

The cost effectiveness of post high school education is a fungible commodity. Incurring and servicing educational debt must be balanced against loss of immediate income (current employment), accrued interest on debt (student loans), and the post-baccalaureate income (potential earnings increase). Prospective students face this decision. They must balance investment and return. They have become the market force that drives California college success, and their increasingly social media consciousness drives enrollment. Recognition of this modern media phenomenon is paramount. After admission, prospective college students review multiple social media platforms before selecting course and professor. The highest performing professors inevitably receive the highest level of enrollment. Deans are well aware that faculty selection is reflected in levels of enrollment. With stagnant budgets, department deans have little opportunity to hire full-time faculty, but have opportunities to hire adjuncts. Market forces predict that the highest performing adjuncts will contribute to maximum enrollment.

As essential contributors, adjuncts are not typically provided compensation reflecting a competitive marketplace. For retention of high performing adjuncts, compensation must reflect fair market practices. Salary levels must include compensation for non-existent benefits, professional experience, lack of institutional assets, and incentive for retention. Colleges must recognize market forces, and out-of-touch administrators, oblivious to the increasing influence of social media and its burgeoning threat to institutional legitimacy, must commit to retaining the highest performing candidates in each department. Failure to provide equitable compensation will result in a decrease in available, high-quality adjuncts as each takes his or her subject matter expertise to different markets and the pool of available adjunct candidates decreases. Colleges will lose the best of the best and ultimately enrollment will decline. Colleges once considered vital to growing income potential will become delegitimized institutions devoid of relevance. The death knell has sounded and the future is clear: Market forces are the driver of success. Students represent that market force. Social media reflects student preference. Adjuncts are the only solution immediately responsive to student preference. Without equitable compensation, that solution will vanish and enrollment will decline. So goes enrollment, so goes college.