

FOCUS ON COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

Colleges use more adjuncts to save money, add flexibility

By **BRENDA LANGE**

Special for Lehigh Valley Business

As institutions of higher education compete to recruit students from a shrinking pool of high school graduates, money-saving measures are put into place across the board.

Those cost-cutting strategies may not, however, include one approach that seems custom-made to trim the budget: increasing the use of adjunct professors in lieu of full-time faculty.

An adjunct professor or instructor is one who teaches on a limited-term contract and is ineligible for tenure, which is a permanent position at the institution.

When the use of adjuncts began to rise in the mid-1970s, they often were retired professionals who shared their expertise and life experiences, enriching the curricula and student learning.

Increasingly, these adjunct professors have terminal degrees in their field and may be in search of a full-time tenure-track position. Instead, they may teach at more than one college or university, without benefits.

For the college, using adjuncts saves money, offers scheduling flexibility, and allows its students to be instructed by instructors with real-world experience.

BY THE NUMBERS

University Business magazine reported in September 2016 that “nontenure-track positions account for 76 percent of all instructional staff appointments in American higher education.”

This figure is supported by reports published by the U.S. Department of Education and by the American Association of University Professors that the use of adjuncts has increased 66 percent in 40 years.

InsideHigherEd.com wrote in April 2017, “adjuncts make up about 40 percent of the “academic labor force at the institutions surveyed.”

Whatever the exact figures, adjunct faculty are responsible for educating large numbers of college students in the United States.

CONTRACT LIMITS USAGE

According to Joanne Z. Bruno, East Stroudsburg University provost, these numbers may not be the same in public and private institutions.

She said that in Pennsylvania’s State System (ESU and Kutztown are two of the 14 universities), the faculty-adjunct ratios are governed by the school’s collective bargaining agreement that allows adjuncts to make up only 25 percent of the full-time equivalency faculty.

“The intent is to have a healthy balance of tenure-track faculty supplemented by adjunct faculty who often bring specialized and unique professional experiences – real-life applications – to the classroom, with former business leaders, educators and health professionals,” she said.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Francis Hall at Alvernia College: ‘There are advantages to having a mix of full-time faculty and adjuncts,’ says Jerry Greiner, the college’s interim provost.

OFTEN DEPENDS ON THE COURSE

At East Stroudsburg, Bruno said, that balance extends to what types of courses are taught by which type of faculty.

Adjuncts often teach master classes or seminars in certain programs, but it is also important to have faculty without a terminal degree teaching lower level courses, “thereby freeing our faculty with doctorates to teach more research and upper programs,” she said.

During the current semester, about 54 percent of adjuncts are teaching lower level courses, while 46 percent teach upper level – mainly professional in nature such as business, education and health-related fields, she added.

During last fall’s semester, East Stroudsburg had a 24 percent adjunct-to-faculty rate.

FAIRLY CONSISTENT USAGE

At Kutztown University, the number of adjuncts ebbs and flows, according to Anne E. Zayaitz, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

“The number has been fairly consistent, but the number varies due to the timing of retirements, the number of sabbatical and other leaves and changing needs due to enrollments,” she said.

She added that hiring of adjuncts is based on their subject expertise, in music, computer science and business, for example.

Last fall, Kutztown had 115 adjunct instructors out of a total of 470 faculty.

21 PERCENT AT ALVERNIA

By contrast, Alvernia University, a Catholic school of about 3,000 students in Reading, has been reducing the percentage of adjunct faculty over the past few years and adding full-time faculty, accord-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

At East Stroudsburg University, using adjuncts frees faculty with doctorates to teach more research and upper-level programs.

ing to Jerry Greiner, Alvernia’s interim provost.

“Students often benefit from the use of adjuncts who are often practicing professionals from the community who bring first-hand, working knowledge of the discipline [to the classroom],” Greiner said.

“There are advantages to having a mix of full-time faculty and adjuncts, and in this academic year, Alvernia has 21 percent of its courses taught by adjuncts,” he added.

“We all prefer more full-time faculty because they advise and mentor students and do research projects, but there are many advantages to having adjunct faculty, as well, especially when they bring real-world examples and experience to their teaching.”

FLEXIBILITY

Hiring temporary faculty will save money for an institution, but again, in the state system in Pennsylvania, pay rates have been negotiated.

An adjunct in the state system earns about \$6,100 for a three-credit course, while, nationally, the average was about half that, according to InsideHigherEd.com.

Hiring adjunct faculty also provides flexibility for an institution.

“Hiring temporary instructors who exemplify the best of their professions or fields, business leaders and finance experts, master artists and performers and education leaders to supplement or complement the core programming provided by full-time faculty cohort is often in the best interest of the institution,” Bruno said.