

*Post-secondary Quality Education Commission*

*Faculty and Program Quality Committee*

## **Summary of Research on Part-time Faculty Published Since the 2008 Report of the Full Commission**

March 2009

**Eagan Jr., M. Kevin and Audrey J. Jaeger. Effects of Exposure to Part-time Faculty on Community College Transfer. Research in Higher Education. October 2008.**

Eagan and Jaeger study individuals attending community colleges and find that students are less likely to transfer to four-year universities as exposure to part-time faculty increases. Unlike previous research, E+J use the individual student as the unit of analysis, making this research far more sophisticated than the existing literature. Additionally, the usage of transfer rates as a measure of success seems more appropriate than using community college graduation rates. One challenge is identifying which students are intending to transfer.

E+J use a social capital theoretical framework to explain why community college students with high exposure to part time faculty might be less likely to transfer. They posit that students who develop relationships with full-time faculty and academic advisors are more likely to learn about and be steered in the direction of transferring to a four-year institution. These full-time employees are more likely to be able to provide advice about articulation agreements, transferrable courses, and other “hoops” students need to jump through, as opposed to part-time faculty who may know very little about the college system beyond what happens in their class. Community college students to begin with are likely to have a lower educational and economic background and are likely to need more support in order to achieve higher educational outcomes. These students have less human capital than one would expect in first-year students at four-year universities, and therefore the interaction of human capital and social capital effects results in students who are less likely to be successful and achieve a bachelor’s degree.

Data came from the entire community college system in California. E+J tracked two cohorts of 700,000 students in each cohort over five years. The study was limited to students who completed at least eight transferable credits at one college. They assumed that these students were likely to transfer. The eight units E+J chose as their threshold was lower than the threshold recommended by previous literature. The authors used an advanced statistical method called hierarchical generalized linear modeling, with which I am not familiar. The gist of it is that it allows them to do individual-level regression across multiple institutions, but also limits the number of variables they can use as controls. This was published in a peer-reviewed journal, so hopefully the methods were reviewed by experts who could evaluate their appropriateness.

E+J found “a significant and negative association between students’ transfer likelihood and their exposure to part-time faculty instruction.” The results of the regression showed that a 10% increase in exposure to part-time faculty was associated with the student being about 2% less likely to transfer. Looking at one extremes, students who had all of their credits from part time faculty

were 20% less likely to transfer than students who only experienced full-time faculty. Other significant variables related to transferring included earning an associates degree (which increases the likelihood of transfer by 24%) and having a high GPA (a 7% increase in likelihood to transfer for every additional GPA point). Variables associated negatively with transferring included majoring in vocational studies (16% less likely to transfer than other majors) and being a part-time student (12% less likely to transfer than full time students).

E+J recommend several avenues for future research. Different definitions of transfer-likely students may influence the results. Controls for engagement and satisfaction with the institution could be added. They also suggest that in the future data for part-time and full-time students be disaggregated. This means that researchers would run two models, one for part-time students and one for full-time students. This could be extremely valuable because it could shed light on whether there are interaction effects; in other words, is the part-time faculty effect on student likelihood to transfer different for part-time students than for full-time students? As there is other research that shows that part-time students are more likely to take classes from part-time faculty (probably largely due to having similar schedule preferences for nights and weekends) we would expect some difference. Disaggregating data by major could also be helpful, as some of the majors included in the sample (such as vocational/technical majors) are probably more likely to attract students looking for marketable job skills than students seeking to transfer to a four-year institution.

The authors also suggest that researchers craft cost-benefit analyses using econometric data. For instance, the cost efficiencies obtained by employing part time faculty could be compared with the decrease in performance (decreased transfer rates) associated with employing part-time faculty. The question would be: where could money be invested to achieve the greatest increase in student success for the lowest cost?

E+J finish with some policy recommendations. They argue that colleges should find ways to invest in the social capital of their part time faculty, providing part-timers with offices and compensation to make time for students outside of class.

**Eagan Jr., M. Kevin and Audrey J. Jaeger. Closing the Gate: Part-Time Faculty Instruction in Gatekeeper Courses and First-Year Persistence. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Fall 2008.**

In this study, E+J examine the effect of part-time faculty teaching gatekeeper courses on student persistence into the second year of college. They define a gatekeeper course as a large lecture that is the introductory course to a major and is intended for first-year students. They obtained enrollment and transcript data from four public, residential universities in one state. There were about 30,000 students in the sample.

E+J found that exposure to graduate student instructors and full-time, non-tenure track faculty did not have a significant effect on second year retention. Exposure to other part-time faculty was associated with reduced likelihood of persistence to the second year (for every percentage point

increase in exposure to other part-time faculty in gatekeeper courses, students were about 20% less likely to return for the second year). One caveat is that, while this result was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, which is considered the standard for social science, the authors obtained much more significant (0.01 level) results for several other variables. Average class size was negatively correlated with second year retention, although this relationship was not as substantial.

E+J conclude that full time non-tenure track instructors and graduate students do not harm student persistence, and argue that this is probably because they are sufficiently attached to the institution to be able to provide support to students. They finish with a policy recommendation that universities ought to be more careful in selecting where part-time faculty should be teaching and that they may be better suited to teach upper-division courses with more committed students who require less assistance and advice, rather than in lower division introductory courses.

One possible criticism of this study is that, while the sample of students was large, the sample of institutions was small (4 in one state) and we have no way of knowing whether these institutions are fairly representative of typical universities throughout the nation. On the other hand, we do know that universities lose about half of the students they will ever lose in the first year, and it would seem that universities could only improve retention by improving teaching quality in introductory courses frequented by first-year students, whether they are taught by full-time or part-time faculty. Additionally, one wonders if universities that assign their gatekeeper courses to part-timers are really committed to undergraduate education in general – it would seem that departments would have a very strong interest in maintaining high levels of quality in their gatekeeper courses and for the tenure-track faculty to be aware of and get to know potential majors.

**JBL Associates, Inc, for the American Federation of Teachers. Reversing Course: The Troubled State of Academic Staffing and a Path Forward. October 2008.**

About 70% of people teaching in colleges and universities are contingent – not tenure-track – faculty, and these instructors receive disproportionately low pay and benefits. This descriptive research documents the state of higher education staffing and compensation for the teaching of undergraduate courses.

**Findings:**

49% of the 1.5 million classes taught every term at U.S. public colleges and universities are taught by contingent faculty, not including graduate assistants, who teach between 16% and 32% of undergraduate courses at research institutions. Therefore, a majority of undergraduate courses in public universities are now taught by contingent faculty.

The share of courses taught by contingent faculty varies by institution type. 58% of courses at community colleges are taught by contingent faculty, whereas 40% of courses taught at comprehensive and research universities are taught by contingent faculty.

43% of undergraduates at public colleges each term are taught by contingent faculty.

Contingent faculty are most likely to be teaching in education, fine arts, human services, and vocational education. The fields with the highest proportion of courses taught by full time tenured or tenure-track faculty are life sciences, engineering, and social sciences.

Part-time/adjunct faculty members earn an average of \$2,758 per course, one quarter of what a full-time tenure-track faculty member would earn on a per course basis.

Women are more likely to be in contingent faculty positions than men.

Part-time /adjunct faculty members tended to be either younger or older than full-time faculty. Part-time teaching for some is a way to enter or exit the teaching profession.

There is limited national data on graduate employees who teach undergraduates. In 2003-04, the average graduate assistantship compensation was \$12,600. That same year, the average compensation for part-time faculty was \$9,745.

At the University of Oregon, graduate assistants taught approx. 2,648 sections in fall 2006, about the same number of sections taught by graduate assistants at the University of Illinois, which has three times as many students.

The report provides a model for calculating the cost of increasing the proportion of courses taught by full-time tenure-track faculty and increasing pay for contingent faculty.