

# **Essays on Teaching Excellence**

## *Toward the Best in the Academy*

*Volume 16, Number 8, 2004-05*

A publication of The Professional & Organizational Development Network in Higher Education ([www.podnetwork.org](http://www.podnetwork.org)).

## **A Roadmap to Part-Time Faculty Success**

**Terri A. Tarr, *Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis***

Part-time faculty often come to their teaching roles with strong content knowledge, but less knowledge of effective teaching practices. However, with proper orientation and support, part-time faculty can make valuable contributions to the academic community and find teaching to be a personally rewarding experience (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). This essay will give an overview of how to prepare for a part-time faculty teaching role.

### **Orientation to Part-Time Teaching**

How much orientation institutions provide new part-time faculty varies. In the best case scenario, you will be given a thorough orientation to the institution, department, and the course you are teaching. You will have a chance to meet colleagues and learn about available resources. In other situations resources may be more limited, and you might just be given a copy of the textbook and told to have a good year. If orientation is minimal, you will have a better chance of being successful if you proactively seek information and colleagues to help you prepare.

*Learn as much as you can about the course you will be teaching.* Ask about course goals and objectives. Request a copy of a syllabus that's been used in the past. Make an appointment to talk with a faculty member who has previously taught the course. Look through course catalogs and semester schedule bulletins for information about course descriptions, prerequisites, exam schedules, the names of other faculty teaching the course, and other useful information.

*Find out as soon as possible the type of online course management system (e.g., Web CT, Blackboard, Angel) used at your institution.* If you're not familiar with it, determine where you can get assistance in learning how to use it. Many of today's students are accustomed to having online access to course materials, so you will want to learn how to navigate the system prior to the beginning of the semester.

*Become familiar with relevant institutional policies and procedures.* Find out how to handle administrative matters such as students adding and withdrawing from classes and more challenging issues such as dealing with student academic misconduct. Most institutions have a faculty handbook that contains this information, as well as information about pertinent employment policies. Your department may have a similar handbook with information about department-specific policies. If you're not given a faculty handbook, find out whether you can access one online, or ask your department how to get a copy.

*Find out how you will be evaluated as a part-time faculty member.* Although full-time faculty members often have to provide extensive documentation for an annual review, part-time faculty are usually evaluated in a much less in-depth manner. Your evaluation may be based solely on student evaluations at the end of the semester, but it might involve classroom observations or other forms of feedback about your

teaching, too. Consider requesting a copy of the student evaluation form that will be used so you know in advance the questions students will be asked to evaluate your teaching.

## **Teaching Practices**

Stay informed about best practices, trends in education, and your own institution's mission, values, and strategic priorities. Consider how you might adopt best practices and advance your institution's and department's priorities.

*Plan thoughtfully for the first day of class.* The first day of class is especially important because it sets the tone for the semester. The McKeachie (2002) and Davis (1997) teaching handbooks have excellent chapters related to preparing for the first day of class.

*Develop your repertoire of active learning instructional strategies.* In recent years, there has been a de-emphasis on lecturing as education has moved from a teaching to a learning paradigm (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The teacher's role has been changing from being a transmitter of knowledge to being a facilitator of student learning. To learn more about active learning strategies, consult Bean's (1996) *Engaging Ideas* or Silberman's (1996) *Active Learning: 101 Strategies to Teach Any Subject*.

*Meet the needs of students with different cultural backgrounds.* Being clear about your expectations for students, encouraging students to express a variety of perspectives, and maintaining an atmosphere of respect for diversity in your classroom are a few of the strategies you can adopt to better meet the needs of all students. To learn more on this topic, see Nancy Chism's chapter about "Valuing Student Differences" in McKeachie (2002).

*Gather formative feedback from your students to find out what*

*they are learning and how you can better meet their needs.* Consider asking them on the first day of class about their reasons for taking the class and what they hope to get out of it. At the end of a class period, have them do a minute paper - ask them what the most important thing is that they learned in class and one question they still have. Details about the minute paper and other quick and easy techniques for obtaining feedback can be found in Angelo and Cross's (1993) *Classroom Assessment Techniques*.

*Connect course content with real-world experiences.* If you are working in a field related to the course you are teaching, sharing real-life applications of course concepts based on your experiences can be very enriching and interesting for students.

*Collect mid-semester feedback from your students about how the course is going.* If your institution has a teaching and learning center or an instructional consultant available, they may be willing to do a focus group with your students mid-semester to find out what's working well and what's not working well in class. Or you could simply ask students to complete an anonymous survey asking them to identify aspects of the course that are helping them learn and to suggest improvements in the course to help them learn better. This will enable you to make mid-course adjustments to make it a better learning experience for your students, and it might enhance your end-of-semester teaching evaluations.

*Work on strengthening your connections to your department and institution.* Be responsive to contacts and requests from your department and school. If you would like to become more involved, be sure to let your department know. Administrators often are reluctant to expect part-time faculty to do anything beyond teaching. Also look outside your department for campus activities and events that you might attend. Get on campus news listservs, read the campus newspaper, and

delve into the campus website to find out more about campus opportunities. The stronger your connections with the institution, the better equipped you'll be to enhance your students' experiences.

## **Teaching Resources**

*Seek out campus resources related to teaching. Many institutions offer workshops or events focused on teaching.* These are excellent opportunities to hear from experts and share experiences with colleagues. Try asking experienced faculty members if you could observe their classes. If you have a campus teaching center, that's an excellent place to find out about the availability of teaching resources.

*Purchase a general teaching handbook.* McKeachie and Davis are excellent basic handbooks for all faculty. If you are interested in a handbook specifically for part-time faculty, Bianco-Mathis and Chalofsky's (1996) *The Adjunct Faculty Handbook*, Grieve's (1995) *A Handbook for Adjunct/part-time Faculty and Teachers of Adults*, or Lyons' (2004) *Success Strategies for Adjunct Faculty* would be appropriate.

*Search the web for information related to teaching.* One place to start your online search is the website for the University of Kansas' Center for Teaching Excellence (<http://www.ku.edu/~cte/resources/websites.html>), where they have a comprehensive list of links to teaching centers in North America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. Many of these centers have extensive online resources related to teaching, including topics such as course planning, active learning, assessment, inclusive teaching, grading rubrics, classroom management, online teaching, and more.

## **Career Considerations**

*Reflect on how a part-time faculty role fits with your career goals and professional development.* Part-time faculty positions can be good career moves, but the outcomes associated with working as a part-time faculty member do not always fit with career aspirations. Satisfaction with the role is likely to be greater when you have realistic expectations of the role and how it can help you reach your career goals. For information on career strategies, see Lyons or Jill Carroll's (2001) *How to Survive as an Adjunct Lecturer: An Entrepreneurial Strategy Manual*.

## **Conclusion**

You may find that your greatest rewards from part-time teaching come from the enjoyment of teaching. By seeking the resources you need for a thorough orientation to teaching, establishing a strong connection with your institution, and locating sources of help and inspiration, you will be setting yourself up for success in your teaching.

## **References**

- Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Barr, R. B., & Tagg, J. (Nov-Dec, 1995). From teaching to learning: A new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change*, 13-25.
- Bean, J. C. (1996). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bianco-Mathis, V., & Chalofsky, N. (Eds.). (1996). *The adjunct faculty handbook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Carroll, B. J. (2001). *How to survive as an adjunct lecturer*.

Chula Vista, CA: Aventine.

Davis, B. G. (1993). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gappa, J. M., & Leslie, D. W. (1993). *The invisible faculty: Improving the status of part-timers in higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Greive, D. (1995). *A handbook for adjunct/part-time faculty and teachers of adults* (3rd ed.). Elyria, OH: Info-Tec.

Lyons, R. E. (2004). *Success strategies for adjunct faculty*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

McKeachie, W. J. (2002). *Teaching tips* (11th ed.) Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.

Silberman, M. L. (1996). *Active learning: 101 strategies to teach any subject*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

*Terri A. Tarr (Ph.D., Purdue University) is Director, Instructional Design and Development, and Director, Associate Faculty Office, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI).*