

20 August 2010

By Robert J. Pohl

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The current funding formula for higher education fails to incorporate a pivotal finding of scholarly research. Although predictable, I was severely disappointed with the May 20<sup>th</sup> hearing of the House Committee on Higher Education. No one—not a single representative on the committee for higher education or Dr. Raymund Paredes—mentioned this pivotal finding of scholarly research on the day that recommendations were made for the funding formulas—the formulas that are applied to all public colleges, both four-year and two-year schools—and that determine the amount of funding that colleges receive from state taxpayers.

The pivotal finding is this: “[C]ommunity college graduation rates decrease as the proportion of part-time faculty employed increases” (Daniel Jacoby, “Effects of Part-Time Faculty Employment on Community College Graduation Rates”).

Working conditions and learning conditions are interdependent—that is another way to think about the pivotal finding of Daniel Jacoby’s research<sup>1</sup>, which was published in the *Journal of Higher Education* (2006). The report<sup>2</sup> used multiple regression analysis and found a statistically significant, negative relationship between the number of part-time faculty employed at community colleges and graduation rates. Jacoby used data

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Jacoby is the Harry Bridges Chair in Labor Studies at the University of Washington, Bothell. The 24-page study mentioned today can be found in Vol. 77, No. 6, of *The Journal of Higher Education*.

<sup>2</sup> “Effects of Part-Time Faculty Employment on Community College Graduation Rates.”

from 1,209 public two-year colleges in the United States and Puerto Rico. There are currently about 1,600 community colleges across the nation.

Jacoby wrote, “While a more detailed cost study is needed, the dangers of expanding part-time faculty appear to outweigh any benefits. There now appear to be few real defenses that can justify maintaining a system of employment that evidence increasingly suggests has adverse results for students as well as for faculty.”

Similar results have been found at four-year institutions. And a works cited is included for those committed to applying the findings of scholarly research to public policy and the state’s funding formulas.

These findings need to be considered within a larger context. Nationally from 2004 to 2009<sup>3</sup>, college administrators’ salaries have risen 35.6 percent. These are people who already have incomes that are at least in the top 10 percent of incomes across the nation. In contrast, the American Association of University Professors reports that part-time faculty account for about 70 percent of the payrolls at community colleges across the nation, a rise of about 43 percent since 1969.

Compared to a full-time colleague, a part-time professor receives roughly half the pay for the same amount of work and receives no benefits.

Alamo Community College District, comprised of five colleges, has dramatically different proportions of full-time professors to part-time professors among the five colleges. (I’ve provided the data for all of you.) Yet, state funding for ACCD does not discriminate among the colleges and award more funding to the colleges with higher percentages of full-time faculty. Given the abundance of scholarly research that

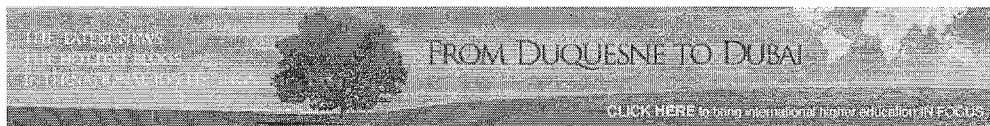
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<sup>3</sup>Journalist Gabriel Arana in a March 2009 *Nation* article

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documents the harmful consequences to student success when institutions heavily rely on part-time faculty, the logical result seems to be that our state's funding formula should incorporate these findings. If 60 percent of a college's faculty is full time, that college should receive more funding than a college where 50 percent of the faculty is full time. The finding—that graduation rates decrease as the number of part-time faculty increases—must be incorporated into the funding formulas. The state of Texas should simultaneously promote better graduation rates and better working conditions

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## News

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### Adjuncts and Graduation Rates

October 16, 2006

If community colleges want to see more students graduate or finish programs, what should institutions do? Add new testing or assessment programs?

There may be a simple answer. A national analysis of graduation and program completion rates at community colleges has found that institutions with higher percentages of full-time faculty members have higher completion rates. The study was conducted by Dan Jacoby, the Harry Bridges Professor of Labor Studies at the University of Washington, whose paper on the research is forthcoming in the *Journal of Higher Education*.

The actual numbers vary by type of institution. But using regression analyses, Jacoby documented the relationship between full-time faculty and completion rates at community colleges with a variety of academic missions and student demographics. In an interview Friday, he said he realized that graduation rates were an imperfect measure of community colleges because so many of their students don't seek degrees. So he looked broadly at measures of program completion, and believes that because some students do want to finish degrees, the analysis is a good measure of student success.

While the use of adjuncts is widespread and growing in all sectors of higher education, it is particularly prevalent at two-year institutions. In many cases, community colleges seek out part-timers who are professionals in various fields to teach career-related courses. But community colleges also fill many sections (a majority in some subject areas on some campuses) with part timers. Administrators frequently say that given their institutions' enrollment growth and tight budgets, they have little choice.

Jacoby said that he hoped his research might prompt more reflection on this practice. "People need to realize that the performance of colleges is not indifferent to the use of part timers," he said. "By having a lot of part timers, the college becomes less effective," he said.

A former part timer himself, Jacoby stressed that he didn't think part-time instructors were any less effective in the classroom or less intelligent than their full-time counterparts. But other realities no doubt kick in: Many adjuncts don't have offices, aren't on campus when they aren't teaching, and don't have the consistent involvement in departments that makes them able to fully help students, he said.

Keith Hoeller, co-founder of the Washington State Part-Time Faculty Association, said he thought Jacoby's findings were quite significant. "There is a fiction that you can cut costs with lots of adjuncts," Hoeller said. "There's a sense that as long as you have someone in front of the classroom in class hours, everything else is fine."

Hoeller said that an important fact to consider is that low program completion rates are expensive -- to students and their families who have paid tuition and to taxpayers who have subsidized instruction. Everyone saves money if students move through the system, Hoeller said, so the current use of part timers may not actually be saving money.

The study is also a reminder, he said, that there is a middle ground between having a full-time faculty and paying adjuncts for time leading classes. He predicted that the graduation rate gap would disappear if adjuncts were paid for time on campus generally, so they could have more office hours, more time to meet with students, and be more fully part of the campuses where they teach.

"Right now adjuncts are being underutilized," he said. "Colleges are just paying them for classroom time, while tenured faculty earn for all hours." If colleges started paying part timers for non-classroom work, he said, "we would be happy to do equal work for equal pay."

— Scott Jaschik

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