**MHEC FAC**

**Standards for Use of Adjunct Faculty Work Group Report, May 2015**

**Responding to the Changing Role of Adjunct Professors**

**in Maryland’s Colleges and Universities**

**Our Charge**:

The Commission, in consultation with colleges and universities, will provide information and conduct studies, within its existing reports or stand-alone reports, to examine whether the use of adjunct faculty has any effects on student progression, and to encourage explicit standards for the strategic use of adjunct faculty.

**Summary of findings:**

The composition of the higher education faculty in Maryland, as in the rest of the United States, has changed dramatically over the past several decades. In 1970, only one out of five faculty in colleges and universities in the United States were adjunct professors 1. By 2013, that number had risen to more than half (51%), while the percentage of full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty dropped to 20% 2. In Maryland, the percentage of adjuncts is even higher: the 2013 adjuncts comprised 59% of the faculty at four-year public institutions and community colleges3 (for additional details, see Appendix).

Our review of research on the effects of adjunct faculty on student progression has not clearly indicated whether or how the use of adjunct faculty *per se* influences the performance or retention of students. The results of the studies we examined were conflicting, which likely reflects the fact that the methodologies in many of the studies we examined were questionable. Many made conclusions based on studies that were performed with small samples sizes, were performed in a very limited time frame, and/or only examined the one type of student 4-7. One recent, comprehensive study by MHEC examining the impact of adjunct faculty on graduation rates at historically black institutions concluded that the results of that study “did not indicate that increased exposure to adjunct instruction had any influence on student persistence”8.

What is clear, however, is that adjunct professors commonly lack the profes­sional working conditions necessary to provide quality instruction to their students. In a recent survey 89% of adjuncts reported that they were provided with “no professional support” 9. Adjuncts often lack access to offices where they can talk to their students, copies of required textbooks, administrative staff support, and/or access to professional development courses provided to other faculty9.

In addition, adjuncts frequently do not feel integrated into the institutions where they teach 10. They often are not provided with orientation to the school and/or department, are not provided with feedback or support from members of their department regarding their teaching, are not given opportunities to participate in departmental meetings with their colleagues, and are not trained to use the learning managements systems (LMS) critical for interacting effectively with students.

Moreover, adjuncts have little job security and typically are poorly compensated for their expertise and their time. Adjunct faculty contracts in Maryland are particularly short, usually for a single course or semester. Adjunct faculty are often hired just prior to the start of a semester, which does not allow sufficient time to adequately prepare the course. Conversely, last minute decisions about scheduling frequently results in adjuncts spending months preparing to teach a course which is canceled at the last minute, and for which they receive no compensation.

Adjuncts are highly educated (55% have Ph.Ds and 35% have Masters degrees11), and many have expertise in their field based on years of experience in the private or public sector. Despite this, their compensation is quite low: the median pay for a standard three-credit course is $2,70012. Since median pay for a fulltime faculty member is $47,500, and a full course load for an academic year is eight courses, this means that an adjunct would have to teach more than twice as many (17.6) courses per year to reach comparable wages11.

Retaining and graduating undergraduate students is a priority of the MHEC. Since many adjunct professors teach first-and second-year courses, facilitating their ability to teach and be engaged with their students and their institution is critical for achieving that goal.

**Recommendations for Strategic Use of Adjunct Faculty**

In Maryland, adjunct professors now represent 70% of instructional faculty at community colleges and 52% at four-year colleges and universities. These professors must be provided with the profes­sional working conditions necessary to provide quality instruction to their students.

Below, we provide a recommendations for actions that we believe will help Maryland to retain valuable adjunct faculty who have a history of excellent teaching and of loyalty to our colleges and universities, and to facilitate the hiring of such individuals in the future.

* Part-time faculty need and must be provided the same access to essential resources for teaching as full time faculty, including textbooks, office supplies, (free) parking, campus activities and recreational facilities, copiers, a college email address and telephone.
* Many students do not have access to adjuncts outside the classroom, since adjuncts are seldom provided with office space or another private place where they can meet with students.

It is of significant concern that the current lack of private spaces for students to speak with adjunct faculty results in conversations in the public spaces (tables in the hallway, the library, the cafeteria) that in turn often can lead to blatant FERPA violations.

* One option to address this, which is currently being used by some colleges in Maryland and elsewhere, is office sharing with other adjunct faculty or with full-time faculty who are not on campus when adjuncts are teaching.
* At nearly all Maryland institutions of higher learning, students and faculty communicate using learning managements systems (LMS) such as Blackboard, Desire2Learn (D2L), or Canvas. For this reason, technology/online training must be offered to all adjunct faculty so that they can use these important tools to communicate with and provide academic support to their students outside of the classroom.
* All adjunct faculty should be required to have an orientation, both to the school and to the department. Studies have shown that retention of students is increased when their connection to their college or university is increased. The current situation, in which many first-year students are taught by adjuncts who themselves often feel alienated from their institution, may decrease the connection the students feel to their school, leading to lower retention and graduate rates. Adjunct should also be permitted to participate in goverance. A recent committee report from the Council of University System Faculty of the University of Maryland stated that the adjunct faculty at UMUC, where they comprise 91.8% of the faculty, have no legitimate shared governance at that institution.
* Adjunct faculty should be evaluated by Department Chairs or designated full-time faculty as well as by students. It should be standard operation for the Department Chair or course coordinators to discuss the evaluations in person with the adjunct. In addition, mentoring of adjuncts by full time faculty should be a standard process within individual departments.
* Adjunct faculty should have incentives to excel in their teaching and professional development. Adjuncts could be compensated for this training; for example, individuals who complete a certain number of relevant courses could receive an increase in their salary. Adjuncts should also be provided with compensation to attend conferences in their field of study to promote their continuing competence.
* Adjunct faculty should receive compensation for all the work they are asked to perform. Since many hours are required to prepare a course, adjuncts should receive at least partial reimbursement for classes that are cancelled by the institution close to the beginning of a semester or session. They should also receive compensation for other situations for which they prepare classes but do not teach them, including snow days.
* The faculty contracts of adjunct faculty teaching in Maryland higher education should be for periods of time longer than a single semester. For a thoughtful approach to this topic, it would be useful to review the new standards of job security that have been established by the University of Denver for non-tenure track faculty (positions which were previously adjunct positions).**13**
* Policies should be established to assure that all expectations of adjuncts should be defined in a transparent manner prior to their acceptance of a contract to teach.
* Standards for financial compensation across Maryland that would create more equity for adjunct faculty should be established. These could be based on the type and level of institution where the adjunct faculty member teaches, their education, and their number of years of experience teaching. Possibilities include basing the salary on a percent of FT equivalent salary; or percent of the salary of an Assistant Professor or Instructor. When setting salaries for adjuncts the Maryland State minimum wage should be considered with the credentials and the approximate time needed, and the salary should always exceed the minimum wage, which it does not now. In the future, the possibility of providing employer-provided benefits, such as access to health care or retirement plans, to long-term adjuncts should be evaluated, perhaps based on the number of hours and/or years of service.

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**Appendix (from reference 3, p.22)**

