The Creation And Implementation Of A Formal Faculty Orientation And Training Program In Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This document provides an overview of a faculty training and orientation program used for adjunct faculty at the H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University. The model includes components for assessing, hiring, orienting, and providing initial training for a diverse cadre of part time faculty in many distant locations. The authors make suggestions as to how this model can be used to provide long-term success in orientation and training, including an argument for appropriate rewards for both new hires and the full time faculty involved in their training.

INTRODUCTION

Nova Southeastern University (NSU) has been offering classes locally at its main campus in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, nationally throughout the United States, and internationally in over ten different countries for the past four decades. For example, in the last decade NSU had close to 800 active students in the country of Jamaica and the school's faculty members have been active in many countries including The Bahamas, Trinidad, China, Brazil, France, Germany, Dominican Republic, England, Greece, Panama, and Venezuela, offering various programs at the bachelor, masters and doctoral levels. While the locations and modalities of education tend to vary from group to group, the content and consistency of the subjects that are taught to each group of students stays the same. As such, not only do the administrators meet the stated requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) but they also meet their own stated institutional mission statement which is:

Nova Southeastern University is a dynamic, not-for-profit independent institution dedicated to providing high-quality educational programs of distinction from pre-school through the professional and doctoral levels, as well as service to the community. Nova Southeastern University prepares students for lifelong learning and leadership roles in business and the professions. It offers academic programs at times convenient to students, employing innovative delivery systems and rich learning resources on campus and at distant sites. The university fosters inquiry, research, and creative professional activity, by uniting faculty and students in acquiring and applying knowledge in clinical, community, and professional settings. (NSU, 2007)

NSU has over 600 full-time faculty members and thousands of part-time faculty that assist them in the delivery of up-to-date education to traditional and adult students. Hiring qualified faculty members to teach in their areas of specialization is one of the initial steps in ensuring student success in the programs.

The authors work at the H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship. Besides being accredited by SACS, the Huizenga School is accredited by the *International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education* (IACBE) and is a member of the *Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business*

International (AACSB) which provides additional levels of “programmatic” accreditation for business schools. AACSB (1999), in their Standards for Business Accreditation, stated that “The school should demonstrate continuous efforts to achieve demographic diversity in its faculty” (page 11). This objective is one reason why NSU’s Huizenga School works diligently to hire and retain a diverse group of practicing faculty members from various fields and specializations.

The school currently has 45 full-time faculty members and over 400 part-time faculty members that reside in the United States, Jamaica and The Bahamas. One reason for having such a large number of part-time faculty is that they are mostly employed practitioners and teach in their areas of academic and practical expertise. As such, these practicing educators are fully qualified to discuss the latest “best practices” with their students. Since many of Huizenga School’s students are working adults, the presence of practicing faculty members facilitating specialized courses can enrich class discussions, learning, and content retention. While securing a diverse group of faculty from different institutions can be a great asset to an institution, these individuals should also be socialized and oriented with the rules and policies of the school if they are to deliver consistently educational values of superior value in each course. Also, it must be recognized that there are significant differences working in Corporate America and working in academia.

The cultural environment in academic institutions is different than in industry. Learning the environmental forces and different socially acceptable customs is critically important to a PA’s (practitioner academic) success. Culture can be learned through close observation, listening, and understanding the organization’s history....The risk to the PA is that culture takes so long to learn. (Simendinger, Puia, Kraft, & Jasperson, 2000, p. 106)

Even adjunct faculty who have experience in teaching and/or training in non-university settings have to make an adjustment when entering the academic classroom. Says one highly experienced nurse and administrator who recently began teaching at a college in Pennsylvania:

I’ve taught in conferences. You teach patients. You teach their families. You teach in peer groups...Teaching in the classroom I think is different because you kind of have to rethink your approach. (Wernowsky, 2006, p. 2)

On page 11 of the Standards for Business Accreditation, AACSB mentions that “The school should have appropriate practices for the orientation of new faculty to the school.” On page 12 of the guidelines, AACSB continues to state that “Processes should be in place to determine appropriate teaching assignments and service workloads, to guide and mentor faculty, and to provide adequate support for activities that implement the school’s mission.” Such processes are designed to ensure fairness and integrity of the system, while continuously providing a diversity of thoughts for enhancing each program. In the case of using practitioner faculty, the orientation process is a key tool for jumpstarting cultural adjustment.

In order to meet the expectations of various accrediting bodies and effectively meet its mission statement, the Huizenga School’s Undergraduate Business Programs created and implemented a comprehensive faculty training and orientation program, which is discussed in the next section. This paper describes the model and the pilot program and suggests ways in which other programs and institutions can use this approach to orienting and training adjunct faculty. (Note: For purposes of this paper the terms “adjunct” and “part-time” faculty will be used interchangeably.)

THE UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS PROGRAMS

Few would argue that all institutions need to have a standardized process to consciously recruit, hire, orient, develop, and retain extraordinary faculty members for all education modalities. Having a standardized faculty orientation and development process is even more critical for institutions involved in distance learning (Mujtaba, 2005). Nova Southeastern University (NSU) has been involved in distance education for over 40 years. Currently, NSU has approximately 27,000 students and nearly 5,000 of these students are registered to pursue degrees in business at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs. The Huizenga School of NSU has traditionally recruited and hired faculty members to teach its classes, mostly based on “word of mouth” advertising, since there really has not been a shortage of qualified people who wanted to teach in this non-traditional format of adult

education. However, enrollment has substantially increased in the last decade, which has required the school to have a large group of qualified part-time faculty members from diverse institutions.

In 2002, the Undergraduate Business Programs at Nova Southeastern University had about 2,100 students and nearly 300 part-time faculty members with 14 full-time professors serving as mentors and lead faculty for courses in their areas of specialty (Mujtaba, 2005). While the program was large, the hiring of adjuncts was being conducted mostly through one-on-one socialization with the Lead Faculty members, Faculty Coordinator, and/or Academic Director. While this process can be done effectively with a large number of Faculty Coordinators, the Undergraduate Business Program only had one official Faculty Coordinator who recruited, hired and trained all part-time faculty members for classes each semester. Naturally, this is too much work for any one person, as there were over 200 sections of classes each term.

Based on a thorough analysis of how things were being done with regard to faculty training and orientation, recommendations from the accreditation team at the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) when the Business and Professional Management (BPM) program was reaccredited, the shortage of faculty coordinators for the program, and the growing enrollment at the Undergraduate Business Programs, the new Director of Undergraduate Business Programs decided that a comprehensive faculty training and orientation program was needed for incoming part-time educators. The Program Director with assistance from selected full-time faculty members prepared a manual titled “Faculty Training and Orientation Guidelines” for an eight-hour session for all incoming part-time faculty members. The manual was designed to be a part of the comprehensive assessment and orientation program for implementation in late 2002. The program was scheduled for pilot implementation at the Main Campus in Fort Lauderdale, and then at four other locations including Tampa, Orlando, Nassau (Bahamas), and Kingston (Jamaica).

THE FACULTY ORIENTATION AND TRAINING MODEL

The comprehensive orientation and faculty training process developed in 2002 for the Undergraduate Business Programs is presented in Figure 1 of this document. While this paper focuses on the orientation and early job-specific training components of the process, each element of this ideal immersion model of training can further provide more specific institution-related policies and links to the organization’s policies, guidelines, and mission as follows (Mujtaba and Preziosi, 2006):

Figure 1: Faculty Orientation and Training Model

As part of the immersion model of training and orientation, the following is the general process used by the Undergraduate Business Program Office. (Note that the Interview and Assessment components are part of the first step of hiring.)

- *Interview:* Resumes are reviewed to see if the academic achievements and practical experiences of each candidate meet the Program's needs for subject areas that will require more instructors. There should be a typical response that prospective faculty members receive when they submit a resume for teaching opportunities. Qualified candidates are often screened and/or interviewed (by phone) to discuss possibilities for a face-to-face interview and assessment. Face-to-face interviews are conducted and those who match the school's needs (and the needs of accreditation criteria) are invited for the Assessment, which includes a presentation by the candidate and other exercises to assess each applicant's ability to facilitate discussion and teach adult learners. In the case of prospective adjunct faculty members, living outside of Fort Lauderdale - Florida, who cannot attend one of the scheduled Assessment and Orientations at the Main Campus, other options such as regional programs and online delivery were planned. A list of sample interview questions with prospective candidates was made available to all individuals involved in the recruitment and hiring process.
- *Assessment:* Assessment includes a presentation on a topic (about 10-15 minutes) in the applicant's area of academic expertise to see his/her teaching style. Candidates will also become aware of the institution's mission, vision, philosophy, and overall expectations from faculty members during the initial hour of the assessment session. Those who successfully complete the assessment process will be invited for the hiring and orientation session. While the initial part of assessment is complete after the first session, the assessment really continues until the successful completion of the faculty member's first course. Instructors who do not have a successful teaching experience in their first course may either receive more mentoring/coaching or may be de-activated (if the situation cannot be improved), and consequently will not be able to teach at the school
- *Hiring & Orientation:* Hiring and orientation training are scheduled on a separate day for qualified applicants who have gone through the assessment process. After the successful completion of the above steps (including the orientation) and the required paperwork, new faculty members can be scheduled for courses in the coming semesters (or year) with an assigned Lead/Senior Faculty serving as a mentor/coach for the first course. The candidate may actually sit in classes with his/her mentor or other experienced faculty members to observe best practices while preparing teaching notes for the upcoming scheduled class. Online faculty members may be asked to actually observe an online section of a course from the mentor or other experienced faculty members. Based on the readiness assessment and first teaching experience of the candidate, the mentor may recommend future course assignments and/or more training for the newly hired faculty to the Program Director (or Chair).
- *Mentorship:* Once a course and mentor have been assigned, the new faculty member needs to submit electronic copies of his/her syllabus for the scheduled course (along with possible exams, quizzes, and teaching plans) to the Lead/Senior Faculty (mentor) for approval at least three weeks prior to the start of the course. So, the mentorship starts with the approval of course syllabus and teaching content. Once this material has been approved (or revised as needed) by the mentor/coach, then it can be submitted to the Program Director/Coordinator for archiving purposes (records are kept for auditing needs) if these items are not available on the online course servers. Newly hired faculty members can call on their mentor/coach for directions and guidance as well as on the Chairs, Academic Director and Program Coordinators when needed.

THE MODEL IN ACTION

There were a total of six different pilot training and orientation sessions scheduled and implemented in early 2003. All current full-time and part-time faculty members were invited to participate in one of these sessions with the result that over 120 full-time and part-time faculty members participated in one of the eight-hour orientation sessions.

Motivated by professional curiosity, prospective faculty members often wanted to know what would be covered in the assessment and orientation sessions. As such, they were told that the assessment sessions, which usually lasts about four hours, are inclusive of passing on relevant information to everyone about the university and the school's expectations from all faculty members, introduction of the school and academic directors along with

faculty members present, a presentation by prospective faculty members (about 10-15 minutes), and other exercises to evaluate each person's teaching and grading style. The presentation by prospective faculty members should be in their area of academic expertise to assess their knowledge and facilitation style. The presentations usually take place in a classroom setting, while other prospective faculty members (and the evaluators) serve the role of students/audience. Since working adults who are not necessarily experts in each person's area of expertise will be the audience, candidates are encouraged to prepare their presentations accordingly so it is not too complex or boring for the audience. They are encouraged to present academically "published" materials that are relevant for the audience. The key is to make their presentations interesting for a diverse audience. Presentations could be made using lecture, blackboard, transparencies, activities, questions and answers, and/or handouts to achieve the proposed presentation objectives in the time allotted.

The orientation session, which usually lasts about eight hours, may include completing the hiring package during the first thirty minutes. As such, candidates are asked to bring the actual and copies of their Social Security Card, Driver's License, Green Card, two forms of picture identification, two professional letters of recommendations, copies of certifications and licenses, and/or other relevant items needed for employment application and academic credentials. The remaining time is spent on faculty familiarization/orientation with the university policies, expectations from all faculty members, grading criteria, preparing standard syllabi with the same outcome competencies, evaluating student performance), familiarity with the American Psychological Association's (APA) writing style, dealing with different learning styles, effectively handling students' concerns with regards to academic rigor or grade complaints, managing diversity in the classroom, and other such topics so as to better equip everyone for a successful teaching experience at the university.

After the successful completion of the assessment and orientation sessions, faculty members can be assigned mentors and a course in a prospective term once they complete their Course Approval Requests (CARs) based on the Course Profile and Teaching Qualification Requirements. The Undergraduate Business Program's lead faculty members developed a comprehensive document known as the Course Profiles and Teaching Qualification Requirements which is initially used by Faculty Coordinators to recruit and hire the right faculty members by matching the credentials of prospective candidates with the qualification requirement of the courses which need more teachers. These qualifications are usually discussed during the initial interview sessions, so the candidate knows what s/he is being asked to teach if hired. Once the candidates complete the assessment and orientation sessions, they are asked to electronically complete a Course Approval Request (CAR) within the next few weeks for courses that they are willing to teach as per their academic (or practical) qualifications and the requirements of each course. As such, the comprehensive Course Profile and Teaching Qualification Requirements form is made available for all faculty members so they can match their credentials with the right courses. The newly hired faculty members are asked to electronically submit their CAR to the academic program office, which is reviewed by the Academic Director, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and/or Chairs in order to grant approval or deny approval for teaching the stated courses. If the person's qualifications match the requirements for teaching the course, then approval is granted. Otherwise, approval is denied. Once approval is granted, then the person can be scheduled for a course in one of the upcoming terms.

Course assignments in the Undergraduate Business Programs are usually completed about one to two semesters ahead of schedule when enrollment is known. If a faculty member is selected for a course during a given term/semester, then someone from the Program Office would contact him or her immediately to see if he or she is open, willing, and available to teach it. If the person agrees to teach it, then he or she will be scheduled for it. If one cannot teach it because of other commitments, then another faculty member will be contacted to see if s/he can teach the course. Periodically, the Undergraduate Business Program holds Faculty Development meetings/sessions to gather information about the curriculum and its improvement, provide updates, network with other faculty members for discovering best practices, etc. and faculty members are expected to attend at least one each year along with all the required meetings. Of course, the main purpose of such a formalized process is to make sure each person is able to be successful as a faculty member and achieve extraordinary results with his or her students in the class. The pedagogy of adult education, as well as expectations and characteristics of being an extraordinary faculty member are discussed with everyone during the assessment and orientation sessions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS OF A TRAINING AND ORIENTATION PROGRAM

The following are some general recommendations for Program Directors of various centers and/or large schools that wish to duplicate this Faculty Training and Orientation process in their departments:

- Create an experienced committee made up of faculty, staff and administrators to design, prepare and implement the faculty training and orientation program. The leaders and senior faculty members must continuously support and feed the program.
- One of the first things that must be done by the committee and faculty members is to create a complete list of course profiles and qualification requirements for all courses in the program. Then, educate everyone on how this document can be used to recruit the right persons for teaching the courses. As such, the faculty coordinators and program managers must be thoroughly educated in the process so they can be empowered to use and improve it.
- Clarify and communicate the program's vision, expectations and orientation process to all faculty members and administrative staff so they can both support and promote it.
- Schedule at least one faculty assessment and orientation session each quarter, or as needed, so the new faculty members can be indoctrinated to the school's culture on a just-in-time basis for teaching in the upcoming semesters (as per the school or college's needs).
- Once the sessions are scheduled, each program should review their projected (or actual) enrollment for the coming few terms to assess their faculty hiring needs. Then they can select resumes for interviewing.
- Interview qualified candidates and invite those who match your needs to the assessment session.
- Conduct the assessment and orientation session for all newly hired faculty members.
- Once the candidate's hiring paperwork and orientation session are successfully completed then schedule a course for this faculty in the coming term and assign a mentor to work with this person.
- Follow up to make sure the person is ready to teach his/her first course. Offer any assistance that the candidate or the mentor needs.
- Once the newly hired faculty member's class is over, speak with the mentor and the newly hired faculty to assess the success of the new faculty.
- All faculty members should be given "feedback" on their performance on a regular basis. It might be best to implement a formal and standardized program where each faculty goes through a peer review process annually. Corporate and government employees often receive a formal appraisal each year and the same should be true of academics as everyone can use quality "feedback" to set goals and improve their performance.
- Learn from the experience, improve the orientation program and continue this process each term or year as needed.
- Augment the orientation and training program as needed to meet the needs of online classes. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss training needed for first-time online instructors, there are significant pedagogical, platform and technological issues which must be addressed for adjuncts recruited to teach online.

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE MODEL THROUGH APPROPRIATE REWARDS

It is also important to mention that an effective faculty training and orientation program qualitatively involves relevant staff, faculty, advisors, administrators, and students. Furthermore, the success of this process requires commitment and resources to effectively compensate mentors and lead faculty members for developing newly hired educators. As part of service requirement to the university, it might be fair to expect full-time faculty members who are not involved on other committees to mentor two new individuals each year. When mentoring more than two mentees in a given year, full-time faculty members should be compensated fairly or given some sort of a reduction in teaching load as appropriate. It is important to note that mentoring requires work and its long-term success depends on appropriate rewards and recognitions for all relevant parties.

When resources are available, and to fairly reward each person's commitment, it is recommended that new faculty members should be given a stipend of \$500 for successfully going through the assessment and orientation

process. This stipend should be paid, along with the contracted compensation for the course, once the person finishes teaching his or her first course. Furthermore, it is recommended that mentors (lead faculty, full-time faculty or senior part-time faculty members) be compensated a sum of \$500 for working with each mentee as they teach their first course at the university. In such a case, when mentors are given a stipend, then they should also be required to physically observe the new faculty member in the class for a period of two hours on the first session and then once again for another two hours during the term as appropriate. Each mentor should also complete formal evaluation forms that need to be submitted to the program office for documentation and processing. When the new faculty member is assigned to teach an online class, the mentor should observe and monitor all interactions (in the background without students being aware) while providing regular feedback on the performance of the faculty. Of course, the specific amounts of compensation, reward and recognitions may vary depending on the teaching load or student numbers in each course, compensation for each course, contact hours with students, benefits offered, and other such variables. So, each program should discuss and design strategies that are appropriate for their program and faculty. Furthermore, the program directors should design effective documentation strategies for properly monitoring progress and performance, while continuously improving the process as needed.

The program directors and administrative leaders must also reward and recognize the assistance and contributions of everyone making the process successful. There should be a formal way of recognizing everyone's contributions to the success of a process. For example, a formal email or letter to recognize everyone's contributions can provide feedback (information) to everyone, appreciate everyone's contributions, encourage others to become a part of the process, and provide a document that faculty members can proudly attach to their portfolios as part of their service to the university during annual reviews or when seeking rank promotion. Of course, this is just one very sincere and inexpensive way of recognizing everyone's contributions when sufficient resources for tangible rewards cannot be secured or don't exist.

Other means of rewarding everyone for their contributions can include taking them and their significant others to a dinner, a play, or a theme park for a day or two as per their preference. Sometimes, the entire team along with one or two family members can be taken to places like Disney World, Epcot Center, Universal Studios, or Busch Gardens where everyone can enjoy the day with each other because of their hard work and synergy as a team. The author used to take such trips with the entire team and/or departments when he worked in the corporate arena and this can be a great way of further developing groups and creating loyalty, while increasing the probability of effective communication among diverse team members and groups.

CONCLUSION

With the increasing popularity of all kinds of distance education, the use of part time faculty is likely to grow. These adjuncts can be an important part of the academic life of any university. In order to speed up their learning curve and to increase their chances of success, structured training and orientation approaches must be developed and maintained. Accordingly, this document presented an immersion model for faculty training and orientation that can prepare new faculty members for successfully facilitating the learning objectives of each course and curriculum in the program.

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NOTES