ACHIEVING BEST PRACTICES FOR ADJUNCT FACULTY AT THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
SPRING 2016 PROGRESS REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(MORE DETAILED REPORT IS AVAILABLE ON FACULTY SENATE WEBSITE)

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SUMMARY: In 2013 I published a report on the College’s policies and practices regarding adjunct faculty. Based on my external and internal research, I developed a list of best practices I recommended for C of C. These were comparable to practices promoted in national publications and position papers. In 2013, C of C was either similar to or somewhat better than other US universities in its reliance on adjunct faculty, its adjunct pay rates, and its support for adjunct faculty. This final report summarizes what the College has done to achieve each of these best practices and makes recommendations for ongoing improvement.

Since 2013, the College has made progress in several areas: better pay, health benefits for full-time adjuncts, better participation in shared governance, and significantly better opportunities for adjunct faculty to participate in, and be paid for, professional development. Recognition of adjuncts’ work is also somewhat improved. Adjunct faculty now serve as Faculty Senators and campus-wide faculty committee members, and department-based professional development programs are encouraging more adjunct faculty and regular faculty to collaborate and learn from one another. A 2015 directive from the Provost has formalized the process of evaluating adjuncts, and Academic Affairs has overseen some technical adjustments to facilitate a smoother path to hiring adjuncts and getting them “in the system” of email, OAKS, and the payroll. However, the College’s earlier progress on raising adjunct pay stalled in 15-16, and there is no sign yet of implementing a tiered pay scale that would pay adjuncts more according to their years of experience teaching at C of C. New official titles for adjunct faculty offer a better way to recognize adjuncts’ record of successful teaching at the College, although additional titles could indicate more clearly the qualifications and experience that many adjunct faculty bring to the College. A final best practice stipulates that institutions collect and report data on their adjuncts and adjunct-related policies. Shared governance is the best way for the College to carry out this best practice.

RECOMMENDATION: Ongoing monitoring and dissemination of data regarding adjunct faculty should become the responsibility of a group of elected faculty and at least one representative from Academic Affairs. In addition to adjunct faculty senators, this group should include faculty who have been department chairs and faculty who serve or have recently served on Academic Planning, Compensation, Welfare, and/or Budget. In the following report, I refer to this hypothetical group as the “Adjunct Oversight Committee,” although there may be a better name that others wish to propose (e.g., Committee on Contingent Faculty). If the Senate prefers not to form a new committee, I recommend that the following duties be added to the charge of some existing committee(s). If a new committee cannot be formed, the work should still begin immediately; the Speaker and Provost could form an ad hoc committee or charge an existing committee to carry out the work until a permanent committee can take over.

PROPOSED DUTIES FOR AN ADJUNCT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE:
--Receive and analyze reports on the number of adjuncts employed by the College, the number of credit hours delivered by adjunct faculty, adjunct faculty members' rank and status as part-time or full-time, and adjunct faculty compensation
--Solicit additional information on the College’s adjunct policies and practices via analysis of published documents (department websites or handbooks), interviews with deans and chairs, and surveys of adjunct faculty
--Receive and respond to information from Academic Affairs and/or senior leadership regarding future plans for the College that will affect our level of adjunct faculty reliance or our compensation of adjunct faculty
--Regularly report to Senate and Provost on the College’s adjunct policies and practices; make recommendations regarding compensation, working conditions, ongoing professional development, and collegiality for adjunct faculty

Best practices for adjunct faculty & how this committee could monitor the College’s progress
1. Adjunct faculty receive equitable pay and benefits, comparable to the pay earned for comparable work done by tenured and tenure-track faculty or other roster faculty with similar qualifications. Academic Affairs should provide the Adjunct Oversight Committee with annual updates on adjunct compensation. Work by Compensation and Welfare committees should be shared with the Adjunct Oversight Committee.

2. Hiring practices for adjunct faculty are comparable to those used to hire and evaluate tenure-track faculty; When hired, adjunct faculty receive contracts, teaching information and support that are comparable to that provided to new permanent or visiting faculty. All new adjunct faculty appointments allow adequate time to prepare to teach a course; contracts, handbooks, and other communication from supervisors clearly stipulate duties, expectations, and the process of performance evaluation. The Adjunct Oversight Committee should periodically survey chairs to see if they are being adequately supported in their efforts to hire adjuncts well ahead of the semester’s start. The Adjunct Oversight Committee should survey adjuncts periodically to learn whether, in practice, adjuncts actually are being hired with a reasonable amount of time to prepare their courses, and whether they receive adequate information on their duties and the way they will be evaluated.

3. Evaluation practices for adjunct faculty are comparable to those used to hire and evaluate tenure-track faculty, including clearly defined criteria and timelines, peer review, and adequate time for adjunct faculty to seek other employment if not reappointed. The Adjunct Oversight Committee should monitor departments’ hiring and evaluation practices. In addition to receiving updates from the Provost’s office, the committee should periodically survey or interview department chairs and/or should review departmental by-laws. The College should identify and reward departments whose hiring and evaluation practices are exemplary; the Adjunct Oversight Committee would be well qualified to assist in identifying these departments.

4. Career ladder for adjunct faculty rewards excellent performance and makes adjunct faculty potentially eligible for some form of job security.

5. Support for adjunct faculty teaching parallels support for tenure-track faculty: appropriate supplies, equipment, office space, and access to campus resources, professional development, & mentoring. The Adjunct Oversight Committee should survey adjunct faculty periodically to determine how many adjunct faculty who teach on campus have access to adequate office space, supplies, and equipment.

6. Adjunct faculty are invited to participate in department meetings and may contribute to curriculum design.

7. Proportional representation in faculty governance is available to all adjunct faculty.

8. Respect for adjunct faculty is communicated clearly and consistently by administration, chairs, and all tenured and tenure-track faculty.

9. Support is available for all adjunct faculty’s professional development and scholarly research. The Adjunct Oversight Committee should receive an annual summary of professional development opportunities sponsored by departments and funded by Academic Affairs.

10. Institution’s staffing plan specifies a ratio of regular faculty/adjunct faculty that is desirable in order for institution and departments to meet their academic goals. Information on College-wide adjunct reliance should be provided each semester to the Adjunct Oversight committee. Academic Affairs can update the committee on the percentage of student credit hours taught by adjunct faculty, the headcount of adjunct faculty, and the number of adjunct faculty who are full-time and part-time.