

The Role of Adjunct Faculty in Quality Teaching

I. Background

At City University of Seattle (CityU), quality of teaching relates not only to the academic credentials of faculty but also to professional experience in the field, relevant training and orientation of faculty to familiarize them with CityU's academic model and approach to teaching, the use of standardized curriculum, student evaluation of teaching effectiveness, systematic program review, mechanisms to recognize and reward excellent teaching, and achieving the intended student learning outcomes across the curriculum.

City University has long embraced a culture of continuous improvement relative to its faculty and its curriculum. New adjunct faculty are provided training and orientation. Once they have joined CityU, our practitioner adjunct faculty are evaluated on a regular basis and our programs are currently on a two year cycle for review. Each year, we establish strategic plans that incorporate opportunities for improvement. In addition to standard continuous improvement practices, CityU recently engaged in a significant quality teaching (QT) initiative.

The CityU QT initiative has two parts. The first part is called the Adjunct Faculty Initiative. City University utilizes many adjunct practitioner faculties and this initiative is an effort to ensure that our adjuncts are delivering instruction in accordance with City University quality standards. We also must ensure that the adjunct faculty understand and act in accordance with the University's academic model. Second, we have a major initiative underway regarding our curriculum. In the School of Management, nearly every program has been rewritten or replaced in an effort to improve quality, ensure that standards are achieved, and make it easier for our adjunct faculty to deliver instruction that is in accordance with our academic model. This document addresses the Adjunct Faculty Initiative but will make reference to the curriculum improvement when necessary to illustrate the impact that both initiatives have on each other.

II. Origin of the Quality of Teaching Initiative

Through past efforts to improve the quality of our instruction, CityU has become increasingly aware of an additional challenge of identifying how the performance of CityU faculty impacts student outcomes. This is the primary origin of the Adjunct Faculty Initiative.

The Adjunct Faculty Initiative has been included as one of our priority projects in CityU's strategic plan. So while reasonable activity pertaining to faculty was already present at a school level, it was at the urging of senior administration that this initiative took a more structured form.

III. Extension and Sustainability

The institution has disseminated or permeated the QT initiative in-house. The information flow has come through the President's Executive Team, to the Deans, and then to the full time faculty. We have also involved many of the part time faculty as many of the decisions that we have to

make will impact them. The primary mechanisms for communicating this information have been verbally and via email.

CityU has faced some challenges in pursuing the QT initiative. The first challenge is setting a clear direction and incorporating that direction in quality improvement project that are already in place. We need to be able to communicate the differences between current quality initiatives and the newer Faculty Initiative.

In order to have a workable plan for the new initiative, it is important to know three things. First, there is need for a baseline measurement of faculty and curriculum quality. There are certain measures that have been already established in previous efforts but more work needs to be done to ensure we have all the baseline data for the new initiative. This is not an easy thing to establish. Yet, once the new baseline metrics are established, we must set goals for improvement. This answers the question of “where do we want to go” with this new initiative. Finally, we must find a way to ensure that we can transition from our baseline level of quality to our incremental goals and then keep repeating that process by revising our baseline at the end of each stage.

CityU also faces a challenge with costs. One example of this is that we needed to find a way to better recognize excellence in our adjunct instructors. Beyond the annual recognition of our best faculty already in place, many of the proposed plans involved additional compensation and with the large number of adjunct faculty that City University uses, this represented a substantial increase in faculty compensation.

CityU also faced the challenge of validation. The primary reason for our Faculty Initiative is to impact outcomes achievement. Yet, there are very few studies that draw a link between instructor behavior and outcomes achievement as verified through student work. We are not satisfied using surveys or End of Course Evaluations. We needed to see a direct connection to student work and that has proven to be a very difficult problem to solve. We are still working on that solution.

IV. Progress to Date

While there have been numerous activities carried out as a result of CityU’s QT Initiative, the following list covers the most important developments.

- 4.1 Regional Faculty Conferences:** We conducted three on-site Regional Faculty Conferences and also two online options for those could not who attend in person. Full-time faculty and full-time equivalent faculty were required to attend, and adjunct faculty were encouraged to attend and received a symbolic honoraria for attending. Topics included Best Practices (from our top-rated faculty), facilitating teaming, benefits of Blackboard, and Blackboard Lab (with an Advanced Blackboard option).

- 4.2 New Faculty Orientation:** The new faculty orientation consists of four parts – the first two are self-paced and can be completed as soon as faculty set up their portal account (which can happen once all paperwork is received by the University). The third part – which is interactive and facilitated by a mentor – will be available once a faculty member is scheduled to teach a class. The final part of the new faculty orientation is one-on-one support, coaching and feedback from the course/instructional manager throughout the first quarter teaching.
- **Blackboard Basics**
All faculty teaching in all delivery modes are expected to use Blackboard for specific activities in their classes.
 - **Introduction to CityU**
Introduction to CityU is a self-paced, online training that covers information relevant to all CityU faculty. In this session, faculty learn about the history, mission and goals of City University of Seattle, and discover how the CityU Academic Model is integrated into our curricula and modeled in our classrooms – both in class and online.
 - **Mentor-Led Interactive Session**
This three-week session is conducted online in Blackboard and provides opportunities to collaborate with other faculty. Faculty also benefit from best practices for engaging and teaching learners at CityU of Seattle, which is notably different from teaching K-12 learners or traditional university students. Mentors facilitate discussions for faculty to share and learn best practices in teaching CityU learners, provide the need-to-know information to set up courses (specific to delivery modes), and equip faculty with the resources needed to be successful from the beginning.
 - **Coaching and Feedback**
The mentor is with new faculty through their first two weeks teaching. During the last week of the mentor-led session, and throughout the first quarter (there is a three-week overlap), the course/instructional manager works with new faculty to support them as they set up their course and strive for excellence in teaching and learning.
- 4.3 Virtual Faculty Lounge:** CityU established a **Virtual Faculty Lounge** that we plan to evolve by including wikis, blogs, discussions, opportunity to highlight and share faculty scholarship, sharing of best practices, provide resources for faculty, and so much more.
- 4.4 Best Practices from Top-Rated Faculty:** CityU analyzed the End of Course Evaluation data from the 2007/2008 courses, identified our baseline, our top-rated faculty, conducted a content analysis on the comments from their students, identified the top 12 attributes of top-rated faculty, and asked them to share best practices for eight of these attributes. The best practices were integrated into the

new faculty orientation, regional faculty conferences, the Virtual Faculty Lounge, and program/course revisions.

- 4.5 Faculty Recognition:** Our top-rated faculty received a congratulatory letter from the deans along with a certificate honoring them for their work. Those that participated in the survey to share best practices are also receiving a CityU branded portfolio.
- 4.6 Developmental Faculty Evaluation:** CityU developed an evaluation process for all new faculty and those in need of development. This evaluation includes a Faculty Instructional Plan, Mid-course Student Feedback, Mid-Course Faculty Observation, a review of Faculty End-of-Course Evaluations, and a Faculty Reflection/Action Plan/Debrief to plan for continuous improvement.
- 4.7 Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation:** CityU developed a faculty evaluation process that was currently piloted in Spring 2009 and is aligned with our Academic Model, current research and best practices on the topic, and our End-of-Course Evaluations (EOCEs). The main instrument (Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation Form) is completed by an evaluator observing faculty and rated on the following three categories:
1. Excellence in teaching and learning – communicates course content clearly; clearly explains session learning goals; uses class time effectively; demonstrates knowledge of subject matter; effectively uses variety of teaching strategies; connects the course to real life situations; respects diverse styles and ways of learning; asks for periodic feedback from students to improve his or her teaching; demonstrates effectiveness in teaching course
 2. Fostering student development – encourages students actively participate; provides opportunities for students to learn from each other; responds to students in timely manner; facilitates supportive learning environment; provides useful feedback on student progress; grades in alignment with grading criteria
 3. Currency – faculty updating data on a yearly basis; commitment to ongoing learning; current on technical training; contributes evidence of scholarship
- 4.8 Curriculum Development Trainings:** These included curriculum development process trainings for course developers, curriculum document training for adjunct faculty, and curriculum development system (CDS) training for pilot participants.

V. Progress Monitoring and Assessment of the QT Initiative

Overall, the success of the QT initiative is a function of the following: Faculty qualifications, faculty training, professional experience levels, use of technology, frequency of communication

with students, promptness of feedback to students, quality of facilitation of courses (in class and online), and proper use of evaluation tools for assessment feedback.

The main consequences for the faculty and the students of the QT initiative involve a much higher focus on the qualifications and performance of our adjunct faculty and the impact that their actions will have on student outcomes. First, the hiring profile has been modified so that it is much more difficult for an adjunct to be qualified. This has required more time to select adjuncts but the result is that much more qualified adjuncts are being utilized. Second, there is a much better training program in place that covers the University's teaching model, its use of technology, and a link to behaviors that lead to success on student outcomes.

Other aspects that have been impacted by the QT initiative appear below:

- Systems are being modified to allow us to track faculty qualifications and performance better. Our current system has these capabilities already included but they were not being used. Most of this work was being done in a decentralized way by each of the full time staff. Now, we will have access to centralized information that keeps records of qualifications and performance.
- Since we are an internationally focused university, and our programs are offered around the world, we have taken a unique approach in the way that we develop our programs. All curriculum development is done centrally meaning that all programs are developed by Program Design Teams located in Bellevue, WA with input from faculty representatives outside the U.S. This curriculum is then provided to our international locations and only minimal changes are allowed to account for geographical differences.
- As we complete the Faculty Initiative domestically, we will work with our international partners to make sure that the same faculty standards are implemented worldwide.
- Our University-wide strategy is founded on our four main goals. The first goal is "Excellence in Teaching and Learning". The Faculty Initiative is part of said goal. Each year, the units in our University draft unit strategies that are structured around these four goals. Thus, each unit in the University has a two-year strategy that is, in large part, focused on the objectives that are in alignment with our efforts to ensure quality improvement which include the Faculty Initiative. These unit strategies, in aggregate, are the driving force that will determine our objectives for the University for the next two years and the Faculty Initiative is an integral part of that driving force.
- The QT initiative supplementing efforts were already underway. The primary goal of the schools is to ensure that students receive a top quality education. There is an emerging culture at the University that is intended to modify or eliminate anything that might interfere with this primary goal. The Faculty Initiative supports this goal and is helping it become an established part of the University's culture.

Since it is tied to the first of our four strategic drivers at the University, it is clear that quality improvement and the Faculty Initiative are an integral part of our identity. These efforts are also supportive of our academic model on which all of the University's curricula are based.