

**Determining the Administrative Support and Professional Development Needs of Contract  
Instructors at a Civilian Federal Training Agency**

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by

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Adult and Continuing Education

(ABSTRACT)

Researchers know much about the use of contract (or adjunct) instructor faculty in academe, but little about contract instructors in civilian federal training agencies. No one has determined the effective administrative support of instructional delivery or the professional development needs of these federal agency contractors.

The National Fire Academy's mission is to promote the professional development of those fire personnel engaged in fire suppression, fire prevention, and allied functions. Each year approximately 3000 resident students complete a variety of two week training programs. Approximately 500 contract instructors conduct most of these on-campus programs. These instructors have widely divergent expertise, instructional competence and teaching experience.

The research questions were:

1. What are the problems, if any, that NFA contract instructors have had that have implications for effective program delivery?
2. What are the administrative support services, if any, that should be provided to contract instructors in the areas of:
  - A. Orientation of new instructors?
  - B. Program delivery?
  - C. Evaluation processes?
  - D. Professional development?
3. What other administrative support services, if any, would assist contract instructors in providing instructional services?
4. What are the problems, if any, that Program Chairs have dealt with that have implications for effective program delivery?

All 536 resident contract instructors received a questionnaire about their perception of their administrative support and professional development needs; 45% responded (n=245). Eight of the ten Academy Program Chairs, who oversee the contract instructors, were interviewed about the types of problems and solutions they have used in dealing with these personnel. Analysis used both quantitative and qualitative methods.

This research had a three-fold purpose. First, the research could determine the elements of effective support of instructional delivery for the Academy's contract instructors. Second, the research could provide the basis to make policy recommendations of such elements for the Academy. Finally, the research sought to determine what was required to support the professional development of contract instructors in any training organization.

The results indicated that the responding contract instructors had several administrative support needs and concerns including keeping program content current, providing new instructors with an orientation and an instructor handbook, gaining access to classroom supplies, and improving the availability of program evaluations. There was also strong interest in three professional development options: preferred admission to other NFA classes, on-site instructor conferences, and a newsletter. Generally, Program Chairs' responses were supportive of these needs.

The recommendations included the implementation of a contract instructor career path and the use of a government and contractor "shared responsibility management model."