

# Update

## Community College Faculty

### **Introduction**

In only a generation community colleges grew from a few institutions to a major sector of postsecondary education by providing nearly universal access. Currently 1,024 community colleges hire over a quarter million faculty members to provide education to 5.4 million students each year. Low cost compared to other colleges and universities is one major reason community colleges succeed in attracting students. This low cost comes at some expense to faculty members. They receive lower salaries and teach more course sections than faculty members at other types of postsecondary institutions. Community colleges also hire more part-time faculty members than any other sector in higher education. This report describes the people who teach in community colleges. All the information is from the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U. S. Department of Education.

### **Who Teaches in Community Colleges?**

The cross-section of faculty members that we examined revealed some surprises about those who have committed themselves to teaching in the nation's community colleges. The first surprise is that there was near parity in the share of men and women teaching in community colleges. Women made up almost half, 46 percent, of the community college faculty members. Women were equally likely to teach full- or part-time, comprising 46 percent of the full-time and 45.5

percent of the part-time faculty members.

The second discovery was the lack of progress made in hiring minority faculty members for community colleges. Only 15 percent of the full-time faculty identified themselves as something other than White, non-Hispanic. One percent of the community college full-time faculty members were American Indian, 3.3 percent Asian, 4.3 percent Hispanic and 6.4 percent African American. An even smaller share of the part-time faculty was minority. The share of Hispanic and African

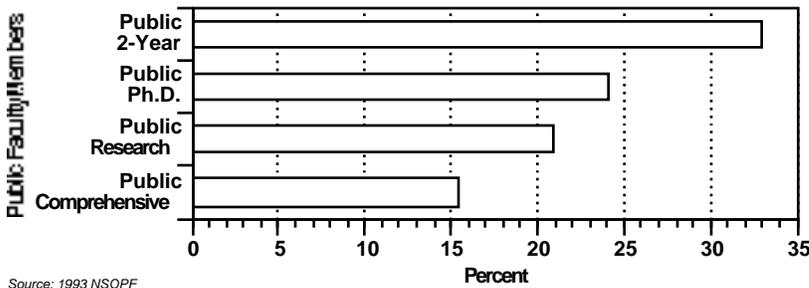
American faculty members would have to double to reflect the population.

Third, community colleges did not have an excessive number of faculty members with tenure. Just over half, 52 percent, of the full-time faculty had tenure and another 15 percent were on a tenure track (see Figure 1). This is a smaller share of tenured faculty members than is typical of other public four-year colleges and universities. Over one-quarter, 26 percent, of the community college faculty reported that tenure was not available, and another 7 percent were not on a tenure track. Low reliance on tenure coupled with a high proportion of part-time faculty members suggests that community college administrators have a great deal of flexibility in managing their teaching faculty.

The final unexpected discovery was the low number of pending faculty retirements. Rapid growth of community colleges in the 1960s has led to speculation that there will be a retirement bulge in the 1990s as the faculty hired 30 years ago enter their sixties. As compelling as this scenario is, research has revealed that there is not any

**Figure 1**

**NOT ON TENURE TRACK / NO TENURE**



Source: 1993 NSOPF

pending retirement crisis in the community colleges. NSOPF showed that just over 10 percent of the full-time faculty members were 60 years or older and 13.5 percent were between 55 and 59 years old. The remaining 76 percent were under 54 years old.

Just over 19 percent of the full-time faculty members suggested any likelihood of retiring in the next three years. If everyone who suggested in NSOPF that they were considering retirement left teaching, a maximum of 8,800 community college teachers would be lost annually to retirement over the next few years. A more conservative assumption would be that everyone will retire at age 65. Under this assumption, roughly 3,000 faculty members will retire annually over the next five years, with the number increasing to 4,600 between 2000 and 2005. The best guess is that the average community college will need to replace between three and nine retiring faculty members annually over the next decade. More faculty members will be eligible to retire each year over this period, but there is no indication of a destabilizing loss of communi-

ty college faculty members in the future.

**Teaching Loads and Methods**

As expected, most full-time community college faculty members listed teaching as their primary activity. Ten percent of the full-time faculty members said that administration was their primary activity and 6 percent had assorted other responsibilities that were

more important than teaching. The remaining 84 percent specified teaching as their main occupation.

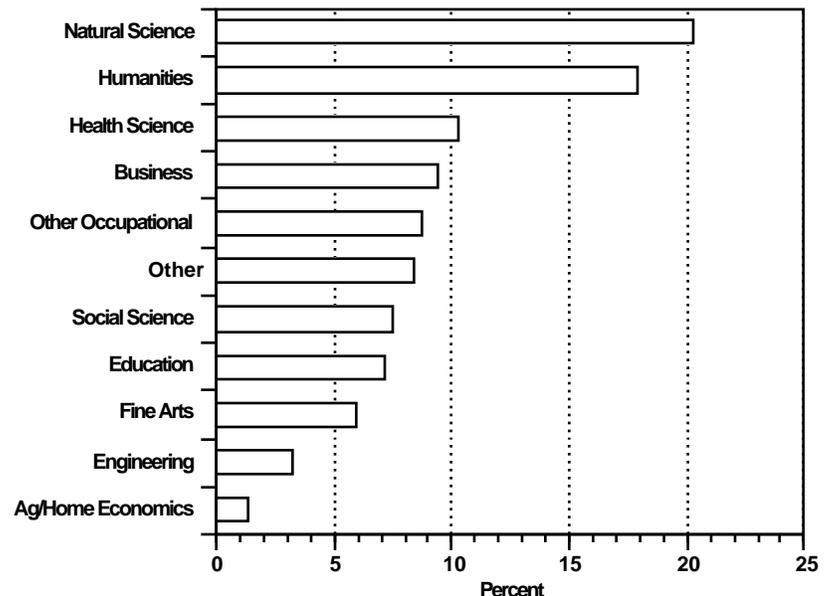
Many full-time faculty members reported working in addition to their basic job. Well over half, 57 percent, had overload work in the institution. Over one quarter of the full-time faculty members worked outside their home institution.

Community colleges did not offer many of the giant lecture sections that frustrate lower division students at major universities. Full-time faculty members at community colleges taught 29.0 students in the average class and part-time faculty members taught 23.3 students in a section.

More community college faculty members taught science than any other subject, closely

**Figure 2**

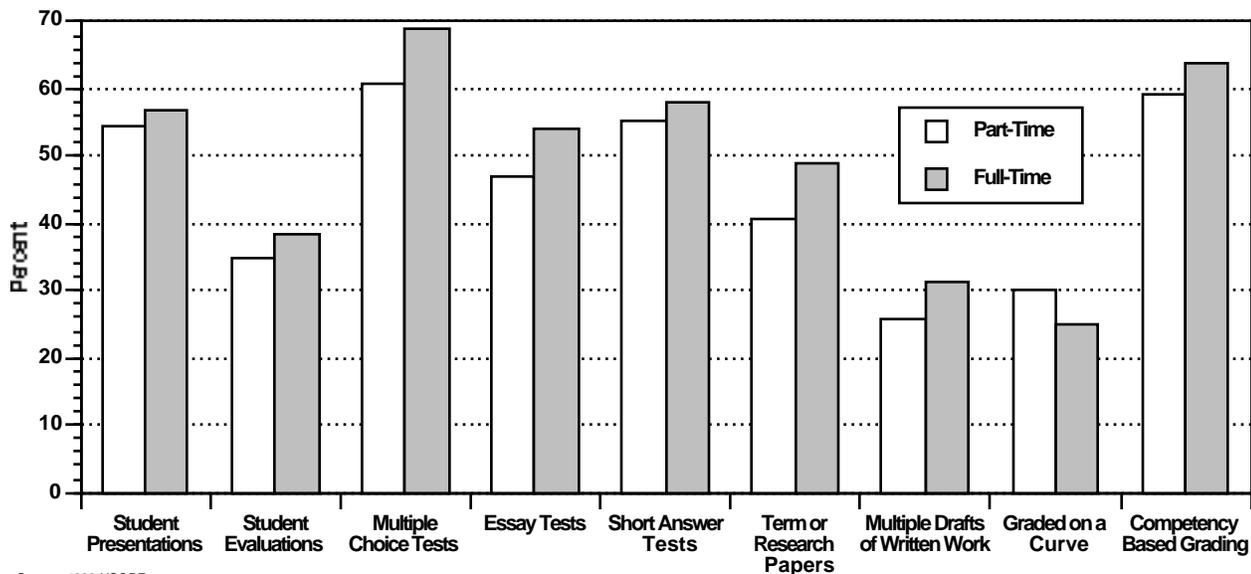
**MAJOR TEACHING AREAS**



Source: 1993 NSOPF

Figure 3

EVALUATION OF STUDENT WORK



Source: 1993 NSOPF

followed by humanities. Figure 2 lists the percentage of faculty members teaching in each of the major academic areas.

The “Other” Category includes programs such as communications and law.

Most community college faculty members used traditional classroom methods in their classes. Lectures top the list, closely followed by seminars, as the most often used teaching style. Very few faculty members report using role playing, television or radio, group projects, co-op learning, or apprenticeships. This does not necessarily suggest that faculty members are not trying new techniques. Nearly half of the full-time instructors and one-third of the part-time faculty members used computer-aided instruction techniques. Figure 3 shows student evaluation methods used by faculty.

**High Dependence on Part-time Faculty Members**

Perhaps the most significant feature of community colleges is the high proportion of part-time faculty members. There were more part-timers teaching in community colleges than in all of the rest of higher education combined. Over half, 55 percent, of the 263,604 faculty members in community colleges were part-time in 1993. That was a slight increase from the 52 percent who taught part-time in 1988.

Using part-time teachers did make a difference in how courses were taught. Part-time teachers were less diverse in their student evaluation methods compared to full-time faculty members. The only technique part-time teachers were more likely to use compared to full-time faculty members was grading on

the curve. The differences can be seen in Figure 3.

Part-time faculty do not have the same academic credentials as full-time faculty members. Eighty-two percent of the full-time community college faculty members have a postgraduate degree. The Master’s degree was most typical and was held by 63.5 percent of the full-time faculty members. Part-time faculty members were less likely to have a postgraduate degree than full-timers. Less than two-thirds, 63.6 percent, of the part-time faculty members reported a postgraduate degree.

Most of the part-time faculty members, 62 percent, taught part-time for the whole year. The remaining 38 percent taught for part of the year. Part-time faculty members who worked for the whole year earned \$8,684 annually.

Those teaching for part of the year earned \$4,619.

Most of the part-time faculty, 78 percent, reported having another job. Those who worked somewhere else identified their employers by the following major categories. The employers were, in rank order from most to least frequently mentioned:

1. elementary or secondary education (19.4 percent)
2. private business (17 percent)
3. consulting (16.8 percent)
4. government (11.2 percent)
5. four-year college (10 percent)
6. hospital or other health organization (8.4 percent)
7. other unspecified employer (7.4 percent)
8. another two-year institution (6.5 percent)
9. foundation (3.3 percent)

The first, fifth, and eighth ranked job categories were all educational institutions. Summing them suggests that 35 percent of the employed part-time faculty had another job in an educational institution of some sort.

## **Conclusion and Summary**

As of 1993, community colleges paid below-average salaries to full-time faculty members and hired more part-time faculty members than other types of institutions of higher education. (According to the 1995 *NEA Higher Education Almanac*, community college faculty earned \$6,567 less than full-time faculty members in public four-year institutions. In 1993-94, the average salary was \$40,470.) Both these policies kept their costs low. Another strategy for keeping costs low was the institutional emphasis on teaching. Community college faculty members taught an average of four courses in an enrollment period and spent very little time on research. There is no question that the continuing low cost and accessibility of community college education are good for students and society. The important question is whether the continuing squeeze on faculty salaries and increasing use of part-time faculty members will limit the quality of community college education.

Part-time faculty members are different than full-time faculty members in two important ways. First, they do not have as much education. Second, they use more limited classroom methods. Part-time faculty members in community colleges teach a smaller range of classes and do not have the same access to institutional resources and developmental opportunities. They should not be considered to be equivalent replacements for full-time faculty.

The other issue of significant concern is the lack of progress in hiring minority faculty members. If community colleges are to continue to claim to be the most democratic sector of higher education, they must develop and hire more minority faculty members. Community colleges are the first collegiate educational experience for many minority students, and as such they need more staff members with whom these students can identify.



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