

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the background, the problem statement, the purpose, the research questions, the significance of the research, and a summary.

Researchers know much about the use of contract (or adjunct) instructor faculty in academe, but little about contract instructors in civilian federal agencies. They apparently serve different audiences. For example, most civilian federal agencies serve audiences that are attempting to, or are required to, improve their existing skill levels in specific jobs. In academe the audiences may be much different, composed of some who are only considering a specific career, some who are already employed in a career, some who are contemplating a career move, and others who are attending for reasons totally unrelated to careers.

No one has determined the most effective administrative support of instructional delivery or the professional development needs of the instructors of these non-academic audiences. No such single, articulated professional development plan is currently in place, or has been contemplated at the National Fire Academy (NFA.) This researcher analyzed the professional development needs of NFA's contract instructors, and their need for administrative support while providing training.

Background of the Problem

The Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act, Public Law 93-498 established the National Fire Academy on October 29, 1974. The Academy's mission is to promote the professional development of those fire personnel engaged in fire suppression, fire prevention, and allied functions. Allied functions are those related areas of emergency services exclusive of fire suppression and fire prevention. For example, pre-hospital emergency medical services and hazardous materials response teams are two allied functions.

Originally located in Washington, D.C., the NFA relocated in May 1979, to its current site in Emmitsburg, Maryland, on the 107 acre campus of what was formerly St. Joseph's College. The Academy has been a component of the Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA) since 1979. The NFA now shares the Emmitsburg facility with the United States Fire Administration and the Emergency Management Institute.

As a civilian training agency the NFA conducts its programs with instructors who are either federal employees or contractors. Over the years the mix of NFA employees to contract instructors has changed. According to Anne Currier Fabyan, formerly NFA's Assistant Superintendent, originally a two-person team would teach each course: one NFA employee, familiar with agency procedures and with recent expertise in the content area, and one contract instructor with current expertise in the content area. The system, according to Ms. Fabyan, gradually changed as the NFA employees became more involved in management duties and further removed by time from their original content expertise (Fabyan, personal communication, 1997).

Classes now offered include a full spectrum of technical subjects (arson investigation, chemistry of hazardous materials, etc.) and management subjects (strategic management of change, interpersonal dynamics, organizational theory, etc.) Each year approximately 3000 resident students complete a variety of two week training programs. A cadre of approximately 500 contract instructors, usually working in two-person teams conducts most of these resident, on-campus programs. These instructors have widely divergent expertise, instructional competence and teaching experience.

The NFA's courses are further organized into programs, which are, in turn, overseen by ten Program Chairs. Beyond overseeing the content of their assigned programs they are also responsible for developing new curricula, serving as the Agency's "expert" in their assigned area and managing contract instructors. Program Chairs are free to manage assigned courses and contract instructors, within certain broad parameters, as they see fit. The basic guiding document for instructors is the contractual Scope of Work, which is developed for each course's contract instructors using federal procurement formats. Beyond that document no clear guidance exists for the day-to-day support of contract instructors, or a policy that establishes a professional development plan.

Initially, the method of offering resident programs was to pair each of the Program Chairs with a contract instructor (Fabyan, personal communication, 1997). However, this

method slowly evolved to the present situation, in which Program Chairs rarely teach. Instead, two contract instructors usually offer each course. Their interaction with the assigned Program Chair may only consist of telephone contact prior to the course offering, followed by one or two brief meetings during the program. The two contract instructors perform the daily delivery of program content (via lecture, discussion, group activity, etc.) and handle administrative matters (such as attendance, course rosters, management of disciplinary problems, student evaluations, etc.) Apparently no one contemplated fulfilling the long-term professional development needs of these personnel. NFA has a cadre of contract instructors with over a decade of teaching experience who have never had an opportunity for any Academy-sponsored professional development program.

The NFA began using an *Adjunct Faculty Handbook* in 1990. Given to all new contract instructors, the manual is 23 pages of text with information on general instructor responsibilities, specific information on precourse responsibilities, and course delivery duties. Also included are extensive appendices with 21 sections that detail need-to-know information such as payment procedures, NFA organizational structure, the student dress code, and instructional equipment requirements (NFA, 1990). According to Wayne Powell, an NFA Program Chair, distribution of the manual was discontinued in 1993, since the content of the manual had become obsolete (Powell, personal communication, 1997).

The NFA has a two-week course, *Training Program Management* (1997), that contains two units on the management of instructors: “Personnel Management” and “Managing Delivery.” Surprisingly, neither unit mentions contract instructors. This lack of program content on contract instructors is particularly pertinent since many of the Academy’s Program Chairs do enroll in, and complete, on-campus resident courses. Further, more fire departments are using contract instructors. Officially then, the NFA’s own training management-specific course does not recognize the existence of contract instructors, nor make any recommendations as to their management. By extrapolation, however, the course does provide suggestions for the professional development of internal staff/instructors. This information is included in the course manual’s Professional and

Career Development sub-section, which states “TPMs [Training Program Managers] have an obligation to develop themselves as an example to others and to assist subordinates with their professional and career planning” (1997, p. 7-29). The manual then provides examples of training options. For example, listed under “Avenues for personal development” are “... seminars, state training [courses], National Fire Academy courses, Open Learning for Fire Service Program [a U.S. Government-developed non-traditional bachelor’s degree program] courses, college courses..., self-education, ... and [an] active role in professional organizations” (1997, p.7-30). All of these, potentially, could be of value to NFA contract instructors, who now have no NFA-sponsored professional development.

On November 10, 1991, the author requested that the then Academy Superintendent, Albert G. Kirchner, Jr., approve a no-cost contract for the delineation of the administrative support and professional development needs of NFA’s contract instructors.

In late September, 1995, the author met with the newly-appointed NFA Superintendent, Dr. Denis Onieal, to determine the status of the project. All previous attempts to ascertain this status by contacting other personnel had been met with the answer that various issues were still under study. Dr. Onieal indicated that he did not have any previous knowledge of the project. He reviewed the proposed no-cost contract, indicated that it appeared acceptable to him, and stated that he would give serious consideration to the resulting recommendations and their implications for policy. He further assigned Dr. Burton Clark as the project officer and research coordinator. Dr. Clark is the Program Chair for the management science courses.

On November 1, 1995, a no-cost contract was awarded to conduct the research. Due to federal government furloughs and severe winter storms, however, the actual starting date for the project was February 1, 1996. The contract provided the following NFA assistance:

1. Permission to conduct up to two meetings with the Program Chairs.

2. Permission to contact the resident contract instructors to obtain perceived needs information.
3. Official use of the Learning Resource Center (Library).
4. Assignment of a "research coordinator" to review all contact with contract instructors and NFA personnel.
5. Use of a small office on the NFA campus during the period of contract performance.

A meeting was held on February 16 , 1996 with four of the ten NFA Program Chairs to establish their perception of needed improvement areas, if any, in their relationship with contract instructors. Overall, they believed that their working relationship with contract instructors was sound. However, they voiced several concerns. One identified concern was the result of Program Chairs now being assigned predominantly management duties versus their historical role as instructors. Consequently, the instruction and classroom administration burden was now clearly carried by contract instructors. Given that contract instructors have no fixed contract frequency (they can either teach often at the NFA or very rarely) the Program Chairs were interested in analyzing the administrative needs of contract instructors so that a method to meet those needs could be developed.

Another concern identified by the Program Chairs dealt with the fact that many of the more experienced contract instructors were not being awarded teaching contracts as often. This is a natural evolutionary process with contractors: as they gain experience they expect a concomitant increase in contract monies earned; yet when they raise bid prices they often are not the lowest bidder. Over time younger, and less expensive, contract instructors replace the more experienced, older ones. This may impact on program quality in several ways. First, many newer instructors have not had the benefit of any orientation to the NFA's philosophy, rules and regulations or physical facilities. Second, they usually have not had the benefit of an in-service program which would give them the opportunity to observe the course they will ultimately teach be presented by an experienced team of instructor-trainers. These instructor-trainers, who are drawn from

the ranks of the older, more experienced instructors, pay special attention to the practicalities of the content to be delivered: how to conduct and debrief activities, for example. Usually, the NFA only does an in-service program when a new course is first being added to the resident programs curriculum. Finally, the issue of instructor performance was also a concern for the Program Chairs: will the less experienced instructors perform as well as the more experienced ones? Currently, feedback from student evaluations or Program Chair evaluations is spotty. A contract to electronically collate student evaluations has expired, been reinstated, and expired several times in recent years.

The last concern of the Program Chairs involved the role of Government in improving or maintaining contract instructors' expertise. Generally, the Program Chairs believe that the NFA is contracting for "turn-key" instructional services. The course content is provided by the NFA, otherwise these "turn-key" services include contractors' provision of instructional delivery, administrative activities (such as arranging for student tours of on-campus labs), evaluation of students and the solution of classroom problems. With the magnitude of these duties does the Government have a responsibility to assist contract instructors in maintaining or improving their skills? The four Program Chairs were ambivalent about the NFA providing what to them was a contractor responsibility. At the same time they acknowledged that something needs to be done to offer opportunities to develop the professional abilities of contract instructors.

Statement of the Problem

There is no single methodology to determine the effective support of instructional delivery, or of the professional development needs of the NFA's contract instructors. The researcher surveyed the contract instructors by questionnaire and used individual personal interviews of the individual Program Chairs to determine these items.

The term "effective support of instructional delivery" means a consistently applied program of agency procedures, administrative support, and professional development strategies for NFA's resident program (i.e., on campus) contract instructors. Essentially,

without such a system in place, Program Chairs must reinvent this support process with the development of each course and in some cases with the selection of each group of instructors. Lack of such a program may cause inconsistencies from program to program, since programs' content and target audiences could vary a great deal. These inconsistencies could occur when two inexperienced instructors teach a course together. Normally, this is avoided. But, when it occurs, the application of policies may suffer. For example, the student attendance policy may not be adhered to. Even the dress code may be ignored; with students in one class wearing shorts (prohibited) while students in other classes do not. More importantly student testing by instructors may not be consistent from one course offering to the next.

Newly selected instructors often struggle to learn the agency's rules and regulations. Ultimately, their lack of contract instructor training may foster inconsistencies for students who attend NFA programs, since contract instructors may not, in turn, correctly brief them on Academy requirements for attendance, discipline and graduation. Also, contract instructors often teach different programs for different Program Chairs. Since there is no consistency of support services between the different programs, the contract instructors must, of necessity, determine how each Program Chair interprets the rules and regulations. For example, some Program Chairs require contract instructors to be physically present in the classroom (except for refreshment breaks and lunch) for the entire work day. Other Program Chairs do not require this.

Purpose of the Study

This research had a three-fold purpose. First, the purpose of this research was to determine the components of effective support of instructional delivery for contract instructors at the NFA. The second purpose of the research was to make recommendations for policy development of such components for the NFA Superintendent's consideration. Ultimately, the system becomes a vehicle for improved program effectiveness by 1) determining contractor's instructional delivery needs, 2) assisting in program design, 3) increasing the effectiveness of program delivery (and, ultimately, student's learning), and 4) determining and meeting the professional

development needs of the Academy's contract instructors. This same need to improve program effectiveness is of concern within academe, as well. Finally, the last purpose of the research was to determine what was required to support professional development of contract instructors in any training organization.

Research Questions

Descriptive and evaluative methods were used to answer the research questions about one federal agency, the National Fire Academy (NFA.) The purpose of descriptive research is to clarify and report the way things are at the present time (Gay, 1987). Questionnaires, such as the one completed by the NFA contract instructors, are one descriptive method often used to describe people's attitudes, feelings and reactions (Leedy, 1989). Evaluative research seeks to identify recommended improvements in processes, programs or methods (Gay, 1987). Its purpose is to establish a basis for decision-making (Merriam and Simpson, 1989). Interviews, such as the ones of the Program Chairs, are one evaluative method often used to provide information for such decision-making.

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?

Research questions 1, 2 and 3 were answered by the contract instructors via a questionnaire. Research question 4 was answered by conducting individual personal interviews with the Program Chairs.

Significance of the Study

Significant research fulfills several needs. It must provide sufficient guidance for the NFA to permit the framing of policy. And, the findings may be generalizable to other similar instructional delivery systems, such as academic institutions, and civilian federal, state and local training agencies who also use contract instructors.

Because no prior studies of NFA's instructors exist, this assessment resulted in information to help frame policy. The basis for framing policy was an understanding of the existing method of managing NFA contract instructors coupled with the development of a conceptual model of how to improve this method. Program Chairs indicated great interest in determining the needs of contract instructors. In addition, the current NFA Superintendent will give serious consideration to the outcome of the research, its recommendations and its policy implications.

The generalizability of the research findings to other academic institutions, and civilian federal, state and local training agencies, who also use contract instructors, may be possible. However, the findings should be used with great caution since other academic institutions, and civilian federal, state and local training agencies will have different organizational cultures, missions, goals and objectives, and operational policies. Still, there are remaining elements that cut across organizational lines. Specifically, these elements relate to the various aspects of training operations regardless of organizational culture, missions, etc. These elements include methods of performance and needs assessment, instructional design, course development, instructional delivery of content, evaluation (of students, instructors and programs), and training program management. Although this research project only deals in detail with the training program management

of contract instructors at one federal training agency these findings have broad applicability to any training organization -- academic institution, federal training agency, private company -- that uses contract instructors extensively.

Clearly, interest in determining and meeting the needs of NFA's contract instructors was there. This belief was predicated on the fact that a number of federal agencies have already been contacted and, with one notable exception, none have an articulated method of instructor support, beyond the contractual scope of work. Several of these same agencies have, however, professed interest in using the results of the research to determine if such a system is applicable. For example, Mr. William D. Lewis, a senior education specialist at the Emergency Management Institute (another Federal Emergency Management Agency component), is interested in using the results of this research to determine the administrative support needs of non-resident contract instructors for a series of field hazardous materials courses under development (Lewis, personal communication, 1997). In addition, the researcher's February 16, 1996 meeting with four of the ten NFA Program Chairs revealed their belief in the need for further analysis.

In a larger sense the potential generalizability of the research has significance for the practice of adult education. The contract instructors are educators of adults; their need for professional development should provide insights into similar needs within the mainstream of adult education. The recommendations for how to meet the NFA contract instructors needs should suggest methods to meet the professional development needs of other trainers and educators of adults.

Within academe the use of adjunct, or part-time, faculty has continued to increase. This mirrors a similar increase in the federal sector. Adult educators, and administrators of adult educators and trainers, must address the emerging issues in professional development, especially as the trend away from full-time career training professionals to part-time contract training professionals continues. Workplace flexibility, including short-term relationships between organizations and contractors, has caused an increased need for adult educators to be responsive to new issues. These issues must be examined and

include the initial orientation, administrative support and professional development needs of part-time contract trainers and academic adjunct faculty.

Summary

This chapter included the background, the problem statement, the purpose, the research questions, and the significance of the research. These lead to a literature review, which is included as Chapter II.