

Voices from the margins: The organizational support experience of
adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college

by

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B.B.A., Mount Mercy University, 2002
M.B.A., Pennsylvania State University, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Department of Adult Learning and Leadership
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

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Data was collected through three rounds of semi-structured interviews with 11 adjunct faculty members across four campuses. Thematic analysis revealed four central themes: (a) communication, (b) isolation, (c) overwhelmed, and (d) recognition. Participants described fragmented and impersonal communication, limited access to resources, emotional fatigue, and a lack of meaningful inclusion in institutional culture. Despite these challenges, adjunct faculty expressed a strong commitment to teaching and a desire for more equitable support.

Findings suggest that adjunct faculty effectiveness is not inherently inferior to full-time faculty but is shaped by disparities in organizational support. Recommendations include: (a) improving communication practices, (b) fostering community, (c) managing workloads, and (d) embedding recognition into institutional policy. The research contributes to the literature on adjunct faculty by centering their voices and offering actionable strategies for enhancing their support experience. The implications extend beyond the study site, offering insights for other colleges seeking to improve adjunct faculty engagement, retention, and student success.

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to adjunct faculty everywhere. Those tireless educators who pour their expertise, passion, and heart into the classroom, often without the recognition, stability, or compensation they so deeply deserve.

To the adjunct faculty who balance multiple campuses, side jobs, and personal commitments, you are the unsung backbone of higher education. Your commitment to student success, despite systemic challenges, is nothing short of heroic.

You inspire not only through your knowledge, but through your resilience, adaptability, and unwavering belief in the transformative power of education. You show up because you believe in the work, in the students, and in the future.

This dissertation stands as a tribute to your perseverance and professionalism. May dedicating this body of work serve as a small but sincere acknowledgment of your profound impact on learners and on the academic community as a whole. More importantly, may the findings be a source of systematic change at colleges and universities all over the world, because change is what you deserve, and I am confident these changes will have a significant effect on the institutions you serve and their students.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter begins with background information about community colleges and adjunct faculty which provide some context for this study. Then, I lay out the conceptual framework to explain the lens with which this study was explored. After briefly describing the problem that gives this study its purpose, I provide an overview of the research design including data collection and analysis that delivered relevant findings, the study's significance, and definition that help making meaning of the research.

Background

Community colleges have played a major role in the U.S. higher education system for more than 100 years. They offer a wide range of educational programming, which would not be possible without the cost savings realized by employing adjunct faculty. The historical context further underscores the significance of adjunct faculty.

Community Colleges

Community colleges are essential for providing accessible and inclusive education (Baker, 1994), adapting to changing educational and societal needs. The origins of community college date back to the Morrill Act of 1862 which aimed to promote higher education by granting each state 30,000 acres for the establishment of colleges (Drury, 2003). Although community colleges were not directly part of the Morrill Act of 1862, the act laid the groundwork for future expansion of public education. In the 20th century, the Junior College Movement focused on offering the first two years of college education and vocational training, making higher education more accessible to local communities (Boswell, 2004; Koos, 1925).

The mid-20th century saw a significant expansion of community colleges, driven by factors like the GI Bill and the baby boomer generation (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The Higher

Education Act of 1965 further boosted their development by providing financial aid and increasing access for minority and low-income students (Meier, 2018). Community colleges have since played a crucial role in workforce development, social mobility, and addressing educational gaps through initiatives like open enrollment and partnerships with local industries (Bogart, 1994).

Today, community colleges enroll a significant portion of undergraduates (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2017), offering affordable education and a wide range of programs, including associate degrees, vocational training, and even bachelor's degrees in some cases (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Community colleges also provide non-credit developmental and continuing education to meet the diverse needs of their communities. Recent initiatives, such as the Second Chance Pell Grant, have expanded their reach to include providing education to prisoners (Chesnut & Wachendorfer, 2021).

However, financial constraints have forced community college administrators to identify cost-saving measures or cut programs and support services (Arden, 1989; Jacoby, 2006; Schneider, 1999). The fiscal limitations have caused community colleges to rely more heavily on adjunct faculty for classroom instruction. In fact, adjunct faculty now make up the majority outnumbering their full-time colleagues (AACC, 2022).

Adjunct Faculty

Adjunct faculty, often referred to as contingent or part-time instructors, play a vital yet often overlooked role in higher education. Adjunct faculty are a cost-effective alternative to full-time faculty and in many instances bring current industry experience to the classroom. The cost savings are necessary given community colleges' limited financial resources, and the industry

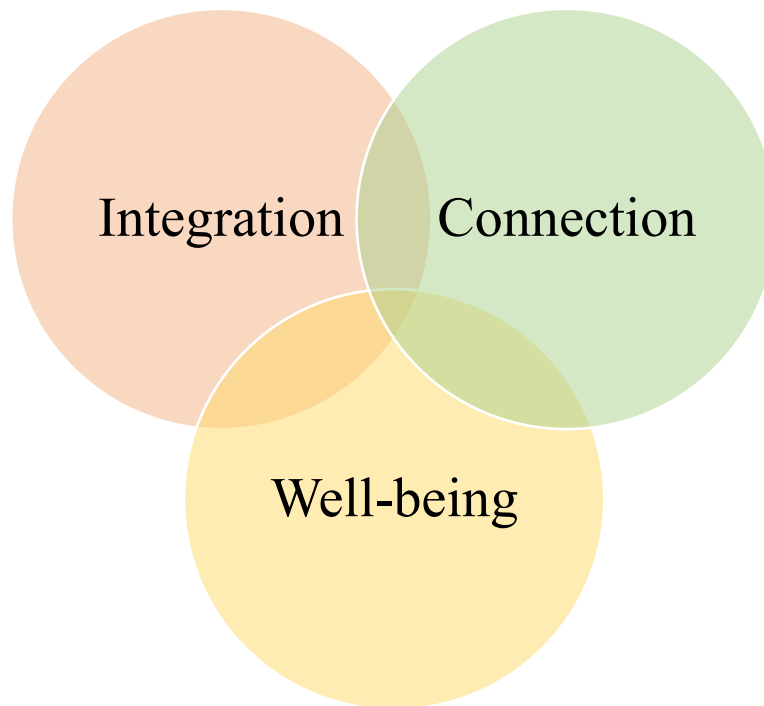
experience adds significant value to student learning. The higher education landscape would not be what it is without the contributions of adjunct faculty (Rich, 2017).

However, there are challenges associated with the use of adjunct faculty. Students taught by adjunct faculty may experience lower persistence (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008), graduation (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2008; Jacoby, 2006; Kezar & Maxey, 2014), and transfer rates (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009) due to issues like grade inflation and lack of preparation for subsequent courses (Eney & Davidson, 2006; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Jacoby, 2005). Additionally, adjunct faculty often face a lack of support and professional development opportunities, which can impact their instructional effectiveness. Despite these challenges, the trend of relying on adjunct faculty is likely to continue as colleges strive to provide a plethora of educational programs with financial constraints. Addressing the support and developmental needs of adjunct faculty could enhance their effectiveness and benefit the overall educational experience for students.

Conceptual Framework

Adjunct faculty play a critical instructional role in multi-campus community colleges, yet they often experience marginalization (Wallin, 2004). The conceptual framework of this study answered the research question: “How do adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college describe their organizational support experience?” It explored how three key concepts in Figure 1.1 capture adjunct faculty perceptions.

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework



Well-being encompasses the holistic experience of physical, emotional, and psychological health in the workplace (Singh, 2015). For adjunct faculty, well-being is influenced by factors such as inclusion, work schedule, and resources (Rich, 2016). When well-being is a priority through a supportive and empowering organizational culture, faculty are more likely to experience lower stress levels, greater job satisfaction, and improved mental health (Joshi & Jaffer, 2024). Conversely, neglecting well-being can lead to burnout, disengagement, and attrition (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Organizational practices that promote well-being such as equitable workload distribution are essential to fostering a supportive and sustainable academic environment (O'Meara et al., 2019).

Integration focuses on structural and institutional inclusion. It involves tangible elements such as access to resources, participation in governance, and involvement in curriculum planning. Effective integration of adjunct faculty involves strategies like clear hiring practices, orientation, professional development, performance evaluations, and equitable pay, which

contribute to improved relationships and retention (Roueche et al., 1996). It ensures adjunct faculty are not treated as peripheral or temporary labor but as essential contributors to the college's mission and culture (Wallin, 2004). When integration is lacking, adjunct faculty may experience isolation, limited professional growth, and diminished organizational commitment (Merriman, 2010).

Connection focuses on the quality and depth of relationships within an organization. When adjunct faculty experience meaningful and consistent connection through shared purpose and institutional presence they are more likely to feel motivated and valued (Porfirico et al., 2024). In contrast, adjunct faculty who feel disconnected from their departments and colleagues often report a lack of support, which negatively impacts their engagement and sense of belonging (Buch et al., 2017). Strong adjunct faculty relations are essential to foster a supportive and inclusive culture.

Although connection and integration are concepts with significant overlap, their distinctions are notable. Connection encompasses experiences such as feeling valued by colleagues, having a sense of belonging, engaging in informal relationships, and sharing a common purpose with others. This concept is inherently subjective and interpersonal, rooted in how individuals perceive their relationships and place within the college community, whereas integration is objective and systemic. When connection is strong, it enhances trust, motivation, and engagement among adjunct faculty (Holbeck et al., 2021). Connection is about how adjunct faculty feel in relation to others and the institution, whereas integration is about what adjunct faculty are allowed or invited to do within the college. In practice, strong connection can support integration (Burroughs, 2019), and vice versa, but they operate on different levels: social versus structural (Fagan-Wilen et al., 2006).

Well-being, integration, and connection are important lenses through which to view adjunct faculty's perceived organizational support. This framework underscores the importance of intentional, equity-minded practices in supporting adjunct faculty across campuses. When colleges foster meaningful human connections, integrate adjunct faculty into their organizational structures, and actively support their well-being, adjunct faculty may be more likely to feel respected, supported, and engaged. In turn, positive outcomes fostered by organizational support include, but are not limited to increased affective commitment and reduced turnover (Rhoades et al., 2001).

Research Problem

Given their part-time status, adjunct faculty are less available to a college than full-time faculty. Consequently, adjunct faculty do not have access to the same level of organizational support as full-time faculty. The lack of access to the same level of organizational support as full-time faculty is part of the reason adjunct faculty may exhibit inferior instructional skills (Harrington, n.d.; Lei, 2007; Preuss, 2008; Smith, 2010), which negatively impacts student outcomes. Students who take many classes taught by adjunct faculty have lower persistence rates year-over-year (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008), reduced graduation rates (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Jacoby, 2006; Kezar & Maxey, 2014), and lower transfer rates to four-year colleges (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009).

Organizational support (e.g., pay and professional development) plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of adjunct faculty and, by extension, the success of colleges and their students (Wallin, 2004). Therefore, understanding the organizational support experience requires more than a simple ranking of services through surveys; it calls for a deeper exploration of how adjunct faculty perceive and navigate these systems. Such insight provides a nuanced view of the

structural, cultural, and emotional dimensions of support, offering institutions actionable knowledge to strengthen equity and inclusion.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the organizational support experience lived by adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. This study sought to explore the organizational support experience of adjunct faculty using the following research question.

- How do adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges describe their organizational support experience?

Research Design

A phenomenological design was used to gain a deep understanding of the lived experience of adjunct faculty specifically focused on the organizational support they received in their role as adjunct faculty. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that explores individuals' lived experiences and perceptions of the world. Originating with Husserl and developed further by Heidegger, phenomenology investigates how consciousness structures our understanding of phenomena (Vagle, 2018). Husserl's transcendental phenomenology emphasizes uncovering universal insights by suspending preconceptions while Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology contextualizes experiences within broader social and historical frameworks (Peoples, 2020).

Interpretive phenomenological analysis "aims to study subjective experience" (Peoples, 2020) and is derived from hermeneutic phenomenology. Interpretive phenomenological analysis adds a layer of understanding to human consciousness and perceptions. Hermeneutic phenomenologists use of interpretive phenomenological analysis acknowledges that individuals

interpret their experiences uncovering subjective realities rather than universal truths. Data analysis was conducted through an iterative process guided by the principles of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle allowed movement between detailed descriptions and broader contexts to reveal deeper meanings inherent in participants' lived experiences (Heidegger, 1982).

Participants

In conducting the study, purposive sampling strategies were used to solicit participants. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of diverse individuals (Bazeley, 2021). Participants were selected based upon many diverse characteristics, such as academic discipline, demographics, and geographic locations (urban, suburban, and online campuses). The business discipline was excluded to avoid potential biases given the power dynamic that exists in my role as the direct supervisor of adjunct faculty in the business discipline.

Data Collection

Aligned with a phenomenological approach, the study used interviews to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences. The use of interviews captured subjective realities and experiences. The initial round of interviews were semi-structured conversations focused on establishing rapport with participants and gaining a broad understanding of participants' lived experiences as adjunct faculty with nothing more than subtle prompts to tell me more about their experience (Vagle, 2018). Subsequent interviews were semi-structured using open-ended questions to probe deeper into each participant's unique experience.

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to collect the data necessary to answer the research question without guiding participants in a way that directs their responses (Giorgi, 1985). Semi-structured interviews allowed for data to be collected that would otherwise be missed, ensuring authenticity and richness in the data gathered. Additionally, I video and audio

recorded interviews because 65% to 70% of communication is conveyed through nonverbal cues (Birdwhistell, 2010), such as “inflections, tones, accentuation, tempo, acceleration, modulation” (Peoples, 2020, p. 54) and facial expressions. Failure to prioritize these characteristics of the communication process would have compromised initial analysis that guided further data collection during follow-up interviews putting emphasis on data from my perspective rather than the participants.

Prior to collecting data, I bracketed my assumptions about the phenomenon to minimize personal biases that may influence the study’s findings (Husserl, 1962). Throughout the data collection process, I revisited my assumptions and biases to maintain a high awareness of them to guard against their influence on the data being collected. Additionally, I journaled throughout the data collection process.

Journaling helped me, as the researcher, reflect on the data and identify probing questions to explore further in future interviews. Drafting subsequent interview questions through reflective journaling was beneficial in capturing the essence of each individual’s lived experience (Peoples, 2020) rather than guiding all participants in the exact same direction with pre-determined interview questions. “In many phenomenological studies it is not necessary nor even desirable to ask the same questions in the same way” (Vagle, 2018, p. 87). Furthermore, semi-structured follow-up interviews using questions specific to each individual’s broad experience is intended to prevent common themes from developing pre-maturely and can contribute to the authenticity of phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985).

Data Analysis

The study employed several tools to analyze the data and followed a step-by-step process to ensure the study is reproducible, transparent, valid, and reliable (Vagle, 2018). Data analysis

involved continuous journaling as the primary source of reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis process. “Analysis is accelerated as you take cognitive ownership of your data” (p. 95) which Saldaña (2011) refers to as "data intimacy". I used Zoom auto transcription for the interviews. However, Zoom auto transcription is an imperfect system. Therefore, I read and revised the auto generated transcripts to ensure accuracy and began making meaning of the data as it was collected. Other tools used include coding, analytic memos, and thematic analysis. Lastly, I used member checking to validate my interpretations of the data ensuring they align with participants’ lived experiences (Peoples, 2020). Through the data analysis process, I captured the essence of participants’ lived experiences and ensured the study's trustworthiness and replicability.

Background of Researcher

I have worked in higher education for more than 25 years, spending the last 18 years on the instructional side at a multi-campus community college. Additionally, I served as an adjunct instructor for three years (2008-2011) at another community college, apart from the college used in this study, yet in the same geographic area. Four years ago, I accepted the responsibilities of program coordinator for the discipline in which I have worked for all my instructional years. With the role of program coordinator comes the responsibility of adjunct faculty support. During my time as program coordinator, the program has experienced significant growth causing us to hire a plethora of adjunct faculty. When I accepted the role of program coordinator the discipline consisted of 20 adjunct faculty (14 on community college campuses and six dual credit high school teachers from two school districts). Now, I support 48 adjunct faculty (32 on community college campuses and 16 dual credit high school teachers from six school districts).

My observation was that little was being done to develop adjunct faculty. The college hosts adjunct faculty orientation, and veteran faculty members, both full-time and part-time, mentor less experienced adjunct faculty. However, given the workload faculty are managing, supporting less experienced adjunct faculty seems to be more reactive than proactive. My goal as program coordinator is to create a more proactive structure to support adjunct faculty. In my role, I strive to be a model for effectively supporting a large group of adjunct faculty across multiple campuses. By learning from the lived experiences of the participants, as a researcher, I identified sustainable methods to enhance their support and improve outcomes both inside and outside the classroom.

Significance of the Study

The study illuminated how best to support adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community based on the lived experiences of adjunct faculty rather than the suggestions of others inside (e.g., administrators and full-time faculty) or outside (e.g., prior research) the organization. By reviewing the literature and researching the support experiences of adjunct faculty, the research uncovered how adjunct faculty feel supported at the site selected. Furthermore, the research focused on the support provided to adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college by learning from the lived experiences of a diverse sampling of current adjunct faculty. The findings identified numerous practices to enhance the support experience of adjunct faculty. These findings may be transferable to other colleges.

Definitions

Adjunct Faculty – “Teach nine or fewer credit hours on a per semester contract with no benefits” (AACC, 2015 as cited in Bakley & Brodersen, 2018, p. 130).

Campus – An educational institution of higher education with a physical or online learning environment that is self-contained with comprehensive student support services, such as counseling, career services, advising, financial aid, tutoring, etc.

Community Colleges – “A unique form of postsecondary education that offers short-term semi- and professional terminal courses as well as an academic curriculum that results in an associate in arts or sciences” (Raby, 2009, p. 3)

Connection – the frequency and quality of interpersonal relationships characterized by mutual empathy, active listening, and emotional support (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Integration – the degree to which employees feel their unique identities, perspectives, and contributions are actively recognized, respected, and incorporated into the organizational culture and decision-making processes (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2022).

Multi-Campus – A college system with more than one self-contained campus with comprehensive student support services such as counseling, career services, advising, financial aid, tutoring, etc.

Perceived Organizational Support – The degree to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Well-Being – the holistic experience of physical, emotional and psychological health in the workplace (Singh, 2015).

Chapter Summary

Student outcomes, such as persistence, graduation, and transfer rates, are negatively impacted by adjunct faculty. Yet, adjunct faculty make up the majority of instructional faculty at community colleges. The negative impact adjunct faculty have on student outcomes is less about

them being inferior to full-time faculty, and more about adjunct faculty not having equal access to organizational support.

This study explored the organizational support experience provided to adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. The conceptual framework centered on well-being, integration, and connection providing a lens for understanding how support factors share the adjunct faculty perceptions of support. Because the focus was on lived experiences, a phenomenological approach was employed to capture the essence of the phenomenon or lived experience.

As a result, this study identified common themes related to the organizational support experience of adjunct faculty at the site selected. These themes allow the site to identify what they are currently doing to support adjunct faculty that is valued and how they might consider improving the support experience for adjunct faculty. Additionally, the findings contribute to the broader literature, offering insights that may be transferable to other colleges as they evaluate student outcomes and the extent to which they rely on adjunct faculty.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature, starting with the evolution and expansion of community colleges, with particular focus on the rise of multi-campus community colleges, before exploring the pivotal role of adjunct faculty in higher education. The literature highlights the benefits and drawbacks of adjunct faculty, which provides a better understanding of the financial and educational impact adjunct faculty have on community colleges and the students they serve. Furthermore, the literature addresses the specific challenges and issues adjunct faculty encounter before extending to the broader implications of adjunct faculty on higher education and the unique challenges posed by multi-campus community colleges. Finally, the chapter explores various types of support available for adjunct faculty and elaborates on the concepts that provided a framework to guide the study. The aim of this comprehensive review of the literature is to provide a better understanding of the complexities and significance of adjunct faculty within a multi-campus community college system.

Community Colleges

Community colleges stand as pillars of accessibility and opportunity in higher education reflecting the ever-evolving landscape of educational needs, socioeconomic factors, and societal aspirations. Community colleges play a critical role in the educational ecosystem. Community colleges offer two years of collegiate instruction and have long been pillars of accessibility and opportunity in higher education (Bogue, 1948). From their modest beginnings to their current role in the educational ecosystem, community colleges exemplify the principles of inclusion and empowerment (Valadez, 2002).

The Evolution and Expansion of Community Colleges

The roots of community colleges trace back to the 19th Century when the concept of providing accessible education to local communities began to take shape (Baker, 1994). The Morrill Act of 1862, which established land-grant universities, laid the groundwork by emphasizing practical education for the working class (Drury, 2003). However, the Junior College Movement in the 20th Century marked the formal emergence of community colleges in the United States (Koos, 1925).

During the 1900s, the Junior College Movement gained momentum as a response to the growing demand for both vocational and academic pursuits. These institutions of higher education, referred to as “junior colleges” at the time, but better known today as community colleges today were primarily focused on providing the first two years of college education, offering a bridge between high school and university (Boswell, 2004). The locations of new community colleges were chosen based on population density. Community colleges were intended to be built within 25 miles of 90% to 95% of the population (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As of 1996, 96% of community college students travel a median distance of 10 miles (Horn et al., 2006).

The mid-20th Century witnessed significant expansion of community colleges, spurred by various factors. The Truman administration’s elaborate plan to make community colleges more financially and geographically accessible coupled with the GI Bill following World War II significantly influenced enrollment (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Also, Baby Boomers, recognized as the largest generation to date, were reaching their traditional college-age years. As shown in **Table 2.1**, the number of community colleges more than doubled between 1960 and 1980 making higher education more accessible since most of the U.S. population now lives near a

community college (National Commission on Community Colleges [NCCC], 2008). The expansion of community colleges has allowed community colleges to reach geographically diverse student populations and offer a broad range of programs from vocational training to liberal arts education.

The 1960s and 1970s marked a turning point for community colleges, characterized by increased federal funding and recognition as vital institutions in the educational landscape stimulated by the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Meier, 2018). The Higher Education Act of 1965 served as landmark legislation that aimed to strengthen the resources available for higher education and provide financial assistance to students attending college through grants, loans, and work-study opportunities (Sewell & Shah, 1967). The act included provisions to increase access to higher education for minority and low-income students through programs, such as TRIO which offers support services to disadvantaged students.

Community colleges also played a crucial role in addressing societal challenges, such as workforce development and social mobility. Community colleges have pioneered initiatives, such as open enrollment, remedial education programs, and partnerships with local industries to meet the evolving needs of both students and communities (Bogart, 1994). Community colleges now enroll 43% of undergraduates (AACC, 2017) costing students 35% of tuition at in-state public four-year institutions of higher education (AACC, 2023) and are more accessible physically and socioeconomically (NCCC, 2008).

Table 2.1. Expansion of Two-Year Colleges

Year	Number of Two-Year Colleges
1900-01	8 ^a
1915-16	74 ^a
1921-22	207 ^a
1925-26	325 ^a
1929-30	436 ^a
1933-34	521 ^a
1938-39	575 ^a
1947-48	650 ^a
1952-53	594 ^a
1956-57	650 ^a
1958-59	677 ^a
1960-61	678 ^a
1962-63	704
1964-65	719 ^a
1966-67	837 ^a
1968-69	993 ^a
1970-71	1,091 ^a
1972-73	1,141 ^a
1974-75	1,203 ^a
1976-77	1,233 ^a
1978-79	1,234 ^a
1980	1,195 ^b
1990	1,408 ^b
2000	1,721 ^b
2005	1,683 ^b
2006	1,694 ^b
2007	1,685 ^b
2008	1,677 ^b
2009	1,690 ^b
2010	1,729 ^b
2011	1,729 ^b
2012	1,738 ^b
2013	1,700 ^b
2014	1,685 ^b
2015	1,616 ^b
2016	1,579 ^b
2017	1,528 ^b
2018	1,485 ^b
2019	1,339 ^b
2020	1,303 ^b
2021	1,294 ^b
2022	1,280 ^b

Note. Table 2.1 was created using data from Cohen & Brawer (2008)^a and Korhonen (2024)^b

For decades, community colleges have been vital in providing higher education to the working class and socioeconomically disadvantaged (Ardalan, 2019). Initially, community

colleges focused on providing associate degrees or transfer degrees through general education courses for students aiming to continue their education at four-year colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Then, community colleges introduced vocational training or terminal degrees and certificates to equip community members with the skills, knowledge, and abilities to pursue work that required less time and money to be spent on higher education (Jacobs & Worth, 2019). Some community colleges have started offering bachelor's degrees in select disciplines where access to four-year colleges is limited. A total of 139 community colleges across 24 states have received approval to offer bachelor's degrees, with many others in the process of seeking similar authorization (Community College Baccalaureate Association & Bragg and Associates, 2024).

In addition to degree programs, community colleges have addressed other educational needs through non-credit developmental and continuing education. Developmental education was deemed necessary because students were enrolling in college inadequately prepared (Kisker et al., 2023). Continuing education has added to the portfolio of learning provided by offering workshops and seminars to fill the educational gaps (i.e., financial literacy) specific to that community (Cohen & Brawer, 1991), such as financial literacy. More recently community colleges have collaborated with the federal government through the Second Chance Pell Grant to provide prisoners with access to higher education (Chesnut & Wachendorfer, 2021).

Table 2.1 portrays the significant growth and reliance on community colleges to provide higher education to the masses. However, declines can be seen periodically due to a variety of reasons, most notably in 2005 and 2020. Although the decline in community colleges cannot be directly attributed to a single factor, the economic downturn that has led to budget cuts in many states has caused some community colleges to consolidate or close. More recently, social and safety pressures have led to a decline in enrollment leading to more contraction within

community college systems (Sutton, 2020; Sutton, 2021). The value of higher education has increasingly been called into question leading prospective students to pursue alternatives, namely full-time employment (Papachristos et al., 2015). The demand for labor has made the decision to pursue full-time employment more palatable given its impact on hourly wages.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic not only caused students to take a break from college, but many of those returning opted for virtual or asynchronous learning upon gaining experience using those learning modalities during the stay-at-home order. There are a plethora of other colleges better equipped to market to students and provide a well-established online learning experience while less prepared colleges slowly transition that direction as a supplement to their in-person learning experience. The rising skepticism about the value of higher education, coupled with shifting student preferences in the wake of the pandemic and the impact of inflation and economic pressures, has prompted many community colleges to reevaluate how they deliver education to their communities. As a result, there has been a contraction in the number of community colleges. These same factors have influenced a recent decline in the use of adjunct faculty as shown in

Table 2.2. However, with nearly a thousand community colleges nationwide many of which are heavily relying on adjunct faculty, the impact community colleges and adjunct faculty continue to have on higher education in the United States remains undeniably significant.

Modern Challenges and Adaptations

Although often referred to as “two-year colleges,” that label misrepresents the reality of today’s community college students. According to the AACC (2019), 63 percent of community college students attend school part-time making two-year completion unattainable. While community colleges have made remarkable strides in expanding access to higher education, they continue to face challenges in the 21st Century. Economic pressures, changing demographics, and technological advancements have necessitated ongoing adaptations to meet the needs of a diverse student body and an ever-changing job market (Morris, 2023). In response to these challenges, community colleges have embraced innovative approaches such as, online learning, competency-based education, and stackable credentials, to enhance flexibility and relevance (Gallagher & Maxwell, 2019). They have also forged partnerships with businesses and industries to ensure that their programs align with workforce demands, thereby enhancing graduates’ employability and economic mobility. Furthermore, community colleges have increasingly focused on student success initiatives, including academic support services, career counseling, and financial aid assistance (Flynn, 2013) to enhance retention and completion rates (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Recognizing the importance of holistic student development, many colleges have implemented programs to address non-academic barriers to success, such as food, housing, transportation, and childcare (Troester-Trate, 2017).

The history of community colleges is a testament to the enduring value of accessible, affordable, and inclusive higher education. As indispensable institutions in the educational

landscape, community colleges have continually evolved to meet the changing needs of students and society. In the future, community colleges will undoubtedly continue to play a vital role in expanding educational opportunities, fostering economic growth, and promoting social mobility. By embracing innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to student success, community colleges will remain beacons of hope, nurturing dreams and transforming lives for generations to come (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Multi-Campus Model

Expanding access to higher education is a fundamental mission of multi-campus community colleges offering a gateway to learning for diverse populations. With campuses strategically located across various geographic regions, multi-campus community colleges break down barriers to access and provide pathways to higher education for individuals who face challenges pursuing traditional 4-year college degrees. Multi-campus community colleges foster diverse learning environments, address regional workforce needs, and provide expansive student support services. Despite the numerous challenges associated with a community college having multiple campuses, they play a pivotal role in expanding access for those who need higher education most. Rather than one campus at the core of the population density, multi-campus models typically have campuses located in the outlying areas that are more conveniently located to suburban and rural communities. Geographic locations are one of many ways the multi-campus model is unique to single site community colleges.

Uniqueness of the Multi-Campus Model

There are significant disparities in academic policies and practices that exist across different campuses of the same college system, such as monitoring student attendance and submission of late assignments. Such variations can influence students' academic performance,

suggesting that factors inherent to the institution, such as its history, geographical location, and organizational structure play a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes (Tzafea, 2023). For instance, campuses with long-standing traditions may have established practices that differ markedly from those of newer campuses, even though they belong to the same overarching system. Additionally, campuses located in urban areas might prioritize experiential learning opportunities differently compared to those in rural settings, further contributing to discrepancies in student experiences and performance (Tchoukaleyska et al., 2022). These inconsistencies are evident not only across different campuses but also within various components of the same college. For example, grading criteria in one department may differ significantly from those in another, leading to confusion and potential inequities in how students are assessed (Wimshurst et al., 2006). These variations pose challenges for quality assurance in higher education, as they call into question the effectiveness of systems, processes, and methods that are typically designed to ensure consistent educational standards. If campuses within the same college function differently, the reliability of these quality assurance measures can be compromised, potentially undermining the college system's academic integrity (Wimshurst et al., 2006).

Given these complexities, there is a pressing need for community colleges to develop more uniform policies and practices across their various campuses. Uniformity would not only enhance the educational experience for students but also reinforce the college's commitment to maintaining high academic standards and ensuring equitable treatment for all students, regardless of their campus affiliation. Such consistency could ultimately lead to improved academic outcomes and foster a more cohesive institutional identity.

Expanding Access

One of the primary advantages of multi-campus community colleges is their ability to extend educational opportunities to a broader population. By establishing campuses in different geographic areas, colleges cater to the needs of students who face barriers to access (Groenwald, 2018). Whether located in urban centers, rural communities, or suburban areas, multi-campus community colleges serve as anchor institutions, fostering educational equity and social inclusion. Moreover, the presence of multiple campuses allows students to choose the location that best fits their needs, whether based on proximity to home, availability of specific programs, or desired campus culture. Flexibility enables students to pursue their educational goals while balancing other responsibilities, such as work, family, and community engagement (Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2002).

Diverse Learning Environments

Each campus within a multi-campus community college system brings its own unique characteristics and strengths, enriching the overall learning experience for students. From specialized facilities for technical training to vibrant campus communities promoting cultural diversity and academic excellence, these institutions offer a range of opportunities for personal and academic growth. Furthermore, multi-campus community colleges often collaborate with local businesses, industries, and community organizations to provide students with hands-on learning experiences and career pathways aligned with regional workforce needs (Cooper, 2010). The integration of academic programs with real-world applications enhances students' readiness for the workforce while fostering strong ties between the college and its surrounding community (Bogart, 1994).

Challenges and Considerations

Multi-campus community colleges play a vital role in expanding access to higher education, fostering diversity (Bing et al., 2020; Pineda & Bowes, 1995), and promoting student success (Jones & Hansen, 2014). By leveraging their unique strengths and resources across multiple locations, these institutions empower individuals to pursue their educational career aspirations while enriching the fabric of their communities. While multi-campus community colleges offer numerous benefits, they also face challenges inherent in managing multiple locations and serving diverse student populations. Coordination of resources, faculty, and administrative functions across multiple campuses can present logistical complexities and require highly effective communication and collaboration strategies (Groenwald, 2018). Additionally, ensuring consistency in academic quality and student services across campuses is paramount to maintaining the integrity and reputation of the institution (Baar, 2020). Addressing disparities in resources and infrastructure among campuses is essential to providing equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their location (Johnstone, 1999). Furthermore, multi-campus community colleges must navigate the complexities of regional demographics, economic conditions, and educational needs, requiring a nuanced approach to program offerings, student support services, and outreach efforts (Castillo, 2013; Kerlin, 2008).

As multi-campus community colleges continue to adapt to evolving societal needs and educational trends, they will remain key drivers of innovation and opportunity in the higher education landscape, ensuring that students from all backgrounds have the chance to thrive and succeed. Like multi-campus community colleges, adjunct faculty play a pivotal role in the landscape of higher education. The experiences of adjunct faculty across various educational settings reveal a range of challenges. Adjunct faculty working at rural community colleges often

experience a greater sense of inclusion both academically and socially compared to their counterparts at suburban and urban colleges (Spaniel & Scott, 2013). The enhanced sense of belonging in rural settings might be attributed to the close-knit nature of these communities and the potentially more personalized interactions with students and colleagues.

Career stage also plays a crucial role in shaping job attitudes among adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty in the later stages of their careers generally have a more positive outlook compared to their early-career peers (Feldman & Turnley, 2001). The difference in outlooks could be due to various factors, such as accumulated experience, increased confidence, or a more established professional identity, which might contribute to a more favorable perspective on their work. Another important observation is that there are minimal differences in the characteristics, motivations, and satisfaction levels of adjunct faculty between for-profit and non-profit colleges (Starcher & Mandernach, 2016) suggesting that effective practices in faculty development and support might be applicable across different types of colleges, regardless of their financial model. The lack of variance among adjunct faculty serving for-profit and non-profit colleges implies that successful strategies for enhancing adjunct faculty experiences can be shared and adapted across various institutional contexts.

These findings underscore the intricate and multifaceted nature of adjunct faculty experiences. They highlight the necessity for community colleges to recognize and address the diverse needs of adjunct faculty members. By understanding the specific challenges faced by adjunct faculty in different settings and stages of their careers, colleges can better support the growing segment of adjunct faculty in the academic workforce, fostering a more inclusive and productive academic environment.

Adjunct Faculty

As higher education experienced growing enrollment and diversified curriculum, the need for additional faculty members arose. Adjunct faculty positions initially emerged to supplement the core faculty ranks, often filled by professionals with expertise in specialized fields or practitioners bringing industry experience to the classroom (Wallin, 2004). However, not all adjunct faculty are industry practitioners. Some adjunct faculty only teach part-time or teach part-time at multiple colleges. Teaching part-time at multiple colleges can result in a full-time workload or overload. While adjunct faculty have played a valuable role in meeting the growing demand for higher education, their status has been marginal, lacking the benefits and job security afforded their full-time colleagues (Halcrow & Olson, 2011; Wallin, 2004).

Rising Use of Adjunct Faculty

In the 1960s, community colleges were being added throughout the country at a rate of one per week (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). In addition to the growing number of community colleges, community college enrollment among baby boomers surged. Community colleges began to increasingly rely on adjunct faculty in the 1960s (Cohen & Lombardi, 1992). The use of adjunct faculty has never contracted significantly from 1960s levels. Driven by budget constraints, changing academic priorities, and shifts in the labor market (Halcrow & Olson, 2011), community colleges' reliance on adjunct faculty continuously increased throughout the later part of the 20th Century. Adjunct faculty have been relied on as a cost-saving strategy since they are paid significantly less than full-time faculty and are more easily dispensable.

The important role adjunct faculty play in higher education has increased significantly over the last 60-plus years. Many disciplines now have adjunct faculty teaching most of their classes (Marcotte, 2021). Adjunct faculty make up the majority of community college faculty

(AACC, 2022), and all signs indicate that trend is likely to continue long into the future as higher education strives to provide a plethora of diverse academic programs with limited financial resources (Halcrow & Olson, 2011).

In recent decades, higher education has grown increasingly dependent on adjunct faculty. Once considered a supplementary resource to full-time faculty, these part-time instructors have now become an essential component of higher education, most especially community colleges. As depicted in

Table 2.2, adjunct faculty make up most of the faculty (AACC, 2022).

Table 2.2. The Rise in Adjunct Faculty at Community Colleges

Year	Adjunct Faculty at Community Colleges
1962	38.5% ^a
1974	50.0% ^a
1980	60.0% ^b
1990	63.0% ^b
1993	65.0% ^b
2013	69.2% ^b
2018	69.4% ^b
2019	66.7% ^b
2020	64.9% ^b
2021	64.8% ^b
2022	64.6% ^b

Note. Table 2.2 was created using data from Cohen and Lombardi (1992)^a and AACC (1995, 2022)^b

The shift toward a greater reliance on adjunct faculty in higher education began in the 1960s, largely as a response to the rapid enrollment surge brought on by the Baby Boomers. Community colleges turned to adjunct faculty as a flexible and cost-effective solution to meet the sudden demand, allowing them to expand quickly without the expense of hiring full-time faculty (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). The cost saving trend of hiring adjunct faculty continued in the decades that followed, as budget constraints and enrollment fluctuations increasingly pressured colleges to prioritize affordability and adaptability in their staffing models. By the 1980s and 1990s, adjunct faculty had become a cornerstone of cost-savings across all types of colleges, with adjunct faculty representing over half of instructional faculty by the early 2000s (Kezar & Sam, 2010). As community colleges face ongoing financial challenges, reliance on adjunct faculty persists, shaping a workforce model in which adjunct faculty often lack job security, benefits, and professional development resources, despite playing a critical role in undergraduate instruction (Bettinger & Long, 2010). A widespread reliance on adjunct faculty is indicative of broader shifts within the sector, as colleges aim to balance quality education with financial sustainability (Umbach, 2007)

The rising use of adjunct faculty depicted in

Table 2.2 reflects the evolving dynamics of higher education driven by economic pressures, demand flexibility, and the desire for specialized expertise (Dedman & Pearch, 2004). While adjunct faculty play a crucial role in meeting instructional needs and enriching the academic experience for students, their increasing prevalence raises important questions about labor practices, educational quality, and institutional values. As community colleges navigate these challenges, striking a balance between cost containment and the fair treatment and support of adjunct faculty is essential to uphold the principles of academic excellence and equity in higher education (Halcrow & Olson, 2011).

Over the past 60 years, the role of adjunct faculty in higher education has grown significantly. In many disciplines, courses taught by adjunct faculty significantly outnumber those taught by full-time faculty (Marcotte, 2021). However, adjunct faculty are easily expendable with contracts that do not extend beyond the current semester, unlike their full-time colleagues (Winters, 2015). As a result, there has been a modest decline in the usage of adjunct faculty since the COVID-19 pandemic (AACC, 2022). Therefore, when colleges experience declining enrollment from one semester to the next, excluding adjunct faculty from the upcoming teaching schedule is contractually the easier option for colleges to pursue. Then, colleges can re-hire adjunct faculty as the need arises. Although there has been a subtle decline in the use of adjunct faculty, all signs indicate heavy reliance on adjunct faculty is likely to continue long into the future as higher education strives to provide a quality education with limited financial resources.

The heavy use of adjunct faculty has raised concerns about the quality of education, academic freedom, and the working conditions of adjunct faculty. Research that focuses on adjunct faculty at community colleges would be beneficial since that is where the largest portion

of them teach (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2018), and there is minimal literature regarding adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges (Wolfe & Strange, 2003). Bakley and Broderson (2018) suggested more research be conducted replicating the “descriptive phenomenological study at other multi-campus community colleges in the Midwest” (p. 144). After all, many adjunct faculty face precarious employment situations, characterized by low wages, limited access to benefits, and little job security (Roach, 2014). Despite their significant contributions to teaching and student success, adjunct faculty often found themselves marginalized within academic institutions, lacking opportunities for professional development, advancement, and meaningful participation in institutional governance (Finn et al., 2000). Given the significance of their instructional role, community colleges must treat these issues as a matter of importance to ensure student outcomes improve.

The Importance of Adjunct Faculty

Higher education plays a significant role in the lives of individuals economically, professionally, and socially (Pee & Vululleh, 2020). The classroom is a learning environment where people can interact with others to develop critical thinking skills, open their minds to diverse perspectives, and foster relationships that last a lifetime. Furthermore, higher education is the conduit to developing skills, knowledge, and abilities for a career with greater earnings potential that improves one’s quality of life (Abel & Deitz, 2019).

Adjunct faculty serve as unsung heroes of higher education, often overlooked amidst the grandeur of academic institutions (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). These part-time instructors play a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience of students. Higher education would look different without the cost savings and industry experience provided by adjunct faculty. For example, higher education would lack faculty with current industry experience (Cline, 1993;

Cohen & Lombardi, 1992; Elder et al., 2016; Littrell, 1990), and higher education would not have the financial means to provide all the programs and services that support student success in fields of study that interest them (Arden, 1989; Jacoby, 2006; Schneider, 1999) if they were more reliant on higher paid full-time faculty.

Adjunct faculty are critical to the success of community colleges considering community colleges limited financial resources. The importance of adjunct faculty is evident in their rise in use at community colleges throughout the United States. Given the reliance on adjunct faculty, multi-campus community colleges must understand the challenges adjunct faculty face and provide them with the necessary resources to be successful so the organization can achieve its goals of high student satisfaction and success rates. In short, the quality of higher education is contingent upon adjunct faculty. If the needs of adjunct faculty are not met, college students do not receive the quality education they deserve, which has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond the classrooms where adjunct faculty teach.

The history of adjunct faculty in higher education is a testament to resilience, dedication, and a commitment to academic excellence despite facing institutional challenges and structural inequities. While adjunct faculty members have long been essential contributors to the mission of community colleges, their contributions have often been undervalued and their working conditions overlooked (Wallin, 2004). As the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, community colleges must prioritize fair treatment, professional development, and inclusion of adjunct faculty. By recognizing and addressing the challenges faced by adjunct faculty, community colleges can foster a more equitable and supportive environment for all members of the academic community, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and advancing the mission of higher education.

As the number of adjunct faculty at community colleges has increased, so too has the recognition of their vital role and efforts to address the challenges they face in higher education (Juszkiewicz, 2016). Advocacy organizations, labor unions, and professional associations have emerged to champion the rights and interests of adjunct faculty, advocating for academic freedom and job security (Atkins et al., 2018). Furthermore, colleges have increasingly implemented policies and practices aimed at improving the working conditions and professional development opportunities for adjunct faculty. Initiatives, such as mentoring programs, professional development workshops, and access to campus resources, aim to support adjunct faculty in their teaching roles and facilitate their integration into the academic community (Webb et al., 2013).

Adjunct faculty are an integral part of the higher education community, significantly enhancing the academic experience for students and addressing critical teaching gaps. Their diverse expertise, flexibility, and commitment to student success are essential to fulfilling the mission of community colleges. Recognizing the importance of adjunct faculty necessitates advocating for their rights, supporting their professional development, and ensuring they receive the recognition and compensation they deserve. Valuing and investing in adjunct faculty is essential to upholding the principles of academic excellence and equity in higher education (Wallin, 2004).

The recognition of adjunct faculty's role in contributing to student success and institutional effectiveness is critical. Acknowledging adjunct faculty as valuable professional colleagues is essential for improving the overall quality of education (Richardson, 1992; Wallin, 2004). By providing appropriate support and development opportunities, community colleges can not only boost the morale and effectiveness of their adjunct faculty but also strengthen the

overall educational experience for students. Furthermore, adjunct faculty support fosters a more cohesive academic community and enhances the connection between adjunct faculty and full-time constituents, ultimately benefiting the entire institution.

Differences Between Full-Time and Adjunct Faculty

Research comparing adjunct and full-time faculty has yielded varied and sometimes contradictory findings, reflecting the complexities of faculty roles and their impact on higher education. One notable difference identified in some studies is related to grading practices. Adjunct faculty may assign slightly higher grades compared to their full-time counterparts (Deeb et al., 2019). Adjunct faculty assigning higher grades than full-time faculty could be due to a range of factors, such as differences in grading standards, assessment methods, or even the adjunct faculty's desire to maintain positive evaluations from students. However, other studies present a different picture. For instance, Landrum (2009) found no significant differences in student evaluations or grade distributions between adjunct and full-time faculty. The lack of variance in grading among adjunct and full-time faculty indicates that, despite variations in grading practices, the overall impact of adjunct versus full-time faculty on student evaluations and grading may be minimal. In contrast, Mueller et al. (2013) provide evidence that student performance and satisfaction tend to be higher in courses taught by full-time faculty. Student performance and satisfaction being higher in courses taught by full-time faculty because full-time faculty have more time for course preparation, student engagement, and departmental involvement than adjunct faculty, which might enhance the quality of instruction and support provided to students.

The significant increase in the use of adjunct faculty in recent decades can largely be attributed to economic considerations. Adjunct faculty are considerably less expensive, costing

about one-third of what full-time faculty do (Dedman & Pearch, 2004; Wilkinson, 2003). The cost-effectiveness of adjunct faculty makes them an attractive option for colleges looking to manage budgets without significantly expanding their payroll. However, the cost savings measure of relying heavily on adjunct faculty raises several concerns.

Benefits of Adjunct Faculty

There are numerous benefits adjunct faculty provide colleges that full-time faculty do not. To name a few, adjunct faculty are more cost-effective (Arden, 1989; Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Deadman & Pearch, 2004; Mangan, 1991; Twigg, 1989), provide flexibility from one semester to the next (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Klein et al., 1996), offer greater diversity of thought (Bedford, 2009), and bring current real-world experience to the classroom as many work in the field while teaching part-time (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Cline, 1993; Littrell, 1990).

Cost-Effectiveness

There is a myriad of reasons why funding for higher education has decreased over the years. The funding cuts have caused colleges to evaluate how they manage their financial situation. Increasing tuition is a solution met with little fanfare since the average cost of college in the United States is \$36,436 per student per year (Hanson, 2023). The cost to attend a community college is approximately one-third to one-fifth of four-year colleges (AACC, 2023), but most students attending community colleges cannot easily afford significant tuition increases given their socioeconomic status. In 2016, 67% of community college students had a household income of less than \$50,000 (Craft, 2021).

Jacoby (2006) and Schneider (1999) claim most colleges would fail to exist and others would look drastically different than they do without a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty cost less than half as much as full-time faculty (Mangan, 1991) and in some

cases one-third as much (Dedman & Pearch, 2004; Wilkinson, 2003) after factoring in adjunct faculty's lack of offered benefits, such as insurances, retirement contributions, and paid time off. College administrators concede that financial considerations are the primary reason for hiring more adjunct faculty (Alsunaydi, 2020; Arden, 1989; Ellison, 2002). Staffing classes with adjunct faculty is an easy and affordable way to provide classroom instruction amidst budgetary concerns and fluctuating enrollment (Gappa & Leslie, 1993).

Flexibility

Adjunct faculty are contracted on a semester basis unlike full-time faculty who usually sign an annual contract and in many cases are tenure track although the percentage of full-time tenured or tenure track faculty has decreased significantly over the last 25 years (Finkelstein et al., 2017). Colleges have found adjunct faculty to be a quick and easy solution to address changing demand for classes and programs from year to year rather than over the lifetime of what would otherwise be full-time appointments (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). The use of adjunct faculty is particularly helpful when dealing with fluctuating enrollment. When most colleges experienced enrollment decline during the COVID-19 pandemic they were able to temporarily forgo assigning adjunct faculty to classes rather than being forced to layoff full-time employees or absorb the financial burden of paying an overstaffed body of full-time faculty (Chun & Evans, 2023). The Education Data Initiative found enrollment in postsecondary undergraduate education has been in a state of decline since 2010 (Hanson, 2023). These enrollment declines can be difficult to manage financially if colleges are overly reliant on full-time faculty. Numerous colleges have made the difficult decision to lay off full-time faculty in the wake of recent enrollment declines, as college administrators have conceded the primary rationale for using adjunct faculty has been the financial consideration (Klein et al., 1996).

Diversity of Thought

Colleges that rely more heavily on full-time faculty require fewer faculty in each discipline limiting the diversity of thought colleagues share among themselves and across disciplines as open-minded lifelong learners (Bedford, 2009). Fewer faculty minimize the diverse perspectives college students receive from their educators. For example, full-time faculty teach four or five classes per semester while adjunct faculty teach one to three classes per semester. A discipline that offers 12 or fewer classes per semester and has two full-time faculty will only require one or two adjunct faculty. However, the same discipline with one full-time faculty will require anywhere from three to seven adjunct faculty. There is value in collegial discussions among faculty who have unique lived experiences. Equally valuable is the opportunity for students to learn from various diverse perspectives. Without a significant number of faculty, the learning experiences of students are limited to the perspectives of a few faculty, some of which might be outdated. Diverse perspectives are highly valuable to the learning experience (Steiner, 2018) especially when they include current experience of adjunct faculty who work full-time in their professional industries.

Current Industry Experience

The industry experiences adjunct faculty bring into the classroom enhances the learning experience. The value of industry experience is especially true among vocational programs (Cline, 1993; Littrell, 1990; Rose & Voigt, 2008; Wallin 2004), such as business, engineering, nursing, and social work among others. The knowledge of faculty gained from current industry experience is an asset to the academic program that aids in student development of practical applications related to the content being learned (Ellison & Williams, 2009). Nurses working in the field and teaching part-time bring current work experience into the classroom

(Anderson, 2009) that could not be provided by full-time instructors who have been teaching full-time for many years. Fagan-Wilen et al. (2006) claim, “they [students] enjoy learning about the real-world experiences from adjunct faculty” (p. 47), but that does not always translate into quality instruction (Bettinger & Long, 2005).

Full-time faculty are subject matter experts, some of whom possess work experience doing what they teach, but that experience becomes outdated over time when they are devoted to teaching. Adjunct faculty were initially introduced to higher education because they could fill staffing gaps and possessed specialized knowledge within a broader field (Wallin, 2004). The specialized knowledge of current practitioners who serve as adjunct faculty is still a factor to be considered today as many disciplines have evolved. For example, computer science now includes data science, software engineering, computer networking, cybersecurity, and programming; business includes accounting, management, and marketing; and biology includes ecology, virology, and zoology.

Drawbacks of Adjunct Faculty

While the fiscal advantages of employing adjunct faculty are clear, and the diverse perspectives and industry experience are favorable for learning, the drawbacks are equally significant. Community colleges need to address these drawbacks to ensure the quality of education provided is satisfactory. There is great value in the industry experience possessed by adjunct faculty, but the industry experience usually comes at the expense of quality instructional practices. West et al. (2009) claim adjunct faculty lack an “educational foundation that allows students to learn” (p. 306). Lacking an educational foundation is one of the drawbacks associated with adjunct instruction. Others include lack of availability and lower student performance.

Inferior Instructional Skills

Barker and Harris (2019), Fedler (1989), Sonner (2000), and Xu (2019) found students taking classes taught by adjunct faculty earn higher grades which suggests adjunct faculty are better at equipping learners than their full-time colleagues or they are more lenient graders. However, students who perform satisfactorily in introductory-level classes taught by adjunct faculty are more likely to struggle in future classes taught by full-time faculty because they are ill-prepared due to grade inflation by adjunct faculty (Eney & Davidson, 2006; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Jacoby, 2005). The issue of grade inflation causes a ripple effect compromising community college students' ability to persist, graduate, and transfer. Students who take many classes taught by adjunct faculty have lower persistence rates year-over-year (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008), reduced graduation rates (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Jacoby, 2006; Kezar & Maxey, 2014), and lower transfer rates to four-year colleges (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009).

There is plenty of research (Harrington, n.d.; Lei, 2007; Preuss, 2008; Smith, 2010) that suggests adjunct faculty instruction is inferior to that of full-time faculty. Researchers find that adjunct faculty rely on traditional methods of instruction, neglecting to incorporate the modern methods of teaching that resonate more with students (Banachowski, 1997; Kelly, 1990; Lei, 2007; Mueller et al., 2013). Students appreciate the practical experience and knowledge adjunct faculty bring to the classroom, but students often view adjunct faculty as “somewhat less effective teachers than full-time faculty” (Klein et al., 1996, p. 253). However, the perceived effectiveness is not due to an inability of adjunct faculty to perform as well as, or better than, full-time faculty. The quality of instruction provided by adjunct faculty is significantly influenced by the availability of professional development opportunities and adjunct faculty's availability in general (U.S. House of Representatives, 2014).

Lack of Availability

Another significant challenge to the learning experience provided by adjunct faculty is their lack of availability for things beyond just professional development. Since adjunct faculty are not paid a livable wage, most of them work another part-time or full-time job limiting the hours they can dedicate to the college or university where they teach (Klein et al., 1996). The same cannot be said for full-time faculty whose professional hours are largely dedicated to the college or university. Full-time faculty working hours are quite flexible allowing them to converse with colleagues in the faculty suite; attend meetings, trainings, and conferences; read about teaching styles and modern instructional best practices; and gain the perspective of students' preferences outside of class time during office hours or scheduled visits (Schuetz, 2002). Adjunct faculty holding other jobs and lacking availability can lead to additional drawbacks.

Holding multiple teaching positions or having other professional commitments makes dedicating significant time for student support and engagement outside of scheduled class time difficult (Bates, 2012; Bedford, 2009). Adjunct faculty may lack access to office space (Eagan et al., 2015), further hindering their ability to be available and accessible to students outside of class. Additionally, adjunct faculty are typically compensated solely for instructional hours, with little to no compensation for additional duties, such as office hours or student consultation, disincentivizing them from being available outside of class time.

Adjunct faculty frequently experience a sense of isolation from their departments and colleagues, a condition intensified by limited access to institutional resources and informal support systems. These factors that contribute significantly to their feelings of marginalization and disengagement (Buch et al., 2017). For example, dedicated office space allows adjunct

faculty to meet with students in a more private setting than the classroom or hallway, but are often not available to them (Halcrow & Olson, 2011).

Students may struggle to access timely assistance, feedback, and guidance from adjunct faculty outside of class, hindering their academic progress, comprehension, and overall learning experience (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018). The lack of availability of adjunct faculty may deter students from seeking help, participating in office hours, or engaging in meaningful interactions with their instructors leading them to a sense of disconnection and disengagement. Limited interactions between adjunct faculty and students outside of class time can impede the development of mentoring relationships, academic advising, and personalized support, diminishing the overall quality of the learning experience (Walton, 2018). A culture that does not prioritize accessibility and support for adjunct faculty can contribute to a fragmented and disengaged academic community, undermining morale, collaboration, and institutional effectiveness (Wallin, 2004).

To address the issue of limited availability of adjunct faculty outside of class time, scholars suggest several strategies. Key among these strategies are incentivizing adjunct faculty to support their students outside of class time and fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion for adjunct faculty within the academic community (Merriman, 2010). Incentivizing adjunct faculty can be achieved by making office space and resources accessible to the adjunct faculty, inviting them to participate in campus activities and events, such as discipline meetings, serving on committees that make academic decisions, and social gatherings with faculty, staff, and administrators. Another strategy to accommodate the availability of adjunct faculty would be to use online platforms, such as email, discussion boards, and video conferencing (Aldemir &

Ardley, 2014), to facilitate communications between adjunct faculty and their students during hours that accommodate both schedules (Matos & Kasztelnik, 2023).

Enhancing accessibility and support for adjunct faculty outside of class time is essential for promoting student success, strengthening faculty-student relationships, and fostering a cohesive and inclusive culture (Walton, 2018). By addressing the challenges faced by adjunct faculty and implementing strategies to enhance their availability, accessibility, and support, colleges can create a more supportive and enriching learning environment for students and faculty alike (Walton, 2018). Investing in adjunct faculty is a practical necessity for colleges committed to excellence, equity, and student-centered education.

Lower Student Outcomes

Inferior instructional methods and the availability of adjunct faculty have a negative impact on students that extend far beyond the classroom. Students who take a substantial number of classes taught by adjunct faculty tend to have lower persistence rates from year to year (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008), reduced graduation rates (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Jacoby, 2006; Kezar & Maxey, 2014), and lower transfer rates to four-year colleges (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009). Part of the problem is believed to be adjunct faculty grading too easily (Ran & Sanders, 2020) for fear that students performing unsatisfactorily in their classes will look unfavorably on their instruction thus jeopardizing their future with the college or university. A future that is already in jeopardy, as adjunct faculty are easily expendable on a semester-to-semester basis, unlike full-time faculty who typically have contracts for one year or longer (Goldstene, 2012).

Students who perform well in introductory level classes taught by adjunct faculty may struggle in subsequent courses taught by full-time faculty due to inadequate preparation (Eney & Davidson, 2006; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Jacoby, 2005). Inadequate preparation can have a ripple

effect, undermining community college students' ability to persist, graduate, and transfer successfully. Lower student performance among those taking classes mostly taught by adjunct faculty is not believed to be caused by the adjunct faculty, but instead by the circumstances surrounding their temporary employment. Jaschik (2008) claims the negative outcomes that come from inferior adjunct faculty instruction are more reflective of the part-time employment conditions rather than an inability to develop professionally.

Challenges Adjunct Faculty Face

The role of adjunct faculty is critical as they bring valuable industry expertise and real-world experience to the classroom, enriching the educational experience for students. However, their contribution is frequently overlooked, leading to a perception that adjunct faculty are treated as second-class citizens within academic institutions (Wallin, 2004). Adjunct faculty feeling marginalized can manifest in various ways from lower pay and fewer resources to minimal recognition and exclusion from decision-making processes.

The growing dependence on adjunct faculty raises significant concerns about the quality of education and academic freedom. As colleges increasingly rely on adjunct faculty to fill teaching roles, there is a fear that the overall quality of education may suffer due to the instability and inconsistency inherent in adjunct faculty positions. Additionally, adjunct faculty often have less job security and fewer academic freedoms compared to tenure-track faculty, which can impact their ability to engage in research, participate in faculty governance, and contribute to the academic community (Howell et al., 2010) because practitioners who take on adjunct faculty roles face increased workloads as they juggle their teaching responsibilities with other professional commitments. Despite these challenges, adjunct faculty can benefit from certain professional development opportunities. These opportunities may include access to workshops,

conferences, and networking events that can help them advance their careers and stay current in their fields (Copolillo et al., 2002).

Feeling Isolated and Undervalued

Adjunct faculty, who make up the majority of teaching faculty in higher education (AACC, 2022), often encounter significant challenges despite their widespread presence. These challenges include feelings of being undervalued and isolated within their colleges (Richardson, 1992; Tomanek, 2010). Such feelings stem from various factors, including limited access to institutional resources, lack of recognition, and insufficient integration into the academic community.

To mitigate these issues, colleges can adopt several strategies to better support adjunct faculty. Implementing robust faculty development programs is one such strategy. These programs should not only focus on practical activities for improving teaching effectiveness but also offer concrete incentives that can enhance job satisfaction and engagement. Incentives might include stipends for professional development, opportunities for advancement, or recognition awards. Additionally, providing flexible scheduling options can help adjunct faculty manage their multiple commitments and alleviate some of the pressures they face (Richardson, 1992).

Beyond institutional-level interventions, academic departments and disciplines play a crucial role in supporting adjunct faculty. Bickerstaff and Ran (2021) suggest that departments can foster a more inclusive environment by enhancing engagement opportunities for adjunct faculty. Enhancing engagement opportunities for adjunct faculty might involve integrating adjunct faculty into departmental meetings, decision-making processes, and professional development activities, thereby addressing their specific needs and making them feel more connected to the college.

Integration into Institutional Culture and Governance

To expand upon the issue of feeling isolated and undervalued, adjunct faculty face difficulties integrating with the institutional culture and participating in governance. These challenges can manifest in several ways, including a sense of disenfranchisement and limited influence over institutional decisions and direction. Adjunct faculty are frequently excluded from meaningful participation in institutional governance, professional development, and miscellaneous college events which can lead to a feeling of marginalization (Burroughs, 2019). The lack of involvement of adjunct faculty may undermine their ability to contribute to or influence the academic direction and policies of the college. Additionally, adjunct faculty are often vulnerable to contradictory incentives that could compromise academic rigor. For example, adjunct faculty might face pressures to prioritize student satisfaction over academic standards to secure favorable evaluations or to maintain their positions in a competitive job market. Pressure to ensure student satisfaction by adjunct faculty can lead to compromises in the quality of education, as adjunct faculty may feel compelled to adjust their grading practices or course requirements in response to student feedback or institutional expectations (Burroughs, 2019; Nash, 2015).

Despite the often-stated support for adjunct faculty from administrators, a gap exists between these affirmations and the actual experiences of adjunct faculty, particularly concerning academic freedom (Smith, 2015). While administrators may verbally support academic freedom, adjunct faculty frequently find that their practical experiences do not align with these aspirational goals (Frontczak, 2020). For instance, adjunct faculty might face limitations in their ability to design and deliver courses according to their own pedagogical beliefs, or they might encounter restrictions that affect their academic freedom. However, there are opportunities to improve the

working conditions and integration of adjunct faculty. One effective approach is the implementation of faculty relations plans that include professional development opportunities and enhanced communication channels (Mech, 2017). Such initiatives can help adjunct faculty feel more valued and integrated into the college community. For example, offering professional development workshops, providing clear channels for feedback, and involving adjunct faculty in departmental activities can foster a greater sense of belonging and professional growth. Faculty handbooks, memoranda of understanding, and the overarching institutional culture can influence the working conditions and perceived stability of adjunct faculty (Flood & Leap, 2018). Despite these efforts, concerns about job security may continue to persist, as adjunct faculty typically work on short-term contracts without the security and benefits afforded to full-time faculty.

As the reliance on adjunct faculty increases and the role of traditional full-time faculty diminishes, supporting and integrating adjunct faculty becomes increasingly crucial for maintaining educational effectiveness. To fully leverage adjunct faculty knowledge and experience, colleges need to fully integrate them into the cultural and governance process. Without adequate support, adjunct faculty may face exploitation, which can undermine the overall quality of education (Stenerson et al., 2010). By investing in adjunct faculty and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment, colleges can enhance their educational programs and ensure that adjunct faculty are fully integrated into the academic community.

Job Security

Adjunct faculty, who are typically hired on a part-time or temporary basis, experience employment volatility. Job instability is starkly illustrated by the fact that short-term contracts make up most faculty appointments (Yang et al., 2021). Insecure employment can create substantial challenges, most notably financial planning. Unlike their full-time counterparts,

adjunct faculty often grapple with irregular income, lack of long-term job security, and limited access to benefits (Dedman & Pearch, 2004). Financial instability is exacerbated by lower salaries and inadequate retirement contributions for adjunct faculty compared to full-time faculty members. The discrepancy in compensation and benefits between full-time and adjunct faculty contributes to a sense of inequity and can significantly impact the quality of life and professional satisfaction for adjunct faculty (Yang et al., 2021). The financial strain and job insecurity can undermine their ability to plan and manage day-to-day expenses effectively seeking alternative sources of income that make them less accessible to students and the campus activities, such as professional development and discipline meetings.

In response to these challenges, there have been various efforts to enhance the working conditions of adjunct faculty (Huber, 2019; Rhoades, 2020; Schreyer, 2012; Smith, 2003). Initiatives have included providing more opportunities for professional development, which can help adjunct faculty build their skills and advance their careers. Additionally, efforts to improve communication within academic departments aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for adjunct faculty (Schreyer, 2012). These measures are part of a broader attempt to address the systemic issues affecting adjunct faculty, but they are only steps towards a more equitable solution. To effectively address the challenges faced by adjunct faculty, a comprehensive understanding of these contractual relationships and institutional practices is essential. Recognizing the complexities and working towards systemic improvements can help create a more stable and equitable environment for adjunct faculty, ultimately benefiting the colleges they serve.

Compensation and Benefits

Relatedly, adjunct faculty face challenges such as low pay, lack of benefits, and pervasive job dissatisfaction (Witt & Gearin, 2021). Adjunct faculty are often paid significantly less than their full-time counterparts and typically do not receive benefits, such as health insurance, retirement contributions, or paid leave. These financial shortcomings contribute to a high level of job dissatisfaction among adjunct faculty, who may feel undervalued and unsupported despite their essential contributions to academia.

Efforts to improve the conditions for adjunct faculty have included initiatives such as enhancing financial support, making adjunct faculty eligible for internal grants, and supporting their transition to tenure-track positions (Howell et al., 2010). These measures aim to address some of the inequities faced by adjunct faculty and provide them with more opportunities for professional growth and stability. However, challenges persist, including the limited availability of tenure-track positions and inadequate communication between adjunct faculty and their colleges. Addressing these issues is crucial for several reasons. Recognizing adjunct faculty as valuable professional colleagues and addressing their concerns can help improve job satisfaction and retention rates. Moreover, ensuring that adjunct faculty are adequately supported and included in academic life is essential for maintaining the quality of higher education and upholding the standards of academic freedom (Wallin, 2004). By tackling these challenges, colleges can create a more equitable and effective academic environment that benefits educators, students, and the college.

Workload/Time Management

Typically, adjunct faculty juggle multiple roles, such as practitioner and instructor, which can substantially increase their workload (Copolillo et al., 2002). For those who balance teaching

with other professional duties, the complexity and demands of their roles are compounded, often leading to significant time management challenges. One prominent issue for adjunct faculty is the requirement to work for multiple organizations, which can lead to job dissatisfaction, partly due to low pay and limited benefits, which are common among adjunct positions (Witt & Gearin, 2021). Some adjunct faculty teach as many if not more classes than full-time faculty for less pay when combining everywhere they teach (Brown et al., 2020). The fragmentation of their professional lives coupled with the lack of stable financial support and benefits can contribute to a sense of instability and dissatisfaction.

The rise in online education has further intensified the reliance on adjunct faculty. The shift towards virtual learning environments requires adjunct faculty to adapt to new technologies and teaching methods, which adds another layer of complexity to their workload (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). Managing an online course often involves additional tasks, such as creating digital content, engaging with students virtually, and maintaining an online presence, all of which demand effective time management skills and ongoing training (Mulig & Rhame, 2012).

Effective practices in time management, such as scheduling, goal setting, prioritizing tasks, and managing paperwork, are essential for balancing the various demands of teaching (Lualhati, 2019). However, adjunct faculty often face the challenge of excessive paperwork and administrative tasks, which can detract from their ability to focus on teaching and other professional responsibilities (Halcrow & Olson, 2011). The administrative burden, including grading, course preparation, and reporting, can be time-consuming and adds to the overall stress of managing multiple roles.

Access to Resources

Despite recognizing the importance of professional development for their success, adjunct faculty often find that available programs do not adequately address their needs or fit into their demanding schedules (Bowers, 2013). Lack of availability impedes adjunct faculty from participating in professional development at the same frequency as full-time faculty (Rhoades, 2020). Lack of access can impact their teaching quality and career progression. However, colleges can improve adjunct faculty availability.

Motivational strategies and incentives are essential in addressing the low participation rates among adjunct faculty in professional development programs. Providing targeted incentives, such as financial support, recognition, or opportunities for career advancement, can encourage more adjunct faculty to take part in these programs (Cooper, 2021). By aligning professional development opportunities with the specific needs and motivations of adjunct faculty, colleges can improve participation rates and enhance the overall effectiveness of these programs.

For remote adjunct faculty, who teach from various geographic locations and often face additional challenges, these barriers are compounded by the physical distance from their colleges. Geographic separation can limit their access to on-campus resources, networking opportunities, and face-to-face interactions with colleagues and mentors. Moreover, motivational differences, such as varying levels of engagement or commitment, can further complicate the effectiveness of remote professional development initiatives (Evans, 2021). Consequently, tailored approaches to professional development that account for these unique challenges are necessary to support remote adjunct faculty effectively. To address these issues, colleges need to take a proactive approach in evaluating and improving their support practices for adjunct faculty,

which involves a comprehensive investigation of current support practices to identify gaps and areas for improvement. Enhancing the delivery and execution of institutional support, such as making professional development more accessible and relevant, is crucial. Additionally, developing professional development programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs and schedules of adjunct faculty can significantly improve their engagement and success (Bowers, 2013; Cooper, 2021; Evans, 2021). By focusing on these areas, colleges can better support adjunct faculty, ensuring they have the resources and opportunities needed to thrive professionally and contribute effectively to the academic community.

Professional development for adjunct faculty is essential not only for enhancing teaching practices but also for ensuring positive student learning outcomes (Cooper, 2021). Effective professional development can equip adjunct faculty with the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver high-quality instruction, which directly impacts student success and academic achievement. Despite its importance, adjunct faculty frequently encounter limited and inconsistent professional development opportunities. The availability and quality of these opportunities can vary significantly among colleges, often leaving adjunct faculty with insufficient support (Butters & Gann, 2022). Such variability can hinder their ability to stay current with best practices and emerging trends in education, ultimately affecting their teaching effectiveness. Adjunct faculty themselves recognize the value of professional development and express a strong desire for orientation, mentoring, and training tailored to their specific instructional needs (Bowers, 2013). Effective professional development should address key areas, such as course preparation, technology awareness, and access to instructional resources. For instance, adjunct faculty may benefit from workshops or training sessions focused on course

design, integrating new technologies into their teaching, and accessing institutional resources that can enhance their teaching practices (Butters & Gann, 2022).

Moreover, professional development extends beyond skill-building, significantly influences how adjunct faculty perceive their role within the college. Many adjunct faculty view professional development as a critical component of their integration into the academic community and expect professional development to be part of their professional relationship with the college (Backhaus, 2009). When colleges fail to offer meaningful professional development, adjunct faculty may feel excluded or undervalued, which can impact their job satisfaction and sense of belonging. To address these issues, colleges should thoroughly investigate their current support practices for adjunct faculty and work to improve the delivery and execution of professional development programs. This process involves assessing the effectiveness of existing programs, identifying gaps in support, and implementing changes that better align with adjunct faculty needs and schedules (Bowers, 2013). By creating more accessible, relevant, and engaging professional development opportunities, colleges can better support adjunct faculty and enhance both their teaching effectiveness and overall job satisfaction.

Adjunct Faculty Challenges Specific to Multi-Campus Colleges

Adjunct faculty at multi-campus colleges encounter distinct challenges that differ from those faced by their counterparts at single-campus colleges. One major hurdle adjunct faculty need to consider when teaching the same class on multiple campuses is contextual diversity among students on different campuses (Daffron & Caffarella, 2021). Such repurposing often involves navigating a range of technological, procedural, organizational, and cultural barriers (Hjelsvold & Bahmani, 2019). For instance, variations in technology infrastructure across campuses can complicate course delivery. Adjunct faculty may need to familiarize themselves

with different learning management systems or classroom technologies, which can create additional stress and uncertainty.

Additionally, adjunct faculty teaching in a multi-campus model can be impacted by the organizational culture and administration from campus to campus (Purdum & Evans, 2024). The organizational cultures from one campus to another may vary leading to further complications (Bakley & Brodersen, 2018). The differences in administrative processes and procedures between campuses can lead to confusion and inconsistency in policies regarding course management, grading, and student engagement among other things. Adjunct faculty teaching at outlying campuses often express a sentiment of being undervalued when compared to their colleagues teaching at the main campus within a college system. Many adjunct faculty report feeling more appreciated by local faculty and staff, who understand the unique context of their teaching environment. In contrast, they frequently cite communication issues and a lack of understanding from central administration as significant challenges (Page et al., 2019). Such a disconnect can foster feelings of isolation and diminish the adjunct faculty's sense of belonging within the larger institutional framework.

The complexity of the adjunct faculty experience in multi-campus settings reveal a pressing need for enhanced communication strategies and greater awareness of the specific circumstances faced by adjunct faculty. By addressing these issues, colleges can foster a more supportive environment that acknowledges the diverse needs of adjunct faculty across campuses. Ultimately, recognizing and addressing these unique challenges can lead to improved job satisfaction for adjunct faculty and, consequently, a better educational experience for students, which is why further insights into the needs of adjunct faculty will help colleges identify how

best to support them, increasing effectiveness and retention of a commodity that has been increasingly relied upon over the years (Elder et al., 2016; Santisteban & Egues, 2014).

Adjunct Faculty Impact on Learning

Since adjunct faculty make up the majority of teaching faculty, their impact is significant. The number of adjunct faculty coupled with their limited availability raises concerns related to delivering a quality learning experience that result in satisfactory student outcomes.

Quality of Instruction

The increasing reliance on adjunct faculty in higher education has sparked significant concerns about maintaining academic standards and ensuring consistency across courses (Valle & Fuchs, 2015; Green, 2007). As colleges increasingly turn to adjunct faculty to meet the demands of expanding student populations and program offerings, there is a growing need to address how these adjunct faculty can be integrated into the academic framework in a way that upholds quality and uniformity. One effective strategy that colleges have employed to address these concerns is the establishment of Teaching and Learning Communities (TLCs). TLCs are designed to create collaborative environments where adjunct faculty and full-time faculty can exchange ideas about course content, pedagogical techniques, and assessment methods (Valle & Fuchs, 2015). TLCs help ensure adjunct faculty are aligned with departmental goals and standards, which can enhance the consistency of teaching and learning experiences at the course, discipline, and institutional levels. A collaborative approach also supports professional development and helps adjunct faculty feel more integrated into the academic community (Mech, 2017).

The rise in use of adjunct faculty has introduced a new dimension to the adjunct faculty landscape, leading to the emergence of professional adjunct faculty who juggle multiple part-

time teaching positions (Bedford, 2009). These individuals often teach at several colleges or universities, which can further complicate efforts to maintain academic standards and consistency. Maintaining consistency in academic standards and assessment is crucial for promoting student success and ensuring quality control in professional education (Urwin et al., 2006). Effective gatekeeping procedures are necessary to uphold these standards. Key principles for developing and implementing student standards involve collaboration among program administrators, classroom instructors, field supervisors, and adjunct faculty (Urwin et al., 2006). By involving all these stakeholders, colleges can create a more comprehensive and unified approach to maintaining educational quality.

Calibration sessions are one method used to address these challenges. These sessions bring together full-time and part-time faculty to discuss and align grading standards, which helps ensure consistency in evaluation across different instructors and courses (Moebs, 1992). Such meetings are beneficial for establishing a shared understanding of assessment criteria and pedagogical approaches. They also contribute to professional equality and a sense of belonging among adjunct faculty, who may otherwise feel marginalized or disconnected from the college's core academic practices.

Overall, while the increased reliance on adjunct faculty presents significant challenges, colleges are developing and implementing strategies to harness their expertise while ensuring instructional quality across multiple campuses. By fostering collaboration through TLCs, involving adjunct faculty in standardization efforts, and holding collaborative workshops, colleges can enhance the effectiveness of their adjunct faculty and maintain high standards in education (Green, 2007; Moebs, 1992). These approaches help create a more cohesive and supportive academic environment, ultimately benefiting both students and educators.

Student Outcomes and Engagement

The increasing reliance on adjunct faculty in higher education has raised concerns about potential negative impacts on student outcomes. Students who have adjunct heavy class schedules, meaning they take a significant number of their classes with adjunct instructors, are less likely to persist into their second year of college (Bettinger & Long, 2005). Such a trend suggests that the presence of adjunct faculty might be associated with lower student retention rates although the reasons behind this correlation are complex and multifaceted.

A comprehensive study of 21,274 student results found significant disparities in key educational outcomes between students taught by adjunct faculty and those taught by full-time faculty (Heath et al., 2022). These differences may include variations in academic performance, engagement levels, and overall student satisfaction. One contributing factor to these disparities is that adjunct faculty are often less involved with students outside of class compared to their full-time counterparts. For instance, adjunct faculty may have fewer office hours, less availability for extracurricular academic support, and limited opportunities for mentorship (Henkel & Haley, 2020). Nevertheless, the quality of instruction is not a static attribute, and evidence suggests that student outcomes can improve when taught by full-time faculty compared to adjunct faculty (Zhu, 2021). Full-time faculty often have more time and resources to devote to teaching, advising, and engaging in departmental activities, which can enhance the overall educational experience for students.

To mitigate the potential negative effects associated with adjunct faculty, colleges can take several steps. Incorporating adjunct faculty into professional development activities can help improve their teaching practices and engagement with students. Additionally, enhancing working conditions for adjunct faculty, such as providing better compensation, access to resources, and

opportunities for involvement in academic communities, may also contribute to better student outcomes (Heath et al., 2022; Zhu, 2021). These measures can help address some of the challenges faced by adjunct faculty and potentially offset the negative impacts observed in student performance and retention.

While there are challenges associated with the increasing use of adjunct faculty, including potential impacts on student outcomes and engagement, there are also opportunities to improve teaching quality through targeted professional development and support. Colleges should focus on creating a supportive environment for all faculty members, ensuring that both adjunct and full-time instructors have the resources and incentives needed to provide high-quality education (Mueller et al., 2013). A balanced approach can help enhance the overall effectiveness of faculty and improve student experiences across the board.

Inadequate Support for Adjunct Faculty

The lack of instructional effectiveness among adjunct faculty is not due to an inability to perform equally or better than full-time faculty (Kirk & Spector, 2009). The U.S. House of Representatives (2014) suggested the availability of professional development for adjunct faculty and adjunct faculty availability in general play critical roles in the quality of instruction provided by adjunct faculty (Klein et al. 1996; Smith, 2007). Adjunct faculty availability can in part be attributed to the wage disparity between full-time and part-time faculty, which requires adjunct faculty to work second and third jobs.

There is an overabundance of literature that speaks to the lack of support available to adjunct faculty (Eddy, 2005; Jacoby, 2006; Juskiewicz, 2016; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Lei 2007; Mazurek, 2011; Spaniel & Scott, 2013). Although the research is plentiful and compelling, most institutions of higher education do not make adequate support of adjunct faculty a priority

(Bakley & Broderson, 2018), and there is no shortage of recommendations (i.e., handbook, templates, and workshops) on how to support adjunct faculty (West et al., 2009). However, more research is necessary (Barnes & Fredericks, 2021) to “clarify the types of institutional support that can strengthen the contributions of adjunct faculty” (Klein et al., 1996, p. 255).

Types of Support for Adjunct Faculty

The growing reliance on adjunct faculty in higher education institutions has prompted significant discussions regarding the support systems needed to enhance their job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness (Danaei, 2019). To address the unique challenges faced by adjunct faculty across different campuses, colleges must adopt comprehensive strategies that encompass orientation, professional development including mentorship, evaluations, and incentivized campus engagement.

Managing adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges requires an understanding of site-specific contexts and the implementation of effective support systems. Colleges should consider the distinct challenges that adjunct faculty encounter which can vary from campus to campus, fostering a sense of community among faculty and students across campuses. A contextually sensitive approach not only enhances the educational experience for students but also promotes equity among campuses (Sielmann et al., 2022).

Support systems for adjunct faculty are essential for their professional growth and job satisfaction. Onboarding programs help new adjunct faculty acclimate to institutional norms, connect with academic units, and increase teaching effectiveness (Farakish et al, 2022). To effectively support adjunct faculty, colleges must implement systematic approaches to orientation, professional development, and evaluation (Oprean, 2012). Evaluating existing support services is crucial for identifying gaps and informing strategies for improvement.

Moreover, the trend towards corporate management practices in higher education, which often prioritizes performance metrics over faculty development, raises concerns about the long-term implications for academic quality and governance (Uzuner-Smith & Englander, 2015). Colleges need to balance the advantages of hiring adjunct faculty with the potential risks of diminished teaching quality and faculty-student relationships (Alsunaydi, 2020).

Ultimately, addressing the challenges faced by adjunct faculty requires a commitment to rethinking their role within higher education. By investing in their professional development, fostering a culture of inclusion, and ensuring that adequate support systems are in place, colleges can enhance educational quality, support student success, and promote a more sustainable academic environment. A comprehensive approach to supporting adjunct faculty is not just beneficial for the faculty themselves; supporting adjunct faculty is essential for the integrity and effectiveness of higher education. By implementing innovative support initiatives (e.g., effective onboarding, professional development workshops, and mentoring programs) colleges can create a more engaged and satisfied teaching workforce that is integral to their mission. Two initiatives that appear to gain the most traction are orientation and mentoring. Other initiatives that have proven to enhance the adjunct faculty support experience include evaluations and incentives.

Orientation

Orientation is the first step to providing adjunct faculty with good communication and support (Tomanek, 2010), familiarizing them with student and faculty expectations, and providing them with a sense of belonging by connecting with peers and support personnel (Fugate & Amey, 2000). Orientation is especially beneficial to adjunct faculty who are teaching for the first time. Specifically, for adjunct faculty, orientation needs to come from the college administration as well as the discipline in which they will be teaching. Hutti et al. (2007) found

that program-specific orientations made adjunct faculty feel more valued and respected. Getting oriented at multiple levels of the organization should help adjunct faculty integrate into the culture of the organization, the academic discipline, and the students they teach. “Adjunct orientation should help adjunct faculty (a) become comfortable with the transition from clinician to educator, (b) be guided through mentorship, (c) experience networking, (d) grow teaching skills, and (e) integrate into the culture of academia” (Suplee & Gardner, 2009, p. 516).

To that point, orientation should not be informal or limited in duration (Forbes et al., 2010). Single-day or multi-day orientations are usually full of information that is difficult for new employees to retain until the first time they need to use it. Coffey (1992) suggested hosting short sessions to orient new faculty to a particular topic throughout the year. The initial orientation would only include pre-employment and information pertinent to the first month of employment. If there is documentation to be submitted early in the semester, schedule another orientation session leading up to the deadline to orient new faculty. Furthermore, colleges cannot expect perfect attendance. They need to make the necessary information available to those who cannot attend. However, incentives such as stipends have proven to increase the likelihood that faculty will make attending a priority (Coffey, 1992). Whether addressed all at once or throughout the year, orientation should be comprehensive and followed by mentoring (Santisteban & Egues, 2014).

Mentoring

Mentoring is defined as a relationship between individuals with significant knowledge and experience and a mentee who benefits from their guidance (Kram, 1985). Mentoring is well-established as a tool to increase job satisfaction (Koberg et al., 1994), career advancement (Fagenson, 1989), organizational socialization (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993), and reduce turnover

(Viator & Scandura, 1991). Mentorship programs pairing adjunct faculty with experienced faculty members can provide valuable support and guidance in navigating the academic landscape (Deigel, 2013). These benefits extend to both the faculty and the students, making mentoring an essential strategy for supporting adjunct faculty in higher education.

For adjunct faculty, mentorship is particularly important due to the unique challenges they face. Many adjunct faculty juggle multiple roles, teaching at different colleges, managing administrative responsibilities, and balancing personal commitments. These work and non-work demands often leave adjunct faculty disconnected from professional development opportunities that are more readily available to full-time faculty (Danaei, 2019). Mentoring programs provide adjunct faculty with structured guidance, helping them improve their teaching and professional competencies while navigating the intricacies of their roles (Ziegler & Reiff, 2006). Mentorship is not only a means of support, but also a tool for creating a more cohesive academic environment.

In addition to professional development, mentoring helps bridge the gap between adjunct and full-time faculty, fostering a sense of collegiality. Case studies show that mentoring programs can reduce the isolation adjunct faculty often feel and encourage collaboration across faculty ranks (Danaei, 2019). After all, a collegial atmosphere enhances job satisfaction, promotes shared responsibility for teaching quality, and improves student learning outcomes (Roth, 2014). When adjunct faculty feel valued and supported, they are more likely to invest in their teaching, which directly benefits students.

Mentoring also serves as a remedy for the disconnect many adjunct faculty experience from their college. Bakley and Brodersen (2018) emphasize the importance of communication and mentoring in addressing the isolation that adjunct faculty often report. With advancements in

technology, mentoring can even transcend geographical boundaries, as seen in videoconferencing-mediated mentoring programs (Aldemir & Ardley, 2014). Initiatives like Teaching Across Geography Groups also ensure that adjunct faculty at distant campuses receive the same level of support as their counterparts on the main campus (Holt & Clements, 2021). These efforts aim to create a unified culture, promoting balance and integration for adjunct faculty across different campuses within the same college system.

The challenge lies in the over-reliance on adjunct faculty and the limited availability of full-time faculty for mentoring roles. Mentoring relationships between full-time and adjunct faculty are the most effective way to integrate adjunct faculty into departmental life (Baron-Nixon & Hecht, 2007). However, with fewer full-time faculty members available due to the increasing workload demands, traditional one-on-one mentoring is becoming less feasible. Some colleges have addressed the shortage of full-time faculty available to mentor adjunct faculty by involving administrators or veteran adjunct faculty in mentoring new adjunct faculty (Elder et al., 2016). Pulling mentors from various parts of the college acknowledges the practical constraints while still providing vital support for adjunct faculty.

Despite the benefits of mentoring, adjunct faculty do not always prioritize it. Mentoring ranked eighth among adjunct faculty's desired support, behind resources like library access, staff assistance, and orientation according to a survey of adjunct faculty at 91 baccalaureate nursing programs in the midwestern United States (Elder et al., 2016). Mentoring ranking behind numerous other support services suggests that while mentoring is widely researched and advocated as a professional development tool, mentoring may not always align with the immediate needs or preferences of adjunct faculty. As such, colleges must be mindful of offering

a variety of support options, ensuring that adjunct faculty have access to the resources most relevant to their roles and challenges.

Mentorship must be part of a broader support system that includes orientation, evaluations, and access to institutional resources. When implemented thoughtfully, mentoring programs can address many of the challenges associated with being an adjunct faculty member, such as improving their teaching quality, job satisfaction, and integration into the academic community. While mentoring is not a one-size-fits-all solution, it remains a vital element in the professional development and retention of adjunct faculty. Colleges have a responsibility to invest in mentorship programs, not only to support their faculty but also to enhance the overall educational experience for students. By creating a comprehensive support system that includes mentorship, colleges can foster a culture of collaboration, elevate the teaching quality of adjunct faculty, and ensure that all faculty members feel valued and integrated into the academic community.

Evaluation

The evaluation of adjunct faculty poses unique challenges due to their varying employment conditions and limited institutional support. However, evaluating adjunct faculty remains important. Evaluating adjunct faculty is crucial for maintaining academic standards, ensuring student learning outcomes, and fostering professional development (Langen, 2011). While adjunct faculty may not have the same level of institutional commitment as full-time faculty, they are often responsible for teaching a significant portion of the classes, especially in disciplines with high demand or specialized expertise; therefore, their performance directly impacts the quality of education provided by the college.

Moreover, effective evaluations provide adjunct faculty with feedback and support to improve their teaching practices, engage students effectively, and adapt to evolving pedagogical approaches. The evaluation process not only benefits the adjunct faculty themselves, but also enhances the overall learning experience for students. Tang's (1997) study identified twelve predictors of overall teaching performance, among which instructor accessibility outside the class emerged as significant. Instructor accessibility is a factor that inherently puts adjunct faculty at a disadvantage compared to their full-time counterparts, given their limited availability due to other commitments. Additionally, Langen's (2011) research underscores the importance of instructor availability with 75% of students rating it as very important. Hence any evaluation framework for adjunct faculty must address the accessibility aspect while gauging their effectiveness in teaching.

Table 2.3. The Use of Student Evaluations

Year	Adjunct Faculty at Community Colleges
1973	29% ^a
1983	68% ^a
1993	86% ^a
2000	98% ^b

Note. Table 2.3 was created using data from Seldin (1998)a and Simpson and Siguaw (2000)b

Table 2.3 depicts how common student evaluations are in higher education with nearly all colleges using them to some extent. However, relying solely on student ratings for evaluation is cautioned by Langen (2011). While valuable, student feedback should be complemented by other sources of information to provide a comprehensive assessment of teaching effectiveness. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommends a triad approach by integrating student, peer, and teaching portfolio evaluations (Boyer, 1990). By incorporating diverse perspectives, colleges can gain a more thorough understanding of adjunct faculty performance. In fact, the evaluation process for adjunct faculty should mirror the thoroughness

applied to full-time faculty evaluations (Langen, 2011). Despite the part-time status, adjunct faculty contribute significantly to student learning and institutional success, warranting equitable evaluation practices. Adopting a structured and systematic approach to evaluating faculty ensures fairness and consistency across all faculty members irrespective of their employment status. Additionally, faculty evaluations should be conducted regularly. The evaluation process is an area for improvement considering 63% of colleges evaluate adjunct faculty on a scheduled basis (Langen, 2011).

The evaluation of adjunct faculty is essential for maintaining academic standards, supporting student success, and promoting professional development in higher education (Langen, 2011). Evaluations do more than identify developmental needs. Evaluations can be used to identify outstanding adjunct instructors who may be suitable candidates for full-time positions or additional responsibilities within the college. By employing comprehensive criteria and implementing effective strategies for evaluation, community colleges can ensure adjunct faculty are adequately supported, motivated, and equipped to fulfill roles as valuable contributors to the college's mission. Moreover, enhancing the evaluation process not only benefits adjunct faculty but also strengthens the overall quality and reputation of the college; therefore, investing in the evaluation and support of adjunct faculty needs to be a priority for community colleges committed to academic excellence.

Incentives

Adjunct faculty make significant contributions to the teaching and learning taking place at community colleges. Their contributions are often undervalued, and they face numerous challenges, including low pay, lack of benefits, and limited job security. Implementing effective

incentive programs for adjunct faculty is essential to recognize their contributions, enhance job satisfaction, and ultimately improve the quality of instruction (Shah et al., 2021).

One of the most straightforward yet impactful incentives for adjunct faculty is recognition and appreciation for their hard work and dedication. Research consistently highlights the need for recognition and support of adjunct faculty (Morton, 2012; Sahl, 2017; Wallin, 2004). Colleges can implement programs to publicly acknowledge outstanding adjunct instructors through awards, commendations, or mentions in newsletters and on social media platforms. Additionally, organizing appreciation events, such as luncheons or receptions, where adjunct faculty can network with colleagues and administrators, fosters a sense of belonging and appreciation within the academic community.

Investing in the professional development of adjunct faculty is essential for enhancing their teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction (Schuetz, 2008) and can incentivize the role. Colleges can offer access to workshops, seminars, and conferences focused on pedagogy, technology integration, and discipline-specific topics. Providing funding or stipends for adjunct faculty to pursue advanced degrees, certifications, or specialized training further demonstrates the college's commitment to the professional growth of its adjunct faculty (Cooper, 2021).

Instructional quality can be compromised when adjunct faculty are dissatisfied with their compensation and recognition (Comm & Mathaisel, 2003). While matching the salaries of full-time faculty is not realistic, colleges can strive to offer competitive pay rates, equitable workload distribution, and opportunities for advancement based on performance and experience. Additionally, providing access to benefits, such as healthcare coverage, retirement plans, professional development funds, and campus resources, such as libraries and fitness facilities, enhances the overall well-being and job satisfaction of adjunct faculty.

Creating pathways for career advancement and job stability is essential for retaining talented adjunct faculty and fostering a sense of commitment to the college. Colleges can offer longer-term contracts or renewable appointments, providing adjunct faculty with greater job security and stability. Colleges could use a triangulated evaluation process previously suggested by Boyer (1990) coupled with years of service as an instructor at that school to identify adjunct faculty to offer increased job stability through a commitment greater than one semester. Those individuals could have priority status when assigning classes in future semesters. Moreover, creating opportunities for adjunct faculty to transition into full-time or tenure-track positions through transparent hiring processes and mentorship programs incentivizes excellence and encourages professional growth.

Research on instructional and broader organizational decision-making that involves adjunct faculty suggests that it fosters a greater sense of belonging (Ridge & Ritt, 2017). Involving adjunct faculty in institutional decision-making processes demonstrates respect and collaboration. Colleges can establish advisory committees or task forces comprising both full-time and adjunct faculty to discuss academic policies, curriculum development, and other relevant issues. Additionally, inviting adjunct faculty to participate in departmental meetings, faculty governance bodies, and strategic planning initiatives insinuates that their voices are heard and valued within the college.

Incentivizing adjunct faculty in higher education is essential for recognizing their contributions, enhancing job satisfaction, and promoting academic excellence. By implementing strategies, such as recognition and appreciation, professional development opportunities, improved compensation and benefits, job stability, and integration into institutional decision-making, colleges can empower adjunct faculty to thrive in their roles and contribute

meaningfully to the academic community. Colleges have an ethical obligation to see that the adjunct faculty experience mirrors that of the full-time faculty to ensure the learning experiences provided parallel one another (Wallin, 2004). Failure to invest in adjunct faculty to the same extent as full-time faculty demonstrates a lack of commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment conducive to teaching and learning for all.

Conceptual Framework

Adjunct faculty are integral to the instructional mission of multi-campus community colleges, yet they often navigate their roles within structures that marginalize their contributions (Wallin, 2004). This conceptual framework was used to explore the organizational support experiences of adjunct faculty through the interrelated lenses of well-being, integration, and connection. These three concepts were informed by Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), Social Exchange Theory (Barbalet, 2017), Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Power, 2013), Job Demands-Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018), Burnout Theory (Maslach, 2003) and Psychological Capital Theory (Singh, 2015) to provide a lens for better understanding how adjunct faculty perceive their place within academic institutions highlighting both the structural and social factors that shape their professional lives.

Organizational Support Theory posits that employees develop beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being organization (Conway, 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). This theory directly informs the well-being dimension of the framework, as adjunct faculty often interpret institutional policies, communication, and resource allocation as indicators of their worth within the organization. When adjunct faculty perceive low organizational support, it can negatively impact their engagement, job satisfaction, and performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Social Exchange Theory underpins the broader relational dynamics within the framework, particularly in how adjunct faculty assess the reciprocity of their relationship with the institution. Social Exchange Theory suggests that when employees perceive fair treatment and support, they are more likely to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors (Barbalet, 2017). This theory informs both integration and connection, as adjunct faculty evaluate whether their contributions are met with equitable access to institutional resources, professional development, and inclusion in departmental decision-making.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory focuses on the quality of the dyadic relationships between supervisors (e.g., department chairs or deans) and adjunct faculty. High-quality relationships are characterized by trust, respect, and mutual obligation (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015). This theory informs the connection dimension by emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships in shaping a sense of belonging and professional identity within adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty who experience high-quality exchanges with their academic leaders are more likely to feel valued and included (Power, 2013), which can buffer against the isolating effects of contingent employment.

Job Demands-Resources Theory provides a structural lens for understanding how the balance between job demands (e.g., workload, lack of job security) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy, recognition) affects employee engagement and burnout. This theory informs the well-being and integration dimensions by highlighting how institutional structures either mitigate or exacerbate the stressors adjunct faculty face. When resources are insufficient to meet demands, adjunct faculty may experience diminished well-being and disengagement from the academic community (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

By examining these dimensions through the integrated lens, this framework aims to illuminate the conditions that foster or hinder adjunct faculty engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Rather than viewing these elements separately, it synthesizes them into a cohesive perspective. This approach provides a multidimensional understanding of the organizational support experience of adjunct faculty, offering insights into how community colleges can better support this segment of their instructional workforce.

Well-Being

Well-being in the workplace is a multifaceted construct encompassing physical, social, and psychological dimensions (Rook et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2015). In higher education, and especially for adjunct faculty, well-being reflects not only individual experiences but also broader institutional structures and cultural norms. Singh (2015) conceptualizes workplace well-being as a holistic state shaped by environmental and relational factors, emerging from the interaction between personal needs and organizational conditions. For adjunct faculty, who often occupy peripheral roles, well-being is influenced by access to inclusion, stability, and institutional support (Mech et al., 2017).

Burnout Theory (Maslach, 2003) and Psychological Capital Theory (Singh, 2015) provide critical lenses for understanding the unique challenges adjunct faculty face. Burnout Theory explains how prolonged exposure to stressors, such as job security, limited institutional support, and high teaching loads, can lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. In contrast, Psychological Capital Theory emphasizes the role of positive psychological resources in mitigating negative outcomes. Building these resources can help adjunct faculty maintain motivation and adaptability despite structural constraints. Complementing these perspectives, Zheng et al. (2015) highlights that

psychological safety, autonomy, and a sense of purpose are foundational to well-being. When employers foster environments where adjunct faculty feel valued, empowered and secure, they create conditions that counteract burnout and enhance overall job satisfaction.

Inclusion, a key dimension of well-being, involves the degree to which adjunct faculty are integrated into the academic community. This includes participation in departmental decision-making, access to professional development, and recognition of contributions. Rich (2016) argues that exclusion from these domains fosters marginalization, negatively impacting emotional and psychological health. Inclusion is both structural and social, tied to perceptions of respect, legitimacy, and belonging.

Temporal and structural stability also play a critical role. Adjunct faculty often face unpredictable schedules, inconsistent contracts, and limited access to resources (Rich, 2016), which undermine psychological safety (Schneider & Harknett, 2019) and hinder the development of a stable professional identity (Gosine et al., 2021). O'Meara et al. (2019) stress that equitable workload distribution and transparent scheduling are vital not only for operational efficiency but also for sustaining well-being. Stability, in this context, is a prerequisite for autonomy, engagement, and long-term commitment.

Support and empowerment are equally central. Joshi and Jaffer (2024) found that mentoring, resource access, and recognition contribute to job satisfaction and resilience. Empowerment is both a psychological state marked by competence and control and a structural condition enabled by institutional practices that affirm adjunct faculty value. Without such support, chronic stress and disengagement are common (Buch et al., 2017). These findings underscore that organizational culture significantly moderates job stress (Joshi & Jaffer, 2024), and that inclusive practices can mitigate burnout. In multi-campus colleges, geographic

dispersion intensifies isolation, making it essential to address well-being through both centralized policies and localized support systems tailored to adjunct needs.

Neglecting adjunct well-being has serious consequences. Shuck and Reio (2014) link organizational neglect to burnout, attrition, and reduced instructional quality. Burnout, as Maslach (2003) describes, results from prolonged exposure to inequitable and unsupportive conditions. When adjunct faculty perceive their roles as undervalued, their ability to contribute meaningfully is compromised.

Taken together, the dimensions of relational inclusion, structural stability, and empowerment form a holistic model of adjunct faculty well-being. This holistic model positions well-being as a dynamic process shaped by ongoing interactions between faculty and their institutional environments. The model highlights the importance of intentional organizational practices that affirm adjunct identities and foster sustainable academic engagement.

Integration

Integration, as a conceptual dimension of adjunct faculty support, centers on structural and institutional inclusion. It reflects the extent to which adjunct faculty are embedded within the operational and cultural fabric of the institution, rather than positioned as peripheral or temporary labor. Mechanisms such as leadership style, institutional culture, shared governance, and curriculum involvement signal legitimacy and professional respect (Ajani & Rathilal, 2025). Roueche et al. (1996) emphasize that effective integration requires intentional strategies, including transparent hiring practices, comprehensive orientation, ongoing professional development, performance evaluations, and equitable compensation. These practices enhance adjunct faculty's ability to contribute meaningfully while fostering stronger interpersonal relationships and institutional loyalty (Danaei, 2019).

Drawing from organizational inclusion theories and shared governance models, integration is not merely about access, it is about influence. Wallin (2004) and Roueche et al. (1996) argue that adjunct faculty must be structurally embedded in institutional processes to feel legitimate. Ajani & Rathilal (2025) further highlight that validation practices in curriculum design reinforce professional respect and inclusion.

Conceptually, integration functions as both a structural condition and a symbolic gesture. Structurally, it equips adjunct faculty with the tools and opportunities necessary to perform their roles effectively. Symbolically, it communicates that adjunct faculty are valued members of the academic community. Wallin (2004) asserts that when adjunct faculty are treated as essential contributors to the college's mission and culture, their sense of purpose and professional identity is strengthened. Conversely, when integration is lacking, adjunct faculty may experience isolation, limited professional growth, and diminished organizational commitment (Purdum & Evans, 2024). Merriman (2010) suggests that such exclusion undermines both individual well-being and institutional cohesion.

Empirical evidence supports the importance of integration. Danaei (2019) found that adjunct faculty who participate in governance and receive professional development report higher job satisfaction and retention. Merriman (2010) links integration to organizational commitment, indicating that exclusion leads to disengagement and turnover. In multi-campus settings, integration must be both intentional and consistent across locations. This includes standardized onboarding, equitable compensation, and opportunities for cross-campus collaboration ensuring that adjunct faculty are supported regardless of geographic placement.

Connection

Connection refers to the quality and depth of interpersonal and professional relationships within the academic institution. It includes both formal and informal interactions that foster shared purpose, mutual respect, and institutional presence (Tran, 2020). For adjunct faculty, meaningful connection through consistent communication, collaborative engagement, and departmental visibility enhances motivation, a sense of value, and alignment with the institution's mission (Porfirico et al., 2024). More than social interaction, connection is a relational construct that affirms identity, cultivates belonging, and strengthens emotional resilience.

Connection encompasses trust, respect, and shared goals. Holbeck et al. (2021) demonstrate that advisory boards and peer networks improve adjunct faculty engagement, reinforcing both well-being and integration. These relational practices are essential for building inclusive academic environments. The absence of connection has tangible consequences. Dolan (2011) found that lack of institutional relationships undermines motivation and performance, while Fouché (2006) linked limited colleague collaboration to increased isolation. Buch et al. (2017) emphasize that relational gaps erode engagement and belonging, ultimately weakening adjunct faculty commitment. Without consistent institutional relationships, adjunct faculty face systemic barriers to professional growth and integration.

Strong relationships between adjunct and full-time faculty are vital for cultivating a supportive academic culture. These connections foster collaboration and ensure adjuncts feel seen, heard, and respected (Mech et al., 2017). Conceptually, connection bridges individual experience and organizational culture, reinforcing the idea that well-being is not solely personal but a shared institutional responsibility.

In multi-campus colleges, adjunct faculty may lack regular contact with peers or leadership, connection must be intentionally cultivated. Mentorship programs, inclusive communication strategies, and recognition of adjunct faculty contributions are essential for building authentic relationships across campuses. Colleges that prioritize relational integration are better positioned to support adjunct faculty in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Together, the concepts of well-being, integration, and connection form a multidimensional framework for understanding adjunct faculty support in multi-campus community colleges. Each concept offers a distinct lens, yet they intersect to reveal how adjuncts navigate complex institutional environments. When colleges implement inclusive structures and equity-minded practices, they enhance adjunct well-being and strengthen institutional effectiveness (Mech et al., 2017). This framework underscores the importance of affirming adjunct faculty value and promoting sustainable engagement across the academic community.

Chapter Summary

The chapter began with the historical development and expansion of community colleges, emphasizing their role in democratizing access to higher education. From the Junior College Movement to the influence of the GI Bill and the Higher Education Act of 1965, community colleges have evolved to meet the changing needs of society, offering vocational training, transfer degrees, and even bachelor's programs in select disciplines.

Multi-campus community colleges are highlighted as key institutions for expanding access to underserved populations. Multi-campus community colleges face unique challenges, including inconsistencies in academic policies, resource allocation, and student experiences across campuses. Despite these hurdles, community colleges serve as anchor institutions that promote educational equity and regional workforce development.

Over the last forty-plus years, adjunct faculty have become a cornerstone of community college instruction, largely due to financial constraints and the need for staffing flexibility. Their use has steadily increased since the 1960s, with adjuncts now comprising the majority of faculty in many institutions. While adjunct faculty offer cost savings, real-world experience, and diverse perspectives, they often face significant challenges such as limited availability, lack of institutional support, and job insecurity. The literature review explored both the benefits and drawbacks of adjunct faculty. Benefits include cost-effectiveness, scheduling flexibility, and current industry expertise. Drawbacks involve concerns about instructional quality, grade inflation, limited student engagement, and lower student outcomes. These issues are compounded by adjunct faculty members' part-time status and lack of access to professional development and campus resources.

The chapter elaborates on the conceptual framework guiding this study. The first dimension, well-being, addresses emotional, psychological, and structural stability, recognizing that faculty effectiveness is closely tied to their sense of security and mental health. The second dimension, integration, focuses on institutional inclusion and equitable access to resources, ensuring adjunct faculty are not treated as peripheral but as essential contributors to the academic mission. The third dimension, connection, highlights the quality of interpersonal relationships and the sense of belonging within the college community, which fosters engagement and professional identity. These dimensions collectively inform the study's approach to exploring how adjunct faculty perceive and experience organizational support in multi-campus community colleges. By addressing the challenges adjunct faculty face, especially within multi-campus systems, colleges can enhance educational quality, promote equity, and ensure institutional

effectiveness. A holistic approach to support is essential for recognizing adjunct faculty as vital contributors to the mission of higher education.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The chapter outlines the research methodology used to explore the support systems and challenges faced by adjunct faculty in community colleges. The chapter begins by detailing the research design, including the chosen approach, methods, and rationale behind these selections. The chapter then describes the process of participant selection, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures to ensure a comprehensive examination of adjunct faculty experiences. Finally, considerations regarding research reliability and ethical standards are discussed to underscore the rigor and integrity of the study revealing meaningful insights into effective support strategies for adjunct faculty across multi-campus community colleges.

The use of adjunct faculty in higher education has increased significantly over the last 40-plus years. Given the financial challenges most colleges face, that trend of relying on adjunct faculty is more likely to be a mainstay in higher education for the foreseeable future. If higher education is going to rely so heavily on adjunct faculty, colleges must support them comparably to their full-time faculty or risk performance outcomes that negatively impact their college and the students they serve. There is no better source to understand how best to support adjunct faculty than asking the adjunct faculty themselves, which is what I did in this study.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the organizational support experience lived by adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. This study sought to understand the support experience of adjunct faculty using the following research question:

- How do adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges describe their organizational support experience?

The support received by adjunct faculty directly affects the college and its students; therefore, colleges must understand the support experience of adjunct faculty more deeply than a surveyed ranking of support services. In the broader context, the findings may benefit other colleges, universities, and organizations outside of higher education seeking ways to improve the support experience they provide part-time and full-time employees.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is used when a problem or issue needs to be explored to identify a detailed understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2023). A qualitative approach enables the gathering of an in-depth understanding of the unique perspectives of multiple participants (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Qualitative research allows the opportunity to understand the perceptions of participants by probing to learn more about their lived experiences as adjunct faculty rather than analyzing numeric responses. In other words, there is much that would not be communicated about the lived experiences of these participants if their data was limited to closed-ended questions with framed responses. A qualitative approach aims to foster a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, analyzed in a way that may inform readers and inspire changes to enhance the future experiences of adjunct faculty and their students

A qualitative approach used to conduct the study to produce rich data through “observing, describing, interpreting, analyzing and abstracting from the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them” (Bazeley, 2021, p. 6). The data was collected through interviewing and reflected upon by the researcher through journaling, and analyzed by memoing, coding, and constructing categories. Researchers contribute essential critical thinking skills such as interrogating, evaluating, and synthesizing evidence to analyze and make informed decisions about various objects, events, and experiences as well as the thoughts,

beliefs, and emotions of individuals within our studies. Interpretations derived from the data were influenced by my past and present experiences adding a subjective element to the analysis of data (Bazeley, 2021) even though I bracketed my assumptions and biases about the support experience of adjunct faculty in my research journal prior to collecting data and re-visited the journal entry throughout data collection and analysis. Interrogating took place during the interviews by asking probing questions, critical thinking and evaluating took place during the coding process, and synthesizing occurred during the construction of categories or themes.

Phenomenology

To understand phenomenology, one must first grasp its foundations. Phenomenology aims to explore the lived experiences of individuals. Within phenomenology, phenomena refer to objects or events as they appear to consciousness. Originally developed by philosophers Husserl (1970) and Heidegger (1988), phenomenology explores the structures of consciousness and how individuals perceive, experience, and make sense of the world around them (Peoples, 2020). In discussing the foundational principles of phenomenological research, it is important to recognize Edmund Husserl's emphasis on suspending assumptions, as he believed nothing should be assumed or taken for granted when trying to understand a phenomenon” (Peoples, 2020). Husserl wanted to get to the pure essence of the phenomenon and proposed doing so by encouraging researchers to bracket or suspend judgments, so they could focus on analyzing the experiences of others.

Husserl (1970) developed transcendental phenomenology, and transcendental phenomenology was influential in developing descriptive phenomenology. Whereas transcendental phenomenology focuses on reducing lived experiences to universal insights, descriptive phenomenology recognizes the uniqueness of individuals’ lived experiences. In other

words, descriptive phenomenology does not seek to uncover universal insights instead presenting the diverse experiences of each participant.

Heidegger (1988) deviated from Husserl and others by creating a phenomenology based on his philosophy of hermeneutics. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand lived experiences within the context of broader cultural, historical, and social frameworks. Like descriptive phenomenology evolving out of transcendental phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology evolved from hermeneutic phenomenology. The differences between hermeneutic and interpretive phenomenology are subtle. While interpretive phenomenology acknowledges the role context plays in shaping experiences, it seeks to understand participants' subjective realities without emphasizing broader cultural and historical contexts.

Interpretive phenomenology adds an interpretive dimension to traditional phenomenology. Interpretive phenomenology seeks to explain the essence of human consciousness, perceptions, and interpretations of the world (van Manen, 2001). Thus, interpretive phenomenology shifts the focus from pure description to interpretation, recognizing that understanding human experience necessitates exploring the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. Interpretive phenomenology acknowledges experiences are interpreted based on cultural, historical, and social contexts (Vagle, 2018). Broader contextual factors are acknowledged; however, the central aim of the study is to understand participants' experiences and how they interpret them, which is a fundamental difference between hermeneutic and interpretive phenomenology.

Through an interpretive phenomenological methodology, I interacted with the data to uncover deeper meanings and insights drawing on interpretive frameworks to guide my study. By actively engaging with the data in an interpretive manner, I was able to generate insights that

are rich and meaningful, offering a deeper understanding of the support experience of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college.

At the heart of interpretive phenomenology lies the hermeneutic circle, a concept rooted in philosophical hermeneutics. The hermeneutic circle posits that understanding occurs through an iterative process of moving between parts and whole (Peoples, 2020). In the context of interpretive phenomenology, I engaged the data by moving between parts of the data to better understand the individual experiences and the whole for a broader context. For example, when a participant expressed feeling a sense of isolation at one campus, I analyzed the responses of other participants to identify whether the issue was specific to the individual, campus, or systemic. Such an approach helped me grasp the deeper meanings inherent in the lived experiences of my participants.

Another crucial aspect of interpretive phenomenology is the practice of bracketing or epoché (Husserl, 1970), which involves suspending one's preconceptions, biases, and assumptions to approach phenomena with a fresh perspective (Peoples, 2020). In interpretive phenomenology, researchers strive to bracket their assumptions to immerse themselves fully in the world of the participants allowing the meanings embedded within their experiences to emerge organically.

Interpretive phenomenology employs various qualitative research methods to gather rich, detailed descriptions of lived experiences. I conducted three rounds of interviews to collect data before immersing myself in the data to identify the essence of participants' lived experiences through patterns and themes. Through interpretive reflection and dialogue with participants, I uncovered the underlying meanings and structures that characterize the lived experiences of my participants.

By illuminating the subjective meanings and interpretations individuals assign to their experiences, interpretive phenomenology facilitates a deeper understanding of diverse phenomena, such as the support experience of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. Moreover, interpretive phenomenology provides a methodological framework for informing interventions and policies by learning from individuals' lived experiences allowing for more informed decision-making. I believe the findings derived from my research can be used to enhance the support experience of adjunct faculty improving job satisfaction and performance and resulting in better outcomes for students.

Interpretive phenomenology offers an insightful approach to understanding the complexity of human experience. By blending the philosophical insights of phenomenology with interpretive methods, I was able to delve into the depths of consciousness, perception, and interpretation which is deeply interconnected and central to understanding human experience. As I investigated the lived experiences of these participants, interpretive phenomenology illuminated their support experience as adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college making meaning of those experiences and capturing the essence of the phenomenon.

Positionality and Role of Researcher

Research suggests the persistence (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008), graduation (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Jacoby, 2006; Kezar & Maxey, 2014), and transfer rates (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009) of college students are negatively impacted by the more classes they take with adjunct faculty. I believe these negative outcomes have little to do with the capabilities of adjunct faculty and more to do with the support they receive in their part-time role. The support experience of adjunct faculty is unsatisfactory in most cases. Colleges should develop comprehensive systems to support adjunct faculty starting with compensation. Adjunct faculty should be compensated at

an equivalent hourly rate as their full-time peers and compensated for non-instructional hours, such as office hours and professional development (Tamayo, 2013). If adjunct faculty were afforded access to resources comparable to their full-time peers, I believe it would have a positive impact on the persistence, graduation, and transfer rates of their students. I believe adjunct faculty are under-supported at most colleges. Given the increasing number of adjunct faculty coupled with the declining number of full-time faculty at many colleges, the topic of adjunct faculty support needs to be researched in a way that speaks to the support experiences from the adjunct faculty's perspective. The findings of such a study should help colleges identify how best to support their adjunct faculty to improve student outcomes such as persistence, graduation, and transfer rates which are a top priority.

Regarding my professional background relevant to the study, I was an adjunct instructor for a few years, but that was more than ten years ago. While my time in that role provides foundational insight into the responsibilities and challenges adjunct faculty face, I recognize that my perspective may be shaped by past conditions and may not fully reflect current realities. Regardless, my experience as an adjunct instructor made bracketing my assumptions and biases prior to collecting data and re-visiting those journal entries throughout the process to ensure my voice did not overshadow that of my participants even more important. Currently, I serve as a full-time instructor at the site selected where I supervise 30-plus adjunct faculty in the business discipline. I will address the power dynamic I present within the exclusion criteria to ensure my role as a supervisor does not skew the data collected.

As the researcher, I will personally carry out the following tasks associated with the study:

- Design the Study

- Interview Participants
- Observe Participants
- Reflect on Data
- Transcribe Data
- Interpret Data
- Report Findings

Serving in so many roles required a great deal of time and attention, but serving in each of those roles allowed me to immerse myself in the data from start to finish, which allowed me to capture the most meaning of the participants' lived experiences.

Bracketing

In the context of a multi-campus community college, adjunct faculty members often navigate unique challenges and experiences. These may include issues related to job insecurity (Twigg, 1989), lack of institutional support (West et al., 2009), and difficulty integrating into the academic community (Elder et al., 2016). To effectively capture and understand these experiences from the participants' perspectives without the influence of my perspectives and experiences, I engaged in a process of rigorous analysis aimed at uncovering the underlying meanings and essence of participants' lived experiences. The process of suspending my perspectives was guided by the phenomenological principle of epoché or bracketing, which involves suspending assumptions and biases to approach the data with openness and receptivity, focusing on the phenomenon as experienced by others.

Bracketing is a critical methodological process within phenomenological inquiry. Bracketing involves setting aside preconceived notions, biases, and assumptions to approach the phenomenon of interest with a fresh perspective (Vagle, 2018). Before initiating the interview

process, I reflected on my support experience as an adjunct faculty member more than 10 years ago and my preconceptions as a full-time faculty member who directly supervises adjunct faculty at the selected site (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Bracketing prior knowledge and assumptions about the support experience of adjunct faculty allowed me to focus on collecting raw data without influencing it. By suspending any prior knowledge and biases I have about adjunct faculty and multi-campus community colleges, I was able to immerse myself fully into the participants' experiences allowing for a more open-minded exploration of the phenomenon to capture participants' lived experience without being influenced by my experience as an adjunct faculty member more than 10 years ago.

Bracketing allowed me to approach the study with openness and curiosity, free from preconceived notions about the experiences of adjunct faculty. Bracketing allowed me to more genuinely explore the richness and complexity of participants' lived experiences across different campuses. Additionally, bracketing helped me acknowledge and mitigate my own biases which could otherwise influence my interpretations of the data collected. By consciously setting aside assumptions about adjunct faculty roles or the challenges they face, I strived to maintain objectivity and aimed to ensure that the findings accurately represent the participants' perspectives. Also, bracketing fosters reflexivity throughout the research process, prompting researchers to continuously reflect on their positionality and its potential impact on the study (Vagle, 2018). Reflexivity encouraged me to engage in critical self-examination enhancing the rigor and reliability of the research findings.

Throughout the analysis process, I continually re-visited and reflected on my bracketing efforts ensuring that my interpretations remain grounded in the participants' lived experiences rather than my assumptions or biases. By maintaining a reflexive stance and attending to the

nuances of participants' lived experiences, I was able to generate insights that are representative of the adjunct faculty experience at the multi-campus community college. Bracketing one's assumptions and biases is a process. However, keeping them bottled up is a mental exercise that proved most challenging, which is why I needed to continuously review my interpretations of the data for vetting. Ongoing effort to vet my findings ensured the integrity of the data is reflected. Another step to ensuring my interpretation reflects the data collected rather than my assumptions and biases is the use of direct quotes from participant interviews. Additionally, I used bracketing to help curb any ethical concerns about conducting a study that results in findings that complement my preconceptions and biases. The anticipated variance between my bracketing and the findings of the study demonstrate no hidden agenda on my part.

Site Selection

Choosing the site for a research study is an important decision influenced by various factors. There are several reasons I selected a multi-campus community that is heavily dependent upon adjunct faculty as the site for my research. There is a need for more research that "clarifies the types of institutional support that can strengthen the contributions of adjunct faculty" (Klein et al., 1996, p.225). Additionally, insights needed to improve adjunct faculty support should be gathered from veteran adjunct faculty who have experienced prior support and can identify what is lacking (Velez, 2010). There is also minimal literature regarding adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges (Wolfe & Strange, 2003). More research should be conducted replicating the "descriptive phenomenological qualitative study at other multi-campus community colleges in the Midwest" (Bakley & Broderson, 2018, p. 144). Community colleges are heavily dependent upon adjunct faculty for classroom instruction, and the site I have selected includes more than 600 adjunct faculty. I have easy access to adjunct faculty at the site selected

and an in-depth understanding of the context in which these adjunct faculty work. The decision to use a single site was intentional because the researcher sought to explore nuanced experiences within one multi-campus community college to identify variances among its campuses. This approach allowed for a deep examination of organizational support perceptions while maintaining consistency in institutional culture and governance, which would not have been possible if multiple colleges were included.

Since I work at a multi-campus community college with more than 600 adjunct faculty, conducting my research there based on the ease of access to adjunct faculty, good rapport with constituents on every campus, and the direct impact the findings could provide a multi-campus community college that is heavily reliant on adjunct faculty made sense. However, using my employer as the site of my research was not without its concerns. Avoiding any power dynamics whereby participants did not feel comfortable being completely transparent with me was important, otherwise the data would have been skewed. I minimized the power dynamic by excluding any adjunct faculty members I directly supervise and implemented several practices to ensure anonymity of participants, such as pseudonyms and password protected storage of data collected. Also, the potential for biases to creep in was a legitimate concern, making bracketing my assumptions and biases more important. Conflicts of interest needed to be avoided so heightened measures were taken to ensure anonymity was maintained throughout the entire research process. Minimizing assumptions and biases required that I follow a clearly defined step-by-step process for data collection and analysis, communicated everything being done to safeguard participant information, and invited participants into the analysis process to ensure my interpretations of the data accurately reflected their lived experiences.

Participants

The study used sampling strategies and selection criteria best suited for a phenomenological study whereby I sought to develop an in-depth understanding of the support experience of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. In conjunction with the sample size, the methods used ensure the data collected represents the unique experiences of diverse participants. Also, when conducting a phenomenological study, considering ethical matters throughout the entire research process is important. During participant recruitment and onboarding, I ensured each individual's participation was voluntary, and they understood exactly what they agreed to when participating in the study.

Sampling Strategy

Non-random sampling is not favored in qualitative research. Besides, “in society almost nothing is random” (Rapley, 2013, p. 3). Qualitative research intentionally focuses on specific people to learn from their lived experiences (Patton, 2015) with nothing random about it. These sampling strategies aim to select participants who can provide insightful and meaningful descriptions of their experience related to the phenomenon being explored. Unlike quantitative research, where random sampling is often employed to ensure statistical representation, the nature of qualitative research justifies a non-random approach.

Within qualitative research sampling approaches, saturation is a term that is commonly used to portray an exhaustive process that captures all there is to know about a topic. Saturation allows the study to reach a point at which gathering additional data does not yield new insights or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Saturation ensures thorough exploration and understanding of the phenomenon. However, saturation should not be prioritized over exploring unique data sources to gather diverse perspectives and experiences relevant to the research questions. I did

not seek to achieve data saturation within the study, instead I strived to capture a wide variety of unique perspectives relating to participants' lived experiences at the same multi-campus community college. Unique perspectives were obtained using sampling strategies that promote diversity.

I used two sampling strategies, criterion and convenience, to conduct the study. Criterion sampling is well suited for exploring phenomena in depth (Schreier, 2018), and the objective of criterion sampling is to match a clearly defined people group to be studied (Patton, 2015). In my case, criteria was utilized to seek diverse participants to ensure that shared experiences and perspectives are uniquely representative of the adjunct faculty at the selected site. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants based on their availability and accessibility. For the study, rather than taking a random sample of anyone teaching part-time at any multi-campus community college, my current employer held the convenient sample to conduct the study.

Target Population and Participant Selection Criteria

The study sought to understand the support experience of adjunct faculty teaching at a multi-campus community college; therefore, I recruited voluntary participants who are:

- Currently teaching nine or fewer credit hours per semester at the site selected
- Demographically diverse (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity)
- Assigned to academic disciplines within the Humanities and Social Sciences
- Diverse in their lengths of service teaching at the site selected, but no less than two years
- Teaching at unique locations to ensure all five campuses are represented in the study

By employing these criteria, I was able to assemble a diverse and representative sample of adjunct faculty members. Thus, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the support experience at the site selected. I used the minimum two years of service because Velez (2010) suggests veteran adjunct faculty who have experienced prior support are better equipped to identify what is lacking. However, I did not want to negate the input of adjunct faculty who have been teaching at the college for less than five years. The selection criteria captured the essence of the support experience of adjunct faculty at the site selected and provides valuable insights as to what can be done to improve future experiences of adjunct faculty at the site selected.

Exclusion Criteria

Adjunct faculty members were excluded from participating in the study if they were teaching part-time while holding another full-time role at the selected site, teaching classes with the BUSN (business) designator, or teaching dual credit classes. I excluded adjunct faculty who serve in another role at the college in a full-time capacity, because of their availability to engage in the campus culture and access to resources that are atypical of most adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty teaching classes with the BUSN designator were excluded from the study because they are my direct reports. The power dynamic between supervisors and their direct reports can make soliciting candid feedback difficult. Power differential can create a sense of intimidation or fear among direct reports, making them hesitant to provide honest feedback that could be perceived as critical or confrontational. Direct reports may worry about the potential repercussions of providing negative feedback to their supervisor. They might fear their feedback could harm their working relationship, lead to negative evaluations, or even jeopardize their job security or career advancement opportunities. Dual credit high school teachers were excluded from the study because of the support they receive from the school district where they are employed full-time.

The frequency with which dual credit high school teachers attend professional development and meet with an instructional coach may indirectly influence dual credit high school teachers' perspective of the support experience they receive as an adjunct instructor.

There were more than 500 adjunct faculty at the site selected who qualified to participate in the study. Embracing Durdella's (2020) claim, "Efforts to invite participants into your study do not need to be overly rigid, formal, or procedural" (p. 20), an invitation to participate in the study was emailed to all adjunct faculty who meet the inclusion criteria at the site selected. They were encouraged to participate in the study because the findings of the study may improve the support experience provided to them and others in the immediate future.

Voluntary Participation

All participants joined the study voluntarily. Prospective participants needed to see the value of participating rather than feel coerced to participate. To ensure that was the case, all prospective participants were asked by me rather than encouraged by their supervisor or others at the college with whom they already have a working relationship. Appendix A - informed and invited rather than persuade. For those who agreed to participate, an informed consent was signed prior to any data collection. Participants were welcome to refrain from responding to any questions they did not feel comfortable answering and had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

Participant Protection

Before conducting any research, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kansas State University and the site selected. Additionally, I obtained a signed copy of the informed consent form from each participant ensuring they understand the purpose, procedures, risks, participant expectations, and benefits of the study before agreeing to

participate. The IRB ensured the proposed study adheres to ethical standards and protects the participants. The IRB application demonstrated how I ensured anonymity and minimized risk. Signed copies of the informed consent form were obtained from each participant before the initial interview, therefore, ensured participants had a clear understanding of what they were agreeing to and how their information would be protected. I strived to create an environment whereby all participants were comfortable speaking freely to ensure the quality of data collected is most beneficial to the findings of the study as well as readers who might be able to benefit from the findings in their circumstances. One of the reasons I hosted multiple rounds of interviews was to build a rapport with participants. Meeting with them on multiple occasions made them more comfortable sharing their lived experiences with great depth in subsequent interactions with me.

Representativeness

Although “any individual who meets the conditions for having the experience under study would be a suitable participant” (Schreier, 2018, p. 12), I used published information about prospective participants to select a representative sample of the adjunct faculty population at the site selected. Participants selection was guided by a range of diversity factors, including demographic, academic discipline, campus of record, and years of service as an adjunct faculty member at the site selected. This approach helped ensure the sample “reflects the diversity of the population that may benefit from the knowledge generated from the study” (Durdella, 2020, p. 31). The diverse participants resulted in unique perspectives which led to a higher variance in which case Rapley (2013) suggests a sample size on the high end of the proposed range.

Sample Size

Schreier (2018) shares, “Sample size is irrelevant in qualitative research or at best of secondary concern” (p. 7) and that “deciding on a sample size before engaging in data collection contradicts the emergent nature of qualitative research and calls for a sampling process that is constantly adjusted as the research unfolds” (p.8). In phenomenological research, the sample size should be presented as a range to avoid establishing a set number that cannot be attained as the study emerges (Rapley, 2013).

There are multiple lines of thought with regards to the appropriate sample size for a study of this nature. Studies employing interviewing as a data collection method should aim for a sample size of 10 to 13 participants (Schreier, 2018). Phenomenological studies typically involve 5 to 10 participants, suggesting the researcher’s ability to offer a comprehensive understanding diminishes with each additional participant or site (Durdella, 2020). Although there are no strict rules, 6 to 8 participants typically suffice for a homogeneous sample, whereas 12 to 20 are often needed to explore disconfirming evidence or ensuring maximum variation (Durdella, 2020). Bottom line however, “Exploring the phenomenon is key, not being able to say I observed X number of men and X number of women” (Rapley, 2013, p. 12).

The study used a sample size of 11 participants. The sample netted 33 interviews that more accurately reflect in-depth conversations about their lived experiences as adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. Early on during the third round of interviews it became clear that sufficient data was being collected to thoroughly answer the research question.

I was mindful of the volume of data collected to ensure there was a representative sample perceived to be rigorous, but I prioritized the importance of depth over breadth most associated with phenomenological studies. I rested in the assurance that saturation will not be achieved

since saturation is unrealistic given the sample size likely necessary to achieve saturation given there are nearly 600 adjunct faculty at the site selected who meet the inclusion criteria. I would be naïve to claim new knowledge could not be gained by expanding my sample size considerably. Instead, I used my inclusion criteria to capture diverse perspectives of unique lived experiences in hopes that approach to those unique experiences would result in some common themes that aptly describe the lived experiences of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college.

Pilot Study

To ensure the initial interview question in Appendix C - would yield rich and meaningful data, I conducted two pilot interviews with adjunct faculty members who teach at the selected site but did not meet all of the inclusion criteria for the main study. These pilot interviews were instrumental in refining my approach. Specifically, I discovered that the original opening question lacked sufficient structure to prompt participants to deeply reflect on and articulate their lived experiences. While the question was open-ended, it did not provide enough scaffolding to encourage detailed narratives, especially from participants with extensive teaching histories, some spanning over a decade.

The insight prompted a revision to the interview protocol, incorporating more explicit prompts and follow-up questions designed to elicit richer, more emotionally resonant responses. Drawing on Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) guidance on qualitative interviewing, I began prompting participants not only to describe their experiences but also to reflect on how those experiences made them feel. This shift was critical in aligning the interview process with the phenomenological focus of the study, which seeks to understand the essence of adjunct faculty members' lived experiences. The pilot study thus served as a valuable calibration tool, ensuring

that the interview protocol would support the depth and nuance required for meaningful qualitative analysis.

Data Collection

When embarking on a phenomenological study, the process of data collection is pivotal to unlocking the subjective realities and lived experiences of individuals. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, seeks to understand the essence of human experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the world around them (Vagle, 2018). Data collection in phenomenological research is characterized by a commitment to uncovering the richness and complexity of human consciousness (Vagle, 2018). The study was designed to go on a rigorous and insightful journey of data collection that highlights the intricacies of the support experience of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. I followed a step-by-step process to collect data, but at the same time was flexible, allowing the participants to play a role in directing the data collection process. A structured, yet flexible approach to data collection allowed me to uncover new insights with the benefit of providing a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Interviews were the method of data collection in the study. Interviews allowed me to go beyond the surface, exploring the deeper meanings and structures that shape participants' understanding of phenomena through multiple rounds of in-depth interviews. Research interviews are a "conversation that has a structure and a purpose" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 5) and "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to the research study" (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 54). Many phenomenologists use interviews as the sole method of data generation (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. The interview process was open and flexible, allowing participants to co-own the data. I hosted three rounds of interviews (Saldaña, 2011)

posing probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Probing questions promoted deep reflection on the participants' lived experiences. These interviews aimed to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences as adjunct faculty.

In a phenomenological study using interviews as the method of data collection, there are numerous key procedures to follow to ensure the reliability of the research. I hosted three rounds of one-on-one interviews with each participant. Interviewing for qualitative research is semi-structured and flexible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data collected during initial interviews laid the foundation for future interviews that asked follow-up questions specific to each individual that more deeply explored their lived experiences as adjunct faculty.

During the interviews, I posed open-ended questions, creating an environment where the interviewee could speak freely and share their thoughts and experiences in depth (Roulston, 2010). The second and third rounds of interviews consisted of follow-up questions to probe into the participants' lived experiences to collect rich data. Also, the interviews were audio and video recorded using Zoom. The initial interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Since I did not have a pre-existing relationship with these participants, I asked broad questions in Appendix C - for them to begin telling me about their lived experiences as adjunct faculty. The purpose of interviewing is to uncover things I have not been able to directly observe, as a supervisor of adjunct faculty, to understand how people interpret the world around them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The second round of interviews were less than an hour. The interviews were less structured than the initial interviews, including prompts to elaborate on certain aspects of what the participant shared during the initial interview. For example:

- Tell me more about...

- What was it like for you when...
- Can you provide a specific example of...

The third round of interviews proved to be quite valuable in most cases. These interviews were largely used to squeeze out additional data related to topics that had already been probed to identify if participants had any more to share and make space for participants to share anything they had not already communicated previously in the data collection process. The duration of these interviews varied widely with the shortest being approximately 20 minutes and others lasting 60 minutes.

Conducting interviews provided access to lived experiences, phenomenological reduction, intersubjective understanding, and rich data (Vagle, 2018). Interviews provided a direct means of accessing individuals' lived experiences. Phenomenology aims to understand the essence of phenomena as experienced by individuals, and interviews allow researchers to explore these subjective experiences in-depth, capturing the nuances, meanings, and perspectives of participants (Vagle, 2018). Phenomenologists aim to uncover the essential structures of phenomenon by suspending or bracketing preconceptions and biases (Peoples, 2020) and interviews facilitate that process by enabling participants to describe their experiences freely without the influence of external factors or theoretical frameworks (Peoples, 2020). Furthermore, interviews yield rich and detailed descriptions of lived experiences capturing the complexity and depth of the phenomenon being studied. Detailed descriptions are essential for uncovering the structures, patterns, and variations of experiences enabling researchers to gain insight into the essence of phenomena (Vagle, 2018). Building on these foundations, the practical advantages of interviews further enhance their suitability for phenomenological research.

Practically, interviews are flexible and allow for great participant engagement. Interviews offer flexibility in terms of format (Roulston & Choi, 2018), structure (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), and content, allowing researchers to tailor the interview process to the specific needs of the study and the preferences of participants. The adaptability of semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore a wide range of topics accommodating diverse participant experiences and perspectives. Interviews promote participant engagement and empowerment by giving them a voice in the research process. Participants had the opportunity to share their experiences, insights, and perspectives, contributing to the co-creation of knowledge and fostering a sense of ownership. Overall, conducting interviews in a phenomenological study aligns with the methodology's emphasis on understanding lived experiences and uncovering the essence of phenomena. Interviews provide a robust and practical means of accessing rich qualitative data by exploring subjective realities.

Interviews offer a rich and nuanced approach to understanding how knowledge is constructed, aligning them with the constructionist epistemological framework. They emphasize the subjective nature of knowledge and the importance of social and cultural contexts, which seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make meaning of the world around them. Consequently, the study explored the intricacies of each participant's unique experiences in their roles as adjunct faculty, considering their perceptions, beliefs, and backgrounds clustering some of the same lived experiences into common themes (Bazeley, 2021). The study specifically sought to examine the perceptions of adjunct faculty teaching at a multi-campus community college to better understand their support experiences (Espartinez, 2023) by gathering, analyzing, and interpreting stories participants offer on the topic (Blanton, 2014). Interpretative phenomenologists seek to understand lived experiences "with the results reflecting a careful

description of precisely the features of the experienced phenomenon as they present themselves to the consciousness of the researcher” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 131). Emphasis is placed on the importance of the researcher analyzing and describing the lived experiences of participants while suspending preconceived notions.

Data Analysis

A step-by-step approach to data analysis contributed to the quality and rigor of research by providing a systematic framework for conducting and documenting the analysis process (Vagle, 2018). Some ways in which a step-by-step approach enhances the quality and rigor of data analysis include accountability, reproductivity, transparency, and reliability. Following a structured approach to data analysis enhances accountability by ensuring that I adhere to established methodological standards and best practices.

By clearly documenting each step of the analysis and providing justifications for methodological decisions, I demonstrated my commitment to rigor and quality in the research process. A well-defined, step-by-step approach makes the data analysis process more reproducible, allowing other researchers to replicate the analysis and verify the results. By clearly documenting each step and providing detailed instructions, I ensure transparency and facilitate the replication of their findings by others in the field. A step-by-step approach promotes transparency in data analysis by making the process explicit and accessible to others. I documented each step of the analysis, including the rationale behind methodological decisions, any assumptions made, and any deviations from standard procedures enhancing the transparency and credibility of the research and enabling readers to assess the reliability of the findings. Lastly, a step-by-step approach helped me ensure the reliability of my findings by addressing potential sources of biases and errors. By carefully designing the analysis process, conducting

checks for quality and integrity, and employing appropriate techniques, I ensured reliability of my findings. Additionally, “Qualitative researchers use not only language but also illustrations to both analyze and display the phenomena and processes at work in the data” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 133). I used visual illustrations, such as tables, charts, matrices, and flow diagrams, to help readers grasp the step-by-step research process and the essence of the phenomenon as well.

An ethical consideration in data analysis is to ensure the outlined process is followed. The process as outlined was time-consuming and exhausting given the number of participants, but a methodical process had to be followed to ensure the utmost quality in findings extracted from the data is shared. Otherwise, I run the risk of compromising the lived experience of my participants and misleading readers, which would be unjust.

Journaling

Initially, I used journaling to bracket or reflect on my own experiences, biases, and assumptions that may influence my interpretations of the phenomena (Peoples, 2020). Journaling served as an effort to deepen my awareness of my own perspective and how my perspective might influence the research process. Journaling occurred before data collection to ensure my bracketed assumptions and biases were considered, but did not overly influence my interview questions, thereby compromising the data in a way that aligns with my experiences as an adjunct faculty. Then, I used journaling to note how the interview process develops throughout the data collection process (Peoples, 2020). Journaling became more inquisitive as I reflected on interactions with the data. For example, I reflected on how the data relates to or differs from the literature and other participants (Bazeley, 2021).

I continued to reflect on my biases and assumptions throughout the data collection and analysis process, but started to integrate the data into those reflections by posing questions about

what I was learning, things I was hearing from multiple participants, and how these findings related to the research question. Journaling was my primary source of reflexivity (Peoples, 2020). Journaling helped me move through the data collection process methodically resulting in richer data being collected and ideas being explored throughout the process. Finally, journaling helped me explore developing themes. “The emergence of themes and theory depends entirely on the work you do with your data, and your reflection on that work” (Bazeley, 2021, p. 129). I reflected on the short stories and accounts participants used to convey their support experience as adjunct faculty (Bazeley, 2021).

Journaling served as a critical component of the data analysis process and became a consistent research habit throughout data collection. The reflective practice of journaling occurred before and after each interview, during and after transcription, and while reviewing audio and video recordings. The purpose of journaling was to capture evolving insights and interpretations regarding participants’ experiences of support in their roles as adjunct faculty at the selected site. Guided by Bazeley’s (2021) recommendations, journal entries focused on what can be learned from the data, how individual accounts compare across participants, how findings align with the research framework, and what limitations may be present in the study.

Following cleaning and member checking transcripts, I read the transcript carefully, highlighting key data and annotating the text with comments that identify aspects of the participant’s lived experience worth exploring further. These reflections informed the development of tailored interview questions for the second round. While many questions were re-used across participants, given the shared focus on support for adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college, I also crafted questions specific to each individual’s unique

experience. I was committed to honoring the distinctiveness of each narrative and did not hesitate to pursue lines of inquiry that were relevant only to a single participant.

Member Checking

In addition to bracketing my assumptions and biases, I used member checking to ensure my interpretations of participants' lived experiences were accurately reflected. Member checking is a fundamental methodological strategy within phenomenological inquiry. Member checking involves returning to participants with the research findings, interpretations, and themes derived from the data and seeking their feedback or confirmation (Peoples, 2020). Member checking served as the means of validating the accuracy and authenticity of my interpretations while also empowering participants to have a voice in the research process.

Member checking fosters transparency and trust between researchers and participants (Peoples, 2020). By involving participants in the validation process, I was able to demonstrate respect for their perspectives and insights affirming their role as active contributors to the research. By soliciting feedback from participants on the accuracy and relevance of my interpretations, I identified discrepancies or misunderstandings and made necessary adjustments to ensure the findings were grounded in the participants' lived experiences.

I integrated member checking into various stages of the research process. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. I requested that the interviewee review the transcript and provide constructive feedback within 24 hours. Quick turnaround of the transcripts ensured I could begin analyzing the data more thoroughly while interview was still fresh in my mind. Participants were invited to review my interpretations of the data and a summary of themes derived from the data collected. Member checking my findings was not as instrumental as member checking the transcripts because participants may not agree with a

particular finding that represents another person's lived experience, but the themes teased out of the data were supported by direct quotes from participants. Nevertheless, there is value in allowing participants to review my findings and weigh-in.

The participants' continuous review of data and findings served as validation that the research is reflective of their lived experiences that are unique to their fellow participants. By engaging participants in the validation process, I fostered transparency, trust, and collaboration, while also enhancing the rigor and reliability of the research outcomes (Peoples, 2020). Member checking offered a deeper understanding and meaningful engagement with the lived experiences of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college.

Coding

Once initial member checking of the transcripts was completed and I made any necessary revisions to the transcript, I started "dwelling with the minutiae of the data" (Vagle, 2018, p. 116) by conducting a line-by-line reading of the transcript. A thorough analysis of the transcripts required me to slow down and pause at times to reflect on the data, so I could start making meaning of data by asking myself how it related to the research question and others' lived experiences. I analyzed the transcript by highlighting text that appears relevant to the research question and entering codes in the margins. Coding the data is what Vagle (2018) refers to as analyzing the parts of the lived experiences.

Coding serves as a systematic method for organizing and analyzing data. Coding involves the process of labeling segments of data with meaningful descriptors or codes. "Just as a title represents and captures a book or film or poem's primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum's primary content and essence" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). Through coding, I organized and analyzed large volumes of data. Organizing the data with codes made

identifying patterns, connections and insights stemming from the participants' lived experiences easier (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The codes that emerged, such as desire for better communication, feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and having a desire to be recognized, allowed me to capture the essence of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. To reach the point in the data analysis process whereby the essence of the phenomenon was captured, I used open, descriptive, and analytical coding.

Initially, I immersed myself in the raw data to gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences using open coding. I coded the data by conducting a line-by-line analysis of each interview transcript, looking for any details that may include data that appeared potentially relevant to the research question, therefore, might have been worthy of further analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Complimentary of the open coding process, descriptive codes are primarily nouns that summarize the data that conveys a particular concept, idea, or experience that may later evolve into essential aspects of the participants' lived experiences which could be useful when clustering data sources, such as transcripts, reflective journals, and analytic memos, to categorize data for further analysis (Saldaña, 2011). Descriptive coding was used to reduce the likelihood that I impose preconceived categories or themes. Descriptive coding is when the researcher identifies patterns or themes within a section of text. Descriptive coding requires slowly reading all of the data multiple times, highlighting text, and writing in the margin when thoughts arise. Throughout the coding process, I continuously compared new data with previously coded data to ensure consistency, or revise codes as patterns start to emerge from the data.

Then, I transitioned from descriptive to analytical coding to take a deeper dive into the data. Analytical coding allowed me to better understand the themes that started to surface

through descriptive coding. These themes were organized and synthesized by identifying connections or patterns within the data set. Analytical coding, based on my reflections and interpretations, advanced meaning-making of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). What surfaces in the transition from descriptive coding to analytical coding is what van Manen (2014) calls themes, Dahlberg (2006) calls patterns of meaning, and Giorgi (1997) calls meaning units. Once the data was thoroughly coded, I clustered similar codes together to identify broader categories or themes.

Table 3.1 Coding Table

Quote	Open Code	Descriptive Code	Analytical Code
Emails are not always the way to be warm and fuzzy, so it's easy to misinterpret.	Email lacks warmth	Communication challenges	Digital reduces emotional clarity
Being an adjunct can feel isolating.	Adjuncts isolated	Social and professional disconnection	Adjunct reduces sense of belonging
If you are like and you haven't taught before, it's terrifying. It's overwhelming	Teaching first time is overwhelming	Challenges of first time teaching	Lack of experience equals anxiety
It would be nice to have some kind of we appreciate you celebration	Desire for appreciation	Request recognition event	Recognition boosts morale

Table 3.1 illustrates the progression from raw participant quotes to refined analytical insights through open, descriptive, and analytical coding. The coding process teased out two primary types of support needs, social and structural, among adjunct faculty. Social support themes emerged from a desire for more meaningful interpersonal connections. Structural support needs were reflective of the organizational challenges participants have experienced as adjunct

faculty. These codes provide a foundation for understanding the multifaceted experiences of adjunct faculty and inform the development of targeted support strategies.

Analytic Memos

Once codes were clustered into categories, I wrote analytic memos to expand on the rationale for these categories (Saldaña, 2011). I used analytic memos to capture insights, generate ideas, and inform interpretations. Analytic memos included my thoughts, reflections, and interpretations as I engaged with the data. The memos included my initial thoughts about the data-capturing insights that were analyzed later in the process. Putting these thoughts in writing allowed me to generate ideas about the phenomena and explore different concepts with the data considering alternative interpretations. Analytic memos were used to inform my interpretations as I wrote memos to myself about what I was learning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The memos described how my interpretations took shape and developed into key findings from the data. Additionally, I used analytic memos to express how I related to the data, how the data relates to the research question, the emergence of themes from the data, and any problems or challenges I encountered during the study (Saldaña, 2011). An example of an analytic memo is included as Appendix D - .

I consistently implemented the same analytical process between every interview. As I learned more about each participant's lived experience, I returned to previous transcripts to expand or revise my interpretations without losing my initial interpretations since there was value in seeing how my understanding transformed as more data becomes available causing the research to evolve. Continuously analyzing data throughout the collection process should result in richer, more meaningful data to answer the research question (Saldaña, 2011). By maintaining

an iterative approach, I ensured my evolving understanding was continually integrated into the analysis.

Constructing Categories

I took all the data that has been chunked by codes and developed into themes and started making meaning of the key findings as a whole again, which is the third step in Vagle's (2018) whole-part-whole analysis. I reflected deeply on the data to discern underlying meanings and insights. Reflecting on the entire dataset involved stepping back to view the data as a whole allowing my intuition to guide the interpretive process.

Understanding the core principles of qualitative data analysis is crucial to conducting meaningful research. "Qualitative data analysis is all about identifying themes, categories, patterns, or answers to your research questions" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 216).

Phenomenological analysis is committed to capturing the essence of lived experiences. I interpreted each participant's unique experience and sought to make meaning of how those experiences surface as patterns in the data to construct categories or themes. My interpretations helped shape future data collection by framing some follow-up questions around those themes to take a deeper dive into the lived experiences of my participants.

Part of the meaning-making process was to synthesize findings into themes. The thematic process began with data sharing the same or similar codes being clustered. These clusters of data could be visualized as "buckets or baskets into which segments of text are placed" (Marshall & Rossman, 2015, p. 224). I adopted a similar model by creating a table with the purpose statement and research question at the top of the table and adding a bucket or column to the table for each category that appeared to be responsive to the purpose of the study and answers the research question. As these patterns or categories evolved throughout the data

collection process, I probed deeper into these areas of the lived experience in subsequent interviews to identify the extent to which rich data providing new knowledge about the phenomenon exists.

Probing deeper resulted in more than 25 categories early in the data analysis process, but I deduced four themes with numerous subcategories (Creswell & Poth, 2023). First and foremost, I sought to construct themes that closely align with the data collected. Additionally, I hoped these themes would be general enough to be applied to the support experience of adjunct faculty outside the site selected so the study would be general enough to apply to other colleges. Something else that reduced the number of categories is the fact that data fit into one category only. “If exactly the same unit of data can be placed into more than one category, more conceptual work is needed to refine your categories” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 212). Something else the table of categories told me was whether the data collected provides an ample response to the research question or whether additional data needed to be collected to develop a sound understanding of the phenomenon.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was a widely used qualitative research method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns, themes, and meanings within a dataset (Bazeley, 2021). Thematic analysis involves systematically coding the data to identify recurring themes or patterns, which are then organized and interpreted to provide insights into the phenomenon being studied. Thematic analysis offers a flexible and accessible approach to data analysis, making thematic analysis particularly suitable for phenomenological studies focused on understanding the lived experiences of individuals (Bazeley, 2021). Furthermore, thematic analysis allowed me to identify recurring themes that are relevant to adjunct faculty members at a multi-campus

community college, which allowed me to uncover the essence of their support experience in that role. These similarities within the data allowed for generalizations that likely apply to the support experience of other adjunct faculty at the site selected, other multi-campus community colleges, or other colleges. Researchers debate whether phenomenological research is generalizable (Saldaña, 2011). I will allow readers to determine whether my findings can be transferred to their circumstances rather than impose or ignore the possibility from my perspective.

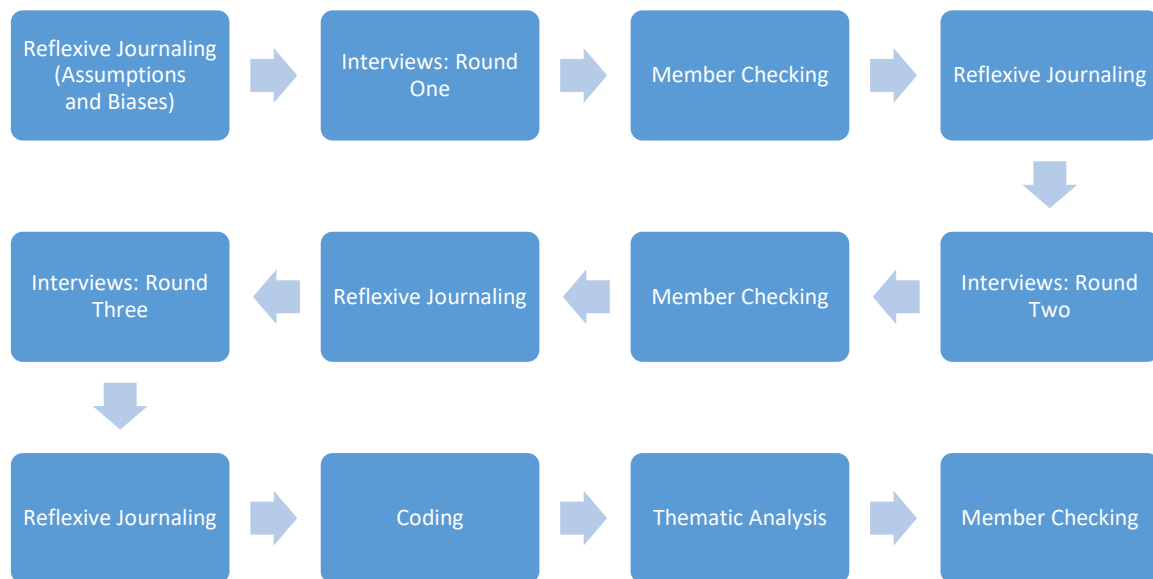
The process of coding to construct categories or themes was continuous with themes evolving as new data was collected (Saldaña, 2011). To guard against my own assumptions and biases and ensure the themes took shape in a manner consistent with the data collected, I continuously questioned and challenged my interpretations by asking myself the following questions posed by Merriam & Tisdell (2015):

- “What does this remind me of?” (p. 198)
- “What might you be projecting onto the data based on your own beliefs and life experience?” (p. 208)

In addition to challenging my assumptions and biases, I challenged my interpretations through member checking. I asked participants what they think about possible patterns or themes I was beginning to detect in the data while continuing to interview for greater depth and understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

I identified numerous analytical tools well suited to answer the research question with depth. I used reflective journaling and coding to construct categories and analytic memos to tease out themes from the data. In conjunction with the methods of data collection, these methods of data analysis made for a rigorous process that reveals new insights about the phenomenon.

Figure 3.1. Step-by-Step Data Collection & Analysis Process



The visual representation in Figure 3.1 illustrates the iterative and reflective nature of the data collection and analysis process used in the study. Each step was intentionally designed to ensure that the voices of adjunct faculty were authentically captured and meaningfully interpreted. The process was not linear but cyclical, with each round of data collection informing subsequent analysis and vice versa. This recursive approach allowed for the refinement of emerging themes and ensured that the analysis remained grounded in participants' lived experiences. By integrating reflective journaling, analytic memoing, and member checking throughout the process, I was able to maintain a high level of analytical rigor and transparency. These strategies not only enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings but also aligned with the phenomenological commitment to understanding the essence of participants' experiences from their own perspectives.

Alignment with the Methodological Approach

The goal of my analysis was “to present a description of essential themes from an experience in a way that is comprehensible and identifiable to anyone who has had that particular experience” (Peoples, 2020, p.58). I analyzed the data by taking a whole-part-whole approach (Vagle, 2018). “Analysis means to ‘break into parts’, whereas phenomenological inquiry seeks to understand a phenomenon as a whole” (Peoples, 2020, p. 57). Explication is a phenomenological term that refers to an analysis of the participants of a lived experience while keeping the context of the whole phenomenon (Hycner, 1985). I thoroughly read the interviews, journal, and wrote analytic memos to gain a sense of the breadth and depth of the data collected as a whole. My initial analysis of the whole data set helped me grasp overarching meanings that emerge. Then, I proceeded to examine the individual parts (sections of interview transcripts, journaling, and analytic memos) in more depth. Analyzing the individual parts allowed me to explore the nuances and intricacies that are unique to each participant’s lived experiences and perspectives.

At the conclusion of my analysis, the data collected consists of central themes supported by specific examples from interviews including direct quotes from the participants to provide a rich understanding of their lived experiences. The depth of insight achieved would not be possible without first reflecting on the interviews and my interpretations as a whole at the beginning of the whole-part-whole process. Those initial analyses helped form follow-up questions for secondary interviews and allow me to think about research differently than my natural tendency based upon preconceived assumptions and biases so I could strive for great attention to detail through the analysis process ensuring my interpretations did not alter the meanings of the data collected. If concrete interpretations have not been obtained, I followed-up with the participant(s) for clarification during secondary interviews rather than assume I knew

what the participant meant (Peoples, 2020). I was able to identify concrete interpretations by connecting them to a direct quote from a participant or a consensus among multiple participants.

Using Analytical Software

While qualitative data analysis software offers certain conveniences, recognizing the limitations of analytical software, especially in the context of phenomenological research is important. “Although qualitative data analysis software can make some qualitative data analysis easier, phenomenological studies do not fall in this category” (Peoples, 2020, p. 66). Qualitative data analysis software can compromise the richness of participants’ lived experiences by oversimplifying the data. Furthermore, these software applications lack interpretive depth and contextual understanding. Instead, they rely on algorithms imposing pre-determined structures or frameworks on the data, reducing flexibility, introducing another layer of bias, and limiting the exploration of new insights and unexpected patterns. In other words, the software causes researchers to have a more mechanistic experience with the data (Vagle, 2018).

Richness and flexibility are two of the most highly sought characteristics in phenomenological studies. Phenomenologists are encouraged to dwell on the lived experiences of their participants to capture the essence of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). When researchers use qualitative data analysis software, the richness and meaning gathered from intimate interactions with the participants’ lived experience can be lost (Peoples, 2020).

My use of software to analyze data was limited to Microsoft Word. Microsoft Word has a plethora of features useful for coding and categorizing data. I highlighted text using different colors that signify different things to be determined throughout the analysis process. Similarly, I manipulated the font color and style as well as underline text to make some data stand out as

more relevant for various reasons. I used the margins to collect comments and codes with the codes evolving into themes (Saldaña, 2011).

There are benefits to using a simple tool, like Microsoft Word in lieu of the more sophisticated data analysis software, to interact with the data, but that approach is not without its challenges and limitations. For starters, Microsoft Word has a plethora of valuable features to replace many of those found in more sophisticated data analysis software, but Microsoft Word lacks the advanced features that make NVivo and others so much more valuable. The decision to forgo using analytical software could cause me to miss something in the data analysis process that NVivo might have brought to my attention. Another feature promoted by more sophisticated data analysis software is the ability to visualize data through charts, graphs, and matrices. Again, the analytical software would have presented me with a different way of looking at the data that might reveal something that is never uncovered without those tools. Despite the volume and complexity of the data, using a straightforward tool like Microsoft Word was manageable. Its simplicity allowed me to focus on the data with a more hands-on approach, which aligned well with the iterative and reflective nature of thematic analysis, making more sophisticated software like NVivo unnecessary for the study. Relying on my own interpretations, rather than those coming from sophisticated analytical software, is what interpretative phenomenology is all about.

Transparent Reporting

When analyzing and sharing data the findings must reflect the lived experiences of participants without guiding the findings to ensure the data depicts what the researcher wants to convey. Instead, researchers must strive for accuracy and completeness. Making a conscious

effort to ensure the entire research process is handled above reproach should result in more valid and reliable data.

I transparently reported the methodological process including data collection procedures and analysis techniques ensuring the research is trustworthy and credible so my research can be replicated by others. After each interview, the participants had an opportunity to review a transcript of their interview to confirm accuracy or clarify responses as necessary. Also, participants had an opportunity to review the findings as written up by the researcher to ensure participants were comfortable with the results and confirm their experiences are not misrepresented in any way.

Like the transparency associated with the data analysis process, I aimed to report my findings transparently by including everything that spoke to the research question rather than selectively choosing from the data what I think should be included. Also, participants had an opportunity to review the findings as written up by the researcher to ensure participants are comfortable with the results and confirm their narratives are not misrepresented in any way.

Ethical Considerations

When addressing ethical considerations, emphasizing respect for participants and the information they divulge is important. Safeguarding personal information from unauthorized access is paramount. Equally important is secure data management and storage, which involves implementing robust measures to protect data integrity and privacy. Autonomy and cultural sensitivity are necessary to ensure individual rights and diverse backgrounds are honored. These principles collectively foster trust between the researcher and participants as well as integrity throughout the research process.

Respect for Autonomy and Cultural Sensitivity

I reflexively acknowledged my biases, assumptions, and preconceptions that may influence the research process, and tried to set aside those biases, assumptions, and preconceptions, so they did not influence responses or alter the data collected. I refrained from commenting on participant responses or adding my commentary. Withholding my perspective limited my influence on participant responses to ensure their responses are authentic rather than compromised by my perspective. I was sensitive to the diverse perspectives shared by participants with unique experiences. Although the lens in which I view the research and interpret the data is a factor in the study, I refrained from imposing my perspectives on their lived experiences.

Confidentiality

I maintained strict protocols for the handling of data to protect the identity of participants. As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom so I could record the interviews. Recording interviews presented some ethical considerations to protect the data shared by participants. A form of protection against participants' identities being shared with readers is using pseudonyms. These pseudonyms are used in all files including transcripts, journals, and memos. Participants were required to have their entire face present for the duration of the interview recording, so body language could be interpreted and used for future data collection purposes. However, participants were invited to change their screen names to the pseudonym of their choosing before the recording begins.

In addition to the previously mentioned confidentiality measures, I strived to maximize the benefits of the research while minimizing the likelihood of harm to participants by sharing with them the interview questions prior to the interview and reminded them participation is not

required but greatly appreciated. I strived to create an environment whereby all participants were comfortable speaking freely to ensure the quality of data collected is most beneficial to the findings as well as readers who might be able to benefit from the findings in their personal circumstances. At no point in time did I observe emotional distress from the participant.

Data Management and Storage

When collecting and storing data, researchers must take measures to protect participants' identity and be sensitive to participants' lived experiences. I stored all electronic files on a password-protected computer and external hard drive locked in a safe that is only accessible to me. All files related to the study will be deleted once I have published my dissertation.

As previously mentioned, data was collected by conducting virtual interviews via Zoom, which allowed me to audio and video record the interviews. The rationale for recording interviews was to transcribe the interviews into written text, listen to recordings to analyze the participants' tone of voice and words used, watch the recordings to analyze the non-verbal communication displayed by participants, and allow me the opportunity to focus on the participant during the interview rather than take copious notes. Additionally, the recorded interviews allowed me to pause recordings to journal and memo.

Transcribing Interviews

Rather than contract someone else to transcribe interviews, I personally transcribed each interview with the assistance of Zoom auto transcription. The auto transcription feature in Zoom saved me a considerable amount of time, but required substantial cleaning of the transcripts, so I read the transcript immediately following each interview while the participant's responses were most clearly on my mind. I did not begin analyzing transcripts for anything other than accuracy. I shared each transcript with the respective participant for member checking. My initial interaction

with the data did not include notetaking or highlighting the data. Reading the entire transcription without dissecting it was an integral part of the whole-part-whole approach (Vagle, 2018) to verify the data collected was accurate before developing a more in-depth understanding of that participant's lived experience as a whole. I recognized the transcription process required a considerable amount of time, but Peoples (2020) suggests learning from these initial interactions with the data can strengthen future data collection and thus findings that come from your research.

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. The study employed multiple strategies to enhance trustworthiness throughout the research process, consistent with the standards of phenomenological inquiry and qualitative rigor.

Credibility

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and reflexive journaling. Multiple rounds of interviews allowed for deeper exploration of participants' lived experiences and the opportunity to clarify and expand upon earlier responses. Member checking was conducted at two critical stages: after transcribing interviews and interpretation of findings. Participants were invited to review their transcripts for accuracy and to provide feedback on the thematic interpretations to ensure their experiences were authentically represented.

Reflexive journaling was used throughout the data collection and analysis process to bracket the researcher's assumptions and biases. The practice of reflexive journaling helped maintain a focus on participants' perspectives and supported the interpretive phenomenological

approach. Journaling also served as a tool for analytic memoing and theme development, contributing to the depth and authenticity of the findings.

Transferability

Although the findings are context-specific to adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college, transferability was supported through rich descriptions of participants' experiences and institutional context. Participant profiles, direct quotes, and comprehensive thematic narratives allow readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings. The diversity of participants in terms of campus location, academic discipline, years of service, and demographic background further enhances the potential for transferability.

Dependability

Dependability was addressed through a clearly defined and consistently applied research design. A step-by-step data analysis process was followed, including transcription, open and analytical coding, category construction, and thematic synthesis. The use of a whole-part-whole approach ensured that individual experiences were interpreted within the broader context of the phenomenon. An audit trail was maintained through detailed documentation of coding decisions, analytic memos, and methodological reflections, allowing for replication and review by other researchers.

Confirmability

Confirmability was ensured using bracketing, member checking, and transparent reporting. The researcher's positionality and potential biases were acknowledged and addressed through reflective journaling and analytic memoing. All interpretations were grounded in the data, supported by direct quotes from participants, and reviewed by participants for accuracy.

The use of pseudonyms and secure data storage protocols further protected the integrity of the data and the anonymity of participants.

Chapter Summary

The study advances our understanding of the support experience adjunct faculty receive from their perspective, and I bracketed my biases and assumptions to ensure my positionality did not influence the participants lived experience as they described it. The site selected for the study included an abundance of qualified participants. Furthermore, the candidate pool allowed me to select a diverse (i.e., campus, discipline, years of experience as an adjunct faculty, gender, and ethnicity) group of participants. To increase the likelihood eligible adjunct faculty participated, I clearly communicated what the data collection process entails and assured them I would protect all data collected to ensure complete anonymity. Multiple rounds of interviews produced an abundance of data to be analyzed. I used thematic analysis, journaling, transcribing, member checking, coding, constructing categories and analytic memos to ensure accuracy of interpretations as well as quality of findings extracted.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter begins by introducing the participants whose diverse backgrounds and teaching contexts provide a rich foundation for understanding the adjunct experience. Through their voices and thorough analysis, the findings tell a story of four common themes that emerged: communication, isolation, integration, and recognition. By weaving participant narratives with these themes, the chapter aims to illuminate not only the barriers adjunct faculty face but also the opportunities for colleges to foster equity, belonging, and sustainable support.

Participant Profiles

Eleven adjunct faculty teaching in the humanities and social sciences divisions at four campuses serving urban, suburban, and rural students in-person, virtually, and online within a community college system participated in the study. The participant group included adjunct faculty who have been teaching part-time for two to 25-plus years, and all participants met the following participant eligibility requirements:

- Currently teaching nine or fewer credit hours per semester at the site selected
- Demographically diverse (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity)
- Assigned to various academic disciplines excluding Business
- Diverse in their lengths of service teaching at the site selected, but no less than two years
- Teaching at unique locations to ensure all five campuses are represented in the study

The following participant descriptions accurately represent each individual, but they have been assigned a pseudonym to protect identities.

Elias

Elias is the kind of educator whose impact is felt more in the quiet moments than in grand gestures. He teaches not for accolades or recognition, but because he believes deeply in the transformative power of learning. “Learning changes lives, and I want to be a part of the that,” Elias expressed. Elias brings a creative lens to his teaching, one that values problem-solving, personal expression, and the spark of discovery. He has taught for decades, first in person, now mostly online, and while the modality has changed, his commitment has not. Elias is meticulous, thorough, and deeply invested in his students. He reads every discussion post, provides detailed feedback, and celebrates small victories. His students often tell him he is the first instructor who has ever really seen them, who has taken the time to respond thoughtfully. He saves those messages, returning to them when the work feels heavy.

But Elias is also tired. Not of teaching, but of being overlooked. He has been with his institution for over a decade, yet milestones pass without acknowledgment. No raise. No note. No swag. “Send me a hat,” he jokes, but the sting is real. “I’ve taught here for 12 years and never received a thank you note,” Elias reflected. He has seen full-time faculty receive bonuses and recognition while adjuncts like him get a fraction or nothing at all. He has asked for clearer policies, better communication, and a chance to give feedback without fear. Often, he is met with silence. Still, Elias persists. He adapts. He lightens grading when the workload becomes unreasonable. “I don’t want students to suffer because the system is overloaded,” explained Elias. He advocates for students, especially those from diverse backgrounds or facing personal struggles. He uses the systems in place, even when it feels ineffective, because he wants to do right by his students. He believes in education as a conduit out of poverty, and he tells his students so. “Go for it!” he said. “Don’t be diminished.”

Elias does not seek perfection, but he does expect respect. He wants to be part of a system that values adjunct faculty not just in words, but in action. “Words are nice, but I need to see change. I need to feel valued, expressed Elias. He wants to be heard, to be seen, to be supported. And through it all, he continues to teach, because despite everything, he still believes in the work.

Clara

Clara is the kind of educator who carries her experience like a well-worn satchel filled with stories, tools, and a quiet resilience. She has taught in classrooms and online, in community colleges and universities, to adults and to high school students earning college credit. Her journey is not linear, but it is rich, woven with decades of teaching, mentoring, and learning. Clara finds joy in helping students discover their voice, especially where fear often overshadows potential. She watches them grow from hesitant to confident, and that transformation fuels her. “I love seeing progress,” she said, “when they realize, ‘I can do this.’”

But Clara's path as an adjunct faculty is not without its challenges. She juggles multiple institutions, each with its own systems, platforms, and expectations. One semester, she is teaching asynchronously to students halfway across the country using a seven-year-old course shell she did not design. Another, she is navigating a classroom filled with high school students who do not yet understand the expectations of college. “It’s like switching languages every semester,” described Clara. She adapts, she learns, she leans on IT support and mentors, but everything about her experience is exhausting, but the feeling of exhaustion could be minimized with a greater sense of community. As an adjunct, she often feels like she is teaching in isolation. There is no lounge to swap ideas, no regular meetings to share frustrations or successes. She longs for orientation events, professional development workshops, and simple opportunities to

meet other instructors, especially those teaching the same courses. “I wish I had someone to bounce ideas off. Just to ask, ‘How did you handle this?’” said Clara. “Sometimes I feel like I’m the only one navigating this maze,” she continued. Despite the lack of structure, Clara creates her own systems. She organizes her materials in separate bags for each institution. She builds checklists to stay on top of grading, announcements, and compliance training. She reaches out to librarians, secretaries, and mentors, forging relationships where she can. She is not afraid to ask questions, and she is grateful when someone takes the time to walk her through a process or offer feedback.

Clara’s evaluations, when they happen, are meaningful. She values constructive feedback and wishes the evaluation was earlier in the semester, when she could apply it. She is not looking for praise; she is looking to grow. “Tell me what I can do better while I still have time to do it,” exclaimed Clara. And when students tell her she made a difference, she saves those notes. “You made me feel like I belong at the college,” she said with appreciation. They remind her why she keeps showing up. She does not complain about pay, though she knows it is inequitable. She does not expect the perks of full-time faculty, but she does hope for recognition. “Even a simple ‘thank you’ would mean the world,” recognized Clara. A sense that someone sees her work and values it. Clara is not bitter. She is hopeful. She believes in education, in students, in the power of communication. She is not asking for much, just connection, clarity, and a little more kindness. And through it all, she continues to teach with grace, adaptability, and a deep commitment to her students.

Silas

Silas is not new to education. He has served the education sector in many unique roles including student services, counseling, teaching, and even growing up in the halls of a

community college where his mother taught for decades. His journey into adjunct instruction was not planned, it was born out of resilience, opportunity, and a deep desire to stay connected to the world of higher education. “I didn’t plan to teach, but I couldn’t imagine being far from education,” Silas reflected.

Silas does not pretend being an adjunct instructor is easy. He is honest about the challenges, the frustrations, and the institutional quirks that make adjuncting feel like a maze with no map. Also, he is honest about why he does it: the money helps, the work matters, and the connection to students keeps him grounded in his passion. “It’s not glamorous, but it’s meaningful. That’s why I stay,” Silas said.

Silas is the kind of instructor who sees his students as whole people. He is flexible, empathetic, and fiercely protective of their dignity. When a student disclosed an abusive situation, Silas did not just refer her to support services, he adjusted deadlines, offered grace, and made sure she felt safe. “I’m not going to give you zeros and make one more thing in your life chaotic,” he said. That is Silas. He knows his lane, and he uses it to make a difference. But Silas also knows the system is not built for adjunct faculty. He has taught at multiple institutions and seen how onboarding, mentorship, and communication vary wildly. At one school, he was welcomed with training, support, and clarity. At another school, he was left to figure things out alone, no guidance, no mentorship, just a shell course and a warning not to change anything. “I didn’t even know what I didn’t know,” he said. “One school made me feel like a colleague. Another made me feel invisible,” Silas recalled when talking about the onboarding experience. He is vocal about what needs to change. He wants better onboarding, clearer communication, and real mentorship, not just a name on an email, but someone who checks in, offers advice, and helps navigate the complexities of teaching. He is tired of being told to “own the course” when

he did not design it, and he is frustrated by the lack of transparency around pay, expectations, and support. “How can I own something I had no hand in building?” asked Silas.

Silas is tech-savvy, but even he struggles with the integration of eBooks, LMS platforms, and proctoring tools. He is not afraid to say when something does not make sense, and he is not afraid to suggest a better way. “Why do we make students buy a \$150 eBook when they don’t understand it’s required for assignments? Why do we make instructors manually link everything when it could be done automatically? We could fix half of this with a better design and clearer instructions,” Silas proposed. Despite the barriers, Silas keeps showing up. He grades after 8:00 PM., juggles multiple roles, and advocates for his students and himself. He does not read student evaluations, not because he does not care, but because he knows his own limits. “If there is a problem, I expect someone to tell me. Otherwise, I am doing my best. I care deeply, but I also have to protect my energy,” said Silas.

Silas is not just an adjunct instructor. He is a systems thinker, a student advocate, and a voice for change. He is not asking for perfection, just progress. “We don’t need miracles. We need consistency, respect and a seat at the table,” claimed Silas. He wants adjunct faculty to be seen, supported, and valued. And through his transparency, tenacity, and thoughtful critique, he is helping pave the way for a better experience for himself, his peers, and the students he serves.

Vivienne

Vivienne walks the halls of her campus with a quiet grace. She is not one to demand attention, but her presence is steady, reliable, and deeply rooted in a love for teaching. After 32 years in public education, she could have stepped away entirely, but instead, she chose to keep going, to keep giving, to keep sharing her passion with students. “I’m not done yet. There’s still joy in the classroom,” Vivienne reflected fondly. For Vivienne, the joy is in the moment when a

student's mind opens, when they wrestle with the problem of other minds or grapple with moral dilemmas. She reads their journals with care, not just for grammar or structure, but for insight, for growth, for the spark of curiosity. But Vivienne's experience as an adjunct is marked by a quiet kind of isolation. She is not bitter, just observant. She notices when she is not included in departmental emails, when she is left off the invite list for campus events, when she walks into the adjunct workspace and no one knows her name. "Sometimes I wonder if they even know I'm here," said Vivienne. She is not asking for awards or recognition. She is asking to be seen. "I don't mind being called adjunct," she said. "I just want to be acknowledged when I'm doing a good job." A passing word of encouragement, a note from a colleague saying a student spoke highly of her, these small gestures would mean the world. She does not need a seat at every meeting, but she would like to know what is going on. She would like to feel like part of the team. "Even a monthly update would help me feel connected," she shared.

Vivienne's onboarding was functional, but impersonal. She got the syllabus, the textbook, and the classroom, but no introduction to her peers, no orientation to the systems and processes unique to the college. She figured things out, because she is resourceful. "I didn't meet another instructor until mid-semester," Vivienne recalled. But she wonders why navigating the process of teaching part-time could not have been easier. Why not a simple video explaining how to submit grades, how to handle accommodations, how to navigate the technology? "A short video could save hours of confusion," Vivienne suggested. She is not asking for much. A Zoom meeting with other instructors across campuses. A shared space to talk about textbooks, teaching methods, and classroom challenges. A liaison who understands the adjunct experience and advocates for inclusion. A system that does not decide for her what information she should or

should not receive. “We need someone who knows what it’s like to teach part-time,” Vivienne stressed.

Vivienne is retired, but she is not done. She still volunteers, still watches her grandkids, still shows up to teach with intention and care. “Teaching keeps me sharp and connected,” she said with an upbeat tone. She does not need MCC to be perfect. She just wants the adjunct faculty experience to be a little more human.

Jasper

Jasper’s journey into teaching was not linear, it was lived. Her journey was shaped by advocacy, emergency response, parenthood, illness, and a deep-rooted love for communication. She began her career in the classroom, left the classroom to for a different career, and returned years later with a renewed sense of purpose. Her story is one of resilience, adaptability, and a fierce commitment to helping others find their voice. “Coming back to teaching felt like coming home with new tools and deeper purpose,” reflected Jasper. Her classroom is a space of high expectations and clear boundaries. She does not cater to the 20% who push limits, she sets the bar and invites students to rise to it. “You have to complete four assignments to pass,” she tells them. “If you miss one, you need to drop the course.” It is not harsh, it is honest. And it is rooted in a belief that structure and accountability lead to growth.

Jasper’s return to teaching was met with challenges. The world had changed. LMS platforms were now central to instruction, and she had to learn them on her own. Canva, Google Slides, Brightspace, she dove in, but she wishes there had been more support. “I would love a centralized place to learn these tools. Not just links to videos, but real training. I spent hours figuring out things that could’ve been explained in minutes,” suggested Jasper. Despite the hurdles, Jasper thrives. She is deeply engaged with her department, volunteers at campus events,

and builds strong relationships with support staff. Her admiration for the administrative assistant and custodial team is palpable. “They’re invested in making sure the environment is great for you,” she said. “They drop everything to help.” She is also a champion for adjunct faculty. She believes in tiered benefits, consistent onboarding, and community-building. “I teach full-time loads,” she said. “But I get part-time pay.” She advocates for retirement access, health insurance, and recognition for longevity. She is not asking for handouts, she is asking for fairness. “I’m not asking for more than what’s right, I’m asking for what’s overdue,” claimed Jasper.

Jasper's teaching philosophy is grounded in practicality and empathy. She balances technology with human connection, adapts her assignments to her grading capacity, and encourages students to take responsibility. She is not just teaching content, she is modeling life skills. Her story is a testament to the power of returning to what you love, even after life takes you elsewhere. Jasper is more than an adjunct instructor. She is a mentor, a leader, and a voice for change.

Penny

Penny is not just an adjunct instructor, she is a seasoned educator, a former administrator, a grant writer, and a lifelong learner. Her journey into teaching began decades ago, and her return to the classroom in retirement is not a retreat, but a deliberate choice to continue making a difference. “Retirement didn’t mean stepping back, it meant stepping into what I love most,” Penny stated. Her students are diverse, ethnically, culturally, and experientially. Penny views the uniqueness of her students as a strength, not a challenge. She has encountered students in hijabs, students observing Ramadan, students navigating international time zones, and students overwhelmed by life. She meets each one with respect and clarity, setting firm expectations while offering grace. “I tell them, you can do this,” she said. “But you need to hang in there.”

Penny's teaching philosophy is rooted in structure and intentionality. She believes in clear instructions, consistent communication, and high standards. She is meticulous about formatting assignments, creating bullet-pointed checklists, and crafting respectful announcements. She is not just teaching content, she is modeling professionalism, cultural sensitivity, and resilience. "Clarity isn't just helpful, it's respectful," suggested Penny. But Penny also sees the cracks in the system. She is candid about the challenges of onboarding, the lack of early feedback, and the isolation of adjunct faculty. "I didn't even know where I was teaching until I showed up at orientation. I had the syllabus ready, but no idea where the classroom was," she recalls. She wishes someone had looked at her course after the first semester, not two years later. She wishes she had a mentor, someone to say, "Here are three videos you need to watch," or "Did you know you could use rubrics this way?" Her suggestions are practical and visionary. She advocates for an Adjunct Academy, complete with certificates, t-shirts, bumper stickers, and structured mentorship. She believes in intentional touchpoints, not just emails, but personal invitations, Zoom sessions, and thematic gatherings. She wants adjunct faculty to feel like part of the institution, not just a name on a roster. "We don't need perks, we need presence," she stressed.

Penny's insights go beyond her own experience. She thinks like an administrator, asking, "What kind of relationship does MCC want with its adjuncts?" She sees the value in data, evaluations, and feedback loops. She believes in aligning professional development with institutional mission, not just personal interest. And she is not afraid to say, "We need to be more intentional." Despite the challenges, Penny is deeply committed. She is passionate about the college's mission and the students the college serves. She is proud to be part of a college that offers opportunity, access, and transformation. And she is eager to keep learning, improving, and

contributing. Penny is more than an adjunct. She is a strategist, a mentor, and a voice for thoughtful change. Her story is a reminder that great teaching is not just about content, great teaching is about connection, clarity, and care.

Milo

Milo did not take the traditional path into academia. His journey is one of creativity, adaptability, and a deep appreciation for the power of education. When he finally entered college at 24, he brought with him a wealth of life experience, and now, as an adjunct instructor, he brings that same depth to his students. “I didn’t start early, but I started ready with stories, struggles, and perspective,” said when reflecting on his college experience.

Milo does not just teach concepts, he shows students how those ideas play out in the real world. He makes learning tangible. His students respond to that authenticity. They see someone who has lived the lessons he teaches. Milo’s approach to teaching is grounded in empathy and engagement. He understands the pressures his students face, many of them juggling school, work, and personal challenges. He is not maternal, but he is deeply compassionate. He sets clear expectations, encourages accountability, and offers support without judgment. “You don’t have to tell me your life story,” he said. “Just let me know something’s going on.” He is also a fierce advocate for mental health. Coming from Los Angeles, where therapy is normalized, Milo regularly encourages students to seek counseling. He talks about therapy openly, reframing it as a tool for success rather than a sign of weakness. “It’s like having a success coach,” he tells them. “We all need help sometimes.”

Milo’s experience as an adjunct has been overwhelmingly positive. He praises the support he has received from full-time faculty who have mentored him through syllabus design, classroom management, and student challenges. “They didn’t just hand me a syllabus, they

helped me shape my own,” said Milo gratefully. He has benefited from in-class evaluations, collaborative workshops, and informal conversations that have shaped his teaching philosophy. He has also found value in MCC’s support services. The writing studio and library labs are integral to his teaching. He brings his students to these spaces early in the semester, helping them build relationships with tutors and librarians. He sees these services not as extras, but as essential extensions of the classroom. “It’s like an all-inclusive cruise ship,” he tells his students. “Everything you need is here, you just have to use it.” Despite his success, Milo is aware of the limitations of adjunct life. He wishes there were clearer pathways to full-time positions and more opportunities to expand his teaching portfolio. He is curious about the multi-campus system but feels disconnected from it. “I don’t know what I don’t know. And I don’t know if I’m supposed to know. I want to grow here, but I don’t know what growth looks like,” he stressed. Still, Milo remains grateful. He is not bitter. He is not burned out. He is energized by the work, inspired by his students, and committed to growing as an educator. “Every class reminds me why I’m here. It’s not just a job, it’s a calling,” said Milo. His story is a testament to the value of creative experience, the importance of mentorship, and the power of showing up; fully, authentically, and with purpose.

Luna

Luna is a utility infielder in the world of academia; versatile, reliable, and quietly impactful. With multiple degrees and certifications, including two master's and a long career in consulting, she brings a wealth of experience to her role as an adjunct instructor. Teaching is not her primary job, but teaching is a passion she has carved space for in a life filled with professional commitments, family, and personal pursuits. “Teaching is my anchor, it keeps me connected to something meaningful,” claimed Luna. She teaches writing-intensive courses, often

asynchronously, and she is clear-eyed about the challenges. The workload is heavy, the deadlines are tight, and the grading is relentless. But Luna does not complain, she adapts. She wakes early, stays up late, and grades with care, always striving to give students feedback they can use. “I want to read what you think in your words,” she tells them. “If you need extra time, let me know.” Her teaching philosophy is rooted in empathy and realism. She understands her students because she lives a life much like theirs; juggling responsibilities, navigating deadlines, and trying to stay afloat. She is flexible with extensions, patient with confusion, and firm in her expectations. She is not interested in adversarial relationships; she wants students to succeed, and she is willing to meet them where they are. “I know what it’s like to be overwhelmed. That’s why I lead with grace,” Luna said.

Luna's experience as an adjunct is marked by both appreciation and invisibility. She feels supported by her department thanks to quick responses, helpful feedback, and a sense of belonging. But she also knows the limits of her role. She is not part of the hallway conversations, the coffee room chatter, or the spontaneous collaborations. She is remote, and that means she is often out of sight and sometimes out of mind. “I’m part of the team, but sometimes it feels like I’m on the bench,” Luna explained. She is pragmatic about recognition. Small gestures, such as a thermos, a snack box, a bookstore gift card, go a long way. She does not need a parade, but she does want to feel seen. “It’s like being a houseplant, you can overwater or underwater, but attention is good,” she said.

Luna is also thoughtful about institutional improvement. She sees the need for more frequent check-ins, better onboarding, and clearer communication. She believes adjunct faculty should be consulted, not just about teaching, but about broader institutional initiatives. “We have real-world experience,” she said. “We intersect with the issues you're wrestling with.” Her

insights on AI are particularly sharp. She is concerned about its impact on learning and assessment, and she advocates for more weight on discussion board responses places where students must engage authentically. She is not anti-technology; she is pro-learning. And she wants the institution to evolve with intention. Despite the challenges, Luna remains committed. She is not chasing tenure or prestige. She is here because she loves teaching, values education, and believes in the mission. “I teach because it matters, not because it’s easy,” she admitted. Her story is one of quiet excellence, a reminder that impact does not always come with a title, and that dedication often lives in the margins.

Jordan

Jordan has been teaching since 2012, but her journey as an adjunct instructor has been anything but straightforward. With multiple advanced degrees she brings intellectual depth and interdisciplinary insight to her classroom. But her story is not just about credentials; her story is about resilience, advocacy, and a relentless commitment to her students. “My students are who I work for,” she said. “They’re the only ones who see my work every day.” But Jordan's passion is tempered by frustration. She is candid about the challenges of adjunct life: low pay, lack of support, and systemic disregard. For years, she cobbled together a living by teaching eight classes across three campuses. Thousands of essays to grade, little time for meaningful feedback, and no space to meet with students privately. “Everything has to be streamlined at the expense of the student,” she said. “They deserve more.” Her experience during the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point. While full-time faculty received support and recognition, adjunct faculty were left out, excluded from the [named] Award, denied financial relief, and ignored when they voiced concerns. “It was a symbol of complete lack of concern,” she said. “We all had sick loved ones, kids out of school, stress, anxiety. But adjuncts got nothing.”

Jordan does not just critique, she proposes change. She advocates for redefining what it means to be an adjunct. Stop calling them “contingent,” she said. Treat them as faculty. Pay them fairly. Give them office space. Invite them to the table. “Be the change,” she urges. “Hire more full-time faculty. Stop exploiting part-time instructors.” She has seen what is possible. At another institution, she is treated with respect, invited to social outings, and referred to as faculty. The pay is lower, but the experience is better. “If I had to choose, I’d pick that school over this college,” she said. “Because of the way I’m treated.”

Jordan sets boundaries to protect her time and mental health. She only responds to emails during business hours, and she has learned to let go of unrealistic expectations. “I’m not trying to be the best professor anymore,” she said. “I’m doing this part-time for supplemental income. I love it, but I’ve had to let go of being good enough.” Her voice is clear, strong, and unapologetic. She is not bitter, she is honest. She is not angry, she is passionate. And she is not asking for praise, she is asking for change. “I love my job, but I’d love to love it more,” she said.

Jordan’s story is a reminder that behind every adjunct is a person juggling multiple roles, giving their all to students, and asking for dignity in return. Her experience is more than a critique, her experience might be a roadmap.

Morgan

Morgan has been teaching for over 25 years, but her story is not one of tenure or prestige, her story is one of grit, adaptability, and quiet excellence. She is what academia calls a “full-time adjunct,” a paradoxical title that reflects the reality of teaching part-time at multiple institutions to piece together a full-time income. Her dashboard has been her office, her car her conference room, and her resilience her constant companion. “I’ve graded papers in parking lots and prepped for lectures in my car. It’s not glamorous, but it’s reality,” Morgan recalled.

Morgan brings a unique interdisciplinary lens to her teaching. She has taught at the multi-campus community college for nearly two decades, and at other institutions as well. Her courses are rich with global perspectives, social relevance, and historical depth. She does not just teach her subject, she teaches students how to see the world differently. Her motivation is clear: she loves education, she loves her students, and she loves the material. “I’m not good at selling products, but I love selling ideas,” she said. She finds joy in the moments when students discover something new, when they connect the subject matter to social issues, when they realize that history is not so different from today. She is proud of the letters of recommendation she has written, the students she has helped get into college, and the feedback that keeps her going. “When a student gets into their dream school, I feel like I’ve done something that matters,” she exclaimed.

But Morgan's journey has not been easy. She has taught seven classes in a semester, managed hundreds of students, and worked seven days a week for years. She has faced burnout, financial strain, and the emotional toll of being undervalued. “I wouldn’t encourage anyone to go down the career path I did,” she admits. “It’s rewarding, but it was so hard.” She is candid about the challenges: inconsistent pay, lack of job security, unpaid training, and limited access to resources. She has had classes pulled without explanation, been asked to help redesign courses for free, and watched full-time faculty receive bonuses while adjunct faculty got nothing. “It was a huge financial hit,” she said. “I was pretty devastated.” Despite these setbacks, Morgan remains committed. She has adapted her teaching methods to manage the workload, shorter writing assignments, online quizzes, and more efficient grading. She has learned to take 24-hour breaks to avoid burnout, and she has found value in trainings on unconscious bias, neurodivergent students, and AI. She is grateful for the cost-of-living raises at the college and the support from

her immediate supervisors. “This campus has been the best. They’ve kept me employed when I lost classes elsewhere,” she said.

Morgan advocates for change, not just for herself, but for all adjunct faculty. She believes in seniority, recognition, and longer contracts. She wants institutions to understand that adjunct faculty are not hobbyists, they are professionals, often supporting families, often doing more with less. “Get to know us. We’re not just filling a role. We’re the ones keeping the restaurant running,” she said. Her story is one of endurance, but also of impact. Morgan has shaped minds, built bridges between past and present, and brought art to life for thousands of students. She is not asking for applause, she is asking for fairness. “I don’t need a trophy, I need a contract,” Morgan claimed.

Casey

Casey’s journey into teaching was not linear, her journey included a departure from the field before returning to the classroom. After starting college in the late 1970s, she paused to raise a family, then returned to complete three degrees. Her path reflects a deep commitment to learning and a belief in the transformative power of education. “I’ve never stopped learning. I just paused to raise a family, then came back stronger,” Casey recalled. Her motivation is rooted in student growth. She finds joy in watching students discover new ways of thinking, especially when they surprise themselves. “Helping students achieve something they didn’t think they could, that’s the most rewarding part,” she shares. Whether recommending a student for an award or seeing a lightbulb moment in class, Casey thrives on connection and transformation. “When I write a recommendation, I’m not just endorsing a student, I’m celebrating growth,” she recalled fondly. But she is also honest about the limitations of adjunct life. She wishes she could teach more focused courses aligned with her expertise. She values the autonomy she has, but longs for

more input in shaping curriculum and contributing to institutional decisions. “I’d love to have more influence,” she said, “but I also appreciate the distance from administrative burdens.”

Casey’s experience with onboarding was positive, she appreciated the training and the “playground” course that allowed her to explore without pressure. “The sandbox course gave me space to learn without fear of messing up,” Casey appreciated. Still, she sees room for improvement in ongoing support. She advocates for more interactive guidance, suggesting that Zoom calls or phone conversations would be more effective than email alone. “We pick up so much from tone and body language,” she notes. She also sees potential in building community among adjunct faculty. She envisions virtual meetings before each semester, recorded for those who cannot attend, and informal gatherings to foster camaraderie. “We come in, we teach, we leave,” she said. “It would be nice to connect.” Her ideas for professional development are creative and discipline specific. She believes these experiences would not only enrich instructors but also strengthen the connection between teaching and practice. “Let’s make development relevant, not just required,” she suggested.

Casey’s reflections on assessment are thoughtful. She questions whether current methods truly measure learning and suggests that instructors should use assessment data to adjust their teaching. “We should be developing our skills too,” she said. “Not just the students.” Despite limited interaction with full-time peers and administrators, Casey feels supported by IT staff and appreciates the resources the college provides. She is grateful for the flexibility her role offers, allowing her to balance teaching with her art practice. “I have the best of both worlds,” she said. Her story is one of purposeful presence of showing up with intention, teaching with heart, and advocating for growth. Casey does not just teach art; she teaches perspective. And her voice,

calm and clear, reminds us that support is not just about resources, support is about relationships, recognition, and respect. “Being seen and heard matters more than any handbook,” Casey stated.

Common Themes

Through a rigorous coding process, several interconnected areas of concern and aspiration were identified, reflecting the multifaceted nature of adjunct faculty roles. Table 4.1 presents a synthesis of all the common themes and subthemes that emerged from this study revealing a complex landscape of needs and challenges. These themes offer insight into both systemic issues and personal reflections.

Table 4.1. Common Themes and Subthemes

Common Themes	Subthemes
Communication	Navigating Ambiguity Chasing Answers Lost in the Noise The Limits of Email From Information to Engagement The Absence of Dialogue Beyond Updates, Building Trust
Isolated	Fragmented Spaces, Fractured Connections Disconnected in Spirit and Structure Emotions Beneath the Surface
Overwhelmed	Surviving, Not Thriving Navigating Complexity Without a Map From Flexibility to Fatigue The Double-Edged Sword of Technology
Recognition	The Need to Be Seen Recognition That Reaches Everyone From Swag to Significance The Absence of Intentional Acknowledgement Mixed Emotions of Being Seen Building Belonging Through Action

The themes and subthemes outlined in Table 4.1 reflect the layered and often interrelated dimensions of adjunct faculty experiences. Rather than presenting these themes in isolation, the

following sections delve into each one with attention to the voices and perspectives that shaped them. The first and most frequently referenced theme, Communication, serves as a foundation for understanding many of the challenges adjunct faculty face. It not only highlights logistical and structural barriers but also reveals deeper concerns about connection, clarity, and inclusion within the college system.

Communication

Communication is a key element in any organization. However, participants emphasized communication often becomes a source of confusion, disconnection, and frustration for adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. “I never know who to contact or when. It feels like I’m constantly guessing and hoping someone will respond,” said Elias. These faculty members, who play a critical role in delivering instruction across various campuses, frequently encounter fragmented and inconsistent communication. “I receive a lot of information at the beginning of the semester, and then nothing for weeks,” noted Casey. Participants described their experiences are often influenced by challenges such as unclear guidance, delayed responses, an overwhelming volume of messaging, and limited opportunities for meaningful two-way dialogue. “We’re expected to stay informed, but no one checks to see if we actually got the message or understood it,” explained Morgan. As a result, participants shared that adjunct faculty are left to navigate complex systems with less than desired support, which undermines both their effectiveness and sense of belonging. The common theme surrounding communications issues explores interconnected subthemes that reveal the multifaceted communication challenges adjunct faculty face, and the broader implications these issues have on their professional integration and well-being.

Navigating Ambiguity

At a multi-campus community college, adjunct faculty are essential to the institution's mission, teaching a significant portion of the student body, often across multiple locations. Yet, their organizational support experience, as described by adjunct faculty, is frequently marked by ambiguity, exclusion, and a lack of recognition. Silas shared a common challenge among adjunct faculty when he said, "Sometimes I forget who I'm really supposed to contact for what." With different departments, campuses, and administrative layers, adjunct faculty feel they lack a clear roadmap for support. Whether accessing teaching materials, resolving student issues, or understanding institutional policies, participants shared that the absence of a centralized or consistent point of contact leaves many feeling lost. Adjunct faculty often feel that communication is one-directional, focused on compliance or logistics, without any real dialogue about their needs, goals, or professional development. The result is adjunct faculty feeling the sense of being peripheral in structure and spirit.

In a system where messages are frequent but unfocused, adjunct faculty struggle to discern what is important. "We receive emails that have nothing to do with us or what we are teaching," explained Elias. For example, adjunct faculty who teach 100% asynchronous online, and never step foot on campus are required to complete slip, trip, and fall training. One participant shared that critical updates may be buried in long emails or shared inconsistently across campuses. "The [discipline] program coordinator sent me important dates in an email, but the email was so long and full of information I overlooked them," recalled Penny. Participants expressed the lack of prioritization and clarity contributes to stress and missed opportunities for engagement or support.

Chasing Answers

The difference between feeling supported and feeling adrift often comes down to when and how communication happens. While some adjunct faculty take the initiative to bridge the gaps, the burden of proactive communication often falls disproportionately on them. “I had to send a lot of emails and regularly stopped by to get the information I needed,” said Clara. Her experience illustrates the self-advocacy many adjunct faculty must adopt to navigate institutional systems. When communication from the college is delayed, inconsistent, or unclear, adjunct faculty expressed the need to chase down answers, often across multiple campuses and departments. While persistence can sometimes lead to positive outcomes, persistence can also underscore a broader concern. Participants suggested support systems should not rely solely on the assertiveness of adjunct faculty. When adjunct faculty are not informed about course expectations, changes, or available resources early on, lack of communication can unintentionally lead to confusion and stress among adjunct faculty. Clara expressed concern when she said, “I wish I would have known this person at the beginning of the semester.” Early connection with support staff or colleagues were suggested to have helped address student issues before they escalated. Unfortunately, participants communicated that adjunct faculty are often left to manage challenges alone without the benefit of timely guidance or collaboration.

Lost in the Noise

In the fast-paced, multi-layered environment of a multi-campus community college, communication is essential, but when communication becomes overwhelming, faculty described that some communication could hinder more than help. For adjunct faculty, who often juggle multiple roles and campuses, the volume and format of communication can be just as important as the content itself. “We receive a lot of emails. Sometimes it can be difficult to figure out if

they are relevant to me in my role as an adjunct teaching at [campus],” said Silas. His comment highlights well-intentioned but overwhelming communication. While the effort to keep adjunct faculty informed is appreciated, the delivery, often in the form of lengthy, dense emails, adjunct faculty noted these messages hinder their ability to identify what is most important compromising their support experience. Inboxes become cluttered, and critical information risks being overlooked.

“I often feel like we’re sent one giant/long email that’s often all-encompassing but still doesn’t always cover when we’re hit with a barrier,” Silas continued. His statement points to a pattern of information overload without practical support. Even comprehensive emails can fall short if they do not address the real-time challenges adjunct faculty face. Participants suggested massive, infrequent communication creates a false sense of coverage leaving gaps when unexpected issues arise. The result is a paradox. “It’s like drinking from a fire hose. So much information all at once, but somehow I still don’t have what I need when I need it,” claimed Clara. They may receive a flood of information at once, but lack the timely, targeted updates they need to navigate day-to-day teaching responsibilities.

The Limits of Email

To keep adjunct faculty informed, colleges often rely heavily on email as the primary mode of communication. Participants described their support experience as marked by well-intentioned but excessive communication, leading to communication saturation, a state where the volume and density of messages become overwhelming and compromise the effectiveness of meaningful support. “We do get emails from our [full-time discipline] contact, but I’m not gonna lie, they’re very long,” said Elias, reflecting a common experience among adjunct faculty. These emails, though packed with information, are often difficult to digest. When messages are lengthy

and infrequent, adjunct faculty may struggle to discern what is urgent and what is optional. The result as described by participants is often skimming, skipping, or saving for later, which may never come.

According to participants, even when emails attempt to be comprehensive, they frequently miss the mark in addressing the real-time, situational challenges adjunct faculty face. “I often feel like we're sent one giant, long email that's often all-encompassing but still doesn't always cover what we need,” said Silas. Without timely, targeted updates or responsive support, adjunct faculty are left to sift through dense messages that may not speak to their immediate needs. Faculty stated that communication does not always mean better communication. For adjunct faculty already managing heavy teaching loads, often across multiple campuses, long emails can feel like just another task, one that competes with their ability to focus on students and instruction.

From Information to Engagement

For adjunct faculty working across multiple campuses, the effectiveness of communication is not just about content, communication is about connection. The channels through which communication happened as described by participants could either foster clarity and inclusion or reinforce distance and disconnection. The findings suggest adjunct faculty have a desire for clear, designated points of contact, someone who understands the context and can serve as a consistent resource. In a multi-campus system, where adjunct faculty are not tied to a single department or location, according to participants, having a known and accessible contact person is essential for navigating institutional systems and building a sense of belonging. Adjunct faculty shared, they often lacked the informal, spontaneous interactions that full-time faculty enjoy, such as hallway chats, office drop-ins, or departmental gatherings.

Participants had a desire to connect with a designated person. Adjunct faculty want to be informed, not just through mass emails, but through direct, respectful dialogue when issues arise expressing a desire for more responsive and reciprocal communication. “If there’s an issue, I expect someone from administration to let me know and have a conversation,” said Silas. His expectation underscores the need for two-way communication that is not just about informing, but engaging. “I think guidance when I have an issue that I’m trying to figure out sometimes would be better served with a phone call or a Zoom than an email,” said Casey. While email is convenient, adjunct faculty did not always find email to be the best tool for problem-solving. Adjunct faculty prefer real-time communication (e.g., phone calls, Zoom meetings, or in-person chats) especially when navigating complex or sensitive issues. These channels allow for clarification and human connection they are seeking to feel included and be well-equipped for their students. Despite the convenience of digital tools, adjunct faculty stated a strong preference for in-person interaction. Participants felt like face-to-face communication built trust and reinforced the idea that they were valued members of the academic community, not merely names assigned to classes.

The Absence of Dialogue

The experience of teaching can often feel like working in a vacuum. Despite being part of a larger academic system, many adjunct faculty report feeling disconnected from the departments and people they serve alongside. “I love my chair and the director of my department, but it’s not like we ever sat down and went over what these classes are trying to fulfill,” said Morgan. Her perspective reflects a positive relationship without meaningful communication. Even when adjunct faculty feel warmly toward their supervisors, the lack of structured dialogue about course goals, departmental expectations, or student learning outcomes leaves them navigating their roles

with limited guidance. According to Milo, the result is a sense of professional isolation, where adjunct faculty are expected to deliver results without being fully integrated into the academic mission.

“I really don’t have much interaction with others. We don’t have any kind of conversation set up between us. Maybe that would be a good idea,” said Elias. His perspective highlights the absence of intentional communication structures. Without regular check-ins, mentorship, or collaborative spaces, adjunct faculty are left to operate independently, often without feedback, support, or a sense of belonging. The suggestion that “maybe that would be a good idea” points to neglect in creating systems that foster connection and inclusion. “Emails are not always the way to be warm and fuzzy,” continued Elias. His perspective underscores the emotional limitations of digital communication. While participants described email as efficient, they also said email lacked the warmth needed to build trust and community. For adjunct faculty, who may never set foot in a department office or attend a faculty meeting, email-only communication can feel cold, transactional, and prone to misunderstanding. “Sometimes the emails are impersonal, like I’m just a name on a distribution list. It’s easy for things to be misunderstood when there’s no real dialogue or context,” said Casey.

Beyond Updates, Building Trust

For adjunct faculty whose roles are often defined by semester-to-semester contracts and limited institutional integration, the desire for meaningful communication is not just about logistics, they mentioned meaningful communication giving them a sense of belonging, trust, and continuity. “I understand that this is a semester-to-semester business, but it would be nice for the adjuncts if [the college] said, we plan to do is...” said Luna when referring to a long-term outlook for staffing classes. Her perspective captures a fundamental need for a sense of direction

and inclusion. Even within the constraints of temporary contracts, adjunct faculty want to feel that they are part of a larger plan, that their work is valued, and that someone is thinking ahead on their behalf. Participants suggested that simple updates about future intentions can go a long way in building trust and reducing uncertainty. Adjunct faculty want to be able to ask questions, share concerns, and receive timely updates without feeling like they are navigating a maze. “I’d like to have more open lines of communication,” said Elias.

Summary of Communication

Participants suggest open communication is more than a preference, open communication is a foundation for professional respect and effective teaching. The communication challenges faced by adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college are logistical, social, and institutional. From unclear points of contact to overwhelming message volume and inadequate two-way engagement, adjunct faculty must frequently compensate for systemic shortcomings through personal persistence. However, their desire for clarity, inclusion, and connection remains strong. Participant insights point to the need for more intentional, timely, and human-centered communication practices that reflect the value of their contributions. Adjunct faculty feel that addressing these gaps is not only a matter of improving efficiency but also of fostering trust, reducing isolation, and strengthening the academic community as a whole. Through more responsive and structured communication systems, participants feel like colleges can better support adjunct faculty in their essential teaching roles.

Isolated

Adjunct faculty play a critical role in educating students across a range of disciplines and locations. Despite their contributions, adjunct faculty express a sense of disconnection from the colleges they serve. Such disconnection is described as emotional and structural, shaped by the

geographic, organizational, and cultural configurations of these colleges. From physical separation across campuses and buildings to the absence of professional networks and emotional support, adjunct faculty frequently noted that they navigate their roles in isolation. The following discussion explores interrelated subthemes to illuminate the pervasive yet often overlooked challenges adjunct faculty face.

Fragmented Spaces, Fractured Connections

The physical and organizational structure of a multi-campus community college can unintentionally foster isolation among adjunct faculty, who are often spread across various buildings, campuses, or even teaching remotely. Such geographic fragmentation shapes many adjunct faculty members' experiences. "We tend to only know people in our discipline or building," said Morgan. The absence of shared office spaces, common meeting areas, or cross-campus engagement further restricts opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and informal support. For new adjunct faculty, the lack of community building efforts has led to a deep sense of professional loneliness. While full-time faculty typically benefit from departmental meetings, mentorship, and professional development, adjunct faculty are sometimes intentionally or unintentionally excluded from these resources, despite having an equal or greater need for support. Although emails and remote sessions aim to keep adjunct faculty informed, these methods often feel impersonal and inadequate, leaving adjunct faculty feeling invisible and disconnected from the college they serve.

Disconnected in Spirit and Structure

Adjunct faculty often find themselves teaching in isolation. Despite sharing course content, student populations, and institutional goals, many participants expressed a profound lack of connection to the broader academic community. "I've never met the other [discipline] faculty

at [this campus]. It would be great to meet the [discipline] faculty on all of the campuses,” said Vivienne. Similarly, Jordan echoed, “I have none. I don’t even know who they are. I’ve literally never met them.” These perspectives reflect a deep yearning for disciplinary community.

Teaching philosophy, or any subject, can be intellectually rich and collaborative, but only when there are opportunities to engage with others in the field. Without those connections, adjunct faculty disclosed they miss out on shared insights, pedagogical support, and a sense of collective purpose.

For many adjunct faculty, there are no department meetings, no introductions, no shared spaces, just a syllabus, a classroom, and a short-term contract. The result is a sense of invisibility, where even the most basic collegial interactions are missing. “It’s very siloed,” described Luna. The term “siloed” conveys the structural nature of the disconnection. The feeling of disconnection is not a matter of chance, but a byproduct of how adjunct faculty roles are designed and supported. Without intentional efforts to foster cross-campus and intra-departmental relationships, adjunct faculty feel isolated, even when they are part of a large and diverse college.

Emotions Beneath the Surface

The experience of teaching is deeply emotional. Beneath the surface of syllabi and student rosters lies a quieter, often unspoken reality that is the psychological weight of working alone. “I know of no other adjuncts in my department,” claimed Luna. That simple statement speaks volumes. Adjunct faculty lack colleagues and feel invisible at times. When adjunct faculty do not know who else shares their role, their subject, or even their hallway, the isolation creates a sense of professional solitude. There is no one to exchange ideas with, no one to ask, “Is this normal?” or “How do you handle this?” Participants share that the absence of peer

connection can lead to self-doubt, emotional fatigue, and a diminished sense of belonging. “I’m not like, oh, perfect or 100% OK with it, but I’m 90% OK with it,” said Vivienne. That perspective reflects emotional compromise, a quiet resignation to the conditions of adjunct life. Participants intimated the lack of personal connection is not ideal, but the lack of connection is manageable. The “90% OK” feeling is common among adjunct faculty who have learned to adapt to lower expectations and to find satisfaction in the classroom even when institutional support is lacking.

Summary of Isolated

The experiences revealed by adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges are a systemic pattern of isolation that extends beyond mere logistics. Structural barriers limit physical proximity and access to shared spaces; organizational gaps prevent meaningful professional interaction; and the resulting emotional toll underscores a deeper issue of invisibility and marginalization. Participants stressed these challenges are not incidental, they are embedded in how adjunct roles are constructed and supported, and suggested addressing these patterns requires more than improved communication or scattered professional development. According to participants, creating meaningful professional connections demands intentional, institution-wide efforts to build inclusive academic communities.

Overwhelmed

Teaching as an adjunct faculty member in a multi-campus community college system presents a unique and often overwhelming set of challenges. While adjunct faculty are critical to higher education functioning, participants expressed their roles are frequently marked by instability, fragmented support, and disproportionate demands. The very structure of their work (e.g., spanning multiple campuses with unique ways of doing things) contributes to a persistent

sense of overload that affects not only their productivity, but also their mental and emotional well-being. The overarching theme of feeling overwhelmed is broken into subthemes that together paint a complex picture that is the adjunct faculty experience. Through their voices, we hear the reality of navigating an academic system that often demands more than the system supports.

Surviving, Not Thriving

For many adjunct faculty members, the experience of teaching at a multi-campus community college is marked not only by logistical complexity but by a persistent sense of mental and emotional strain. The demands of managing multiple courses, navigating institutional systems, and responding to students, often with limited support, is described as leading to a state of near-constant overload. “Adjuncts could use better support to do our jobs without feeling overwhelmed and burnout and all those negative stresses,” explained Morgan suggesting support systems are often reactive rather than preventative. Adjunct faculty are expected to perform at high levels while managing stressors that participants suggest full-time faculty may be shielded from, such as unclear expectations or lack of access to resources. Without intentional support, participants suggested that the risk of burnout morphs from possible to likely.

Feeling overwhelmed is not about a lack of motivation or professionalism, overload is about having the capacity to do all that is expected of adjunct faculty with limited resources. “Well, I mean if [the college] put something on there, then I’ll read it. But to be honest, I don’t really go beyond that and I’m not a slacker at all, but I just try to keep my head above water,” said Elias. His comment reflects the cognitive triage or sorting things out and organizing the mind that many adjunct faculty perform daily. When every hour is accounted for by grading,

prepping, commuting, or responding to students, participants echoed that there is little room left for optional engagement, even if participating might be beneficial. The phrase “keep my head above water” is telling. “It is not about thriving, it is about surviving,” suggested Morgan. Participants describe limitations to participating in professional development, engaging with colleagues, or even fully absorbing institutional communications based on their need to work elsewhere or lack of inclusion. These constraints contributed to feelings of disconnection from the college community and being unsupported in their roles.

Navigating Complexity Without a Map

Participants described the experience of navigating institutional systems as less like support and more like survival. While the intention behind administrative processes may be to ensure consistency and compliance, the reality is often overwhelming, especially for those who are part-time, new, or teaching across multiple campuses. “There’s just a lot of layers, and that is a bit overwhelming,” said Morgan. Her observation reflects a common sentiment among participants. Even when adjunct faculty are not directly involved in every layer of bureaucracy, the sheer complexity of the system creates a sense of distance and confusion. Participants stressed that the layers of approval, communication, and policy can make it difficult to know where to go for help or even what questions to ask.

Clara’s previous mention of “drinking through a fire hose” is applicable to the institutional burden adjunct faculty feel. Her vivid metaphor reflects the intensity of procedural communication. Participants expressed the need to absorb large amounts of information in a short time at orientation or training, with little opportunity for clarification or follow-up. The result is not just cognitive overload, but a feeling of being set up to miss something important. These burdens are compounded by the fact that adjunct faculty typically lack the institutional

memory or informal networks that help full-time faculty navigate these systems. Without clear guidance or streamlined processes, adjunct faculty suggested feeling detached from the very structures meant to support them.

From Flexibility to Fatigue

The rhythm of the semester is often dictated by relentless demands on time and energy. Many adjunct faculty described teaching loads that rival or exceed those of full-time faculty without the same compensation, support, or stability. “I don’t even feel like I could ethically tell you how many classes I teach in a semester. I think a lot of people assume that adjuncting is just like a hobby rather than the main income of a family,” explained Morgan when referring to teaching part-time at three different colleges. Her perception is perhaps the most damaging, because it reflects a systemic undervaluing of adjunct faculty, where their work is seen as supplemental rather than essential. Such assumption not only affects how adjunct faculty are treated, but also how they are supported by the institution.

Excessive teaching loads reveal the unsustainable behavior some adjunct faculty take on to provide for themselves and their dependents. Whether driven by financial necessity or institutional need, the result is described the same: exhaustion, diminished capacity for engagement, and a growing sense of invisibility within the academic system. “I feel like the workload for adjuncts is ridiculous. It’s too much even though I know that we have the freedom to change 10% of the curriculum,” said Elias. Even when small flexibilities are offered, like limited curricular autonomy, they often feel insufficient in the face of overwhelming responsibilities. The freedom to tweak a syllabus means little when adjunct faculty feel there is no time to reflect, revise, or innovate. Adjunct faculty described managing content, students, and logistics with what feels like little room to breathe.

For many adjunct faculty, teaching becomes a cycle of preparation and grading with little time for professional development, collaboration, or even rest. “This semester has been really difficult. I have done nothing but grade and prepare class materials,” said Clara. Adjunct faculty feel the emotional toll of constant output is rarely acknowledged, yet they stress that lofty expectations without acknowledgement shapes every aspect of the adjunct experience. Even the idea of shifting focus, whether to attend a meeting, explore a new teaching tool, or engage with institutional communication, was described as an impossible feat.

The Double-Edged Sword of Technology

For adjunct faculty navigating the demands of teaching across a multi-campus community college, technology was described as both a lifeline and a barrier. Learning management systems, grading platforms, communication tools, and institutional portals are essential to the job, but when support is lacking or attitudes are dismissive, these tools can become sources of stress and exclusion. “I do not like this person’s attitude because sometimes the technology is beyond me,” said Elias when describing assistance from technology support staff. His experience reveals more than just a technical challenge, his experience speaks to the emotional toll of feeling unsupported or dismissed. When adjunct faculty encounter unfamiliar systems or face technical difficulties, the response they receive matters. A condescending tone or lack of patience makes adjunct faculty feel a deep sense of inadequacy and isolation, especially for those who may already feel peripheral to the institution.

Technological barriers are not just about skill gaps, they are about access, training, and empathy. Some participants talked about the need to master complex systems with minimal onboarding, often outside of paid hours. When they reach out for help, they need more than instructions, they need understanding. In a multi-campus system, where adjunct faculty may

teach remotely or move between locations, tech fluency becomes a survival skill, but without consistent, respectful support, even the most dedicated instructors mentioned feeling overwhelmed and left behind.

Summary of Overwhelmed

The lived experiences of adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges reveal a system strained by its own complexity and lack of cohesive support. Participants communicated a high level of dedication and expertise. However, they also described feeling they needed to manage untenable workloads, navigate overwhelming systems, and function with limited institutional guidance. The result is described as a recurring cycle of burnout, disconnection, and emotional fatigue. If institutions truly value the contributions of adjunct faculty, participants stressed the need to move beyond surface-level fixes and implement systemic changes that prioritize clarity, respect, and sustainability. Participants suggested that intentional and empathetic support of adjunct faculty may better position them to thrive.

Recognition

In the complex and often impersonal environment of a multi-campus community college, adjunct faculty members routinely find themselves on the periphery of institutional life. Despite their essential contributions, they frequently experience a lack of recognition, both formal and informal, that affects not only their professional satisfaction but also their emotional well-being. For adjunct faculty, recognition is about being seen, valued, and included. Their desire for recognition will be explored through multiple dimensions of recognition that leave many adjunct faculty feeling invisible. Through their voices, it becomes clear that recognition is not a luxury. Recognition is a vital component of belonging, morale, and retention.

The Need to Be Seen

For adjunct faculty, recognition is about being seen. In the fast-paced, often impersonal environment of a multi-campus community college, adjunct faculty frequently operate on the margins of institutional life. Amid heavy teaching loads, limited resources, and minimal job security, participants shared that a simple acknowledgment can carry profound emotional weight. Morgan shared, “It would be nice to get a little e-mail from the chair saying, wow, you’ve been here 18 years. Congratulations and thank you!” After all, many adjunct faculty demonstrate the same long-term dedication as full-time faculty without benefits or recognition. A brief message of appreciation, especially after years of service, adjunct faculty feel can affirm that their contributions matter.

Recognition does not need to be elaborate. “Maybe just, I mean professional accolades, maybe. Just a little more for when you know anybody sees an adjunct doing a great job,” said Vivienne. Participants believe acknowledging excellence when it is observed, whether in teaching, mentoring, or innovation, can validate an adjunct faculty member’s professional identity and reinforce their sense of purpose. “I feel more welcomed when I’m seen as a person and a person that contributes to the [college] education environment,” Vivienne continued capturing the core emotional need for belonging. According to participants, recognition is not just about performance, recognition is about being valued as a human being, a colleague, and a contributor to the educational mission. “A general meeting once a year just to acknowledge that we exist and are appreciated,” suggested Vivienne. A once-a-year gathering can help counter the invisibility many adjunct faculty feel. These moments of acknowledgment signal, to adjunct faculty, inclusion in the broader academic community.

Tangible tokens, while small, can have a big impact. For example, they serve as symbols of institutional appreciation, helping adjunct faculty feel connected to the college's identity and culture. "Send me a [college] hat and a T-shirt. Tell me you value me," said Elias. "Just gives you a little bit of a lift that you know what... they do recognize me," added Vivienne when referring to subtle gestures of appreciation. Adjunct faculty suggest recognition does not have to be expensive to be meaningful. Kindness, warmth, and informal appreciation were mentioned as ways to lift morale.

Recognition is not just personal, recognition is cultural. "When you celebrate someone, it's important to be mindful of the positive impact that it has on others," said Elias. When institutions celebrate their adjunct faculty, they model respect and inclusion, setting a tone that resonates across departments and campuses.

Recognition that Reaches Everyone

Recognition in higher education can take many forms, from formal awards to subtle gestures of inclusion. For adjunct faculty, who often work across multiple campuses and with limited visibility, the type and source of recognition can significantly shape how valued they feel within the institution. Award ceremonies and honors are powerful symbols of appreciation, but they are often reserved for full-time faculty. Participants describe these moments can be both inspiring and alienating which raises the question posed by Morgan, "what should recognition look like for adjunct faculty? Acknowledging years of service, giving you first shots at scheduling, you know." Here, we see a more practical and policy-based form of recognition. Priority scheduling is not just a perk, priority scheduling is a meaningful acknowledgment of loyalty and contribution. When institutions embed recognition into operational decisions, adjunct faculty feel recognition sends a clear message that loyalty and seniority matter. Also, adjunct

faculty believe recognition must reach in-person and online adjunct faculty thus decreasing isolation and increasing inclusion. “It would be nice if adjuncts that teach online receive the same recognition as those teaching in-person,” said Elias. His perspective highlights a gap in inclusive recognition. Adjunct faculty who teach online may never set foot on campus, therefore, are especially vulnerable to being overlooked. As suggested by adjunct faculty teaching asynchronously only, ensuring that recognition reaches all adjunct faculty is essential for building a culture of equity and inclusion.

From Swag to Significance

For many adjunct faculty, recognition does not need to be formal or flashy. According to participants, recognition needs to be real, relatable, and reflective of their contributions. In the context of a multi-campus community college, where adjunct faculty often feel peripheral to the institution, the most meaningful forms of recognition desired by participants are those that foster a sense of belonging, not necessarily prestige. “Awards and other things like that aren’t needed,” said Vivienne. Her grounded perspective suggests recognition does not have to be ceremonial. Many adjunct faculty are not looking for plaques or banquets. They are looking for acknowledgment that feels sincere and accessible. The absence of hierarchy in recognition is key. Participants mentioned that recognition is not about being the best, but about being seen.

“Send me some swag. I’d love a T-shirt,” said Elias. “Send me a T-shirt. And I also want a bumper sticker,” added Penny. These requests may sound lighthearted, but they speak of a deeper desire for inclusion and identity. A college-branded T-shirt or bumper sticker is more than just merchandise, tangible gifts are a symbol of connection. For adjunct faculty who may not have an office or a nameplate, these items suggest you are part of a community. Penny went on to reference a tiered approach to recognition, one that aligns with professional development

milestones perhaps. “And maybe when I finish the Adjunct Academy, I get a certificate and polo. But prior to that, I just get the cheap cotton T-shirt,” she said. Her comment reflects a preference for recognition that is earned, visible, and tied to growth. The reference to “cheap cotton T-shirt” does not diminish its value, the suggested gift reinforces the idea that even small gestures matter when they are thoughtfully timed and meaningfully delivered.

The Absence of Intentional Acknowledgement

Participants intimated that recognition is most powerful when recognition feels personal, thoughtful, and proportionate to the contribution being honored. “When I celebrated 10 years at [the college], it would’ve been nice to be recognized in some way similar to the full-time faculty,” said Elias. His perspective captures the disappointment that can come when adjunct faculty are overlooked.

Another common gap in recognizing adjunct faculty is indirect or impersonal recognition. “The only time I have [been recognized] is through the Registrar office and it wasn’t really directly to me. It was through a student,” said Vivienne. When appreciation is filtered through third parties or institutional processes, appreciation can feel disconnected from the individual’s actual experience. Participants expressed recognition that does not come directly or does not feel intentional can reinforce feelings of invisibility rather than counteract them.

These examples reflect a broader issue. Recognition that is procedural rather than personal. Adjunct faculty shared that they often receive gestures that check a box but fail to acknowledge the depth of their contributions or the challenges they face. The result is not just dissatisfaction, but a missed opportunity to build connection, morale, and loyalty.

Mixed Emotions of Being Seen

Recognition, even when unexpected or imperfect, can leave a lasting impression. For adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college, the experience of being recognized often comes with mixed emotions of gratitude, surprise, skepticism, and sometimes even discomfort. These reactions reflect the broader context in which recognition is received. “Recently, [adjunct faculty] just got a little bonus out of nowhere, and that was really nice,” shared Morgan. Even if recognition comes in the form of a modest or informal gesture, modest recognition is still meaningful. The surprise element added to its emotional impact, signaling that someone, somewhere, was paying attention. According to one participant, the size of the bonus is not what mattered, the acknowledgment of time, effort, and presence is most important. Recognition is not one-size-fits-all. Recognition is often shaped by personal expectations, institutional culture, and past experiences. Participants intimated, when recognition feels authentic and timely, recognition can uplift and affirm, but when recognition feels out of place or disconnected, recognition has the tendency to raise questions about intent and equity.

Building Belonging Through Action

At a sprawling multi-campus community college, adjunct faculty often teach evening classes, filling in gaps, and bringing real-world experience into the classroom. Yet, despite their essential role, many adjunct faculty feel like ghosts in the academic machine. “Occasionally you’ll get an attaboy or a shout out. Sure, it’s nice, but it doesn’t pay the bills or make me feel like I belong,” shared Luna. Recognition, while appreciated, often feels performative when not backed by meaningful support.

Many adjunct faculty members juggle multiple jobs, commute between campuses, and rarely have time to attend faculty mixers or professional development sessions. “I appreciate the

offer, but I just can't say I'm taking the afternoon off to go hang with my faculty buddies at the college,” said Luna. The solution is not just about recognizing adjunct faculty or providing perks. The solution is about integrating adjunct faculty into the life of the college. In the end, recognition in practice is more than a shout out. Recognition is a culture of respect, a commitment to equity, and a willingness to solve problems not just with words, but with meaningful change.

Summary of Recognition

Recognition for adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges is about far more than symbolic gestures. Recognition is about institutional values, equity, and the culture of inclusion. While a T-shirt, a brief email, or a shout out may seem small, participants described these acts carry powerful emotional weight when they are sincere and timely. Yet, too often adjunct faculty suggest, recognition feels distant, procedural, or reserved for full-time peers, reinforcing the sense that adjunct faculty are outsiders in the very institutions they sustain. To address the desire for recognition, participants suggested that colleges consider moving beyond occasional gestures and commit to building a culture where adjunct faculty are meaningfully integrated and consistently appreciated. True recognition is not performative. Recognition is participatory, personal, and part of the everyday fabric of academic life.

Summary of Findings

The experiences of adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges reveal a complex interplay of structural, cultural, and emotional factors that shape their professional lives. Through participant profiles and thematic analysis, this chapter has highlighted four critical areas that influence not only adjunct faculty well-being but also the quality of education they deliver. These findings underscore that adjunct faculty are not peripheral contributors, they are central to

the mission of community colleges. Yet, systemic gaps in support and inclusion persist, leaving many to navigate ambiguity, disconnection, and overwhelming demands with limited resources. Recognition, when authentic and consistent, emerges as a powerful antidote to invisibility, fostering belonging and morale. Moving forward, institutions must embrace intentional strategies that prioritize clarity, equity, and engagement, transforming adjunct faculty roles from transactional to relational. Doing so is not merely an act of goodwill, it is essential for sustaining academic excellence and institutional integrity.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The experience of adjunct faculty at the multi-campus community college, as revealed through participant narratives, highlight persistent challenges related to well-being, integration, and connection. These narratives illuminate how adjunct faculty navigate a professional landscape shaped by systemic limitations that often leave them feeling unsupported, undervalued, and isolated. Through their voices, we gain insight into the emotional and cognitive toll of working within fragmented systems that prioritize efficiency over inclusion. This study explores how adjunct faculty experience their roles within institutional structures that frequently fail to provide adequate communication, meaningful support, or recognition. This analysis traces how these systemic shortcomings unfold across three interrelated dimensions: the structural communication experiences that shape daily interactions, the cognitive and emotional overload that undermines well-being, and the persistent sense of marginalization that positions adjunct faculty on the periphery of academic life.

Adjunct Faculty in Systems

Systemic shortcomings, particularly regarding communication, support structures, and recognition, create an environment where these fundamental elements of professional life are persistently compromised. Participants consistently identified that they encounter fragmented communication, structural isolation, and a persistent state of emotional and cognitive overload. These issues are not considered incidental. The pervasive sense of disconnection is described by Clara as “a byproduct of how adjunct faculty roles are designed,” illustrating deep structural neglect in fostering inclusion and support.

The working environment places significant mental and emotional strain on adjunct faculty, forcing many to perform daily tasks while focused on surviving, not thriving. The conceptual framework of well-being, integration, and connection provides a multidimensional lens to understand these experiences. Well-being, as defined by Singh (2015), encompasses emotional and psychological health shaped by environmental and relational factors. When institutions neglect adjunct well-being through unstable schedules, lack of inclusion, and limited access to resources, burnout and disengagement become prevalent (Rich, 2016; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

The structural inclusion of adjunct faculty into institutional processes, known as integration, is often absent, leaving faculty feeling peripheral and undervalued (Wallin, 2004; Merriman, 2010). Without access to governance, professional development, or equitable compensation, adjunct faculty experience diminished organizational commitment and professional identity (Roueche et al., 1996; Danaei, 2019). “I feel like I’m just a name on a schedule. No voice in decisions, not real sense of connection,” expressed Jordan.

Connection, the relational depth within the institution, is similarly compromised. Adjunct faculty frequently report a lack of meaningful relationships with peers and leadership, which undermines their sense of belonging and motivation (Buch et al., 2017; Holbeck et al., 2021). The absence of consistent communication and recognition contributes to emotional isolation and a fragmented professional experience (Dolan, 2011; Fouché, 2006). Together, these systemic deficiencies reflect a broader organizational failure to affirm adjunct faculty as integral members of the academic community. Without intentional efforts to nurture well-being, foster integration, and build connection, adjunct faculty are left emotionally strained, professionally isolated, and structurally unsupported.

Interconnected Social and Structural Communication Experiences

The ability of adjunct faculty to achieve connection is continuously hindered by structural and communicative barriers. Participants reported that communication is frequently fragmented, inconsistent, and predominantly one-directional, often centering on logistics or compliance rather than genuine, reciprocal dialogue about adjunct faculty needs. Adjunct faculty often experience a lack of meaningful institutional relationships, which erodes engagement and belong (Buch et al., 2017). The institutional reliance on digital formats, specifically long and dense emails, reinforces professional distance, leading faculty to feel that communication is impersonal, cold, and transactional. Casey's description of being "a name on a distribution list" reflects the broader issue of relational disconnect, where adjunct faculty are informed, not engaged.

To overcome this impersonal nature, adjunct faculty expressed a strong desire for responsive, two-way communication and often prefer real-time channels, such as phone calls or Zoom meetings, especially when navigating complex issues. These modes offer clarification and the necessary human connection, which Holbeck et al. (2021) argue is essential for building inclusive academic environments. Their research shows that advisory boards and peer networks significantly improve adjunct engagement, suggesting that intentional relational structures can counteract isolation.

Isolation is compounded by a profound lack of structural and social connection, resulting from geographic separation across campuses and the absence of intentional communication structures or collaborative spaces. Physical and professional isolation not only undermines performance, but they also intensify emotional strain, compounding the challenges adjunct faculty face in disconnected institutional environments (Dolan 2011; Fouché, 2006). Without consistent opportunities for informal interaction or disciplinary community, adjunct faculty often

operate in siloed roles disconnected from the collegial networks that support pedagogical growth and professional identity.

Connection, as defined in the framework, is not merely social, it is a relational construct that affirms identity, cultivates belonging, and strengthens emotional resilience (Tran, 2020; Porfirico et al., 2024). When institutions fail to foster this connection, adjunct faculty are left navigating their roles without the interpersonal scaffolding that full-time faculty often take for granted. The literature underscores that connection must be intentionally cultivated through inclusive communication strategies, mentorship programs, and recognition of adjunct contributions (Mech et al., 2017). Without these efforts, adjunct faculty remain professionally isolated, emotionally strained, and structurally unsupported.

Cognitive and Emotional Overload

Professional isolation, emotional strain, and structural neglect directly compromise the well-being of adjunct faculty, who report high levels of cognitive and emotional overload. Navigating organizational systems is described as less like receiving support and more like survival, characterized by the intensity of procedural communication which feels like “drinking from a fire hose,” as described by Clara. This metaphor reflects the overwhelming nature of institutional messaging, which often lacks clarity, responsiveness, and personalization. Well-being can be understood as a holistic state shaped by environmental and relational factors, and when these are misaligned adjunct faculty experience psychological strain rather than support (Singh, 2015).

This mental strain forces many participants to engage in cognitive triage just to “keep my head above water,” implied Elias, limiting their capacity for engagement in professional development or collegial activities. Exclusion from professional development and decision-

making processes contributes to marginalization and emotional fatigue (Mech et al., 2017; Rich, 2016). The stress is exacerbated by an overwhelming workload, often driven by financial necessity, in a context where their work is systemically undervalued through the damaging perception that adjuncting is merely a hobby. Shuck and Reio (2014) link such organizational neglect to burnout and disengagement, while Maslach (2003) describes burnout as a result of prolonged exposure to inequitable and unsupportive conditions.

Furthermore, the emotional toll of technological barriers is significant. Adjunct faculty frequently face technical difficulties with minimal onboarding and sometimes encounter dismissive attitudes from support staff. This cultivates feelings of inadequacy and isolation, echoing findings from Schneider & Harknett (2019), who argue that instability and lack of support undermine psychological safety. The absence of adequate training and responsive assistance not only impairs the ability of adjunct faculty to perform their roles effectively but also signals a lack of institutional care, which Eisenberger et al. (1986) identify as detrimental to perceived organizational support.

The accumulated effect of these stressors can lead to emotional fatigue, where adjunct faculty adapt to conditions that are manageable but severely limit their ability to thrive. Organizational culture significantly moderates job stress, and inclusive practices can help mitigate burnout (Joshi & Jaffer, 2024). However, when such practices are absent, adjunct faculty are left to navigate a landscape of procedural overload, undervaluation, and technological friction, conditions that compromise their well-being and diminish their professional engagement.

On the Periphery

Finally, the systemic barriers to connection and support demonstrate a failure of integration, where adjunct faculty feel peripheral in both structure and spirit, and largely invisible within the institutional landscape. Integration, as defined by Wallin (2004) and Roueche et al. (1996), involves embedding adjunct faculty into the operational and cultural fabric of the institution, not merely granting access, but affirming influence and legitimacy. When integration is absent, adjunct faculty experience isolation, limited professional growth, and diminished organizational commitment (Merriman, 2010; Purdum & Evans, 2024).

Participants emphasized that recognition is a vital component of belonging, morale, and retention, and is fundamentally about being valued as a human being and a contributor to the educational mission. This aligns with Ajani & Rathilal (2025), who argue that practices, such as inclusion in curriculum design and governance, signal professional respect and institutional validation. True integration, therefore, necessitates intentional efforts to move beyond occasional gestures toward structural acknowledgment. Adjunct faculty who are included in governance and receive professional development report higher job satisfaction and retention, underscoring the importance of sustained policy-based recognition (Danaei, 2019).

Adjunct faculty explicitly desire practical forms of recognition, such as priority scheduling, which they view as meaningful acknowledgment of loyalty and contribution embedded into operational decisions. Equitable workload distribution and transparent scheduling are not only operational necessities, but also critical to sustaining well-being and institutional commitment (O'Meara et al., 2019). These practices communicate that adjunct faculty are not temporary labor but essential contributors to the college's mission.

Furthermore, recognition must be inclusive, ensuring that online adjunct faculty receive the same acknowledgment as those teaching in-person. Geographic and modality-based isolation can erode motivation and performance, making it imperative that institutions foster equity across all teaching formats (Dolan, 2011; Fouché, 2006). Intentional communication and visibility are key to reducing isolation and affirming adjunct faculty identity (Mech et al., 2017).

Ultimately, participants stressed that addressing these gaps requires implementing systemic changes that prioritize clarity, respect, and sustainability. Integration must be more than a symbolic gesture. Integration must be operationalized through policies, practices, and cultural norms that embed adjunct faculty meaningfully into the everyday fabric of academic life. When institutions commit to such equity-minded practices, they not only support adjunct faculty well-being but also strengthen institutional cohesion and effectiveness.

Implications for Practice

The success of multi-campus community colleges increasingly depends on the contributions of adjunct faculty, yet these educators often face systemic barriers that hinder their effectiveness and well-being. Implications for Practice outlines practical, research-informed strategies to address the most pressing challenges identified in the study, such as fragmented communication, professional isolation, overwhelming workloads, and lack of recognition. Drawing from both participant experiences and a conceptual framework supported by theories, the recommendations presented here aim to guide institutional leaders in creating more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable environments for adjunct faculty. By implementing these practices, colleges can not only enhance adjunct faculty engagement and retention but also improve the overall quality of education for students.

Recommendations for Better Communication

Clear and consistent communication is essential for supporting adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges. Adjunct faculty often face unique challenges, including limited access to institutional resources, inconsistent messaging across campuses, and exclusion from departmental processes. To address these issues effectively, colleges could adopt a comprehensive communication strategy. Key components might include standardizing communication protocols, designating clear support contacts, fostering inclusion, offering professional development, and recognizing the vital role adjunct faculty play in student success.

A key element of this strategy is ensuring adjunct faculty are included in department meetings and decision-making processes. When they are excluded, they miss critical updates and opportunities to share their perspectives. Inviting adjunct faculty to participate, in-person or virtually, not only keeps them informed but also reinforces their value within the academic community. Their involvement in curriculum discussions, policy reviews, and planning initiatives helps cultivate a more collaborative and inclusive culture.

Another important consideration is the timing of communication. Initiating contact early, particularly before the semester begins, is crucial. Many adjunct faculty are hired close to the start of a term, leaving little time to prepare syllabi, access course materials, or navigate institutional systems. By reaching out in advance with essential information, such as course assignments, textbook details, and technology access colleges can help adjunct faculty feel more confident and prepared. A proactive approach sets a tone of respect and readiness that positively influences morale and performance.

In addition to early outreach, the mode of communication also matters. Encouraging in-person or synchronous communication whenever possible enhances relationship building. While

asynchronous methods like email are convenient, they often lack the personal touch that is needed to build rapport. Scheduled video calls, phone check-ins, or informal gatherings create opportunities for real-time dialogue and community building. These interactions humanize the college, reduce feelings of isolation, and promote a sense of belonging.

Another reason to use synchronous modes of communication is because adjunct faculty often face a flood of emails, announcements, and administrative messages, which can lead to overload. This barrage of unfiltered and inconsistently formatted information makes discerning what is urgent, relevant, or actionable difficult. However, some messages are better communicated in writing. To combat the challenges related to asynchronous modes of communications, colleges should prioritize clarity, accessibility, and efficiency. Effective strategies include breaking down communication into smaller, digestible updates; using clear formatting; centralizing resources; and offering real-time support. For example, a centralized, searchable hub for policies, forms, and frequently asked questions can significantly reduce confusion and reliance on repetitive emails.

To further reduce communication saturation, segmented messaging is a valuable tool. Rather than sending blanket emails to all faculty, institutions could tailor messages based on campus, department, or instructional role. For instance, an adjunct faculty member teaching online should not receive updates relevant only to in-person faculty. Using segmented mailing lists or communication platforms with filtering capabilities ensures adjunct faculty receive only pertinent information, reducing inbox clutter and increasing the likelihood that important messages are read and acted upon.

Another foundational step is assigning clear, accessible contacts for adjunct faculty at each campus. These designated individuals, such as division chairs, program coordinators, or

faculty mentors serve as reliable sources of guidance and support. Clearly identifying these contacts and ensuring they are approachable helps adjunct faculty feel more connected and supported, especially in complex multi-campus systems.

Synchronous communication should be prioritized, especially with dealing with personal or sensitive matters. Real-time conversations allow for greater empathy and help prevent misunderstandings that can arise from written messages. These methods are particularly important when discussing performance feedback, student concerns, or contract issues.

Despite best efforts, communication gaps between adjunct faculty and department leadership remain a persistent challenge. These gaps can lead to confusion, disengagement, and a sense of isolation. To bridge these gaps, colleges could implement intentional strategies such as regular conversations with leadership, mentorship and peer support programs, varied communication channels, and inclusion in departmental planning. Using diverse communication methods respects the varied schedules and preferences of adjunct faculty, making adjunct faculty engagement easier.

Establishing regular check-ins between adjunct faculty and supervisors is another essential practice. Whether held monthly, quarterly, or aligned with academic milestones, these check-ins provide structured opportunities for two-way communication. They allow adjunct faculty to ask questions, share concerns, and receive updates, while giving department leaders valuable insight into the adjunct experience and helping identify issues early.

Ultimately, communication challenges require more than logistical fixes. Communication challenges demand a cultural shift. Colleges must foster a culture rooted in inclusion, transparency, and respect. By clearly communicating expectations, maintaining regular check-ins, creating open dialogue spaces, and involving adjunct faculty in long-term planning, colleges

can build stronger, more collaborative relationships. These efforts not only improve communication but also enhance institutional cohesion and effectiveness.

Recommendations for Feeling Isolated

Adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges often experience structural, social, and emotional isolation due to the decentralized and part-time nature of their roles. Many adjunct faculty teach remotely or across multiple campuses, which limits their access to resources, professional networks, and a sense of belonging. To effectively address these challenges, institutions must implement intentional strategies that foster connection, inclusion, and well-being across all levels of the academic experience.

To begin, addressing structural isolation requires the creation of shared spaces, both physical and virtual, where adjunct faculty can connect and collaborate. Faculty lounges, shared offices, and online platforms, such as discussion boards or group chats, offer opportunities for informal interaction and resource sharing. These spaces help reduce the siloed experience that participants referenced. In tandem with shared spaces, structured onboarding and mentorship programs are essential. New adjunct faculty members, particularly those teaching online or at multiple campuses, benefit from clear introductions to institutional policies, teaching tools, and available support services. Pairing them with experienced mentors not only builds confidence but also fosters meaningful professional relationships.

To further support integration, colleges could facilitate cross-campus communication through regular meetings, newsletters, and shared calendars. These tools help adjunct faculty stay informed and reinforce their role as integral members of the academic community. Moreover, including adjunct faculty in campus events, professional development opportunities,

and departmental planning, such as workshops, retreats, and curriculum discussions, signals their value and strengthens institutional cohesion.

Beyond structural barriers, adjunct faculty often feel socially and professionally disconnected due to limited interaction with colleagues and inconsistent inclusion in department activities. To help counter these challenges, colleges can facilitate introductions among adjunct faculty within the same discipline. Discipline specific meet-and-greets, collaborative workshops, and shared teaching forums help build relationships and foster a sense of shared purpose. Regular gatherings, such as coffee hours or themed discussions, provide additional opportunities for adjunct faculty to exchange ideas and build community. These events not only promote collaboration but also demonstrate the institution's investment in adjunct faculty.

Online communities and directories further support connection. Platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams can serve as hubs for communication and resource sharing. A searchable directory with names, disciplines, and contact information enables adjunct faculty to identify peers with similar interests or teaching assignments, making collaboration more accessible. Equally important is ensuring adjuncts are included in department communications and planning. Adjunct faculty should receive the same updates and invitations as full-time faculty and be involved in curriculum development and assessment planning. Such inclusion affirms their importance and enhances the overall academic experience for students.

In addition to structural and social challenges, adjunct faculty often face emotional and psychological isolation, which can lead to burnout and feelings of invisibility. To support their emotional well-being, colleges could foster community, acknowledge emotional labor, and provide access to mental health resources. Acknowledging the emotional labor of teaching is crucial. Adjunct faculty frequently carry responsibilities similar to those of full-time faculty but

often without equivalent recognition. Simple gestures like thank-you notes, public acknowledgments, or inclusion in faculty highlights can validate their efforts and boost morale. Access to mental health and wellness resources tailored to adjunct faculty members' needs is another vital component. Many adjunct faculty are unaware of or excluded from employee wellness programs. Institutions should ensure that adjunct faculty can access counseling, stress management workshops, and wellness initiatives, with flexible, virtual options to accommodate their varied schedules. Also, creating reflective spaces, such as peer-led support groups or writing circles allows adjunct faculty to process their experiences and build resilience. These forums not only offer emotional support but also foster professional growth and solidarity.

Addressing the isolation experienced by adjunct faculty requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach. By creating shared spaces, fostering community, recognizing contributions, and supporting emotional well-being, multi-campus community colleges can cultivate a more connected and equitable academic environment. These efforts not only benefit adjunct faculty but also enhance the quality of education and institutional cohesion for all.

Recommendations for Feeling Overwhelmed

Adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges often face a combination of cognitive, emotional, and logistical demands that can quickly become overwhelming. Balancing multiple teaching assignments, navigating complex institutional systems, and managing diverse student needs can lead to chronic stress and burnout. To support adjunct faculty effectively, institutions need to adopt proactive strategies that not only reduce overload but also streamline processes and foster a culture of inclusion and support.

Colleges should offer flexible and accessible support resources. Short instructional videos, drop-in sessions, and peer mentoring programs can provide timely assistance without

requiring significant time commitments. These resources should be available asynchronously to accommodate the varied schedules of adjunct faculty. Peer mentors, in particular, can offer both technical guidance and emotional support, helping adjunct faculty feel less isolated in their roles.

Equally important is acknowledging the emotional toll inherent in teaching. Adjunct faculty often support students through academic and personal challenges while managing their own professional uncertainties. Colleges can help by creating reflective spaces, such as discussion groups or wellness workshops where adjunct faculty can share experiences and build resilience. Moreover, designing systems that anticipate overload, such as providing early access to course materials, avoiding peak stress periods for communication, and scheduling regular check-ins with department leaders, may prevent burnout before it begins.

Beyond emotional and cognitive challenges, adjunct faculty often carry a disproportionate share of administrative responsibilities. These burdens are exacerbated by inconsistent access to support and training. Simplifying onboarding and routine processes is therefore critical. Clear, up-to-date guides and checklists can help adjunct faculty complete essential tasks, such as setting up email, accessing learning platforms, and submitting grades with greater confidence and efficiency. To further ease the transition, assigning a dedicated point of contact or mentor can be highly beneficial. This individual can serve as a reliable source of guidance, helping adjunct faculty navigate institutional systems and policies. Additionally, colleges should regularly solicit feedback from adjunct faculty through surveys or informal check-ins to identify pain points and improve workflows. Acting on that feedback not only enhances systems but also signals that adjunct faculty voices are valued.

Workload and time constraints are among the most pressing issues for adjunct faculty. Many adjunct faculty juggle multiple courses across campuses with limited compensation for the

time spent preparing, grading, and engaging in professional development. To address this issue, institutions should consider capping teaching loads to prevent burnout and ensure instructional quality. Reasonable course limits allow adjunct faculty to dedicate adequate time and energy to each class while maintaining their well-being. In tandem with workload management, colleges must compensate adjunct faculty for essential tasks beyond classroom hours. Stipends or hourly pay for preparation, grading, and professional development recognize the full scope of teaching responsibilities. Offering paid opportunities for training and growth not only supports faculty development but also enhances student learning outcomes.

Administrative efficiency also plays a key role in managing time constraints. Adjunct faculty often navigate multiple systems for payroll, course management, and communication. Colleges should work to consolidate platforms, eliminate redundant steps, and provide clear, streamlined instructions. Purposeful, well-organized communication reduces time pressure and cognitive load, allowing adjunct faculty to focus more fully on teaching and student engagement.

Technological challenges can further compound feelings of frustration and isolation, particularly for adjunct faculty teaching remotely or across multiple platforms. To mitigate these barriers, institutions must provide accessible, hands-on training tailored to varying levels of digital fluency. Tiered workshops and self-paced modules should address both foundational tools, such as learning management systems and more advanced technologies for online engagement. Training should be offered in multiple formats and at flexible times to accommodate diverse schedules. Equally important is the availability of real-time, empathetic tech support. Rather than relying solely on ticketing systems, colleges should offer live help sessions, phone lines, or chat services staffed by knowledgeable and patient personnel. Support

staff should be trained not only in technical troubleshooting but also in empathetic communication, recognizing that tech issues can be both stressful and urgent.

Creating a respectful learning culture around technology is essential. Adjunct faculty should feel comfortable asking questions and seeking help without fear of judgment. Department leaders can model a respectful learning culture by sharing their own learning experiences and encouraging open dialogue about tech challenges. To increase comfort with the college's technology, adjunct faculty should be included in technology-related decisions and updates. Changes to platforms or tools should be communicated clearly and well in advance, with opportunities for adjunct faculty to provide feedback. Involving them in pilot programs or advisory groups ensures their needs are considered in institutional planning and implementation.

Supporting adjunct faculty requires more than reactive solutions. Supporting adjunct faculty demands a systemic, intentional approach. By simplifying processes, managing workloads, and addressing technological barriers, multi-campus community colleges can create a more equitable and sustainable environment. These efforts not only reduce stress and improve morale, but they also enhance the quality of education for students and strengthen the institution.

Recommendations for Better Recognition

Adjunct faculty at multi-campus community colleges often feel emotionally and professionally overlooked, despite their essential contributions to student learning and institutional success. Adjunct faculty frequently juggle multiple roles across campuses with limited recognition. To foster a more inclusive environment, colleges should go beyond logistical support and actively cultivate a culture of acknowledgment. This effort can include personalized appreciation, inclusive recognition events, and consistent, meaningful gestures that affirm adjunct faculty's value.

Personalized messages from department chairs or deans acknowledging milestones, such as completing a challenging semester or receiving positive student feedback can have a profound impact. These messages should be specific and timely, reinforcing that leadership values individual contributions. Inclusion in recognition events, such as award ceremonies or informal gatherings, further affirms adjunct faculty's role in the academic community. Small tokens of appreciation, like thank-you cards or campus-branded items, also help foster a sense of belonging. Most importantly, cultivating a culture of everyday gratitude through verbal thanks, email shout-outs, or notes of encouragement normalizes recognition and strengthens morale.

Recognition should be diverse and equitable. While formal awards like 'Adjunct of the Year' are valuable, informal acknowledgments, such as digital badges, thank-you notes, or newsletter mentions can be equally meaningful. Institutions must ensure recognition is distributed fairly across campuses and teaching modalities, including remote instructors. Empowering students, peers, and staff to nominate adjunct faculty through accessible processes broadens participation and ensures recognition reflects the full campus community. Integrating recognition into institutional practices such as priority scheduling, professional development access, and committee invitations reinforces adjunct faculty's importance to the college mission.

To ensure recognition resonates, colleges should consider adjunct faculty preferences. Branded items like mugs or T-shirts can foster institutional pride, especially when distributed inclusively. Tying recognition to milestones—such as years of service or professional development completion—adds personal and professional meaning. Soliciting adjunct faculty input through surveys or listening sessions helps tailor recognition efforts and demonstrates respect for their voices. Institutions must also ensure that recognition reaches all adjunct faculty through virtual events and mail if necessary.

Despite good intentions, recognition efforts often fall short due to impersonal delivery or lack of alignment with adjunct faculty realities. Mass emails or generic announcements rarely convey genuine appreciation. Instead, recognition should come from leaders familiar with the adjunct faculty member's work and be tied to meaningful milestones. Avoiding tokenism is key. Gestures should be thoughtful and specific, not perfunctory. Regularly seeking feedback from adjunct faculty ensures recognition efforts remain relevant and effective, while also reinforcing that their perspectives matter.

Recognition is most effective when recognition is intentional, consistent, and responsive. Communicating the purpose behind recognition helps adjunct faculty feel genuinely valued. Offering a variety of recognition options, such as public acknowledgments, private notes, or professional development opportunities respects diverse preferences. Creating space for feedback and embedding recognition into the rhythm of academic life, through monthly shout outs or milestone celebrations, helps build a culture of appreciation. Ultimately, recognition should be a sustained practice that affirms adjunct faculty's essential role in the institution.

To move beyond symbolic gestures, colleges must embed recognition into institutional culture. Flexible programs that accommodate diverse schedules and teaching modalities ensure inclusivity. Professional development access, including stipends and scheduling accommodations, signals investment in adjunct faculty growth. Integrating adjunct faculty into division meetings and planning sessions fosters connection and visibility. Peer mentoring and informal gatherings help build community, while dedicated communication channels ensure adjunct faculty are informed and supported. These systemic efforts create a culture of appreciation that strengthens both faculty engagement and institutional cohesion.

Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into the organizational support experiences of adjunct faculty teaching humanities and social sciences at a multi-campus community college, several limitations should be acknowledged.

Gender Representation

One notable limitation of this study is the gender distribution of participants, with 10 out of 11 identifying as female. While their insights provided valuable depth and perspective, the predominance of female voices may limit the generalizability of findings across a more gender-diverse population. Future research should aim to include a more balanced representation to explore potential gender-based differences in experiences or perceptions.

Lack of Racial Diversity

This study consisted of participants who identified as Caucasian only, which presents a limitation in terms of the racial and cultural diversity of perspectives represented. This homogeneity may restrict the applicability of the findings to broader, more diverse populations. Future research should strive to include participants from a wider range of racial and ethnic backgrounds to better capture varied experiences and insights.

Campus Representation

This study included participants from four of the five campuses within the community college. While this provided a range of perspectives, the absence of representation from one campus may have excluded unique contextual factors or experiences specific to that location. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across all campuses. Future research should aim for full campus representation to enhance the comprehensiveness and applicability of the results.

Disciplinary Scope

Participants in this study represented six distinct academic disciplines. While this provided a degree of interdisciplinary insight, the findings may not fully reflect the experiences or perspectives of individuals in unrepresented fields. As such, the disciplinary scope of the study may limit the generalizability of the results across the broader academic landscape. Future research could benefit from including a wider range of disciplines to enhance the diversity and applicability of the findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through rich qualitative data and thematic analysis, the study revealed systemic challenges (e.g., fragmented communication, professional isolation, overwhelming workloads, and lack of recognition) that shape the lived experiences of adjunct faculty. While the study provides actionable recommendations for institutional practice, the study also opens several avenues for future research that could further illuminate and address the complexities of organizational support adjunct faculty receive.

One of the most immediate recommendations for future research is to replicate the study across different types of colleges and universities. The study was context-specific, focusing on adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college. Future studies could explore whether similar themes emerge in four-year universities, where adjunct faculty may face different expectations and support structures; in private colleges, which may offer different compensation models or cultural dynamics; or in single-campus community colleges, to assess whether the multi-campus structure uniquely exacerbates communication and isolation issues. Such comparative studies would help determine the generalizability of findings and identify institution-specific best practices.

Another direction for future research is to include adjunct faculty from any academic discipline. The study was limited to adjunct faculty in the humanities and social sciences. Future research could examine the experiences of adjunct faculty in vocational and technical programs, where instructors often bring industry experience but may lack pedagogical training. Additionally, dual credit instructors teaching in high schools represent a unique subgroup whose support needs may differ due to their hybrid roles. Understanding these nuances would allow colleges to better support adjunct faculty with customized support strategies specifically customized for certain disciplines.

Longitudinal studies also present a valuable opportunity for future research. The study captures a snapshot of adjunct faculty experiences, but a longitudinal approach could explore how these experiences evolve over time. Key questions might include how adjunct faculty perceptions of support change over multiple semesters or years, what factors contribute to adjunct faculty transitioning into full-time roles or leaving academia altogether, and how institutional interventions, such as mentoring programs or improved communication systems impact adjunct faculty satisfaction and retention over time. Longitudinal data would provide valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness of support initiatives and the career trajectories of adjunct faculty.

While the study is rooted in a qualitative methodology, future research could employ mixed-methods or quantitative designs to validate and expand upon the identified themes. Surveys could measure the prevalence of Overload or feelings of isolation across a larger adjunct population. Statistical analyses could examine correlations between perceived organizational support and outcomes such as job satisfaction, burnout, or student evaluations. Experimental designs could test the impact of specific interventions, such as segmented communication

strategies or peer mentoring on adjunct faculty engagement and performance. Quantitative validation would strengthen the empirical foundation for institutional policy changes.

Lastly, future research should consider intersectionality. For example, how race, gender, age, and other identities shape adjunct faculty experiences. The study includes a demographically diverse sample, but a more focused analysis could reveal whether women, people of color, or Baby Boomers face unique barriers to support and recognition. Future research could also explore what culturally responsive support practices are most effective in fostering inclusion and belonging. Intersectional research would contribute to more equitable and justice-oriented adjunct faculty policies.

Again, the study offers a powerful foundation for reimagining how institutions support adjunct faculty. By centering the voices of those often relegated to the margins, the research not only identifies critical gaps in communication, inclusion, and recognition but also charts a path forward. Future research should build on this study by expanding its scope across institutional types, disciplines, and methodologies. In doing so, scholars and practitioners alike can contribute to a more equitable, sustainable, and human-centered academic workforce where adjunct faculty are not only acknowledged but empowered.

Conclusion

This study is critically important to the field of higher education, particularly within the community college sector, where adjunct faculty comprise nearly 65% of the faculty (AACC, 2022). Despite their prevalence, research consistently shows that students who take many courses from adjunct instructors experience lower rates of persistence (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008), graduation (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Jacoby, 2006; Kezar & Maxey, 2014), and transfer

(Eagan & Jaeger, 2009). These outcomes highlight a pressing need to better understand adjunct faculty in an attempt to improve student outcomes.

The findings of this study reveal that adjunct faculty often describe their organizational support experience as isolated, overwhelming, and undervalued. They report limited access to resources, exclusion from governance and decision-making, and a lack of meaningful relationships within the institution. Many juggle full-time careers, part-time instruction, and personal responsibilities. For adjunct faculty who teach on multiple campuses, varying campus norms is another issue for them to manage. Furthermore, they receive inferior compensation and minimal benefits (Yang et al., 2021) without long-term job security (Halcrow & Gann, 2022).

By identifying actionable strategies to enhance organizational support such as improving communication, integrating adjuncts into governance and discipline-specific communities, and fostering social connection, this study offers a roadmap for colleges to better support adjunct faculty. These improvements are not only vital for faculty well-being but also for student success. When adjunct faculty are supported, valued, and connected, they are better positioned to deliver high-quality instruction and contribute meaningfully to the academic community. Ultimately, this research underscores the urgent need for systemic change in how colleges engage with and support their adjunct faculty. Addressing these issues is essential for improving institutional effectiveness, equity, and student outcomes.

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Appendix A - Recruitment Message

Dear [first name],

My name is Zack McNeil. I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University in the Adult Learning and Leadership program, and I am passionate about improving the support experience of adjunct faculty, therefore, am conducting a research study to better understand the support experience of adjunct faculty from their perspective which is why I am reaching out to solicit your participation.

Your insights and experiences are invaluable to me, and your participation will contribute significantly to understanding and improving the support systems for adjunct faculty. The study aims to capture your journey from application, to onboarding, classroom instruction and everything in-between.

Should you choose to participate, you can expect the following:

- Three one-on-one virtual interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes with the initial interview in April and subsequent interviews in April and May.
- Interviews will be recorded via Zoom for transcription purposes and inaccessible to anyone other than you and me.
- All information shared will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. No one will ever know the names of the participants, watch or listen to any recordings, or participate in any activities such as reading findings or transcripts that will indicate who participated in this study. Furthermore, all data will be stored on a computer that is password protected or a locked safe that is accessible to me only.
- Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please notify me using any of the contact information provided below. I look forward to the possibility of working with you and hearing your unique perspective in hopes we might be able to improve the adjunct faculty support experience at MCC and beyond.

Thank you for considering the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to this study!

Sincerely,
Zack McNeil
Business Instructor & Program Coordinator
Metropolitan Community College of Kansas City
office: (816) 604-2522
cell: (816) 956-2103
Zack.McNeil@mcckc.edu
zackmcneil@hotmail.com

Appendix B - Informed Consent Form

If you are performing research involving human subjects, it is your responsibility to address the issue of informed consent. This template is intended to provide guidance for crafting an informed consent document. The Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) *strongly* recommends that you model your consent form on this template. However, if you choose a different approach, it must contain at a minimum the same elements as this standard version. Language and terminology used in the consent form must be written at no more than the 8th-grade level, so that the potential participant can clearly understand the project, how it is going to be conducted, and all issues that may affect his or her participation. In addition, please write the consent form in a manner that addresses your subjects directly instead of writing it in a manner that addresses the University Research Compliance Office directly. *Information on the important issue of informed consent can be found in 45 CFR 46 at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html#46.116>. Federal law mandates that all signed and dated informed consent forms be retained by the P.I. for at least three years following completion of the study.*

WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT: *There are limited instances where the requirement for a formal informed consent document may be waived or altered by the IRB.*

45 CFR 46 states that "An IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it

- finds either:*
- 1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will*
 - 2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no written consent is normally required outside of the research context."*

If a study employs only questionnaires and surveys as the source of their data, it may generally be assumed that to answer and return the questionnaire is an appropriate and sufficient expression of free consent. However, there are circumstances that might call this assumption into question - e.g., teacher-student relationship between the investigator and the subject, etc. However, a statement should be included on the questionnaire or survey form indicating that participation of the subject is strictly voluntary, the length of time reasonably expected to complete the questionnaire or survey form, and that questions that make the participant uncomfortable may be skipped.

Form Content

PROJECT TITLE: Full title of project. If possible, the title should be identical to that used in any funding/contract proposal.

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE/ EXPIRATION DATE: provided in the approval letter, must be in place before distributing to subjects.

LENGTH OF STUDY: Estimate the length of time the subject will be expected to participate.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Must be a regular member of the faculty.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Name, phone number and/or email address of the P.I.

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION: *For the subject should he/she have questions or wish to discuss on any aspect of the research with an official of the university or the IRB. These are:* Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PROJECT SPONSOR: Funding/contract entity.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: Explain in lay terms that this is a research project, and why the research is being done.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Explain in lay terms and in language understandable at the 8th grade level how the study is going to be conducted and what will be expected of participants. Tell participants if they will be audio- or videotaped, if they will be paid, etc.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: Explain any alternative procedures or treatments if applicable.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: Describe any foreseeable risks or discomforts from the study. If there are no known risks, make a statement to that effect.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Describe any *reasonably expected* benefits from the research to the participant or others from the research.

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: If minors or those who require the approval of a parent or guardian are participants, you should include a space for their consenting signature.

PARTICIPANT NAME/SIGNATURE: Name of research participant and signature.

WITNESS TO SIGNATURE (PROJECT STAFF): Staff signature.

If any of the following content sections do not apply to your research, feel free to delete from the consent form.

PROJECT TITLE:

The support experience of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college

**PROJECT
APPROVAL DATE:**

**PROJECT
EXPIRATION DATE:**

**LENGTH
OF STUDY:**

**PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR:**

Dr. Susan Yelich-Biniecki

**CO-
INVESTIGATOR(S):**

Zachary McNeil

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR
PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

Dr. Susan Yelich-Biniecki
785-532-5535
susanyb@ksu.edu

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT
INFORMATION:**

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving
Human Subjects
203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan,
KS 66506
(785) 532-3224
rubin@ksu.edu

Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research
Compliance
203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan,
KS 66506
(785) 532-3224.
comply@ksu.edu

**PROJECT
SPONSOR:**

N/A

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the support experience of adjunct faculty at a multi-campus community college.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

This research study will consist of one-on-one interviews that will be recorded using Zoom for transcription and analysis purposes. Each interview is expected to last 60 to 90 minutes. The interview questions will be shared with participants prior to signing the consent form which will be at least one week prior to the interview. There will be two follow-up interviews with questions based on the initial responses of each participant. For example, can you tell me more about that experience? Participation in this study is voluntary; therefore, no one will be paid.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts to the participants. Participating in this study will not positively or negatively impact participants or non-participants' standing with the college as valued members of the faculty.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

The primary benefit of this study will be to better understand the support experience of adjunct faculty, so improvements can be made to the support experience provided adjunct faculty. This will likely result in a more favorable experience for adjunct faculty, their students, the program, and college they serve.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

No one other than the responsible graduate student (Zack McNeil) will ever know the names of the participants, watch or listen to any recordings, or participate in any activities such as reading findings or transcripts that will indicate who participated in this study. Furthermore, all data will be stored on a computer that is password protected and an external hard drive that is locked in a safe that is accessible to the responsible graduate student only.

Participant information collected as part of this research study, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies

The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? ☐ Yes ☒ No

**PARENTAL APPROVAL
FOR MINORS:**

**PARENT/GUARDIAN
APPROVAL SIGNATURE:**

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DATE:

--

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

**PARTICIPANT
NAME:**

**PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE:**

**WITNESS TO
SIGNATURE: (PROJECT
STAFF)**

DATE:

--

DATE:

--

Appendix C - Interview Protocol

Initial Interview

Thanks

First of all, thank you for sacrificing your time to participate in this study! I value your perspective, therefore, am extremely grateful you agreed to be interviewed. As previously mentioned, I will be recording the interviews, so I can review portions of it for transcribing purposes to conduct better research, but the recording will not be shared with anyone unless of course you would like a copy of it.

Context of Research

I am interested in better understanding the support experience of adjunct faculty from your perspective.

Process of the Interview

Today, I will pose the questions already shared with you, but future interviews will be a mixture of structured and spontaneous questions based upon your previous responses.

I welcome you to take any time necessary to ponder your response before speaking, therefore, welcome what is typically perceived as awkward silence. Don't be off put if I ask you to tell me more multiple times. I am merely trying to understand your experience more deeply. If you have nothing more to share relating to a topic, you can simply state such.

I anticipate this interview will take 60 to 90 minutes. Does that still work for you?
Great, are you in an environment free from distractions?

Thanks!!

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Interview Questions

1. What is your educational background?
2. What is your professional background including teaching experience?
3. What motivates you to teach?
4. What do you find to be most rewarding about being an adjunct instructor?
5. What do you find to be most challenging about being an adjunct instructor?
6. What do you wish was different about being an adjunct instructor?
7. How do you manage the work-life balance of being an adjunct instructor?
8. Describe your experiences as an adjunct instructor.
 - the application process
 - onboarding
 - interactions with full-time and part-time peers
 - interactions with administrators
 - interactions with support services staff
 - the classroom experience
 - professional development (i.e., mentorship, coaching, training, evaluation, etc.)
9. Can you identify any ways you could be better supported as an adjunct instructor?
10. Do you think being part of a multi-campus college system factors into your support experience as an adjunct instructor? If so, how?
11. What else can you tell me about your experience as an adjunct instructor?

Second Interview

Reminders

- Participation is voluntary, therefore, you do not have to answer any question you feel uncomfortable answering.
- This interview is being recorded for transcription purposes.
- No one will have access to the raw data collected.
- Any data included in the findings of this study will not include your name or personal characteristics that make you definable to others.
- Extended silence for pauses to think or reflect on experiences are welcomed, so you should not feel rushed when responding to questions.
- Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me more about...
2. What was it like for you when...
3. Can you provide a specific example of...

Third Interview

Reminders

- Participation is voluntary, therefore, you do not have to answer any question you feel uncomfortable answering.
- This interview is being recorded for transcription purposes.
- No one will have access to the raw data collected.
- Any data included in the findings of this study will not include your name or personal characteristics that make you definable to others.
- Awkward silences is welcomed, so you should not feel rushed when responding to questions.
- Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Process

During the third and final interview, I will pose clarifying questions based on the participant's responses during previous interviews. Then, I will briefly summarize what the participant has already shared with me during previous interviews before asking them the following question.

1. What additional thoughts or insights do you have that were not prompted by the questions previously asked throughout this process?

Appendix D - Analytic Memo

April 22, 2025

Reflections on Interview #1 with Jordan

Jordan's interview offers a compelling and emotionally honest account of the adjunct faculty experience, characterized by a deep passion for teaching and a persistent sense of institutional marginalization. Her motivation to teach stems from a student-centered philosophy, where she views learners as her primary evaluators and finds fulfillment in helping them shift their perspectives on the subject matter. She articulates a realistic goal, not to make students love the subject, but to help them "not hate it", which reflects a grounded and empathetic approach to instruction.

However, Jordan's narrative is equally shaped by structural challenges, particularly around compensation and workload. She repeatedly emphasizes that adjunct faculty are not paid according to their worth, which forces many, including herself, to work multiple jobs. This financial strain directly impacts instructional quality, as she describes semesters where she taught up to eight classes, making it impossible to give students the attention they deserve. Her experience highlights how inadequate pay structures create a ripple effect that undermines both faculty well-being and student outcomes.

Institutional devaluation is another dominant theme. Jordan recounts being excluded from recognition programs like the Wolf Pack award and receiving dismissive responses from leadership when she advocated for adjunct inclusion. Her participation in the adjunct task force further illustrates this issue; she felt patronized by symbolic gestures such as T-shirts and was discouraged when meaningful suggestions were not taken seriously. These experiences contribute to a broader feeling of being treated as a "second-class citizen" within the college hierarchy.

Isolation also plays a significant role in Jordan's experience. She reports minimal interaction with full-time faculty and administrators, especially after transferring campuses. While her early years at one campus offered more informal connection, her current environment at another campus is marked by professional detachment. Adjunct faculty are rarely invited to collaborative or social events, and Jordan notes that meeting colleagues often requires personal initiative rather than institutional support.

Over time, Jordan has reframed her role as an adjunct to protect her well-being. She now sets firm boundaries, such as not responding to emails after 5:00 PM and has let go of the expectation to perform at the level of full-time faculty. This shift reflects a coping strategy that allows her to maintain her passion for teaching while acknowledging the limitations imposed by her adjunct status.

Interestingly, Jordan contrasts her experience at the multi-campus community college with a private university where she served as adjunct faculty in the past and felt more respected despite lower pay. This comparison underscores the importance of institutional culture and

attitude toward adjunct faculty. She argues that respect and inclusion can go a long way, even in the absence of financial incentives.

In sum, Jordan's interview reveals a complex interplay between intrinsic motivation and systemic barriers. Her insights point to the need for both structural improvements, such as fair compensation and access to resources and cultural shifts that recognize adjunct faculty as valued members of the academic community. Her voice is not only representative of broader adjunct faculty concerns but also serves as a call to action for institutions seeking to improve faculty support and student success.