
Contingent and Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty: Motivations and Incentives to Teach Distance

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Abstract

The number of distance education (DE) offerings, including programs and courses, continue to grow in higher education. The current economic hardships have only increased the demand. However, with this increase comes the urgent need to maintain a reliable and consistent DE faculty. This need is complicated by the increasing reliance on contingent faculty to teach DE courses. While previous research has focused on the motivators and incentives of DE faculty members, little has been explored about the differences between the contingent and tenured/tenure-track instructors. This paper reports the findings of a study focused on the motivations of and incentives for two groups of faculty members who teach distance education courses, tenured/tenure-track and contingent. The study compared the motivators and incentives that drive each group's decisions to participate in DE instruction.

Introduction

Growth in distance education (DE) enrollment and needs for DE administrators to meet staffing challenges under budget constraints are accompanied by a growing reliance on part-time adjunct and non-tenure track instructors to teach online courses (Bettinger & Long, 2010; Fagan-Wilen, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2006). This staffing model creates challenges for DE administrators, such as increased turnover of contingent faculty coupled with costs of recruitment and retention (Betts & Sikorski, 2008). A reliable and consistent contingent faculty is essential to growing and maintaining quality in distance education programs. It is imperative for DE administrators to be aware of factors that motivate instructors (both tenure-track and contingent) to teach DE courses and the types of incentives needed in order to attract and retain them. While several studies were found that identified factors that motivate DE instructors to teach (Maguire, 2005; McKenzie, Mims, Bennett, & Waugh, 1999; Parker, 2003; Wilson, 2001), none were found that look at the similarities and differences between tenured/tenure track and contingent faculties. In a primarily quantitative study, DE instructors were asked to identify the factors by which they are motivated to teach distance education courses. In addition, they were asked about the types of incentives that would positively influence their decision to teach again. A questionnaire was distributed to all DE instructors listed for an academic year at a large, research-intensive university in the southern U.S. Analyses were performed to compare the responses of the tenured/tenure-track faculty to those of the contingent faculty.

Literature Review

There are several areas of the literature that inform this study. The changing landscape of distance education plays a role as does the motivation of faculty to teaching DE courses. Retention of students is an issue that complicates matters as distance education has had higher attrition rates than face-to-face learning. Thus, the increasing use of contingent faculty muddies those waters even further. Finally, the status and characteristics of contingent faculty as a group provides insight into this study.

The Growth of Distance Education

Higher Education continues to see strong growth in the number of courses and programs offered online. In their 2010 Sloan-C report, Allen & Seaman confirm that more chief academic officers than ever (63.1%) agree that online education is critical to their long term strategies. In addition, they found that the percentage of students taking at least one online course has increased from 9.6% in 2002 to 29.3% in 2009. "Three quarters (74.5%) of all institutions say that they are seeing an increase in the demand for online courses and programs as a result of the current economic downturn" (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p.14). DE is growing much faster than the overall higher education growth rate with public institutions witnessing the highest impacts (Allen & Seaman, 2009). Cuts in state funding and the current economic downturn have exasperated this increase. "The economic impact has been greatest on demand for online courses, with 66 percent of institutions reporting increased demand for *new* courses and programs and 73 percent seeing increased demand for *existing* online courses and programs" (Allen & Seaman, 2009, p.1). Distance education is and will continue to be an increasingly important part of higher education.

Faculty Motivation to Teach DE Courses

Faculty members are still generally resistant to being involved in teaching distance education courses. "Less than one-third of chief academic officers believe that their faculty accept the value and legitimacy of online education. This percent has changed little over the last six years" (Allen & Seaman, 2009, p.3). This is consistent with other studies that reported that faculty members teaching distance education courses felt they were undertrained, under-supported, and had a heavier workload than those teaching face-to-face courses (Academic Leader, 2006; Conceição, & Baldor, 2009; Wilson, 2001). "For a variety of reasons, faculty resist efforts to force them into distance learning" (Bower, 2001, ¶3).

Parker (2003) reviewed over 100 articles about faculty motivation and incentives to teach DE courses. She found that in general, faculty are motivated to teach DE courses for the same reasons they are motivated to teach traditional courses which are overwhelmingly intrinsic rewards. She also found only three motivators appeared consistently in the literature, self satisfaction, flexible scheduling, and accessibility to a wider audience. These findings are consistent with those of Wilson (2001) who surveyed all full-time faculty in nine Kentucky state-supported institutions of higher learning and found that instructors "tended to be intrinsically motivated to participate in DE, especially to facilitate student learning" (p.71). Her study found the lowest ranked motivators to be financial rewards.

In a study of 70 faculty members, McKenzie, et al. (2001) found that they were most likely to deliver online courses to get students more involved with technology, to enhance course quality through innovation, and to meet the needs of students at a distance. Maguire (2005) performed an extensive literature review on the motivating factors for faculty participating in online teaching. Through her review she identified three categories of factors, intrinsic (those internal to the faculty member), extrinsic (those external to the faculty member), and institutional which are described as extrinsic motivators which "the institution or the administration are perceived to have the ability or power to alter distance education policies or procedure" (Maguire, 2005, ¶17). She also found the literature to support intrinsic motivators as the strongest for enticing faculty to teach online.

Retention of Students

Those institutions with the most DE experience are more likely to believe that it is harder to retain students in online courses than face-to-face courses (Allen & Seaman, 2009). Student services may suffer, such as advising and mentoring, as continuity in faculty decreases. Accrediting commissions are beginning to see problems and are already pointing out that institutions using contingent faculty have a greater responsibility for training, oversight, evaluation and personal development (Middle States Commission on Higher Education's Standards for Faculty, as cited in Monhollon, 2006). Jaeger and Hinz (2008) found that as exposure to part-time faculty increases, the likelihood of retention decreased for second-year college students. Similarly, at the master's level, "students were 37 percent less likely to be retained into the second year for every percentage-point increase in exposure to other part-time faculty in gatekeeper courses" (Jaeger, 2008, ¶11). Retention of an experienced distance education faculty is essential to success for DE at both the program and university levels and more and more this faculty is in the contingent realm.

Growth of Contingent Faculty

As a result of the increases in DE offerings, the lack of support and unwillingness of tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach DE courses, and issues with student retention (among others), there is a trend toward hiring non-tenure-track and adjunct faculty to fill these roles. Commonly referred to as contingent faculty, these are people in both full-time and part-time faculty in non-tenure track positions (Marklein, 2008). They have also been referred to as contract faculty, full-time non-tenure track faculty, term faculty, adjunct professors, visiting professors, and lecturers (Holub, 2003). Research indicates that adjuncts, nationally, teach 30-50% of all credit courses, with the number of adjuncts at community colleges comprising up to 60% of all faculty (Puzzi Ferro-Schnitzer, 2005).

Distance education is not the only force driving the increase in the use of contingent faculty. There is an increase in graduate enrollment, placing pressure on faculty to serve more students and contingent faculty cost considerably less than ranked faculty (Miccieri, 1996). The benefits of contingent faculty are compelling and include more flexible staffing models, higher integration of practitioner expertise, less cost to educate students (approximately 36% less), and a flexible strategy to address insecure funding for DE programs (Holub, 2003). Although part-time instructors offer benefits to students and programs, such as specific subject expertise, instructional technology expertise, a motivation to teach, and a high level of commitment, this staffing model presents significant challenges as well (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003).

With the benefits come disadvantages. Many programs suffer from high rates of contingent faculty turnover. There is documented compensation inequity. "Part-time non-tenure-track faculty are paid approximately 64 percent less per hour than their full-time counterparts" (Holler, 2006, p. B11). The trend to replace tenure track lines with contingent lines creates a permanent underclass of faculty (Monhollon, 2006). "The increasing number of faculty who are employed in contingent positions, whether full or part time, represents probably the single most significant development in higher education in the last two decades" (American Association of University Professors, 2005, p.25).

Purpose of the Study

As a result of the increased use of contingent faculty and the associated challenges, there is a growing need to better understand what motivates DE faculty to teach at a distance and to discover if there are differences as compared to instructors in tenure-track positions. This paper, part of a larger study into characteristics of DE instructors at one university, focuses on faculty motivations and incentives to teach distance education courses.

Definitions

In this study, online education is defined as courses or programs offered completely via the Internet, with no requirement for on-campus attendance. Distance education (DE) is defined as off-campus education which can include online or face-to-face education at remote locations. Blended education is defined as those courses or programs that combine both online and face-to-face components. Finally, for the purposes of this study, motivators are items that impel someone to act and incentives are rewards.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide this study:

1. What motivates contingent faculty to teach DE courses?
2. What motivates tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach DE courses?
3. What types of incentives would attract faculty to teach DE courses?
4. What incentives would attract tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach DE courses?

Methodology

This research study was conducted at a large Southeastern university (over 31,000 students) with a strong distance education component having an extensive collection of distance education programs and course offerings (over 300 DE courses, 48 distance education degrees, certificates, licensure programs, and specializations).

Subjects

The sample for this research study was comprised of all faculty members listed as teaching at least one distance education course in an academic year. The list was obtained from the university's distance education office and was cleaned to remove duplicate entries and instructors who were known to be no longer associated with teaching DE courses. The final list contained 299 instructors. All of these instructors were invited to participate in the study.

Instrument

An online survey was developed through a thorough review of the literature. In terms of motivation, the literature was reviewed to compile a list of all factors that have been found in the past to motivate instructors to teach. In addition, a separate list of incentives related to teaching was compiled. This resulted in 25 questions for motivation and 21 incentives. The questions and response options were reviewed for face validity by a 2-person panel of DE instructors, not affiliated with the study. A pilot test was then conducted using a group of 5 DE instructors from the university under study. These respondents were later removed from the sample. Several of the response items were reworded for clarity and two motivators and one incentive were found to be redundant and were removed as a result of these tests. Table 1 displays the two questions and their response options. The final lists included 23 motivation options and 20 incentive options. An option "other" was added to each question to capture any options not found in the lists. Respondents were asked to describe the option when selecting "other." Because all motivators and incentives are desirable to some extent, checkboxes were used in favor of Likert scales to force a dichotomous selection by participants.

These questions were part of a larger survey sent to 294 DE instructors listed as teaching at least one distance education course in a particular academic year. The surveys were administered electronically via *SurveyMonkey*. Respondents were given a three-week window in which to answer the survey. Reminders were sent to non-respondents twice (at the end of the first and second weeks).

Table 1

Survey Questions and Response Options

What motivates you to teach Distance Education courses? (check all that apply)	Which of the following items (if available) would positively influence your decision to continue to teach Distance Education courses? (check all that apply)
Response Options	Response Options
To enhance my online teaching skills	Free professional development opportunities
Self-satisfaction	Stipends for professional development
Flexible schedule	Tuition reimbursement at this institution
Financial rewards	Program for certification in online instruction
Pressure from my department head	Enhanced technical support
Pressure from my peers	Increased healthcare benefits
Opportunities to use new technologies	Increased retirement benefits
Opportunities to develop new competencies	Access to office space on campus
Sense of empowerment	A designated mentor from more experienced faculty
To enhance my professional career	Ability to assume leadership positions in my department
To better balance work and family	Serving on departmental or college policy committees
As a potential entry point for teaching career	Ability to attend departmental faculty meetings
To supplement my other career/job	Ability to attend departmental social activities
A lack of permanent employment elsewhere	Opportunities to conduct research
To pass on experiential knowledge	More job security
To work with adult learners	Opportunities for promotion or increase in rank
Intellectual stimulation	Eligibility for teaching awards
As an avenue for full-time employment at this institution	Higher pay
For the social connections with faculty	Closer relationships with other faculty
For the professional connections with faculty	Online community for DE instructors like me
For the social connections with students	Other (please specify)
For the professional connections with students	
For the opportunity to give back to my community of practice	
Other (please specify)	

Study Design

The research design was primarily quantitative, but also employed qualitative methods for open-ended responses. Research questions were analyzed using response frequencies for descriptive analysis and chi square tests in order to compare groups and to look for significant differences in responses. The "other" option for both questions was analyzed using qualitative analysis where responses were grouped into themes.

Limitations

Limitations associated with this study stem from three areas. First the study is limited to a single, public, land-grant university. Results may not generalize to universities with dissimilar characteristics. Second, the nature of the study makes it a snapshot of the perceptions of faculty at one point of time. It does not take into consideration changes that may occur over time. Third, because of the anonymity associated with the study, no analysis was done to look at potential differences between respondents and non-respondents. Should there be a difference, this would also limit any generalization of the findings. Finally, the results are based on instructor self-reporting, meaning that there is the possibility of error in the results that would not occur with other methods such as observation.

Study Results

A total of 142 people responded to the survey, resulting in a 48% return rate. Tenure track or tenured instructors comprised 68% (97) of the respondents and 42% (45) of the respondents identified as contingent faculty. Looking at response modes, the typical tenured or tenure-track respondent and contingent respondents are displayed in Table 2. The differences in characteristics is consistent with literature claiming that contingent faculty is likely to be lower in rank and have less teaching experience than the tenured/tenure-track faculty (Betts & Sikorski, 2008; Holub, 2003).

Table 2

Typical Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty	Contingent Faculty
Rank	Full professor	Assistant professor* or lecturer
Time teaching face-to-face courses	Over 21 years	8 years
Time teaching online courses	6 years	2 years
Academic preparation	Doctorate	Master's degree or doctorate
Gender	Male	Female
Primary teaching responsibility	Online undergraduate courses	Online undergraduate courses

Note. * = "Teaching" or "Clinical" and not on the tenure-track

Motivations to Teach Online

Respondents were asked to select all that apply from a list of potential motivators for teaching at a distance. For the first and second research questions: What motivates tenured/tenure-track and contingent faculty to teach distance education courses, the percentage of respondents selecting each option was analyzed. The response frequencies and associated percentage for each faculty group are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Motivator Selection Frequencies

Motivator	Tenured/Tenure-Track (n=97)	Rank	Contingent (n=45)	Rank
	n (%)		n (%)	
To enhance my online teaching skills	39 (41.9%)	4	22 (48.9%)	5
Self-satisfaction	49 (50.5%)	2	25 (55.6%)	3
Flexible schedule	54 (55.7%)	1	29 (64.4%)	1
Financial rewards	46 (47.9%)	3	23 (51.1%)	4
Pressure from my department head	18 (18.6%)	9	3 (6.7%)	15
Pressure from my peers	1 (1%)	14	3 (6.7%)	15
Opportunities to use new technologies	49 (50.5%)	2	28 (62.2%)	2
Opportunities to develop new competencies	39 (41.9%)	4	20 (44.4%)	6
Sense of empowerment	15 (15.5%)	11	5 (11.1%)	13
To enhance my professional career	28 (28.9%)	6	20 (44.4%)	6
To better balance work and family	15 (15.5%)	11	14 (31.1%)	10
As a potential entry point for teaching career	1 (1%)	14	5 (11.1%)	13
To supplement my other career/job	3 (3.1%)	12	8 (17.8%)	12
A lack of permanent employment elsewhere	0 (0%)	15	1 (2.2%)	16
To pass on experiential knowledge	22 (22.7%)	8	15 (33.3%)	9
To work with adult learners	35 (36.1%)	5	1 (35.6%)	8
Intellectual stimulation	46 (47.9%)	3	20 (44.4%)	6
As an avenue for full-time employment at this institution	2 (2.1%)	13	4 (8.9%)	14
For the social connections with faculty	0 (0%)	15	1 (2.2%)	16
For the professional connections with faculty	3 (3.1%)	12	3 (6.7%)	15
For the social connections with students	0 (0%)	15	1 (2.2%)	16
For the professional connections with students	16 (16.5%)	10	12 (26.7%)	11
For the opportunity to give back to my community of practice	24 (25.3%)	7	17 (37.8%)	7

Frequencies displayed in Table 3 illustrate a variety of similarities and differences between the two faculty groups. A flexible schedule was most selected as a motivator by both groups, with opportunities to use new technologies, self-satisfaction, financial rewards and enhancing online teaching skills also at the top of both lists. Differences appear in intellectual stimulation as this was selected third most frequently by tenured/tenure track faculty members, falling to sixth most frequently with contingent faculty. Professional connections with faculty and working with adult learners were more frequently selected by contingent faculty as would be expected, as some of the contingent faculty would not have these opportunities in their other work. An interesting finding is that a higher percentage of contingent faculty members are motivated to teach online due to pressure from their department heads. This might be due to the tenuous nature of many contingent faculty jobs, whereas this group might feel more obliged to succumb to this pressure.

Analysis of "Other" Motivator Responses

Survey respondents were allowed to select a response option called "other" if they had a motivating option that was not included in the list. Twenty of the respondents commented to this option, five were members of the contingent faculty and 15 were members of the tenured/tenure-track faculty. Contingent faculty responses fell into two themes. The first theme concerned increasing access to non-traditional students and those who could not come to campus. The other theme focused on helping the university as one respondent said he was motivated by being the instructor of record for DE courses and another said she wanted to help the department grow.

Tenured/tenure-track faculty responses fell into four themes. The first and second themes were similar to contingent faculty as the tenured/tenure-track faculty members were motivated to teach DE to expand opportunities and offer flexibility to students and to contribute to the organization. The third theme concerned the faculty members' need to communicate their disciplines to the public. In the final theme, instructors explained that they were motivated to teach DE courses because it was part of their job description, one indicating that they had no choice in the matter.

Comparison of Motivation of Tenured/Tenure-track to Contingent Faculty

For analyzing for differences between contingent and tenured/tenure-track faculty responses about what motivates them to teach DE courses, a Chi Square test was performed on the raw data for each of the motivators. Table 4 displays the results of these tests.

When looking at what motivates faculty to teach DE courses, a flexible schedule is the most selected by both groups (Table 3.) The next three most selected factors are also the same, just in a slightly different order. The only difference in the top five motivators between faculty groups was that contingent faculty value the ability to enhance their online teaching skills and tenured/tenure-track faculty value intellectual stimulation, neither of which was significantly different.

The least valued motivators were also somewhat similar. The three least selected motivators for both groups (Table 3) are identical. The differences are that contingent faculty were not motivated by pressure from the department head or professional connections with faculty and tenure/tenure-track faculty were not motivated by teaching DE as a potential entry point for a teaching career or as an avenue for full-time employment. But, the only significant difference between the two groups in terms of lowest motivators was in pressure from peers which was low on the list for both groups.

Table 4

Differences in Motivators of Tenured/Tenure-track and Contingent Faculty

	Tenured/ tenure-track	Contingent	X2	Df (n)	Sig. level
Motivator	n	n			
To enhance my online teaching skills	39	22	.594	1 (138)	p=.441
Self-satisfaction	49	25	.313	1 (142)	p=.576
Flexible schedule	54	29	.974	1 (142)	p=.324
Financial rewards	46	23	.125	1 (141)	p=.724
Pressure from my department head	18	3	3.291	1 (141)	p=.070
Pressure from my peers	1	3	3.566	1 (141)	p=.059
Opportunities to use new technologies	49	28	1.697	1 (141)	p=.193
Opportunities to develop new competencies	39	20	.144	1 (140)	p=.704
Sense of empowerment	15	5	.481	1 (142)	p=.488
To enhance my professional career	28	20	3.334	1 (142)	p=.068
To better balance work and family	15	14	4.631	1 (142)	p=.039
As a potential entry point for a teaching career	1	5	7.718	1 (142)	p=.005
To supplement my other career/job	3	8	9.276	1 (142)	p=.002
A lack of permanent employment elsewhere	0	1	2.171	1 (142)	p=.141
To pass on experiential knowledge	22	15	1.811	1 (142)	p=.178
To work with adult learners	35	16	.004	1 (142)	p=.951
Intellectual stimulation	46	20	.110	1 (142)	p=.741
As an avenue for full-time employment at this institution	2	4	3.540	1 (142)	p=.060
For the social connections with faculty	0	1	2.171	1 (142)	p=.141
For the professional connections with faculty	3	3	.970	1 (142)	p=.325
For the social connections with students	0	1	2.171	1 (142)	p=.141
For the professional connections with students	16	12	2.009	1 (142)	p=.156
For the opportunity to give back to my community of practice	24	17	2.309	1 (140)	p=.129

Note. p≤.05 are in boldface.

Of the entire list of motivators, only three were significantly different between contingent and tenured/tenure-track faculty: to better balance work and family, to supplement my other career/job, and as a potential entry point for a teaching career. The lack of significant difference between responses of the two groups may mean that all types of faculty members are motivated to teach DE courses by essentially the same things.

Incentives

Respondents were asked to select all that apply from a list of potential incentives for teaching at a distance. The question was phrased, "How helpful would the following items be if teaching another DE course?" (check all that apply). The percentage of respondents selecting each option was analyzed. These frequencies are displayed in Table 5 with the ranking from 1=most selected item.

Table 5

Incentive Selection Frequencies

	Tenured/ Tenure-Track (n=97)	Rank	Contingent (n=45)	Rank
Incentive	n (%)		n (%)	
Free professional development opportunities	47 (48.5%)	3	30 (66.7%)	1
Stipends for professional development	51 (52.6%)	1	27 (60%)	2
Tuition reimbursement at this institution	19 (19.6%)	8	18 (40%)	6
Program for certification in online instruction	17 (17.5%)	9	20 (44.5%)	4
Enhanced technical support	45 (46.4%)	4	19 (42.2%)	5
Increased healthcare benefits	28 (28.9%)	5	14 (31.1%)	9
Increased retirement benefits	25 (25.8%)	6	13 (28.9%)	10
Access to office space on campus	2 (2.1%)	16	7 (15.6%)	13
A designated mentor from more experienced faculty	8 (8.2%)	13	9 (20%)	11
Ability to assume leadership positions in my department	11 (11.3%)	12	8 (17.8%)	12
Serving on departmental or college policy committees	5 (5.2%)	15	6 (13.3%)	14
Ability to attend departmental faculty meetings	1 (1%)	17	3 (6.7%)	16
Ability to attend departmental social activities	1 (1%)	17	2 (4.4%)	17
Opportunities to conduct research	15 (15.5%)	10	14 (31.1%)	9
More job security	13 (13.4%)	11	18 (40%)	6
Opportunities for promotion or increase in rank	21 (21.6%)	7	15 (33.3%)	8
Eligibility for teaching awards	25 (25.8%)	6	17 (37.8%)	7
Higher pay	49 (50.5%)	2	27 (60%)	2
Closer relationships with other faculty	6 (6.2%)	14	5 (11.1%)	15
Online community for DE instructors like me	19 (19.6%)	8	21 (46.7%)	3

Comparison of Incentives of Tenured/Tenure-track to Contingent Faculty

For analyzing for differences between contingent and tenured/tenure-track faculty responses about incentives that would positively influence intentions to teach DE courses a Chi Square test was performed on each of the incentives. Table 6 displays the results of these tests.

Table 6

Differences in Incentives of Tenured/Tenure-track and Contingent Faculty

	Tenured/ tenure-track	Contingent	X2	Sig. level
Incentive	n (%)	n (%)		
Free professional development opportunities	47 (48.5%)	30 (66.7%)	4.108	p=.043
Stipends for professional development	51 (52.6%)	27 (60%)	.684	p=.408
Tuition reimbursement at this institution	19 (19.6%)	18 (40%)	6.648	p=.010

Program for certification in online instruction	17 (17.5%)	20 (44.5%)	11,561	p=.001
Enhanced technical support	45 (46.4%)	19 (42.2%)	.216	p=.642
Increased healthcare benefits	28 (28.9%)	14 (31.1%)	.074	p=.785
Increased retirement benefits	25 (25.8%)	13 (28.9%)	.152	p=.696
Access to office space on campus	2 (2.1%)	7 (15.6%)	9,428	p=.002
A designated mentor from more experienced faculty	8 (8.2%)	9 (20%)	4,029	p=.045
Ability to assume leadership positions in my department	11 (11.3%)	8 (17.8%)	1,099	p=.294
Serving on departmental or college policy committees	5 (5.2%)	6 (13.3%)	2,877	p=.090
Ability to attend departmental faculty meetings	1 (1%)	3 (6.7%)	3,566	p=.059
Ability to attend departmental social activities	1 (1%)	2 (4.4%)	1,732	p=.188
Opportunities to conduct research	15 (15.5%)	14 (31.1%)	4,631	p=.031
More job security	13 (13.4%)	18 (40%)	13,353	p=.001
Opportunities for promotion or increase in rank	21 (21.6%)	15 (33.3%)	2,217	p=.136
Eligibility for teaching awards	25 (25.8%)	17 (37.8%)	2,127	p=.145
Higher pay	49 (50.5%)	27 (60%)	1,112	p=.292
Closer relationships with other faculty	6 (6.2%)	5 (11.1%)	1,044	p=.307
Online community for DE instructors like me	19 (19.6%)	21 (46.7%)	11,140	p=.001

Note. DF (n) = 1 (142); p≤.05 are in boldface.

When asked about what incentives would influence their decisions to teach DE courses, the groups diverged. Tenured/tenure-track faculty members wanted stipends for professional development, higher pay, free professional development opportunities, enhanced technical support, and increased healthcare benefits. Contingent faculty members wanted free professional development opportunities, higher pay, an online community for DE instructors, a program for certification in online instruction, and enhanced technical support. Of these free professional development opportunities, an online community for DE instructors, and a program for certification in online instruction were significantly different between the two groups.

Analysis of “Other” Incentive Responses

Survey respondents were allowed to select a response option called “other” if they had an incentive option that was not included in the list. Ten of the respondents commented to this option; all 10 were members of the tenured/tenure-track faculty. Responses fell into two themes. The first theme concerned time and resources. Respondents commented about potential incentives including release time for the development of or re-vamping courses, increased software and hardware resources, and teaching load adjustments. The second theme focused on money. Proposed incentives included tuition reimbursement for family members, more access to grant funding, and stipends to teach distance education.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper reports the results of a survey-based study of 142 distance education instructors at one university. All distance education instructors (294) at one university were asked to respond to an electronic survey. Of this, 48% (142) completed the survey. This study focused on the motivations of and incentives for two groups of faculty members who teach distance education courses, tenured/tenure-track and contingent. A list of motivations and incentives for teaching distance education courses was compiled through review of the literature. For motivations, respondents were asked to select all of the items on the list that motivate them to teach distance education courses. For incentives, instructors were asked to select all items that would positively influence their decision to continue to teach distance education courses. The analysis focused on determining items that motivated faculty the most and incentives that were attractive to the most faculty members. In addition, the study sought to determine whether or not there were differences between contingent and tenured/tenure-track faculty members in what motivated them and by which incentives they were likely to be motivated.

In general, the study found that most distance education instructors, whether tenured/tenure-track or contingent, are motivated to teach DE courses by the flexible schedule, self-satisfaction, opportunities to use new technologies, and financial rewards. As to incentives, the study found that both groups were likely to select stipends for professional development, free professional development opportunities, and higher pay as potential incentives to continue to teach distance education courses. The finding that *financial rewards* was a top incentive is inconsistent with previous research (Parker, 2003; Wilson, 2001). In addition, contingent faculty wanted an online community for instructors like them and tenured/tenure-track faculty wanted enhanced technical support.

The demographics of this study inform these results. It should be noted that the two groups are quite different in terms of demographics. Contingent faculty respondents tended to have lower faculty rank, less years of teaching experience (both online and face-to-face), and are overwhelmingly female. These differences in themselves may be mitigating factors and further analysis is needed to uncover any effects.

In terms of items that motivate instructors, significant differences between tenured/tenure-track faculty and contingent faculty were found in three items, *To better balance work and family*, *As a potential entry point for teaching career*, and *To supplement my other career/job*, which were all more likely to be selected by contingent faculty.

In terms of incentives, significant differences were found in eight items, *Free professional development opportunities*, *Tuition reimbursement at this institution*, *Program for certification in online instruction*, *Access to office space on campus*, *A designated mentor from more experienced faculty*, *Opportunities to conduct research*, *More job security*, and *Online community for DE instructors like me*. Contingent faculty members were most likely to select these items.

This study’s findings of which factors motivate instructors consistent with previous studies (Wilson, 2001; Maguire, 2005) that found that instructors are primarily motivated to teach distance education courses by intrinsic factors. In addition, this study also indicated that in terms of top motivators, that tenured/tenure-track faculty and contingent faculty are motivated to teach distance education courses by similar items. This may be an important finding as administrators work to attract and retain both types of faculty. Special attention should also be given to motivations where the two faculty groups were significantly different in responses. To retain contingent faculty, program administrators should pay attention to the goals of the faculty members and be realistic as to the chances of and process by which one might move to the tenure-track ranks. Care should be taken to maintain the contingent faculty member’s flexibility by limiting requirements that infringe on the balance of work and family.

This study found many more significant differences between the two faculty groups in terms of incentives. Contingent faculty members were likely to select many more types of incentives that would influence their decision to teach DE courses again. This may be because teaching DE courses is becoming more and more likely to be an expected part of a tenured/tenure-track faculty member’s job.

Two incentives were at the top of the contingent faculty members’ list that were also significantly different from the tenured/tenure-track faculty, an online community for DE instructors and a program for certification in online instruction. This finding suggests that program administrators who want to attract and retain contingent faculty should consider instituting these types of programs as a value-added experience.

Implications for DE Administration

Implications are provided here for program administrators who desire to attract and maintain a DE faculty consisting of both contingent and tenured/tenure-track instructors. Programs have been challenged to have a more diverse curriculum (Bierma, 2010), to enhance the connections between scholarship and practice (Kuchinke, 2007), and to increase online course offerings (Leneer & Johnson, 2002). However, the skills needed to offer diverse topics, the infusion of more practice-based experiences, and the faculty time needed to offer more online courses will likely require an increased reliance on contingent faculty. Contingent faculty members bring benefits to higher education programs such as instructors who are situated in professional practice bring a sense of legitimacy and authenticity to programs, specialization in different scholarly areas than may be available on the regular faculty, and flexibility for the tenure-track faculty to devote more time to scholarship and other academic pursuits. All of these benefits work to provide students more varied and comprehensive learning experiences.

From these findings, program administrators can structure their contingent and faculty teaching loads with an understanding that both faculty groups are motivated by relatively the same things. The similarity in motivations of these groups leads administrators to the ability to motivate all faculty members in the same manners. Such motivating forces should include protection of the flexibility provided by distance instruction. Such protection may include flexibility in on-campus attendance for instructors, access to web-conferencing options, and limitations on requirements for synchronous instruction. Because of the motivating force of the ability to use new technologies, program administrators should advocate for campus-supported technologies that not only help to make teaching more effective, but that also allow instructors to gain technology skills that will be useful in other areas of their lives. There may not be much program administrators can do about enhancing instructor self-satisfaction or financial rewards, but these findings are useful when it comes to selecting new instructors for teaching in DE programs.

One consideration when looking at these findings is the nature of the tenure/tenure-track faculty member role. In most public universities this group has little motivation in general to teach DE courses. With pressure to research, publish, advise students, serve on committees (etc.) any incentive or external motivation to teach is likely meaningless as it is highly unlikely that public institutions could offer financial incentives that outweigh the additional workload. Teaching DE is actually discouraged in many institutions for those who are seeking tenure as it takes them away from the work that *counts*.

Specifically pertinent to retaining contingent faculty, administrators should investigate the feasibility of establishing certification programs for online instructors, not only to motivate them to teach, but to also establish baseline quality standards. Online communities for this group may address some of the isolation and disconnectedness that often accompanies the contingent faculty role. In addition, both types of DE faculty commitment may be enhanced by offering more avenues for pursuing professional development opportunities, such as free internal offerings and stipends for external offerings.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study pointed out specific ways in which tenured, tenure-track, and contingent faculty may be motivated to teach DE courses and the incentives that might be used, further research should expand upon the findings. Broadening the sample to include a variety of other public institutions of higher education may add insight into whether or not these motivators and incentives are universal in similar institutions and whether or not they change over time or due to other external factors such as economic conditions. Additionally, comparing responses from faculty from different types of institutions (i.e., for-profit, private, public) may allow for strategies for attracting and retaining faculty by institution type. The overarching goal of implementing any of these strategies should be to increase and maintain an institution's (or program's) ability to attract and maintain a qualified and effective DE faculty.

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