For-Profit Career Colleges and Faculty Instructional Competence

Because for-profit career colleges (FPCCs) are typically vocational training institutions that grant diplomas and two- or four-year degrees, the instructors are subject-matter experts (SMEs) in their professions. Most instructors have at least baccalaureate degrees in their disciplines. However, neither experience as an adult educator nor knowledge of adult-specific educational principles and instructional methodologies is a requirement for initial or continued employment. Most FPCC instructors have little or no understanding of the uniqueness of andragogy, nor do they implement its precepts in their instructional activities.

In the experience of J. Rogers, a former FPCC administrator and current FPCC consultant, the above-described instructional environment is industry-wide. Not only are most instructors devoid of andragogical training or experience, FPCCs typically do not provide sufficient continuing education in adult education theories, principles, and instructional methodologies for their faculty members. Rogers strongly believes FPCCs need to provide such knowledge and skills to increase faculty competence (personal communication, January 26, 2006).

This writer interviewed David Cooper, a retired, second-generation FPCC owner in April, 2007. Mr. Cooper's parents founded a business college, Cooper Institute, after graduating from Harvard's business education program under the tutelage of Frederick G. Nichols. Cooper Institute subsequently purchased an older local competitor and received certification to provide certificates and degrees up to the master's level. Mr. Cooper ran both schools. Mr. Cooper's perspective and responses were weighed against trade articles, observations of industry insiders, federal data, and published academic research. Mr. Cooper's statements will be cited in a shortened form ("DC") for the purpose of this paper.

For-Profit Career Colleges

CBS News (2005) reported that FPCCs constitute one of the fastest-growing segments of the education industry. The first U. S. career college opened in 1832, with rapid expansion after World War II when GI Bill benefits were coupled with the necessity for specialized training in business and industry. Revisions to the Higher Education Act in 1972 allowed FPCCs to participate in the federally guaranteed student aid program (Title IV). Massive growth was followed by a rocky period during the 1980s and regulatory restrictions in the 1990s, which resulted in hundreds of school closings (Meers, 2002). Of adult students enrolled in college courses for credit, 22% attend FPCCs, and most are in one of more than 500 sub-baccalaureate programs (Jacobs, 2003; Meers, 2002).

With total revenues in the billions of dollars, mostly guaranteed by the federal government, FPCCs have been an investment plum. Jacobs (2003) lauded FPCCs as post-secondary occupational education innovators and risk-takers whose methods should be studied. He believes FPCCs have a significant role in workforce education and training. FPCCs "are the future of education," according to Dennis Keller, then-CEO of DeVry Institute of Technology (Glass, 1995).

Glass (1995) describes how former President Clinton and his administration denounced FPCCs and labeled their degrees as valueless. As a result of this and similar attitudes from public college and university administrations, FPCCs are closely scrutinized by the public, media, accreditors, regulatory agencies, and especially their students. FPCC students, as experienced adult consumers investing as much as $80,000 in their educations, hold their institutions and instructors accountable (Flanagan, 2002; CBS, 2005). Lowry & Froese (2001) contend that effective instruction is an integral factor of such accountability because it represents a measure of institutional performance.

FPCC Faculty Description and Demographics

Meers (2002) reports most FPCC faculty hold full-time appointments, which is the model used at Cooper's schools (DC). However, industry-wide statistics among sub-baccalaureate post-secondary educational institutions indicate that adjunct, or part-time, faculty comprise the primary instructional pool. Very few researchers have studied sub-baccalaureate faculty with the intention of producing a model or defined set of characteristics (Fugate, 2000). JobBank USA (2006) describes adult vocational instructors in the following terms:

1. Part-time positions are more prevalent;
2. More than one third only teach part-time;
3. Many work in careers related to their teaching subject areas.

JobBank's (2006) description continues, "Practical experience is often all that is needed to teach" (Significant Points, par. 2). Cooper agrees, stating his schools hired instructors based on technical knowledge in their fields, rather than their teaching experience. "Good teachers did not necessarily have prior classroom experience. They were niche people who wanted be in a small environment where they could work closely with often-disadvantaged students" (DC).

Defining "adult educator" or "adult instructor" is difficult because adult education ranges from providing basic knowledge and skills to facilitating highly skilled on-the-job training. Some instructors simply have adults as students, while others are trained facilitators of adult learning activities; a wide variety of FPCC administrative and instructional positions are filled by individuals with no direct training in adult education (Hiemstra, 2002). Fugate (2000) and Hiemstra (2002) found that most faculty did not

anticipate teaching adults as they began their own college educations. Some simply transitioned to teaching because a position opened. FPCC faculty may approach adult instruction with the attitude found in McManus' (1988) unrealistic advice: "Whatever you do for a living qualifies you for a second job — teaching others about it . . . [i]f you want to try teaching but lack experience, adult-ed programs offer opportunities galore" (pp. 87-88). Hiemstra (2002) encourages the employment of untrained and inexperienced individuals as adult instructors, writing that "anyone who finds satisfaction in working with the adult learner" should have no problem finding a job (par. 3).

Recognized as experts on adjunct faculty, Gappa & Leslie (1993) identified four categories of individuals who teach in that capacity : retired or semi-retired professionals, subject-matter experts who teach out of devotion to education rather than income, would-be academics seeking full-time careers, and freelance workers who are itinerant by choice. Dozens of books and hundreds of articles discuss the pros and cons of adjunct faculty, both as employees and as instructors (*see*, e.g., Charfauros & Tierney, 1999). There is widespread debate about adjuncts' instructional effectiveness (*see*, e.g., Dickinson, 1999; Charfauros & Tierney, 1999; Fugate, 2000; and Hiemstra, 2002).

FPCC Faculty Competence: Instructional Efficiency & Effectiveness

Meers (2002) and Glass (1995) paint a rosy picture of FPCC faculty competence, noting faculty work hard to ensure their skills are highly developed and information conveyed is correct, relevant, and timely. They contend FPCC faculty are trained as instructors and have shown proficiency to supervisors or peers under rigorous standards of both curricular and instructional competence. Respondents in Fugate's (2000) study expressed concern about effectiveness in the classroom, describing their instructional roles as reaching far beyond disseminating discipline-specific information. An authority on faculty competence, Robert Boice (1992) suggests faculty lacking adult education experience or training will teach as they were taught, which was most likely through highly inefficient didactic content delivery.

Kugel (1993) writes that development of instructional effectiveness and efficiency occurs in hierarchical stages. Galbraith & Shedd (1990) identify three skill categories required for instructional efficiency and effectiveness: interpersonal, instruction planning, and teaching and learning skills. Interpersonal skills include caring about, listening to, and respecting learners. Instructional planning skills include assessing learner needs, writing appropriate learning objectives, developing effective activities, and evaluating learning using valid measures. Teaching and learning skills include creating a positive learning environment and engaging students in active learning. Cooper extends this description, indicating FPCC faculty often "love teaching" and convey that feeling to their students (DC).

Hiemstra (2002) acknowledges most adult instructors have limited training in andragogical principles; yet, he argues that many adult educators are competent, even without a college degree, much less a degree in adult education. Conversely, Lowry & Froese's (2001) study participants "suggested that instructors should not enter a classroom without adequate training" (p. 8).

Numerous general studies of instructional competence refute or qualify Hiemstra (2002) and confirm inexperienced and untrained faculty are ineffective instructors (*see*, e.g., Boice, 1992; Brent & Felder, 2001; Fugate, 2000; Grubb, 1999; Lynch, 1998). Faculty roles are changing at an accelerated rate. Current and future adult educators will likely require some level of management skill and must possess a variety of skills not previously required of instructors, including technology proficiency, synthesis and navigation of knowledge, design of learning environments, customization of learning to meet learners' needs, provision of synergistic learning activities, and the spreading of learning across a broad educational terrain (Lowry & Froese, 2001; Dickinson, 1999, Goldstein, 2001; Grubb, 1999).

Faculty Development

Although several organizations and individuals have likely performed needs assessments that are on-topic (e.g., MaxKnowledge, Training Masters, Pearson/Prentice-Hall), no published studies have been found that recommend methods for remediation of andragogical deficiencies, instructional inefficiency and ineffectiveness, or both, among FPCC faculty.

Cooper's position on FPCC faculty development supports the typical industry implementation: required participation in continuing education specific to the fields, although such participation may not be compensated. Like his FPCC peers, Cooper encouraged, but did not require, continuing education in instructional methodologies. Cooper believes there should be more training for instructional skill development because "it is almost impossible to have effective instructors if y ou rely on industry experts. You can't take a person from industry and expect him to also have complete knowledge of everything he needs to be successful in the classroom" (DC). For maximum skill development, Cooper supports one-on-one interaction among instructors, but not in the form of mentoring because "the mentor population is often not qualified" (DC). Cooper also supports new-faculty orientation activities to allow FPCC administrators the opportunity to determine individual levels of instructional competence.

Brent & Felder (2001) write, "College teaching may be the only skilled profession that does not routinely provide training to its novice practitioners" (p. 1). Lowry & Froese (2001) argue that post-secondary schools must place a high priority on faculty training, especially in the area of instructional effectiveness. The schools must also focus resources on faculty development. Otherwise, these institutions fail in their mission to foster learning. Fugate (2000) reports college faculty respondents

credited the impact of professional development on their careers, with no significant differences in the opinions of liberal arts and vocational faculty regarding development activities. In addition to assisting with day-to-day support of learning, respondents experienced increases in technical expertise as instructors. Lowry & Froese (2001) contend faculty development and institutional development are interconnected. Cooper maintains, however, "Professional development programs are difficult to create and administer, so FPCC's often put them on the back burner" (DC).

Among FPCCs, there is a significant gap in the priority and resources allocated to instructional effectiveness and faculty development (J. Rogers personal communication, January 26, 2006). According to Cooper, the gap likely arises because development activities are a cost-center with little or no return-on-investment (ROI) for FPCCs. Further, Cooper found it "nearly impossible to successfully measure the intangible benefits of such activities to faculty and students, especially in a small school" (DC). When pressed, he continued, "You have to get a feel for ROI" (DC). Interestingly, Cooper found informal, interdepartmental "relating" was of much greater benefit to instructional skill development. For that reason, Cooper's schools held social activities for faculty to intermingle. Not confined to technical/topical discussions with their departmental peers, faculty had the opportunity to share ideas for "instructional skill development" (DC).

From their perspective as vocational instructors, Lowry & Froese (2001) argue post-secondary schools need better methods for developing instructor effectiveness. They laud Canada's Community College Education Diploma Program (CCEDP), which requires two years to complete and is a condition of employment for new faculty. Holbert (2001) describes a nationwide movement in the U. S. to "professionalize the adult education field" (p. 11) through instructor certification. The certification process has multiple purposes: to provide instructors with clearly defined performance expectations, to provide an incentive for instructors to participate in professional development, and to provide a quality assurance mechanism for monitoring instructor competency. As of August, 2001, twenty-two states required adult instructor certification. Cooper does not believe in teacher certification at the college level, favoring instead the effective use of instructor evaluation by peers and students and such technological options as videotaping learning activities with supervisor and peer feedback to instructors.

Galbraith & Shedd (1990) maintain all faculty should have a plan for professional development that includes instructional effectiveness and should actively pursue it. Fugate (2000) reports faculty were more motivated and self-directed toward professional development and held development activities in high regard early in their instructional careers. Hiemstra (2002) contends faculty are independently motivated to enter formal training or engage in self-study designed to provide specifically andragogical knowledge and skills. Cooper disagrees. He argues many instructors are unwilling to expend the time or

energy required, especially since it is typically uncompensated activity. Citing himself as an example, Cooper believes experienced instructors are often unwilling to change their instructional styles (DC).

Rheingold (1994) states eloquently the need for faculty to take responsibility for developing their instructional effectiveness: "To teach is a skill to be learned, to be practiced, and ever to be perfected. It is a skill not automatically guaranteed by knowledge of your subject matter, for that by itself will not stimulate students" (p. 34). Cooper strongly agrees with Rheingold's position on student inspiration. Cooper believes the most important function of a FPCC instructor is to seek out and motivate students. Unlike students in "real colleges," FPCC students "do not usually have the academic maturity to seek out instructors or self-motivate for learning" (DC). However, Cooper maintains students are ultimately responsible for "making the instructor teach them" (DC).

Hiemstra (2002) believes that maturation of adult education as a discipline, more financial support (although he was unclear about the sources), and honing of faculty development programs for adult instructors will eliminate the problem of instructional ineffectiveness and inefficiency and andragogical deficiency. Hiemstra (2002) specifies a number of questions to encourage research, including inquiry into the kind of training needed by instructors who have no previous training or experience in adult instructional methodologies or andragogical principles. Unfortunately, he places the burden for engaging in developmental activities on adult educators rather than their employers.

As Fugate (2000) points out, remediation through faculty development has the effect of creating instructors who have increased value to other employers, so an investment that fosters better instructors could backfire. Some of Lowry & Froese's (2001) participants agreed, concluding "it was wasteful to train faculty and then have them take their skills elsewhere" (p. 9). Fugate (2000) argues against college administrations that view faculty development as an extravagance and cancel funding when instructional budgets are constrained. This behavior quickly lets faculty see how little value the institution places on professional development.

What about governmental oversight? The U. S. Department of Education recognizes sixty-three accrediting agencies, the majority of which oversee post-secondary occupational education. Each accrediting agency sets its own standards and protocols. According to Meers (2002), most FPCC institutional-level accrediting agencies require instructors to have three years' experience in their disciplines. None, however, require FPCC faculty to have experience or training in adult education. All accrediting agencies require documentation of faculty professional development, but few require faculty to engage in training related to andragogical principles and instructional methodologies (J. Rogers, personal communication, January 26, 2006). In Cooper's – and this writer's – experience, FPCC program-level accreditation holds schools to higher standards than institutional-level (DC). Cooper said,

"Accrediting bodies are not concerned with monitoring compliance. They do not 'audit' in the traditional accounting sense. They merely confirm the statements made in the school's self-study" (DC).

David Cooper recounted the various and significant changes in proprietary higher education during the past thirty years. From the industry's U. S. genesis in the 19th Century, FPCCs were typically family-owned, individual schools with little organizational structure and, most-often, administered by individuals with no formal college experience. These historic FPCCs had very little in common with state-supported or non-profit institutions. Today, with school mergers and the growth of mega-for-profit entities, accompanied by expanded programs and accreditation by the same regional agencies that accredit state-supported colleges, the delineation between FPCCs and "real schools" is becoming blurred (DC). Cooper believes as for-profit higher education industry leaders – such as DeVry, Phoenix, Kaplan, and ITT – provide serious competition to non-profit and state-supported higher education, the requirements for instructional efficiency and effectiveness will increase. He believes for-profit schools will ultimately develop internal faculty development programs to meet those requirements, requiring a complete paradigm shift for FPCC instructors and administrators.

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