

COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY RETIREMENTS: THE SEARCH FOR QUALIFIED REPLACEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Two-year colleges have grown in both number of institutions and number of faculty. Many faculty members are at or near retirement age. Two-year colleges must recruit qualified faculty for normal growth and to replace those nearing the end of their careers. This paper examines the efforts at one two-year college to find new faculty. Two senior administrators were interviewed to determine the severity of the problem, the recruiting actions taken, and the successfulness of recruiting efforts. Efforts include advertising nationally, increased advertising on the college's website, recruiting from other websites, and recruiting "in-house." Recommendations for policy are also provided.

INTRODUCTION

Daugherty (2003) states that "community colleges are one of the most important sectors of U.S higher education" (p. 75). Generally designed to increase access to higher education without burdening four-year colleges, community college enrollments boomed in the 1950s after World War II as a result of the G.I. Bill. In the 1960s and 1970s, demand again increased when baby boomers began to reach college age and Vietnam War veterans returned to use the G.I. Bill benefits. Others in America looked to colleges as a way to avoid service in the Vietnam War (Kane and Rouse, 1999).

With an increase in demand for services, the number of community colleges increased at a rapid rate. This rapid increase in numbers required hiring additional faculty and staff. "Faculty members hired during the great expansion of community college education in the 1950s and 1960s are now reaching retirement age, and after many years of hiring freezes, reductions in force, and restricted growth, community colleges today are recruiting increasingly large numbers of new faculty to fill retirees' positions" (Winter & Kjorlien, 2000). The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the actions of one community college in South Carolina, as administrators recruit replacements for retiring faculty and prepare for future vacancies. This study will be guided by two questions: 1) what is the severity of the problem at this community college and 2) what actions are being taken to find replacements for retiring faculty members?

BACKGROUND

Table 1 provides the most recent data of change in the number of two-year colleges and faculty over the period 1975 – 2005.

Table 1: Two-Year Colleges and Faculty: 1975 to 2005

Item	1975	1985	1995	2005
Number of colleges ^a	1,128	1,311	1,462	1,694
Instructional staff (Lecturer or above) ^b	161	211	285	373

Source: U.S. National Center for Education Statistics

^aIncludes branch campuses. ^b Number in thousands

The number of two-year colleges and branch campuses increased 50% between 1975 and 2005. During this same timeframe, the number of faculty increased 132%. Upon closer examination, the percent change in the number of two-year colleges increased 16% between 1975 and 1985, while in the decade 1985 to 1995, the number of two-year colleges increased 12%. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of two-year colleges increased 16%. The increase in the number of two-year college faculty was quite different. Over each decade of the period 1975 through 2005, on average, the percent difference of faculty increased 32%. Based on these findings, two-year colleges must be concerned with recruiting qualified faculty for normal expansions. Table 2 shows the most recent data of percentages, and total numbers of two-year faculty by age group.

Table 2: Two-Year Faculty Age in 2004

Age of faculty	Percent of Total	Total ^a
Under 55	35	790
55 or above	65	422

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:04).

^aNumber in thousands.

Roughly 65% or 422,000 two-year college faculty members are at or nearing the age of retirement. “One-quarter (25 percent) of faculty members fifty-five or older reported that they were very likely to retire in the next three years. An additional one-quarter (24 percent) were somewhat likely to retire. Nineteen percent of all full-time instructional faculty and staff had at least some plans to retire” (Martin Conley, 2005, p. 17). Given this, many two-year colleges should prepare to recruit qualified replacements for those retiring now or that may be retiring in the near future.

METHODOLOGY

Two senior administrators of one two-year college, located in the South Carolina Upstate region, were asked to participate in a short survey regarding the severity of the faculty retirement problem and the extent of their faculty recruitment efforts. One administrator responded to the survey questions during a phone interview with the researcher. A second administrator completed the survey and returned their responses directly to the researcher electronically. These participants were asked three open-ended questions: a) what is the extent of the problem of retiring faculty at your institution; b) What actions are being taken by your institution to find replacements for these retiring faculty members; and c) what successes are you finding with these actions? The findings presented are based on the results of these survey responses.

FINDINGS

The problem of retirements may not be as bad now as it was earlier in the decade. South Carolina has the Teacher and Employee Retiree Incentive program (TERI) program which eased the burden as replacements were recruited and hired. According to the South Carolina retirement systems (2007) website, under the TERI program, if an individual is an active employee who is eligible for service retirement, the employee may elect to participate in the program. TERI allows an individual to retire and begin accumulating retirement annuity on a deferred basis without terminating employment; the employee must enroll in the program at the time of retirement.

The main action taken by this institution has been to double recruiting efforts. Before 2000, this two-year college primarily recruited from within the state of South Carolina. Now, they recruit nationally, not through the Chronicle of Higher Education, but through lesser known publications due to cost considerations. They have also advertised through several trade publications specific to the disciplines from which they wish to recruit. Recruitment is also conducted through the use of their web site.

In health programs, specifically nursing, the problem is not only finding replacements for retiring faculty, it is simply hiring new faculty for expanding or specialty programs. The Dean of Nursing will often watch and recruit from clinical sites. Another action taken by this two-year college to attract new faculty for these programs has been to pay for advanced degrees for hard-to-recruit faculty such as nursing instructors. This two-year college began using its Foundation to provide financial assistance for its employees to earn advanced degrees many years ago. In recent years, significant increases have been allocated for employees pursuing a Masters in nursing degree.

An individual possessing a Bachelors of Science, Nursing (BSN) degree will be hired and placed into an assistant teaching slot for the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program. While working in this capacity at the two-year college, they will receive financial assistance from the college Foundation to work toward completing their Masters degree. Upon completion of the Masters of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree, the employee is placed into a faculty position in the Associate Degree Nursing program. Once into a faculty position, the individual is bound to a five-year employment agreement. If the faculty member leaves during the first five years, they must repay the Foundation a pro-rata share of the assistance that they received.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the problem of faculty retirements in two-year colleges from the perspective of one South Carolina two-year college. Overall, roughly two-thirds of two-year college faculty members are at or nearing the age of retirement. Within the last four decades, two-year colleges have continued to grow at a rate of approximately 15% each decade. The growing problem is two-fold; two-year colleges must be concerned with recruiting qualified faculty to replace those nearing the end of their careers and also recruit for normal growth.

The impact of the problem for this two-year college has been eased through the Teacher and Employee Retiree Incentive (TERI) program for most disciplines. One response to the problem of recruiting to specialty areas such as nursing has been to double recruiting efforts and expand active searches outside the state of South Carolina. Another response has been to increase monitoring and recruitment of qualified instructors from clinical websites. A third effort is the offer of financial assistance to nurses holding baccalaureate degrees in nursing and having the potential to become effective instructors. This offer enables these individuals to gain their MSN while teaching at the college. In return, an obligation to

continue to teach at the college is expected. Collectively, these efforts have proven highly effective and, with the exception of four or five slots, the college is fully staffed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Based on this research, two-year college administrators should consider lobbying legislators to implement state incentive plans to encourage faculty eligible for retirement to continue their service to ease the burden. An aggressive recruitment effort using multiple venues is another aspect of the solution. Two-year colleges may also wish to consider looking within for potential replacements for faculty. Individuals with the talents and skills needed to be quality faculty members may be in service, but lack the academic credentials. This may be due to a lack of funding for advanced degrees. Two-year colleges should consider policies that address the issue of funding the academic efforts of top candidates in an effort to secure future qualified faculty.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study was conducted on a local level, it may be beneficial to expand the focus to the regional or national levels as well. Additionally, an examination of the various programs offered by other states, such as the South Carolina TERI program, may add another dimension to the options available to community colleges as they recruit new faculty members. Finally, since community colleges are expanding their programs into hard-to-staff specialty areas such as nursing, an examination of the efforts to sway legislators at the state and national level to increase funding for the purpose of recruiting and retaining quality faculty may be an interesting study.

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