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“Where do I park my DeLorean? A Workshop to Establish an Informed and Dignified Work Experience for New Part-Time and Partial-Load Faculty”

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Abstract: This paper identifies some of the problems stemming from current onboarding practices of contract faculty within many Ontario community colleges. It identifies how a lack of proper onboarding impacts new faculty. It further considers how limited onboarding informs the comprehensive relationship between colleges and contract faculty. This offering stresses the importance of managing long-term expectations, of providing clear information and fostering a sense of belonging for contract faculty. The paper begins by highlighting the existing gaps in onboarding processes, particularly for part-time (PT) and partial-load (PL) instructors. It emphasizes the disconnect between institutional expectations and the information provided to new hires, leading to misunderstandings and potential resentment. The lack of clarity on career advancement prospects further compounds challenges faced by contract faculty members. The authors argue that an effective onboarding process should go beyond simply providing access to virtual learning management systems and human resources information. It should include comprehensive support and guidance tailored to the specific needs of PT and PL faculty. The paper proposes the development of an onboarding manual based upon solutions generated from a workshop that identifies and addresses the challenges faced by new contract faculty.

Keywords: Onboarding Practices, Contract Faculty, College, Support.

Introduction

Congratulations, you're hired! And oh, you start teaching in two days. Welcome!

This *greeting*, coupled with an intro to Human Resources and the college's virtual learning management system, has been the stark reality of onboarding for many part-time (PT) and partial-load (PL) faculty members across Ontario colleges. While some institutions have implemented initiatives to improve onboarding processes for full-time instructors, little guidance and support are provided to those new to contract faculty work. Counsel beyond *click this link* is warranted, particularly as post-secondary institutions gravitate towards automation and self-direction.

PT and PL instructors are often unaware of how to access curriculum materials, when to ask for support, to whom to direct students with registration concerns, or where to park their DeLorean (but we'll get back to that...*in the future*). The disconnect between the institution and new hire lies within the types of questions and responses that are not explicitly stated at the signing of new work agreement(s). For example, does the new contract faculty member harbour the notion that being hired as a PL professor is the first step en route to full-time employment at some point in the near future? If that is not a realistic assumption, has that been explicitly communicated to the hire?

Concealed expectation, for example, would be a breeding ground for misdirected efforts by the new hire, met by corporate indifference from the college, possibly resulting in burgeoning faculty resentment. An onboarding process that reviews and manages expectations surrounding advancement would increase clarity in a situation like that. Beyond misunderstandings, however, there is still some baseline information that ought to be provided to PT/PL teaching faculty. Without guidance and support, PT/PL embark on their teaching journey feeling ill-prepared and incidental, which with prolonged exposure to what can feel like employer apathy, can affect their well-being.

This presentation and workshop seek to identify and itemise college PT/PL instructor challenges at the onset of their teaching employment. The solution-directed, brainstormed ideas collected from the workshop will serve to provide the basis for producing better onboarding practices. The data will be provided to college administration(s). We plan to develop an onboarding manual based on the solutions generated from this workshop in support of new PT/PL instructors.

The DeLorean

Let us now outline and contextualise the use of the question/assertion, 'Where do I park my DeLorean?' What is a DeLorean? What does parking this vehicle have to do with acclimating to a new part-time teaching position?

Firstly, a DeLorean was imagined and manufactured by its namesake, John DeLorean, an automotive industry visionary executive, turned automotive visionary entrepreneur. He identified, what he believed, was lacking in the driver's experience and built it. The resulting vehicle, the first DeLorean, was available to 'fill that void' in 1981. However, despite John DeLorean's previous industry success, he had completely misread the needs of the marketplace, and, in the end, the vehicle only sold nine thousand units worldwide (Rothman, 2016). John DeLorean's understanding of market needs was not born from market assessment, but from his market assumptions. As a result, he made a costly miscalculation, providing a product born of his ingenuity and industry experience, serving no one.

Interestingly, without a clear directive of academic 'market needs' the new PT/PL professor can find themselves in a similar predicament. They are entering the academic marketplace, prepared to deliver their ingenuity and industry experience to the college without clarity of what those deliverables look like, or how to cultivate them best. Within the context of our provided imagery, the new professor's DeLorean, is their professional portfolio. The seeking out of their 'parking space' is a request for practical guidance on how to best leverage their skills to become an asset to the learning institution and the students they have committed to instruct.

Now, this is where the story of John DeLorean and the new professor diverge. The new professor wants to secure as much marketplace data as they can locate. They would like to display their ingenuity in the classroom, not in inventing new ways to locate the classroom. Further, it is a college's responsibility to ensure that their new hires are provided with resources for fulsome enculturation to the institution, prior to them standing in front of a classroom. Colleges must have a system in place that outlines where they expect the professor to park their DeLorean and provide clear directions to that space.

Finally, the workshop title, *Where do I Park my DeLorean*, serves an additional function: it is in keeping with the larger theme of this conference, *Back to the Future*. The facilitators of this workshop are team players. Therefore, it seemed fitting to have our workshop reflect the larger theme of this conference.

Tan's Tale

Tan's experience as a new PT professor serves as the inspiration for our presentation. Here is his story.

In late Fall 2022, Tan expressed interest in teaching at Humber College. He reached out to his friend Marylou, a full-time professor at Humber, to inquire whether any teaching opportunities for him are appropriate to his skill set, ideally legal writing. Tan is a practising barrister and solicitor by trade. Marylou offered to share his interests with the administration, who were happy to keep him in mind, should an opportunity arise, which it did...four days before the beginning of the 2023 winter

semester. Tan was offered a legal writing course; his initial excitement was quickly overtaken by panic. What now? Will someone contact me? What is Blackboard? How does it work? When will my email address be activated? Why won't this password work? What do I teach? To whom do I ask for help? When do I get paid? Where is my classroom? Where do I park?

Unlike many new hires, Tan had a personal connection with a seasoned faculty member. Marylou knew the *parking lot* of Humber College well enough to make some useful suggestions on possible spots for his DeLorean. While the two are touring the balance of the college campus, now the day before he is to face a classroom, they run into Alyson, a full-time professor with vivid memories of Tan's predicament. She had long abandoned securing a parking spot and circumvented being overwhelmed by simply taking public transit. Within the context of this metaphor, when Alyson was hired as PL and could not find all that was initially needed, she internalised that as an indication of her inferiority as a qualified instructor, instead of seeking out needed resources. Abandoning the quest to park her DeLorean also meant that there was a great deal more struggle than there ought to have been. Hearing Tan's story mobilised Alyson's concern. Alyson had been developing onboarding resources for full-time faculty. Tan's predicament was a stark reminder that those efforts needed to be broadened to include all new faculty. By the end of this brief but comprehensive conversation, the full-timers decided to strategically address this concern by beginning a constructive discussion with the intention of developing solutions to this glaring deficit. The bottom line: first-time instructors require comprehensive support.

Profiles of Professors

It is important to identify and qualify the profiles of professors we imagine pursuing a new PT/PL role (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

Profiles of Professors

Title	Description
The Ideal* Part-Timer	The <i>ideal part-timer</i> carries full-time employment beyond the college. They are not currently seeking a full-time career in academia and do not necessarily have any prior experience in teaching. They are incented to work at the college to access a dignified supplemental income.
The Prosaic Part-Timer	The <i>prosaic part-timer</i> does not hold full-time employment outside of the institution. However, they may carry additional part-time employment, generally in academia, and usually seek a full-time career in the given sector. They may or may not have prior experience teaching (e.g., TAship, OCELT, OCT). They may be marginalised (i.e., carry an identity that does not historically occupy spaces of academic authority).
The Passionate Part-Timer	The <i>passionate part-timer</i> carries no other employment and is not seeking a full-time career or advancement. Their incentive to work/teach is for personal fulfillment, not income. They may or may not have prior teaching or working experience.

*The adjective *ideal* is intended from the perspective of the institution

The prosaic part-timer is the focus of our presentation, but we hope the workshop and manual can support all professor profiles. The prosaic part-timer is particularly interesting, as they embody the most complex roles and expectations and face the most precarity in their work.

PT/PL College Instructors: Sustaining Perpetual Precarity

The trending verity of the PT/PL college instructor experience is defined by a perpetually unstable, insecure, and rudderless work environment. Yet, most of the college academic workforce is PT/PL, and therefore, this precarity is dynamic. It is an unapologetic institutional cost-saving measure (La Tour, 2019). It is a trend with annual growth: “There’s been a 200 percent increase in contract faculty and only a fourteen percent increase in regular faculty” (Fitzpatrick, 2017). PT/PL instructors are expected to assume workloads equivalent to (and sometimes more than) those of full-timers, with less compensation (Shafiq, 2021). According to Shafiq’s (2021) piece, *Trapped in the Ivory Basement*, “at Toronto’s four public colleges—George Brown, Sheridan, Humber, and Centennial—contract faculty consistently face chronic job instability and lower wages than their full-time counterparts.”

The COVID-19 global pandemic intensified the precarious work conditions of contract faculty into unsustainability. During the pandemic, college enrollment dropped, justifying the loss of contract work for many PT/PL instructors that followed (Busta, 2021). Additionally, migrating the teaching model from an in-person to a virtual one meant larger class sizes and fewer instructors (Flaherty, 2020). Today, institutions have not completely returned to pre-pandemic teaching and learning models, nor have they made any measurable indication of doing so in the future. Budget constraints and/or other politically driven agendas may be the cause (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020). Post-pandemic higher education trends have pushed PT/PL faculty considerations further into the peripheral. Irrespective of institutional pandemic coping measures, it is likely that the journey of isolation for contract faculty begins during onboarding, or a lack thereof.

Onboarding Frameworks and Guidelines

Onboarding for college instructors can manifest differently across institutions. Onboarding is “the process by which a new instructor is oriented to his or her role as an instructor and best practices to complete that role successfully” (Fogle, 2018, p. 15). Bauer (2010) is widely recognised for his conceptual framework of the onboarding process, shaped by his experience in human resources and organizational socialization theory. Organisational socialisation is “a process by which a new employee acquires knowledge and skills necessary to assume a role in a new organization” (Fogle, 2018, p. 18). Bauer (2010) determined four levels of onboarding: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. *Compliance* represents the lowest level of information instructors must know (e.g., policies), while the next level (*clarification*) ensures that instructors understand their roles and responsibilities. *Culture* is where instructors are introduced to the formal and informal norms of the institutions and *connection* puts instructors in contact with colleagues. At every level, Bauer (2010) suggests the cultivation of baseline competencies before instructor start dates and the use of milestone dates i.e., *30 days*, *60 days*. Additionally, instructors are invited to schedule *check-in* meetings and stakeholder engagement, as part of the structured onboarding process (Rodrigues, 2019).

With Bauer’s (2010) conceptual framework as a bedrock, researchers have proposed varying onboarding initiatives. For example, Eisner (2015) crafted ten institutional directives to follow when developing onboarding programs. These guidelines include, “[placing] someone in charge, anchor it in the faculty, give all a role to play, balance formal structure with spontaneous interaction, train participants...” (Eisner, 2015, p. 15–16). Similarly, institutions have likely designed their own onboarding programs and practices. For example, Humber College (2022) offers voluntary orientation sessions, during the summer, for part-time faculty. Whilst some of these initiatives are solution-facing, evidence suggests that

part-time/partial-load onboarding initiatives (in research and practice) are not sufficiently effective (see Farakish, Cherches, & Zou, 2022; Fogle, 2018; and Rodrigues, 2019 for comprehensive literature reviews on the given subject). For example, many onboarding practices do not go beyond a single orientation session (Farakish et al., 2002). Existing PL/PT onboarding practices are often untimely, not compensated for, and replete with more information than can be absorbed within the timeframe of the ‘training’ (Farakish et al., 2002).

Conclusions

Given the current state of onboarding practice and its obstacles to efficacy, what *does* successful onboarding for new PT/PL college instructors look like? According to Bauer (2010), best practices for onboarding begin with a written plan. An effective written plan would include orientation, training for the learning management system and technology introduced, and directions to the parking lot and spot, for each new faculty’s DeLorean...or whatever model or make best describes their value proposition.

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Availability of data and material

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author’s contributions

Both authors conceptualized, designed, and wrote the manuscript, as well as contributed to manuscript drafting and revision and approval of the final version.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval

No ethics approval required for this publication.

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