

Chapter 11

The Gig-Juggler: Part-Time Faculty in the For-Profit University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will introduce the part-time online for-profit faculty member who has carved out a full-time (or more) work life teaching for these institutions. Who are they, and do they fit the profile of a traditional adjunct or contingent faculty member? Specific challenges and experiences of the part-time faculty member will be presented, and suggestions for leadership will be offered. The voices in this chapter are those of part-time faculty who teach in two or more online for-profit universities, with PhDs, professional licenses, and extensive work experience.

INTRODUCTION

The Road to Juggler

After leaving the professional rat-race riddled with a life of overwork, burnout, and enormous stress, I needed a break. Since I was already teaching part-time online, I figured our family could simplify, hunker down in an RV and reconnoiter what might come next for us. I was teaching two courses with 30 students each, and I was earning more than \$1,000/week. It would turn out to look great on the surface: a professor mom and road-schooled kid having rich experiences, seeing national parks, learning

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all kinds of things; but I hid a troublesome reality. I became a very low-income sort of person four months into this plan, when the university shifted gears, the course no longer loaded to two full sections, and I was teaching one very small section of the course. My income went from over \$1,000 a week to under \$1,000 a month in one day. I'd learned the most important rule of gig-juggling: Never depend on one school. For the next two years, I would jump on any crumbs that came my way developing volumes of course prep, feedback banks, resources, videos, and became very creative with how to live for free in an RV by doing volunteer work. When I added my second university, a lot more doors opened, a lot more opportunities came around for me, and I started to think perhaps this could become a viable career option instead of a temporary filler. A decade later, gig juggling is what I do. I have taught 280 individual sections of 39 different courses during 21 years.

In a study involving part-time faculty subjects, 40% indicated that they would ideally be teaching for two or more institutions (Starcher, 2017), suggesting a fair number of part-timers are hoping for more opportunities. One colleague shared that her path to gig-juggling happened when she realized there were not going to be any good days to have off. She was able to stop in to work for less than three minutes one or two of the days of the week but to be truly successful, she needed to be there 6–7 days. She realized quickly after adding a second gig, that the three-minute days were different days at that place, so at that point, given there will be no days available to be off, that gig-juggler put on her entrepreneurial hat and organized time like a pro, seeking out additional opportunities to pack her calendar. The gig-juggler might have at least a few days a month that will be very close to being a free day, where they check in to each institution for a wee bit of time and have their workday finished in an hour. The trouble is that those are unpredictable days at best.

BACKGROUND

Adjunct Casual Contingent Professional Full-Time/Part-Time Migrant Temporary Faculty

A challenge in discussing the role of the faculty with many part-time positions at multiple online for-profit universities can be what we call these people. Any examination of research on the population of faculty gig workers would involve any of these terms, none of which completely fits the gig-juggler well. There is a fair amount of literature that involves adjuncts, but in the for-profit world, an adjunct is often someone who is brand new to the gig and is not on the official teaching schedules yet. Once they are being re-hired each term, their title would shift to

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