How Industry Professionals Learn to Become Effective Adjunct Professors

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Abstract
This study investigated how industry professionals go about acquiring and building the teaching skills required to succeed as an adjunct professor. A target outcome was to help administrators gain a deeper understanding of the real-life experiences of a major segment of their faculty. Today, most college instructors are adjuncts (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012), and individuals who hold a full-time job within a given profession represent the largest adjunct segment (Eagan, 2007). Yet how do these individuals pick up the teaching skills to effectively share their subject matter knowledge with college students? Study participants described in their own words how they learn to teach and the obstacles they face in the process. The study employed a qualitative design and involved approximately 60 adjuncts from industry participating in a combination of an online survey, a focus group, and a one-on-one interview. Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998) provided the theoretical lens for examining the research questions. Three findings emerged from the study about adjuncts from industry: 1) they typically are self-confident and self-sufficient in accepting adjunct assignments, 2) they report both direct and indirect obstacles that impact their effectiveness as teachers, and 3) most feel that their college or university underinvests in adjunct orientation and development, but a minority speak highly of the support their institution provides. This latter group provides exemplars that can help colleges and universities in developing programs for their adjunct faculty.

Key Words: Adjunct, Part-time, Faculty, Teaching, Orientation, Development, Adult Learning Theory
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Chapter I: Introduction

The model of how colleges and universities teach their students has shifted significantly during the past few decades. Previously, the majority of instructors were full-time tenure track professors (Marcus, 2009; Gappa, 2000). These individuals received their training as teachers in parallel with their studies to earn a doctoral degree, often serving as teaching assistants or instructors for entry-level courses (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). A key part of their role was to advance theory through research and publication of their findings.

Today, the majority of higher-education instructors are contingent faculty, meaning that the college or university has hired them for a temporary period for a specific assignment, rather than for a permanent position with the possibility of tenure (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). Most of these contingent positions are filled by part-time adjunct faculty (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2010). These individuals often are industry professionals whose primary job is within their given field and whose secondary job is teaching college courses (Eagan, 2007; Gappa, 2000). They typically possess deep hands-on experience that can be of great value to universities seeking to provide students with practical knowledge (Lei, 2008; Forbes, Hickey & White, 2010; Kirk & Spector, 2009). At the same time, they likely will have little or no teaching experience when they start (West, 2010; Coddington, 2005; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Berschback, 2010; Minter, 2011). In addition, these individuals rarely will be involved in academic research and publishing (Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez, & Muth, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The use of adjunct faculty in U.S. colleges and universities has increased dramatically during the past few decades. In 1980, according to the National Center for Education Statistics
(as cited in Gappa, 1984), part-time instructors comprised 32% of higher education faculty in the U.S., which in itself represented a steady increase over the prior three decades. Moser (2000) reports that contingent faculty grew by 1% per year in comparison to tenured faculty between 1970 and 2000, suggesting a 30% relative increase during that period. Between 1975 and 2005, the percentage of part-time faculty in the U.S. more than doubled, from 22% to 48% (Kirk & Spector, 2009). In 2007, part-time faculty accounted for more than half of college and university faculty in the U.S. (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2009). More recent data show that approximately 75% of the 1.8 million undergraduate instructors in the U.S are contingent employees (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2010), with part-time faculty representing 70% of this contingent workforce (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012). While the use of part-time faculty is far from a new phenomenon, their employment has passed an important demarcation point in recent years – they now represent the major teaching group at U.S. colleges and universities.

Higher education institutions have moved in this direction for several reasons. One is the ability to tap into the real-world experience of industry professionals. This benefits students by providing them with a better understanding of how theory relates to practice and exposing them to the skills that are required in the workplace. The shift to a greater dependence on part-time instructors, however, has spurred debate about the relative strengths and weakness of adjunct faculty in comparison to full-time faculty. One basic issue that arises is that industry professionals who choose to serve as adjuncts, a group that forms a major segment of part-time faculty (Eagan, 2007), typically come to that role with no teaching experience (West, 2010; Coddington, 2005; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Berschback, 2010; Minter, 2011). Drawing from Cohen and Brawer (2003) and Gappa and Leslie (1997), Eagan (2007) states that most “part-time
faculty tend to come from full-time jobs in other professional fields” (p. 5). Yet, Eddy (2005) raises the question of how well prepared they are for this role: “There is a difference in the skills required for classroom teaching and being a content expert” (p. 23). Furthermore, adjunct teaching often represents a secondary vocation for these individuals, implying that the time they can allocate to learning and development is limited.

A good deal has been said about how colleges and universities can best support their adjunct faculty, from actual programs in action at specific institutions (e.g., Smith, 2007) to suggestions for initiatives colleges and universities can implement (e.g., Levin & Shaker, 2011). Less attention has been paid to how adjuncts actually learn to become college instructors. Research has been limited on how adjuncts view the process of learning to teach and the process of ongoing improvement in teaching skills. As a result, a number of questions come to mind. Where do adjuncts turn to learn to become effective teachers? How do they find and evaluate the options available to them? Where do offerings of the college or university employing them fit in? Given their part-time status, how do they determine the appropriate level of effort? What gets in the way of their learning to teach? This research study attempts to gain insight into these questions, from the perspective of the adjunct professor, and fill a void in the knowledge of how adjunct faculty view their development as teachers.

Some observers might argue that no real problem exists. Their rationale would be that no large-scale student or parent backlash to the shift in the instructional mix has occurred. Similarly, they would point to fact that except for select disciplines and select locations, a ready supply of part-time instructors is available (Charlier & Williams, 2011). This study does not seek to challenge these points. Rather, it intends to examine the opportunity for college and
university administrators to gain deeper insight into how a fast-growing portion of its teaching staff thinks about and approaches its own skill development.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

The justification for this research problem is based on the convergence of three related ideas: part-time instructors now representing the faculty majority in the U.S. (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2009; Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012), part-time instructors from industry following a different path to becoming college teachers than full-time tenured faculty, and administrators gaining better insight into how part-time instructors approach their development as teachers.

The use of part-time faculty at U.S. colleges and universities has passed a tipping point, with part-time faculty overtaking full-time tenured faculty as the primary group of instructors teaching college students (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2010; Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012). In parallel with this numerical change, the nature of how adjunct professors fit within the academy has changed, as well. Whereas thirty years ago adjuncts often would be filling specific subject niches or handling gaps caused by enrollment overflows (Gappa, 1984), today the collective role of adjuncts is no longer primarily transient or supplemental. As a group, adjuncts represent a stable, fundamental component of how colleges and universities fulfill their mission of teaching students. The academy now is highly dependent on this group for its success. With this evolution has come the need for administrators to think in new ways about their contingent teaching corps and eliminate the assumptions of the past that labeled adjunct faculty as inferior to full-time tenured faculty (Kezar & Sam, 2011).

College and university administrators know how their full-time faculty have learned to become professors. Tenured and tenure-track faculty have earned their degrees and gained their
teaching experience in the systems where they end up as professors (Eddy, 2005; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). They have pursued an academic career track, a path familiar to administrators because they, too, typically have followed this path. In contrast, most part-time faculty come to the teacher role by following different career paths than the traditional academic. Administrators often have a second-hand understanding of these backgrounds and thus know less about how their part-time faculty have learned to become teachers. In short, the faculty group that administrators know the best is decreasing in size, while the faculty group with whom they are less familiar is growing in size.

Administrators would benefit from better knowing how part-time faculty approach their development as teachers (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazaar, 2010), expanding on current feedback mechanisms and adding a new level of depth. For example, university leaders may already perform a survey following an orientation program or professional development workshop. And they may regularly review student evaluations about the effectiveness of part-time faculty. What is far less common is for college and university leaders to hear from adjuncts in their own words on how they approach teaching. Given the importance of quality teaching to the success of the institution, along with the fact that part-time faculty are now the predominant face of the college or university to students, the value of this deeper insight is significant. It can lead administrators to a clearer understanding of how part-time faculty go about learning and improving their teaching and the impact of such factors as the uncertainty that accompanies part-time work (Redpath, Hurst, & Devine, 2009). In turn, this can lead the university to changes and improvements in how it supports teaching development for adjuncts. Ultimately, this can lead to improved outcomes for the institution, its part-time faculty, and its students.
Deficiencies in the Evidence

Researchers have covered the subject of adjunct instructors from many different angles. This includes examining why colleges and universities have continuously increased their use of adjunct faculty, who chooses to be an adjunct and why, adjunct satisfaction levels with the various aspects of their relationship with the college or university, the comparative strengths and weaknesses of adjunct instructors versus full-time faculty, and ways in which colleges and universities can support adjuncts through orientation and development programs. With respect to this last area, the literature contains examples of adjunct feedback on the training programs offered by the institution employing them, providing a picture of adjunct views of such offerings (West, 2010). What is generally missing from the literature, however, is research on how adjuncts, particularly those who come to the role from industry, think about the process of learning to teach, decide what resources to take advantage of, and identify and overcome obstacles to building their teaching competency.

Adjunct faculty coming from industry provide colleges and universities with practical expertise that full-time tenured staff do not possess (Lei, 2008; Forbes, Hickey, & White, 2010; Kirk & Spector, 2009). Possessing hands-on expertise in a given area, however, does not automatically translate into being an effective teacher of that subject matter. Adjuncts’ discipline knowledge “does not automatically make them good instructors” (Berschbach, 2010, p. 14). In addition, as Pearch and Marutz (2005) point out, “Many new part-time faculty members have little or no formal background in teaching” (p. 40). While a fair amount has been said about the practical expertise versus teaching inexperience divide, what’s missing is insight into the way adjuncts determine how to tackle the challenge of gaining the skill set necessary to succeed and thrive as a teacher.
Baldwin and Wawrzynski (2011) state that “sufficient data and the full understanding of contingent faculty” (p. 1507) is lacking. This, in turn, can lead college and university administrators to make decisions based on incomplete information and at times make assumptions, including ones related to how their part-time faculty teach. West (2010) provides an example: “The administration *assumed* the orientation program would help adjuncts connect to the business school and enhance their success in the classroom. They *hoped* that orienting adjuncts to the school would result in fewer student complaints and more effective student learning” (p. 21). [Emphasis added by this author.] Yet assumptions can be incorrect. Fisher (2004), for example, found that administrators believe adjunct faculty are motivated by the prestige of being affiliated with the university, yet adjuncts report that a love of teaching is their primary motivator. A better understanding of how part-time faculty think about the process of learning to teach and improving their teaching skills will help close assumption gaps that may exist.

Differences between full-time and part-time faculty, from demographics to teaching practices, are present in the literature (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Scheutz, 2002). What’s not as readily available are examinations of the differences in how full-timers and part-timers think about preparing to teach. The different employment situations have an impact on how the two groups approach teaching. As an example, it is hard for an industry professional who works part-time to find the time to teach (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). If it is hard to find time to teach, by extension it is hard to find time to learn or advance teaching skills. These types of special circumstances can impact how part-time faculty conceptualize and approach their teaching self-development.
Coddington (2005) conducted research with parallels to the study being performed by this researcher. His study examined how new adjunct faculty with no formal teacher training and employed at a specific college prepared themselves to lead a class for the first time. He found that the confidence these individuals brought to their first assignment was shaken as they encountered trials and challenges they felt ill equipped to handle. This researcher intends to build on Coddington’s study in two ways. One is to interview a broader set of adjunct faculty across multiple higher-education institutions. Two is to incorporate both new and experienced instructors as study participants. Whereas Coddington’s research findings highlight the teaching experiences reported by first-time adjunct faculty, this study will examine the thought processes and strategies that industry professionals employ to gain and enhance the teaching skills necessary to survive and thrive as an adjunct instructor.

Relating the Discussion to Audiences

College and university administrators can benefit from better understanding how adjuncts view and approach their teaching role. Several decades ago, when adjuncts represented a relatively small portion of higher education instructors, it was less important to have this insight. At that time, adjuncts filled a more supplemental role. In more recent times, colleges and universities have turned to adjunct faculty as the answer to the twin challenges of reduced budgets and increased enrollments (Umbach, 2007). Today, adjuncts form the majority of instructors teaching college and university courses and, at some institutions, they represent the entire faculty (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazaar, 2010). Given the primary role that adjuncts now play, it could be of great value to leaders responsible for academic programs to know how these key employees conceptualize their teaching role.
One potential benefit is that the research findings could open up new ways of thinking about how administrators and department heads can best help adjunct faculty in their core role as teachers. Similarly, the study could expose faulty premises that administrators hold in evaluating adjunct needs. As such, the research could lead to new resources or techniques that better support adjuncts in their development as effective teachers. While colleges and universities may ask adjuncts for feedback on training and development offerings, they may not get the data they want. Adjuncts may be too busy to provide such feedback, may be hesitant to speak too candidly, or may not be able to describe what they are missing.

While administrators are a primary audience in terms of the potential value of the research, students and faculty also factor into the discussion in important ways. In terms of academic significance, if administrators can offer adjuncts better programs and resources for teaching development based on better insight, they can increase their chances of better student learning outcomes. In terms of policy significance, the research could help inform administrator decisions on the allocation of training and development dollars among full-time and part-time instructors. For example, how much do adjuncts prefer to learn on their own versus participating in structured training programs? In terms of optimal impact on student success, how much instructional training should be mandatory versus discretionary? Being able to answer these questions accurately can help an institution allocate its training budget wisely and in a way that aligns closely with its teaching mission.

**Research Questions**

The goal of this research study is to gain first-hand accounts of how a specific group of contingent faculty – industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors – view their development and growth as college teachers, choose the resources to build and expand their
teaching skills, and perceive obstacles to gaining and building their teaching competency. The study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. How do industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors determine how they will initially learn and continuously enhance their teaching skills, and subsequently pursue resources to enhance their teaching skills and teaching competency?

2. What do industry professionals who serve as adjuncts perceive to be the greatest challenges to their learning and ongoing development as a teacher?

The intent of gathering these accounts is to understand how adjuncts view and approach the development of their teaching skills. This, in turn, offers the potential to provide college and university administrators with insights on how best to assist adjuncts in their maturation as teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that will provide the lens for examining the problem of practice and associated research questions is adult learning theory (ALT) from Malcolm Knowles (1970, 1973, 1980, 1984). The essence of Knowles’ theory is that adults learn differently from children. The terminology that captures this difference is that pedagogy refers to the methods by which children learn, while andragogy refers to the methods by which adults learn (Knowles, 1970). Others have sought to apply Knowles’ theory to adult learning in situations involving high academic content, such as in medicine (Bennett, Blanchard, & Hinchey, 2012).

In the case of this research study, ALT relates not to the students but to the adjunct professor who comes from an industry background. Many adjunct professors will find themselves in a situation where they have good control of their core subject matter but are out of their element when it comes to teaching college students (Berschback, 2010). In essence, they
are being asked to perform a job for which they are not prepared (West, 2010). Adult learning theory applies because the adjunct professor has a skills gap to overcome. Some form of learning is needed to sufficiently close that gap and achieve the desired competency and confidence.

Knowles’ theory primarily addresses the needs and requirements of an adult who is returning to school to pursue further education. This can range from an adult who wants to earn a college degree after having been away from school for many years to an individual who wants to earn an advanced degree specifically related to the profession in which he or she is working. The question arises as to how typical or atypical an adjunct professor would be compared with the adult returning to school to earn a degree. In other words, do distinctions exist between different types of adult learners, similar to the differences Knowles identified between adult and children as learners? To answer this question, the researcher will examine how similar or dissimilar the adjunct professor’s case is to the average adult learner.

ALT provides a solid framework for analyzing this problem of practice. It is a prevalent, enduring, and oft-cited construct for viewing the adult learning process (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). This study involves the learning needs of a specific adult group -- adjunct professors who come to the role with limited or no formal teacher training. An underlying premise of ALT is that it applies to all adults, regardless of background or reason for being a learner (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Thus, it is inclusive of the case of the adjunct instructor learning to teach or improving existing teaching skills. Also, ALT provides a means to identify learning methods that may be of practical value to a new or emerging adjunct professor. As such, the research offers the potential to further validate the theory’s tenets.
The following section examines several aspects of adult learning that provide insight into the link between the educator as learner and how an adjunct enters and navigates the world of teaching. These include background on ALT and associated concepts, applications of ALT, adult learning strategies, research studies with ties to this one, and adult learning obstacles.

**Educator as adult learner.** Modern adult education research and analysis began in the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. Key milestones included the first national study of participation in adult education (Merriam & Brockett, 1997) and Malcolm Knowles’ introduction of Adult Learning Theory to differentiate how adults learn from how children learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). ALT is based on the following assumptions (Knowles, 1970; Knowles, 1984; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998):

1. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before beginning to learn about it.
2. Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, including related to learning.
3. Adults come to an educational activity with a well-established set of experiences.
4. Adults are ready to learn topics that help them cope with real-life needs.
5. Adults are problem centered, not subject centered, in their approach to learning.
6. Adults are driven to learn primarily by internal motivations, such as enhanced self-esteem, job satisfaction, and quality of life.

The concept of adults being self-directed in their learning, as reflected in the second assumption, has received wide interest and attention. Cercone (2008) and Pratt (1993) describe it as a central concept and keystone, respectively, to andragogy. Merriam and Brockett (1997) highlight that self-directed learning “is the most frequent way in which most adults want to
learn” (p. 140). Lowry (as cited in Cercone, 2008) says self-directed learning occurs when control over learning lies with the adult learner. A self-directed learner demonstrates independence, a willingness to take initiative, persistence in learning, self-discipline, self-confidence, and the desire to continue to learn (Cercone, 2008). The description would look to apply well to the adjunct wanting to learn teaching skills. Knowles (1970) asserts that “those methods and techniques which involve the individual most deeply in self-directed learning will produce the greatest learning” (p. 51).

According to Merriam (2001), three theories or models have formed the foundation for a macro view of adult learning – andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning. Transformative learning involves reconstructing or significantly changing one’s frame of reference to emerge with a new and reoriented view on a given topic (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). The process has three main steps. The first is becoming aware of existing or acquired frames of reference. The second is to perform a critical analysis of the underlying premises to these frames of reference, what Mezirow and Associates (2000) refer to as taken-for-granted assumptions. The third is to reorient the frame of reference in a major way based on the insights and knowledge from exposure to new and different ways of thinking about the subject (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; King, 2002; Cercone, 2008). The result is that transformative learning shapes people and makes them different than they were before (Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

The relevance of transformative learning to an adjunct learning to teach lies in what Mezirow (1991) calls disorienting dilemmas, which are events or information that contradict or run contrary to an existing perspective. An example of a disorienting dilemma for a new adjunct might be the realization that expertise in a given field does not automatically translate into the
ability to effectively teach that subject matter. Another example could be the recognition that teaching methods that impressed the adjunct as a young student may no longer have the same impact with today’s students. As Alfred (2003) captures it, “When people recall their educational experience, they tend to remember . . . [the] people who changed their minds and lives” (p. 21). In the absence of other reference points, faculty as adult learners draw upon these positive student memories in mapping out their approach to teaching (Eddy, 2005; Chu, Chu, Weng, Tsai, & Lin, 2012).

**Adult learning theory applications.** Numerous authors have examined how the underlying assumptions of ALT can be applied to adult learning situations. Multiple examples can be found in the healthcare field. For example, Clapper (2010) examines how ALT can provide nursing instructors with insight into how adult students going through clinical simulations perceive their learning. Similarly, McMillan et al. (2007) describe how ALT application helped graduate nursing students build their knowledge of difficult scientific and theoretical concepts. Chesbro and Davis (2002) lay out how ALT-related techniques could help physical therapists in persuading older individuals to take actions to prevent the bone density loss associated with osteoporosis. Bennett, Blanchard, and Hinchey (2012) describe a teaching aid that presents ALT-based methods medical residents can apply to teach more junior students and patients.

Besides the healthcare connection, what each of these examples has in common is that ALT provides a framework for developing an optimal approach to adult learning. More specifically, the authors describe how ALT can be applied to facilitate learning. This application takes the form of customized techniques that correlate to ALT’s core assumptions. The desired learning outcomes range from better understanding levels to new capabilities that improve
performance. The intent of this current study is not to determine the best methods for helping adjuncts acquire teaching skills. Rather, it is to better understand how adjuncts perceive and evaluate the learning options available to them. Towards this goal, examples of ALT application raise the question of whether or not adjuncts experience a similar thought process in defining their own learning. In other words, do adjuncts apply learning theory in determining how to approach their own learning needs? Minter (2011) likely would say the answer to this question is no because “…the majority of university faculty may be illiterate or semi-literate about the theories and practices related to pedagogy and andragogy” (p. 7).

Another noteworthy example comes from business and industry. Williams (2001) discusses how ALT can be used to train subject matter experts as technical trainers in a corporate setting. The situation parallels that of an industry expert entering academic teaching as an adjunct. Although their subject matter expertise provides an advantage in terms of the content to be taught, “there is some question if they possess the appropriate instructor competencies” (Williams, 2001, p. 96).

**Adult learning strategies.** Similar to the application of ALT, the literature contains repeated references to adult learning strategies that overlap between the educator and the learner as the intended audience. Critical reflection, a process of thorough and honest self-examination of one’s comprehension in a given area, is one such learning strategy (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). The significance of critical reflection to the adjunct grappling with the challenge of teaching can be found in its association with positive learning outcomes. Merriam (2008) and Clapper (2010) state that transformative learning, a desired result when considering a novice instructor, does not occur without critical reflection. Mezirow (1991) adds that adult
development is based on the ability to “validate prior learning through reflective discourse and to act upon the resulting insights” (p. 7).

Different instruments exist for helping to determine learning strategy preferences among adults, such as Assessing the Learning Strategies of AdultS (ATLAS). ATLAS is a simple instrument that a user can complete in just one to three minutes; it can be taken as a self-assessment or administered by an instructor (Conti, 2009). Repeated uses of ATLAS have shown that adults fall into one of three learning preference groups. Navigators are individuals who set and follow a focused learning path, Problem Solvers are individuals who rely on critical thinking skills for their learning, and Engagers are individuals who love to learn and are passionate about the learning they undertake (Conti, 2009). Assessment instruments can help adjuncts approach their own learning. By understanding their personal preferences, adjuncts can pursue teacher training that aligns with how they learn best.

**Relevant research studies.** The literature is sparse in terms of research exploring either how part-time faculty learn to teach or how theories of adult learning shape adjunct approaches to teaching. A few studies are worth noting, however, for their value in bringing forward ideas related to the experience of adjuncts entering the world of teaching. Forbes, Hickey, and White (2010) conducted a survey of 132 adjunct faculty members teaching in a school of nursing at a medium-sized doctoral university. The goal of the survey was to identify development needs of the adjuncts and design potential solutions to the needs. A significant theme that emerged from the participant responses is the need for greater clarity in teacher role expectations and the elimination of inconsistent and ambiguous practices. Caprio et al. (1998-99) capture the same sentiment from a slightly different vantage point when they say “. . . it is a mistake to assume
they [adjuncts] know what is expected of them . . . and how they can effectively satisfy these expectations” (p. 168).

Coddington (2005) performed a qualitative study of six new adjunct faculty members at a community college in Indiana. His purpose was to examine the effectiveness of new, untrained, and inexperienced adjuncts and how they prepare themselves to teach for the first time. He found that the adjuncts began their jobs with high enthusiasm and confidence that soon waned as they experienced teaching issues they did not know how to handle.

Colwell (2011) performed a quantitative study that compared the level of importance adjuncts and administrators at nine community colleges in Oklahoma place on different types of support for part-time faculty. She found significant differences between the two groups in three of four categories: orientation, professional development, and evaluation/recognition. In each case, the administrators rated the importance of specific activities higher than the adjuncts did. The study examined the value the two groups place on different elements of instructor support but did not delve into the reasons for the ratings.

King (2002) conducted a study of 175 teachers and teachers-in-training who were taking a graduate course in educational technology. Her objective was to examine how adult learning theory could be applied to teachers’ professional development, with a specific focus on how to become comfortable with new technology and incorporate it into teaching practices. As King states, “Technology learning can sometimes be intimidating or frustrating” (p. 283). Thus, the study participants were in a vulnerable position similar to other adult learners. It is from this discomfort, though, that the research demonstrated transformational learning in the participants’ teaching perspectives.
**Adult learning obstacles.** Various authors have identified obstacles that can interfere with an adult’s ability to learn. Cross, along with Darkenwald and Merriam (as cited in Merriam & Brockett, 1997), place these obstacles into four categories. The first consists of situational barriers, such as lack of time or money. The second consists of institutional barriers, such as inconvenient course scheduling or demanding prerequisites. The third consists of dispositional barriers, such as negative past experiences or fear of being too old. The fourth consists of information barriers, such as not knowing where to turn or what is available for learning resources.

While most of the barriers to adult learning could apply to adjuncts learning to teach, one in particular is worth exploring further -- confidence level. As described by Knowles (1970), lack of confidence can hold a person back in their pursuit of learning. Lack of confidence may seem odd in considering an adjunct’s situation. Typically, these individuals possess advanced degrees and, in many cases, have achieved success in industry, government, or other professional sector. Yet this does not mean that their confidence level matches their accomplishments. Brookfield (as cited in Clapper, 2010) points out that people fear being exposed as a fraud or imposter when expectations of their expertise do not match reality. This scenario would look to be highly relevant to novice adjuncts, given that they often report receiving little to no formal teacher training (Day, et al., 2011).

**Positionality**

The researcher for this study is an industry professional who has taught for the past eight years as an adjunct instructor in a graduate program closely related to his field. As such, he brings an axiological assumption to the research. The researcher’s experiences in the role prompt his interest in the proposed study (Creswell, 2013).
Two aspects of the problem of practice are of particular interest to the researcher. One is that teaching is not a simple task, yet colleges and universities do not require the type of formal training and certification found at lower levels (Minter, 2011). This description matches adjunct faculty coming from industry; they enter the job with deep subject matter knowledge but typically little or no teaching experience (Berschbach, 2010). Two is that based on the significant growth in the use of adjunct faculty coming from industry, one could conclude that these individuals are able to adapt to and thrive in the new role. Yet it is not clear how they make it work.

The researcher expects to hear from study participants -- industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors -- that they have experienced some of the same issues and challenges that he has in learning how to teach college students. The researcher is open, however, to receiving input that is different from his expectations. In pursuing this research, he is not trying to test a theory or prove a specific method of adjunct orientation and development is more effective than alternatives. As such, the risk of unintentionally steering study participants toward certain answers is limited compared with a study in which the researcher were seeking to validate specific results.

In essence, the researcher could be a participant if someone else were conducting the study. As such, the researcher must acknowledge his biases related to the reasons for performing the study and the impact of those biases on his analysis (Creswell, 2013). His primary bias is a belief that industry professionals turned adjuncts employ informal methods, such as trial and error and talking with a colleague, to learn how to teach and continually improve their skills. A related bias is that the researcher considers his transition to adjunct teaching to have been successful. With respect to both biases, the researcher recognizes that the experiences of the
study participants very well could be quite different from his own. Similarly, the researcher will take care during the literature review to make sure he does not give unequal weight to articles that are sympathetic to or supportive of adjuncts.

In general terms, the researcher is responsible for acknowledging that he occupies a position within the research itself. He cannot be detached or completely objective in collecting and analyzing the data. His experiences will frame both the questions and how he interprets the answers. At the same time, to make study participants comfortable and encourage them to share openly, he must be mindful to be a good listener, develop a relationship of trust, and establish a friendly and supportive tone during interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

**Definition of Terms**

Some authors make a distinction between adjunct faculty and part-time faculty. For example, Langenberg (as cited in Leslie, 1998) defines adjunct faculty as individuals whose primary employment is outside of the college or university. In contrast, he points to lower pay, benefits, and status as key characteristics that differentiate part-time faculty from full-time faculty. Many authors, though, opt to use adjunct faculty and part-time faculty as interchangeable terms (Shiffman, 2009; Coddington, 2005; Pearch & Marutz, 2005). This researcher also will use *adjunct faculty* and *part-time faculty* interchangeably. By either name, individuals who perform in this capacity share the following characteristics: they represent an addition to the existing full-time faculty to enable a college or university to staff all classes being run in a given term; their teaching load is less than full time; and they do not receive the same level of benefits and job security as full-time faculty.

Adjunct or part-time instructors are a subset of a broader group called *contingent faculty*, that is, they are employed by a college or university on a temporary or non-permanent basis.
Contingent faculty can be either full-time or part-time. Their length of assignment can be as short as a term or of indefinite duration. Contingent faculty are never on a tenure track (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). In addition to adjunct or part-time instructors, full-time non-tenured faculty fall into the contingent faculty category.

*Full-time tenured faculty* are individuals who work full-time at a college or university in guaranteed jobs. As Hutchens (2011) states, with tenure “a faculty member enjoys a continuing employment relationship with his or her institution absent extraordinary circumstances” (p. 1445). Full-time tenured faculty typically must perform a mixture of three main responsibilities – teaching, research, and service to the institution.

This study looks at how industry professionals turned adjunct instructors both acquire and enhance teaching skills. For this study, an *industry professional* is an individual whose primary job is in a given field that requires specific subject knowledge and expertise. The individual teaches at the college level as a secondary role.

While the purpose of this study is not to examine the efficacy of orientation and professional development that colleges and universities offer, these topics are intertwined with the focus on how adjunct or part-time faculty view the learning process to become effective teachers. As such, *orientation* refers to programs or activities an institution offers its faculty to become familiar with what is expected of them and aware of the resources available to assist them as instructors. *Professional development* refers to ongoing programs, activities, resources, and tools that faculty can access to continue to improve their skills as teachers.

**Summary**

This first chapter presents the case for the research study and how the findings will contribute to better understanding what enables adjunct faculty from industry to acquire and
build a new skill set – teaching college students. The statement of the research problem, its justification, and deficiencies in the evidence are fairly straightforward. The use of adjunct faculty has grown steadily, to the point where adjuncts now represent the majority of college and university instructors. Industry professionals teaching part-time as a secondary position to their main job represent a large portion of the adjunct population. These individuals come to adjunct teaching voluntarily based on their own interests, often with great energy and enthusiasm but with little to no teaching experience. While certain research has examined the effectiveness of orientation and ongoing development programs colleges and universities offer part-time faculty, little has been done to explore how adjuncts actually view and approach their own learning and development as teachers. This study will help fill that void.

College and university administrators represent a primary audience who would be interested in and could potentially benefit from the study’s findings. The reason is simple: the research will provide insight that can deepen administrators’ knowledge of how adjunct faculty view and approach their role as teacher. Adjuncts themselves are another important audience in that the study provides a mechanism for their voice to be heard in a way that is currently missing in the literature. Furthermore, students are a valued audience for the study. Improved administrator understanding of adjunct learning methods can lead to enhanced training and support programs that can lead to improved teaching outcomes that benefit students.

The research questions are built around how adjunct faculty both learn and improve their teaching skills, the resources they choose to access, and the obstacles that impede their learning and development. These questions will form the basis for interviewing adjunct faculty from multiple institutions about how they view and approach their teaching responsibilities. Knowles’ Adult Learning Theory (ALT) will provide the lens for examining the research problem. In this
case, the adult who is learning is the industry professional turned adjunct instructor. In preparation for the study, the researcher has explored multiple aspects of adult learning, covering such specific topics as the underlying principles to ALT and related theories, examples of ALT applied to specific learning situations, adult learning strategies, relevant prior research, and adult learning obstacles.

The limited amount of research on how part-time faculty evaluate and act on options for their own learning as teachers supports the need for this current study. The researcher, who fits the same profile as the study participants, will be consciously assertive in ensuring his own biases do not interfere with or influence the adjuncts being interviewed.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The rise in the use of part-time faculty has been accompanied by mixed opinions and viewpoints about the impact on students, tenured faculty, and adjuncts themselves. Examples of titles from journal articles capture this divergence: How over reliance on contingent appointments diminishes faculty involvement in student learning (Benjamin, 2002); Part-time faculty: Competent and committed (Leslie & Gappa, 2002); Adjunct and temporary faculty: Advantageous or detrimental? (Gerhart, 2004); Work to school transition: Part-time faculty bring expertise, challenges to college (Cline, 1993); Community college dilemma: Adjunct faculty (Reid, 2008).

For this study, the literature review covers various aspects of adjuncts’ employment as teachers and is divided into five main sections. These include:

- why colleges and universities have continuously increased their use of part-time faculty;
- who adjuncts are and their motivations for teaching;
- adjunct satisfaction levels;
- comparisons of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of part-time faculty versus full-time faculty; and
- recommendations for supporting the orientation and development of adjuncts.

The overarching picture is one of a group that has gone from a secondary to a primary role in providing college-level instruction, is happy with its role in teaching but less satisfied with the terms of employment, and who look like their full-time counterparts in several ways but significantly different in others.
Growth in Part-time Faculty over Several Decades

The literature paints a clear picture of the transformation in U.S. faculty staffing that has occurred during the past few decades, as shown in Table 1. Once primarily a fill-in for a vacationing professor or a temporary addition to handle a surge, part-time faculty now are the largest single group of higher education instructors (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012). As the ranks of part-time faculty have surged, particularly at community colleges, the number of full-time faculty being hired into tenured positions has shrunk.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Faculty</th>
<th>% of Total: Past</th>
<th>% of Total: Recent</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part-time – All Categories</td>
<td>22% (1975)</td>
<td>48% (2005)</td>
<td>26 point increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kirk &amp; Spector, 2009)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time – Community College</td>
<td>27% (1969)</td>
<td>67% (2003)</td>
<td>40 point increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Eagan &amp; Jaeger, 2009)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time – Tenure Track</td>
<td>78% (1969)</td>
<td>34% (2009)</td>
<td>44 point decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kezar &amp; Maxey, 2013)</td>
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</table>

According to Liu and Zhang (2013), “The use of part-time faculty in higher-education institutions is extensive and has been increasing over the last three decades” (p. 20). Statistics bear this out. Part-time instructors went from 22% of the entire faculty population in 1975 to more than half of all faculty by 2007 (Kirk & Spector, 2009; Jaeger & Eagan, 2010). The number of part-time faculty more than tripled between 1975 and 2005, more than doubling between 1987 and 2007 alone, suggesting that the pace of hiring part-time instructors has accelerated in the most recent period (Cooper, 2009). The use of part-time faculty has outpaced
that of other professions. In 2009, 20% of the overall U.S. labor force was employed part-time (Liu & Zhang, 2013).

The growth in part-time faculty has been accompanied by a corresponding decrease in full-time tenured faculty. In the 1960s, 97% of full-time faculty appointees were on a tenure track; that number had dropped to approximately 30% by the late 2000s (Marcus, 2009). Colleges have hired full-time faculty at a slower rate than part-time faculty (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014). The proportion of all employees who were full-time faculty between 2000 and 2012 declined 5-7% at four-year colleges and 16% at community colleges (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014).

Part-time instructors represent the largest segment of contingent faculty; non-tenured full-time professors and graduate teaching assistants also fit into this category. The use of contingent faculty as a whole has grown in parallel with that of part-time instructors; the two combined represent more than half of the faculty at all types of higher-education institutions (see Table 2). Of the 1.8 million faculty members in the U.S. in 2009, more than three-quarters were in contingent positions (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012). As stated by Jaeger and Eagan, (2010), “[t]he hiring of contingent faculty has become the norm,” (p. 511).

While every type of higher education institution has seen a rise in part-time faculty, community colleges have been at the forefront. As Gappa and Leslie (1993) report, “Clearly the community colleges employ by far the greatest overall number and percentage of part-time faculty” (p. 112). Part-timers represented 27% of community college faculty in 1969 (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009). That number had grown to 65%-70% of the total faculty by the early to mid-2000s (Lei, 2008; Cashwell, 2009; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Charlier & Williams, 2011; Wallin, 2004; Christiansen, 2008; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; American
The impact of this evolution is all the more significant given that more than half of all college students are enrolled in community colleges (Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez, & Muth, 2010).

Table 2

Percentage of Part-time and Full-time Non-tenured Faculty at Different Higher Education Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type (2009 statistics)</th>
<th>% Part-time Faculty</th>
<th>% Full-time Non-tenured Faculty</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Research</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Non-profit Research</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Comprehensive</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Non-profit Comprehensive</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Two-year College</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Non-profit Two-year College</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kezar & Maxey, 2013)

Comprehensive universities are next in line in terms of percentage of total instructional staff who are part-time. According to Kezar and Maxey (2013), approximately 46% of faculty at public comprehensive universities and 53% at private comprehensive universities are part-timers. Next in line are research universities, with 27% and 40% of faculty being part-timers at public and private universities, respectively. It is worth noting that contingent employees represent more than half of the faculty at every type of institution.
Reasons for the Transformation

The trend clearly is that “today part-time faculty far outnumber full-time faculty at most colleges” (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014, p. 2). At the same time, it is highly unlikely that the transformation that has occurred will reverse itself. Gappa and Leslie (1993), for example, noted the passing of the tipping point some 20 years ago: “While individual part-time faculty members come and go, part-timers as a group constitute a permanent part of the faculty work force in every type of institution of higher learning” (p. 110). So why have colleges and universities continuously increased their use of adjunct faculty? Why have part-time faculty become the predominant teaching corps at the higher education level?

Leslie (1998) says, “Undoubtedly, there is no single, simple explanation for the increase in the number of part-time and adjunct faculty in American colleges and universities” (p. 4). Most authors, however, point to a combination of four reasons for the dramatic shift in faculty staffing. One is the large increase in student enrollments, necessitating the need for more instructors. Two is the ability to reduce costs, particularly for institutions facing lower funding levels. Three is the flexibility that part-time faculty provide in terms of a university being able to expand and contract its staffing with minimal risk. Four is an expanded capacity for providing students with access to real-world experience and practical skills related to their major field of study. Each of these will be discussed below.

Increase in student enrollments. Student enrollments in two-year and four-year colleges have grown by nearly 140% during the past several decades (see Table 3). Between 1976 and 1999, enrollments in degree granting programs increased 34% (Reid, 2008), and Desrochers and Kirshstein (2014) point to the uptick in millennials attending college starting in the late 1990s. Similarly, student enrollments increased dramatically in the last decade of the
past century and first decade of the new century, according to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012). In addition to an absolute growth in student population, other authors have highlighted the expansion of course offerings, including both specialized and remedial programs (Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Leslie, 1998).

Table 3

*Increase in Student Enrollments During Past Four Decades*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment (In millions)</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Increase, Period to Period</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Services, n.d.)

Part-time faculty have been the primary response to the growth in the student population and parallel expansion in student offerings. Looking at data from 1997 to 2007, the American Federation of Teachers Higher Education (2009) reports that the number of enrolled students grew by more than 3 million. Two-thirds of the corresponding growth in instructors came from hiring contingent faculty (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2009). The correlation between student population growth and adjunct faculty growth is particularly marked in community colleges. According to Leslie (1998), “Steadily escalating enrollment and expanded program offerings in community colleges seem to be the most important reasons behind the rise in hiring part-time faculty” (p. 29). Charlier and Williams (2011) state more definitively that community colleges could not have kept up with increased student enrollments without the use of adjuncts.

**Seeking reduced costs.** Higher education institutions generally do not pay their part-time faculty as much per course taught as full-time faculty and often do not offer benefits,
enabling them to reduce their costs (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012; American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2010). This move towards greater use of adjuncts mirrors market models used in business (Berg, 2002). Certain authors say that a primary reason behind the increased hiring of part-time faculty is economic (Ehrenberg, 2002; Gappa, 1984). “For more than a decade, colleges and universities have tried to manage costs by increasingly relying on part-time instructors,” say Desrochers and Kirshstein (2014). While part-time faculty save colleges money because they cost less than full-time faculty, how much of a savings is debatable. Based on figures in various studies and articles, part-time faculty earn anywhere from 22% to 80% less than full-time faculty (Marcus, 2009; Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Forbes, Hickey, & White, 2010; Schneider, 2004; Jaeger & Eagan, 2010; Christiansen, 2008; Kezar & Maxey, 2013; Monks, n.d.). One author indicates that 12 part-time instructors can be hired for the price of one full-time instructor (Lei, 2008).

While the differential is debatable, it is clear that the savings are substantial enough to have prompted higher education institutions to hire increasingly greater numbers of part-time faculty. Why is this? Given that the vast majority of colleges and universities are not-for-profit organizations, why has lowering faculty labor costs become such an important objective? The literature points to two reasons. The first reason is that public institutions have seen reduced government funding for their operations, with public funding as a percentage of college costs having steadily declined (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Hiring lower-cost part-time faculty is a counter measure to offset these shrinking budgets (Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Ehrenberg, 2002; Gappa, 1984).

The second reason is that colleges and universities have taken steps to address the expense associated with the tenure system. According to Umbach (2007), problems with the
tenure system lead colleges and universities to use contingent faculty. Liu and Zhang (2013) state that colleges that pay high salaries to full-time faculty tend to hire more part-time instructors. They then link this tactic to the desired result: “Using part-time faculty and other types of contingent faculty has been one of the main strategies to achieve these [cost savings] goals” (Liu & Zhang, 2013, p. 332). By way of comparison, colleges are similar to professional sports teams trying to balance payroll by paying a handful of key veterans at the higher end and the larger pool of less-seasoned players at the lower end.

**Greater staffing flexibility.** According to Gappa (1984), the most prominent argument supporting the use of part-time faculty is increased staffing flexibility. This flexibility can take multiple forms. One relates to the availability of part-time faculty, such as teaching evening classes to continuing education students (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Another is flexibility in types of courses taught. Multiple authors point out that part-time faculty teach a significant portion of introductory and lower division courses (Miller, 2001; Cross & Goldenberg, 2003; Gappa & Leslie, 1993).

Further, part-time faculty provide flexibility in type of delivery. Carnevale (2004), for example, points to the explosion of online courses. “Colleges increasingly turn to part-time faculty members to help expand their distance education programs,” he says (Carnevale, 2004, para 7). According to Reid (2008), full-time faculty often are reluctant to teach online courses, increasing the dependence on part-time faculty to fill the gap. An additional form of flexibility is the added capacity part-time faculty provide in helping meet the demand for new course offerings (Pearch & Marutz, 2005). In sum, the flexibility that part-timers bring to the academy “can supplement, complement, and enrich the opportunities a university offers students through its regular faculty” (Leslie, 1998, p. 41).
Provide real-world experience. One benefit of part-time faculty that many have pointed out is that adjuncts often can offer practical skills that full-time faculty may not possess (Kato, 2011; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009). “At many colleges, the use of contingent faculty began with hiring career professionals who brought real-world experience into the classroom,” (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014, p. 2). The pace of this hiring looks to have grown as colleges increasingly seek new ways to add value to the student experience. Stated slightly differently, part-time faculty with real-world experience can be a marketing advantage that differentiates a college from competitors.

According to Gappa and Leslie (1993), “Substantial numbers of part-time faculty members are employed in business, government, or a profession. They are in active touch with trends in practice and in some cases have an enormous fund of practical wisdom with which to enliven their instruction” (p. 127). Colleges and universities can offer specialized courses that draw on the experience and first-hand knowledge of these industry and government professionals (Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Kato, 2011). As Leslie and Gappa (1995) state, “. . . they are able to relate theory to practice in unusually credible fashion” (p. 93).

Gappa and Leslie (1993), who conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of the use of adjuncts in higher education during the past 25 years, describe what they learned from talking to adjuncts with hands-on experience in their chosen field. They note that:

At virtually every institution in our study, we interviewed part-timers who have full-time jobs as professionals or managers. They have advanced training in fields such as medicine, allied health, biochemistry, mathematics and statistics, public administration, business, education, social work, law, and criminal justice. Some of them teach courses
closely related to the primary occupation; some of them were hired as generalists for courses such as basic mathematics. (p. 51)

In some fields, such as nursing, adjuncts fill a role that otherwise would go unfilled due to shortages of faculty with the requisite background (Forbes, Hickey, & White, 2010). In addition, part-time faculty enable a college to try out courses in new subject areas without a major investment. As stated by a participant in the Gappa and Leslie (1993) study, “We can offer experiential courses at a minimum of risk to the institution and help create new program niches” (p. 124).

Who Adjuncts Are and What Motivates Them

Adjuncts have been teaching in large numbers at higher-education institutions across the country, filling a mix of instructional needs that colleges and universities face. But who are these individuals? How similar are they to one another in terms of background and experience? How do they compare and contrast with full-time faculty members? Why do they choose to teach as part-time instructors? What drives them to be an adjunct, particularly when it is on top of a full-time job elsewhere? Gappa and Leslie figure prominently in the research on these topics during the past three decades, highlighted by a landmark 1993 study in which they conducted in-depth interviews across 18 institutions.

Adjuncts are a mixed group. Part-time faculty are a mixed group in terms of where they come from and why they want to teach. As a whole, though, a number of characteristics differentiate part-time faculty from full-time faculty. Part-time faculty are more likely than full-time faculty to be white, younger, female, less degreed, and teaching in the arts and humanities (Eagan, 2007; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). When it comes to age, part-time faculty are more likely to be both younger and older than full-time faculty (Leslie & Gappa, 2002), suggesting that
adjuncts tend to be young people working at a first or second job or older people shifting careers or taking on a second position. In terms of academic training, part-time faculty are less likely to have a doctorate (Leslie & Gappa, 2002), with less than a third of part-time faculty holding doctorates (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Eagan & Jaeger, 2009), compared with 65% of full-time faculty (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009). At the same time, however, part-time faculty typically have more recent graduate-level training than full-time faculty (Gappa & Leslie, 1993).

While part-time faculty are likely to have less teaching experience and fewer years of teaching at their current institution than full-time faculty, as a group they possess substantial longevity with the college or university that employs them. The typical part-time faculty member has taught for 11 years and been teaching at their current institution for somewhere between four and seven years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; Leslie & Gappa, 1995), with others reporting that it is not uncommon for part-time faculty to have been with the same college or university for 11 years or more (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2010). Gappa and Leslie (1993) capture the mixed length of tenure when they note, “There was considerable variation in length-of-time-at-institution among our sites. Most were characterized by a combination of relatively new and long-term part-timers” (p. 36).

The biggest difference between part-time and full-time faculty is that the majority of part-time faculty come from full-time professional jobs in other fields (Eagan, 2007). Select surveys show that 70% or more of part-time faculty work elsewhere in non-teaching jobs (American Association of University Professors, 1998; Gappa, 2000). These other jobs typically represent the adjunct’s primary source of income. Gappa and Leslie (1993) report that adjuncts derive an average of 18% of their income from part-time teaching. This lower level of dependence on
teaching income matches well with a college’s goal of carefully managing its faculty staffing costs. Halfond (2000) points out, however, that this group’s main allegiance is to their primary employer, not the academic institution.

Multiple authors point out that adjuncts are a diverse, heterogeneous group that defies being stereotyped by a single set of descriptors (Wagoner, 2004; Wisneski, 2003; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Several researchers have tried to categorize part-time faculty in different ways. For example, Halfond (2000) places adjuncts into five groups: migrants, apprentices, wannabes, moonlighters, and retirees. Duncan (1999) groups adjuncts according to four primary motivations for teaching: intrinsic, professional, careerist, and economic. Puzziferro (2004) puts adjuncts into six bins: philosopher, moonlighter, full-time part-timer, seeker, graduate, and retiree. Wagoner (2004) sees adjuncts fitting into one of two broad categories from the institution’s perspective: those who offer specialized experience in a given field and those who offer generic skills for teaching various courses in a given subject matter.

The two primary taxonomies for characterizing the different types of adjunct faculty, both of which are based on reasons for teaching part-time, come from Tuckman (1978) and Gappa and Leslie (1993). Tuckman (1978) defines seven categories:

1. semi-retireds (former full-time instructors now working part-time),
2. students (graduate students teaching for income and/or experience),
3. hopeful full-timers (those teaching part-time as a step to gaining a full-time job),
4. full-mooners (those with a full-time job elsewhere),
5. homeworkers (those who primarily care for children or other relatives),
6. part-mooners (those with another part-time job), and
7. **part-unknowners (those who teach part-time for unknown reasons).**

Gappa and Leslie (1993) condense Tuckman’s categories into four broader segments. One is career-enders, who are similar to Tuckman’s semi-retireds. A second is aspiring academics, who are similar to Tuckman’s hopeful full-timers. A third is freelancers, who are similar to Tuckman’s homeworkers, part-mooners, and part-unknowners. A fourth is specialists, experts, and professionals, who are similar to Tuckman’s full-mooners. Given that the majority of part-timers are employed elsewhere as specialists, experts, and professionals (Gappa, 2000), this segment is the largest single group among part-time faculty. Being employed full-time at another job is positively associated with length of time teaching at a single institution. “Those who do have full-time positions elsewhere tend to have been employed at their colleges or universities as part-time faculty members for a longer period of time” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 51).

**What motivates adjuncts to teach.** The supply of adjuncts is generally plentiful (Monks, n.d.). This has occurred despite low pay, limited benefits, and a lack of job security (Monks, n.d.). Given this dichotomy, what motivates people to want to teach part-time? For most adjuncts, the main motivator is a personal interest in teaching. Researchers describe this personal motivation in various ways. Adjuncts pursue part-time teaching because they are intrinsically motivated (Leslie, Kellams, & Gunne, 1982) and have an inherent interest in and satisfaction with teaching (Eagan, 2007). Their top motivations include a joy of teaching, personal satisfaction, and a flexible schedule, Shiffman (2009) reports. According to Gappa (1984), “The leading motive for teaching part time [is] intrinsic, a matter of personal satisfaction. Part-time faculty [teach] to achieve personal enjoyment, fulfillment, and accomplishment, or to escape from a routine, less satisfying environment” (p. 35). Gappa and Leslie (1993) point to a
connection between having a full-time job elsewhere and being satisfied with part-time teaching: “Those with intrinsic motivations are almost always also employed elsewhere and are motivated to teach part-time because of the satisfaction the work itself brings them” (p. 37). This same report says part-time faculty teach “because they love to and are rejuvenated by their students” (p. 53).

While the literature makes it clear that intrinsic satisfaction with part-time teaching is the primary driver for most adjuncts, three other reasons have a lesser impact: professional, careerist, and economic. Professional refers to enhancement of one’s nonacademic profession through part-time teaching (Gappa, 1984). Careerist describes an individual’s desire to become a full-time faculty member. According to different sources, between half and two-thirds of adjuncts prefer to teach part-time, suggesting that one-third to a half have interest in a full-time position (Monks, n.d.; American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2010; Duncan, 1999). Economic refers to the compensation a part-time instructor receives. According to Gappa and Leslie (1993), “. . . economic motives—while critically important for some part-timers—are not the principal reason for entering part-time teaching” (p. 37). Another factor is cited in the literature at a lower impact; for some adjuncts the status of the role and association with an academic program are important considerations (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Klein, Weisman, & Smith, 1996). Yet all of these additional reasons play a secondary role to the personal desire to teach. In particular, for those who hold full-time jobs elsewhere, “teaching represents a professional commitment, a community service, and a source of personal satisfaction” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 51).
Adjunct Satisfaction Levels

The literature shows that part-time faculty are satisfied with their role as teacher but less satisfied with the conditions surrounding their employment. Different studies point to adjunct satisfaction being around 60% on the low end (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2010) and around 85% on the high end (Gappa, 2000; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). This high level of satisfaction makes sense in that it aligns with adjuncts being motivated primarily by an interest in teaching. Feldman and Turnley (2001) report that the most positive aspects of being an adjunct are the work itself and contact with colleagues. Contrary to popular belief, states Eagan (2007), part-time faculty are generally satisfied with their appointments. This “popular belief” relates to impressions that part-time faculty are less committed and engaged than full-time faculty (Kezar & Sam, 2011) and can be characterized as malcontented when unable to find a full-time teaching job (Wisneski, 2003).

Various researchers have examined part-time faculty satisfaction in comparison to that of full-time faculty. Satisfaction levels for part-time and full-time faculty were nearly identical in the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty survey in 1988, with percentages for both groups being in the high eighties (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). In a similar way, most studies show that satisfaction levels for tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty are nearly the same (Adamowicz, 2007). In areas showing contrasting results, adjuncts are likely to be more satisfied with their workload and less satisfied with their level of job security than full-time faculty (Eagan, 2007). Part-time faculty report a slightly higher emotional commitment to their job than full-time faculty (Maynard & Joseph, 2008).

While part-time faculty are well satisfied with the actual teaching they do, they are less satisfied with surrounding job circumstances or, as Levin and Shaker (2011) state, “the work is
satisfying but the conditions are not” (p. 1480). Specifically, adjuncts express concern about pay, benefits, job security, and overall employment status (Valadez & Anthony, 2001; Tuckman, 1978; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011). The American Federation of Teachers Higher Education (2010) survey of part-time faculty refers to these as “bread and butter” conditions and reports that 57% of adjuncts are dissatisfied with the pay. The same study shows that only 28% and 39% of respondents receive health care and retirement benefits, respectively. In addition, more than 40% of respondents say job security falls short of expectations and more than 60% indicate that full-time job opportunities are not at the desired level. Part-time faculty frustration with full-time faculty earning higher relative pay has roots that trace back to the mid-1970s (Tuckman, 1978). The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012) reports that part-time faculty do not earn premiums based either on professional credentials or years of teaching.

Researchers have developed different descriptions to capture this split between satisfaction with teaching on the one hand and dissatisfaction with working conditions on the other hand. For example, Klausman (2010) states that adjuncts resent teaching a large portion of a program’s classes while receiving little in terms of pay and benefits. He captures the dichotomy by describing adjuncts as feeling respected for the role they play but undervalued for the expertise they bring to the job. Levin and Shaker (2011) say non-tenured full-time faculty experience similarly mixed reactions to their role, leading them to view their work as part job and part profession.

Differences in adjunct satisfaction levels can be found when looking at part-time faculty in a disaggregated fashion (Wagoner, 2004). Not surprisingly, adjuncts hoping for a full-time job but not finding success are less satisfied than colleagues for whom this is not an issue (Cashwell, 2009). Most researchers say that between 35% and 50% of part-time faculty hope to
become full-time instructors (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Duncan, 1999; American Association of University Professors, 1998; American Federation of Teachers, 2010). In contrast, Jacoby (2005), contends that most part-time faculty both want and seek full-time positions.

Maynard and Joseph (2008) indicate that part-time faculty who rely on teaching as a primary source of income are less satisfied with their compensation, job security, and advancement opportunities than voluntary part-time faculty -- adjuncts who do not depend on their teaching income. Jacoby (2005) says that nearly all adjuncts are unhappy with the lack of job security and that those unable to find full-time jobs become discouraged and spend significant energy on trying to obtain higher-than-average course loads.

Being a member of a specific adjunct faculty segment can affect perceptions of satisfaction. For example, individuals who come to part-time teaching from professional or managerial backgrounds are vocal about their dissatisfaction with working conditions. According to Gappa and Leslie (1993):

Part-timers who work at other jobs in addition to their part-time faculty employment are among the most critical of the way they are treated. They have broad experience in the real world of corporate, government, and artistic life, and they can compare the way they are treated in academe with what they are accustomed to elsewhere. (p. 42)

Also, those entering adjunct teaching late in their career are more satisfied than those starting as an adjunct early in their career (Feldman & Turnley, 2001), probably reflecting the distinction between teaching as a primary versus secondary job. Gappa (2008) points out that adjuncts teaching online are generally satisfied with this mode of teaching, likely due to the scheduling flexibility and lack of requirement to travel to campus.
Other elements of adjunct satisfaction portrayed in the literature relate to teacher recognition and time constraints. Part-time faculty perceptions of institutional recognition for good teaching are mixed. For example, adjuncts seeking full-time positions have voiced disappointment over lack of recognition for their contributions specifically and good teaching generally (Cashwell, 2009). In contrast, Eagan (2007) reports that part-time faculty believe they are both fairly treated and properly recognized. Constraints unique to part-time faculty that can contribute to discouragement or dissatisfaction include lack of time and compensation for preparing for classes, meeting with students, reflecting on teaching practices, and becoming involved in university activities (Adamowicz, 2007; Jacobs, 1998).

**Part-time to Full-time Comparisons**

Several researchers have examined the strengths and weaknesses of part-time faculty in comparison to full-time faculty, looking to discover the impact on student learning. The studies have primarily explored differences in student outcomes, with a smaller proportion focusing on differences in teaching methods and preparation for teaching. The research has produced mixed findings (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014), with some showing a negative correlation to the use of part-time faculty and others showing either no difference in impact or equivocal results.

A number of researchers find that community college students are negatively affected by increased exposure to part-time faculty as their instructors. These negative effects include a decreased likelihood of transferring to a four-year college (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Schmidt, 2008), staying in school (Charlier & Williams, 2011; Schmidt, 2008), and graduating (Charlier & Williams, 2011; Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009; Schmidt, 2008). Other researchers report comparable negative associations among students at four-year colleges (Samuel, 1989; Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Jaeger & Hinz, 2008-09). For
example, Jaeger and Eagan (2010) found that first-year students in a state university system were up to 30% more likely to drop out based on exposure to part-time faculty, while Schibik and Harrington (2004) report that first-semester freshmen who took more than half of their courses with part-time faculty were significantly less likely to return for the second semester than students taught primarily by full-time instructors. In a different study, accounting students who took an initial finance course taught by a part-time instructor performed worse than students taught by a full-time instructor, plus were less likely to subsequently declare accounting as their major (Kirk & Spector, 2009). Multiple studies have shown that part-time faculty contribute to grade inflation (Kirk & Spector, 2009; Forbes, Hickey, & White, 2010; Diegel, 2010).

In contrast to these negative associations, other researchers have found no differences or insufficient data for a correlation between faculty status and student outcomes. According to Umbach (2007), the percentage of part-time faculty on a campus does not affect the overall quality of teaching. Landrum (2009) examined student evaluations of their instructors and course grade distribution and found no significant differences between full-time and part-time faculty. In a study of student achievement, Smith (1990) found no differences between full-time and part-time instructors. Benjamin (2002) says the research data is “not sufficient to prove definitely that the increased reliance on contingent appointments is substantially damaging undergraduate learning” (p. 9). Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne (1982) go a step further to say that not only do part-time faculty not detract from instructional quality, they “can enrich it greatly” (p. 140).

Assessments of the instructional practices of part-time faculty versus those of full-time faculty are similarly mixed and contradictory. As Gappa and Leslie (1993) state, two themes emerge. The first is that part-time faculty are less effective teachers than full-time faculty. The
second is that part-time faculty have teaching capabilities equal to or better than full-time faculty. With respect to the idea that part-time faculty are less effective at teaching than full-time faculty, various authors point to differences between the two groups, starting with the point that part-time faculty generally have less teaching experience than full-time faculty (Scheutz, 2002; Samuel, 1989). In addition, part-time faculty are more likely to use objective, multiple choice exams (Lei, 2008; Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011), employ subject-centered versus learning-centered instructional techniques (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011), and have lower academic expectations of their students (Umbach, 2007). Also, part-time faculty are less likely to use interactive, innovative, collaborative practices in their teaching (Umbach, 2007; Scheutz, 2002), as well as less apt to incorporate technology into their lessons (Jackowski & Akroyd, 2010).

One of the most frequently cited drawbacks associated with part-time faculty is that they interact with students less frequently (Umbach, 2007; Samuel, 1989; Schuster, 2003; Benjamin, 2002). The significance of this lower level of accessibility goes beyond resource availability. Meeting with students outside of class has been shown to contribute to their academic success, particularly for students most in need of support. In addition to being less accessible than full-time faculty, part-time faculty often have less experience in identifying at-risk students and less detailed knowledge of the university’s student services. Taken together, these factors can result in at-risk students not receiving the help that keeps them enrolled in college (Schmidt, 2008; Schibik & Harrington, 2004; Scheutz, 2002).

Part-time faculty suffer from a perception problem in terms of their teaching capabilities. Diegel (2010) points out that many see part-time faculty as having lower status and prestige than full-time faculty and thus providing lower-quality instruction. In a related way, students
perceive part-time faculty as less effective instructors than full-time faculty (Forbes, Hickey, & White, 2010; Todd, 2004). The teaching capabilities of part-time faculty are impacted by the amount of attention and support from their host institution. Part-time faculty often receive less professional development than full-time faculty (Schibik & Harrington, 2004; Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012), meaning that they have less access to the latest practices and techniques to improve their teaching. In addition, part-time faculty are less likely to receive a thorough job evaluation (Mooney, 1992), meaning that they may not receive feedback on areas for improvement.

In contrast to these criticisms of part-time faculty teaching methods, other authors point to the lack of meaningful differences in comparison to full-time faculty. For example, Leslie and Gappa (2002) report that the two groups use similar teaching methods and that part-time faculty “look more like full-time faculty than is assumed” (p. 65). They also point to the lack of studies finding differences in the quality of the instruction between part-time and full-time faculty. Nutting (2003) cites the specific case of part-time community college instructors who “often are better qualified and better prepared to teach history courses than the full-time faculty” (p. 34). Part-time and full-time faculty spend nearly the same amount of time on classroom instructional practices, finds Scheutz (2002). Based on extensive interviews at 18 colleges and universities, Gappa and Leslie (1993) state that “. . . part-timers are exceptionally well qualified for their assignments...a rich resource to higher education . . . (p. 18). Baldwin and Wawrzynski (2011) perhaps best capture the conflicting nature of the literature by describing the analyses on the teaching practices of contingent faculty as “contradictory and difficult to interpret” (p. 1489).

The mixed findings related to student outcomes and instructional practices lead to authors falling into one of three camps when it comes to point-of-view on the impact of part-time
faculty. The first camp views the limitations associated with adjuncts as problematic and points to the studies identifying negative correlations as evidence. A good example of this point-of-view can be seen in a report issued by the American Association of University Professors in the early 1990s, as summarized by an industry reporter: “The growing use of part-time and temporary faculty members is hurting the quality of higher education” (Mooney, 1992, p. A16).

The second camp views issues arising from part-time faculty expansion as reflecting not a problem with adjuncts themselves but a set of new responsibilities that higher education institutions must manage (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Kezar & Sam, 2011; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009; Elman, 2003; Schmidt, 2008). An important corollary of this perspective is that colleges need to provide part-time faculty with the level of resources and support that enables them to succeed (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Landrum, 2009; Christiansen, 2008). Landrum (2009), for example, marvels that part-time faculty are able to achieve the same as full-time faculty despite having far fewer resources and less experience.

The third camp views the available data as ambiguous and insufficient for drawing valid conclusions. Jaeger and Hinz (2008-09) represent this group: “Although the differences between part-time and full-time faculty are distinctive, no clear conclusion can be drawn as to the effect of part-time faculty on student outcomes in higher education” (p. 267). Given the three different interpretations that are possible, it is not surprising that Wallin (2004) says that depending on circumstances, adjuncts can be seen as savior or villain.

**Supporting Adjunct Orientation and Development**

The literature is full of ideas and recommendations for how colleges and universities can effectively support the orientation and development of their part-time faculty. In some cases, the articles present high-level models or strategies to guide university leaders in developing their
approach to adjunct support. In other cases, the articles consist of case studies of colleges that have successfully implemented programs that enable adjuncts to be high performers. A half a dozen recurring themes on key areas of focus cut across the literature, as do descriptions of several training tools to consider. Different authors also explore the question of whether part-time faculty should be treated the same as or differently from full-time faculty.

The models and strategies to establish a framework for adjunct orientation and support are wide and varied, ranging from those that focus on stages or phases of adjunct teaching (West, 2010; Berschback, 2010; Smith, 1980), to ones that offer guiding principles or maxims (Murray, 2002; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2005; American Association of University Professors, 1998; Roberts, Kasal Chrisman, & Flowers, 2013; Gappa, 1984), to others that address such specific needs as steps for mentoring online faculty (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazaar, 2010). Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron (1996a), for example, offer a six-point strategy for building a good adjunct-institution relationship and strong adjunct teaching skills. The steps are: 1) hire adjuncts with a clear purpose in mind, 2) require adjuncts to participate in an orientation program, 3) require adjuncts to participate in ongoing professional development, 4) integrate adjuncts into the institution, 5) have a program to evaluate adjunct performance, and 6) provide equitable pay for adjuncts.

Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron (1996b) developed the Part-time Faculty Integration Model. It is based on research examining the characteristics that lead an individual to identify with an organization, along with a review of practices at colleges deemed to be exceptional in their use and treatment of part-time faculty. The core elements of the model are socialization, communication, and participation. Specifically, the authors recommend that administrators
implement steps to socialize new part-time faculty, connect full-time and part-time faculty, and enable part-time faculty to participate in the broader activities of the college.

Case studies about best practices in adjunct orientation and development are numerous, with a heavy emphasis on community colleges. Among the colleges that are profiled are Northern Virginia Community College (Wyles, 1998), Florida Community College (Puzziferro, 2004), Lone Star Community College (Mangan, 2009), and the Colorado School of Mines (Gosink & Steveler, 2000), along with a campaign by the Washington Federation of Teachers to help adjuncts in that state (Smith, 2003). Multiple authors cite Rio Salado Community College in Tempe, Arizona as an exemplar for effective development and utilization of adjunct faculty (Smith, 2007). The key to the college’s success has been a systems approach that addresses adjunct faculty needs so that they can focus on the teaching and learning process. The approach includes systems for support akin to what students receive, inclusion and collaboration within the broader college community, and communication of expectations around performance and continuous improvement. More than 1,000 adjuncts teach more than 25,000 students at the college. A key indicator of the success of Rio Salado’s methods is an adjunct turnover rate of less than 5%.

A half dozen themes regarding key elements of adjunct support occur regularly across the literature. The most prevalent of these themes relates to the involvement, integration, and socialization of adjunct faculty into the larger institution (Fisher, 2004; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2005; Gosink & Steveler, 2000; Maguire, 1983; Kilmer, 2004; Fagen-Wilen, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2006; Roberts, Kasal Chrisman, & Flowers, 2013; Roueche, Roueche, & Milliron, 1996b; Puzziferro, 2009; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Leslie, 1998; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Authors point out that adjunct
connectedness to the institution promotes important relationships and builds a sense of belonging to the organization. Gosink and Steveler (2000) and Roueche, Roueche, & Milliron (1996b), for example, highlight the value of full-time and part-time instructors working together to create a unified faculty. Puzziferro (2009) describes how regular contact with full-time staff positively affects adjunct motivation. The overarching benefit, as the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014) states, is that engaged faculty lead to engaged students.

A second theme is that college and university leaders be aware of and acknowledge that a significant portion of their adjuncts each term are new to teaching (West, 2010; Day, Lovato, Tull, & Ross-Gordon, 2011; Coddington, 2005; Pearch & Marutz, 2005). As West (2010) points out, it can be hard for adjuncts to figure out how to teach when they have not done it before.

A third theme focuses on the need to tie adjunct development to the mission of the institution (Murray, 2002; Tittle, 2009; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). According to Murray (2002), for example, few community colleges either connect their faculty development to their stated mission or evaluate whether or not faculty development efforts have been successful.

A fourth theme addresses the role of two-way communication between university leaders and adjuncts (Fisher, 2004; Diegel, 2010; Caprio, Dubowsky, Warasila, Cheatwood, & Costa, 1998-99; Puzziferro, 2004). As Caprio et al. (1998-99) state “…. it is a mistake to assume they [adjuncts] will know all that is expected of them at a particular institution and how they [adjuncts] can effectively satisfy these expectations” (p. 168).

A fifth theme covers the role that recognition plays in supporting adjuncts (Fisher, 2004; Diegel, 2010; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). For instance, in Diegel’s (2010) study, adjuncts cited “feeling valued” as one of their three top needs.
Finally, a sixth theme deals with viewing adjunct development and support as an ongoing need versus a discrete activity (Roueche, Roueche, & Milliron, 1996a; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). As Gappa and Leslie (1993) put it, “Professional development activities often focus on improving teaching. The best programs, in our view, involve continuing efforts to help part-time faculty shape their teaching” (p. 204).

Similarly, certain tools for adjunct orientation and development are mentioned regularly in the literature. Gappa and Leslie (1993) alone put forth 43 ideas. Mentoring programs are one of the tools recommended most often (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazaar, 2010; Peters & Boylston, 2006; Diegel, 2010; Meixner, Kruck, & Madden, 2010; Langan, 2011; Roberts, Kasal Chrisman, & Flowers, 2013). Resources for helping part-time faculty improve their teaching also are cited frequently, such as establishing a center for teaching excellence (West, 2010) and holding teaching seminars and workshops (West, 2010; Gosink & Steveler, 2000). Other ideas relate to specific aspects of support to part-time faculty, such as appointing an advocate for adjuncts (Fagen-Wilen et al., 2006), providing adjuncts with a handbook that addresses the most common questions (Wallin, 2004), and providing adjuncts with clear guidelines on teaching evaluation (Langan, 2011).

The literature reveals mixed viewpoints on whether part-time and full-time faculty should be treated the same or differently when it comes to professional development. Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2005), for example, say, “It is essential to find ways to ensure that all faculty members, regardless of their appointment type, are supported in their work and valued by their institutions” (p. 37). In contrast, Leslie and Gappa (1995) endorse the idea of extra support for part-time faculty. Existing studies show that full-time and part-time faculty develop their classroom skills differently. In terms of student assessment, for example, Lei (2008) finds that
full-time staff have learned their techniques primarily from a resource center, workshop or seminar, or an educational course, while part-time staff have developed their approaches based mostly from colleagues, personal experience, and former instructors.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature related to various implications of the rising use of adjuncts and what Bowen and Schuster (as cited in Leslie & Gappa, 1995) describe as a faculty bifurcated into full-time tenured and part-time contingent tracks. The first section looked at the reasons behind the major increase in part-time faculty during the past several decades. This part examined four main drivers for the growth – the increase in student enrollments, the ability for universities to lower their costs, the staffing flexibility that part-time faculty offer, and the real-world perspective that part-time faculty can share with students.

The second section delved into who adjuncts are, highlighting that overall they are a mixed group but with the majority holding full-time professional jobs outside of teaching. In addition, the section examined what motivates adjuncts to teach, with a personal interest in teaching emerging as the primary reason. The third section covered the satisfaction levels of adjunct faculty, with the main finding being that adjuncts are happy with the teaching they do but are less happy with the conditions of their employment, such as pay, benefits, and job security.

The fourth section explored the perceived strengths and weaknesses of part-time faculty in comparison to full-time faculty. The major findings were mixed in terms of impact on student outcomes and effectiveness of instructional practices. The fifth section explored ways that colleges and universities can best support the orientation and development of adjunct faculty. It presented high-level models and strategies, case studies of successful practices, and frequently cited concepts and tools.
Chapter III: Research Design

This chapter describes the design of the research study. It covers such major areas as the procedures to collect and analyze data, the structure for writing the resulting findings, the means to ensure study participants are properly protected, and an examination of the significance of the study. In addition, it describes the overall methodology and research tradition guiding the study, the means to identify and recruit candidates, the steps to store and protect data, and the methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. While each individual component of the design is important to the success of the study, it is equally as important that the parts link together to form a coherent and integrated approach for collecting data, examining the data collected, and answering the research questions.

Methodology

The focus of this study was on how industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors think about and approach their development and training as teachers. The intent was to identify and capture themes that provide meaningful insights into what these adjuncts see as their options for learning to teach, how they evaluate those options, and why they ultimately choose a certain course of action for their professional development as instructors.

Ponterotto (2005) says research methodology entails the process and procedures for a study and reflects the researcher’s position on ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontology refers to the nature of reality, epistemology to the relationship between the researcher and study participants, and axiology to the place the researcher’s values occupy in the study (Creswell, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). For this study, reality was based on the perceptions expressed by the study participants. The relationship between researcher and study participants was designed to facilitate the emergence of open and candid comments that provide significant insight into the
adjuncts’ perceptions. The researcher, who is an industry professional and adjunct professor, attempted to not have his personal values and beliefs interfere with the views, perspectives, beliefs, and values of the study participants. At the start of the study, he set the objective to be open to participants describing experiences that could be similar to or different from his own. He intended to achieve this objective through a supportive tone that would encourage participants to speak freely, as well as by actively listening to participant comments and stories. Similarly, he attempted to not have his own ideology unduly affect the review and examination of data.

**Research questions.** The two research questions guiding this investigation are as follows:

1. How do industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors determine how they will initially learn and continuously enhance their teaching skills, and subsequently pursue resources to enhance their teaching skills and teaching competency?
2. What do industry professionals who serve as adjuncts perceive to be the greatest challenges to their learning and ongoing development as a teacher?

**Research design.** The overall design of this investigation was intended to be interconnected with the purpose of the study and the questions being explored (Creswell, 2013). To achieve this connectedness and avoid steps in the research process from being separate and standalone, the researcher followed several key principles (Creswell, 2013). One was to employ open-ended inquiry that provides study participants the greatest latitude to respond in ways that draw on their real-life experiences, as well as allows the researcher to continually refine the questions to reflect growing levels of understanding. Another was to have the responses from study participants be the driver for conclusions drawn from the research, rather than using those
responses to validate or invalidate a hunch or preconceived notion. Additionally, the design of the study followed rigorous, well-established research methods, as described in the following sections of this chapter.

**Research paradigm.** The research paradigm for this study was constructivist-interpretivist, whereby “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). A key characteristic of constructivism, also known as interpretivism, is that reality and knowledge are created in the mind of the individual, with multiple, equally valid realities possible among different people (Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 2000). For example, Hansen (2004) indicates that the sound of a dog barking could elicit quite different reactions based on people’s background and past experience, which in turn provides evidence of Schwandt’s (2000) point that “[w]e do not construct our interpretations in isolation” (p. 197). Another important defining element of constructivism is the prominence of the interaction between the researcher and study participants to identify key experiences around a given topic and co-construct meaning from these experiences.

Against the constructivist framework for this study, the researcher sought participant views on how industry professionals teaching as adjuncts determine their approach to acquiring and developing teaching skills. These views formed the starting point for the researcher to understand the subjective meaning of participant experiences and subsequently to develop a larger pattern of meaning about the collective experiences. The researcher started with broad and general questions that allow for leeway in how the participants answer, followed by an inductive process to interpret the meaning of the expressed views (Creswell, 2013). This process enabled the researcher to uncover the key influencers of the participants’ perceptions and the
degree to which they result from personally constructed or socially constructed realities (Hansen, 2004).

Social constructivism has been applied as a theory of learning (e.g., Harkness, 2009). Adams (2006), for example, connects the two: “Constructivist learning orientations seek to understand how people create their knowledge constraints and what these mean for understanding influences on thought processes” (p. 245). This description aligned well with the focus of this study on the thought processes adjuncts bring to their own experience of learning to teach at the college level. It thus formed a link that connects the purpose of the study, Adult Learning Theory as the theoretical framework for the research, and constructivism as the research paradigm.

**Research Tradition**

This research was a qualitative study targeted at obtaining insight into how industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors think about and approach their development and training as teachers. The constructivist paradigm is “a traditional approach to planning qualitative research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 61). In fact, as Williams (2000) states, “Interpretivism and qualitative research are sometimes used interchangeably” (p. 209).

This study was a natural fit with a qualitative inquiry. For one reason, “[q]ualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore,” (Creswell, 2012, p. 16). In a similar way, qualitative inquiry is the way to go “when we want to empower individuals to tell their stories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Additionally, qualitative research emphasizes open-ended inquiry that “frequently produces surprises, changes of direction and new insights” (Bryman, 2006, p. 111). These descriptions aligned closely with the intent of this study.
The researcher considered different qualitative traditions for this study, including phenomenology and a case study, yet ultimately settled on the principles of general qualitative research as the right choice. Two factors drove the selection of a general versus specific approach to inquiry. The first factor was the lack of a close match with the characteristics associated with the more specific traditions. For example, at first pass the study would look to be a good candidate for a phenomenological study, which seeks to identify common feelings and thoughts among multiple people living through a similar experience (Creswell, 2013). A defining feature of phenomenology, however, is that it often involves an emotional component in response to a high-impact experience, such as grief over losing a loved one (Creswell, 2013). No such comparable component was immediately evident in looking at adjuncts working through the challenges of learning to become college teachers. The second factor is that a general qualitative approach to inquiry worked well with the objectives of the study. It provided the researcher with both the guidance and freedom to explore the research questions in depth with the study participants.

Participants

As Creswell (2013) points out, the selection of the right participants is important if a researcher wants to get good data. The participants for this study were part-time faculty whose primary job is in industry. The researcher employed purposeful sampling to intentionally select individuals for the study (Creswell, 2012). Purposeful sampling involves three main considerations – the selection process, the sampling strategy, and the sample size (Creswell, 2013).

For this study, the selection process involved finding a generally homogenous set of individuals. While they could be different in terms of background, profession, courses being
taught, and other characteristics, they needed to have two important features in common – being an adjunct professor and holding a primary professional job outside of teaching. Also, the participants needed to represent typical, not extreme cases, of individuals in the target group. Participants came from multiple institutions and thus represented a cross-segment of the population. To the extent feasible, the researcher sought gender and race diversity among the participants. The researcher kept an open eye for participants who appeared to have an ax to grind with the institution where they teach so that he could take appropriate measures in response. No issues presented themselves in this regard.

The sampling strategy was based on whether potential participants met the criteria of being both adjunct faculty and full-time professionals in a position outside of college teaching. In addition, sampling was based on where the researcher had access to invite individuals to participate in the study. These two approaches are referred to as criterion and convenience sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The research plan called for surveying as many as 50 industry professionals across several industries who teach at various colleges and universities, with about half of the respondents then participating in focus groups. The intent was to engage participants in at least four to five focus groups, each with four to six participants, for a total of 20-25 people.

**Recruitment and Access**

Sutherland and Fantasia (2012) highlight the importance of getting the recruiting process right: “Successful recruitment of research participants is essential to a research study” (p. 381). The researcher for this study tapped into the company where he works to recruit participants. The company is technology-based and has a significant number of employees who teach as part-time faculty. These employees are based primarily in locations near two major cities in the
Northeast U.S. and thus offered the opportunity for the researcher to identify candidates who teach at a mix of colleges and universities. The researcher found a sufficient number of candidates who meet the selection criteria from this single source. Given that all participants worked for the same employer for their primary job, the company represented a single site for the study. In other words, while the participants taught as adjuncts at many colleges and universities, this mix did not result from the individuals coming from multiple workplaces.

The next step in the process was for the researcher to obtain the necessary approvals to proceed with the study and begin the recruitment process. He needed to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board at Northeastern’s College of Professional Studies. This required that he submit a description of the study and the proposed research methods, along with evidence that he had considered the potential impact on participants and taken appropriate precautions to protect them (Creswell, 2012) -- all of which are covered in this chapter. In addition, he needed permission from the office of the general counsel at his employer to be able to ask employees who work as part-time faculty to participate in the study. The researcher received the necessary approvals from both organizations.

**Outreach.** In terms of recruitment, the researcher emailed 150 people at the company where he works whose profile pages on the company intranet indicated they have been involved in adjunct teaching. He described the research study and asked if they would be interested in participating in a 10-minute online survey asking about their experiences as part-time faculty and how they have approached the task of learning to teach (Appendix A). He also briefly presented that he planned to conduct focus groups as a second part of the study and would be back in touch at a later date to determine who might be interested in participating in that research.
Following completion of the online survey, the researcher re-contacted the original group of 150 people to invite them to participate in focus groups or one-on-one interviews as the second part of the study (Appendix B). He made it clear that a person did not have to have completed the online survey to qualify to participate in the focus groups or one-on-one interview. He described to the potential participants that the sessions would last approximately one hour, occur at a time convenient for the greatest number of people, and take place either in person or using a combination of video- and tele-conferencing.

Focus groups were appropriate for this particular study based on the researcher’s desire to draw out as many participant experiences as possible and observe where participants concurred and disagreed on different topics. Gathering participants with like experiences enabled them to share and compare these experiences, develop and generate ideas related to the experiences, and explore sub-topics of mutual interest (Breen, 2006). The researcher planned to conduct one-on-one interviews only when he was unable to get the desired number of people to participate in the focus groups. As such, interviews served as a back-up to the focus groups. In only one instance did the researcher need to go the route of a one-on-one interview.

For the online survey, the researcher made it clear that in completing the survey a participant was giving permission for their responses to be used in the study. For the focus groups, the researcher asked participants to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C). The consent form pointed out the following: a participant’s right to withdraw at any point, the purpose of the study and the research procedures being used, the criteria for participation, the protection of a participant’s confidentiality, the risks and benefits of participation, the anticipated time commitment, and how to contact the researcher with questions or to respond to the invitation (Creswell, 2013). Also, the researcher communicated that no incentives for
participation would be provided but that he would share the study findings, including implications for practice, with anyone who was interested.

An important element in the recruitment process is to describe the expected benefits a participant might gain. For this study, the researcher identified two primary benefits. The first was the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of research on a topic directly applicable to the participant. The second was the chance to network and engage with peers who are going through comparable situations related to attaining and developing teaching skills. Given that the research topic has direct relevance to the participants, the researcher felt confident that they likely would be interested in contributing to and learning about the findings.

Setting was not an issue for the study. The researcher did not need to go on site at a college or university for any of the focus groups. The focus groups all originated in conference rooms at the company where the researcher works, with participants either being in the same room as the researcher, being in a conference room at a different company location and connected via video-conferencing, or being in a remote location and connected via audio-conferencing only. For the sole one-on-one interview, the researcher and participant met in a company conference room.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The interview subjects for this qualitative study were part-time faculty who hold full-time positions in industry or other professional fields. The research questions focused on their experiences in acquiring and developing teaching skills to be successful in their role as adjuncts. The researcher identified the main concern that may worry potential participants as the risk of their comments creating negative consequences at the college or university where they teach.
The researcher took two main steps to protect the participants. The first step was to avoid situations that could cause them embarrassment or even potentially put them at risk of not being invited to teach further. The researcher accomplished this by using pseudonyms that provide anonymity. In addition to pseudonyms for the participants, the researcher used general descriptions rather than specific names for the institutions where they teach as adjuncts (Creswell, 2012). The second step was to ensure the accuracy of the information the subjects provided during the interviews. The researcher accomplished this by digitally recording and carefully transcribing what the participants had to say during the focus groups and one-on-one interview.

The researcher’s efforts to protect human subjects in this study started with explaining to prospective participants the purpose of the research and its intended benefits. The outreach also covered what the prospective participants could expect in terms of how the interview process would work, the degree of preparation required, the anticipated time commitment, and the likelihood of post-interview information requests.

**Rights of Participants.** To avoid any candidate feeling undue pressure, the researcher made it clear to prospective interview subjects that their participation was strictly voluntary and could be terminated at any time. He disclosed that he is an adjunct professor in Northeastern’s College of Professional Studies who holds a full-time position in the same company as the participants. The researcher committed to not sharing the names of interviewees with academic program directors or university officials, thus minimizing the risk of an adjunct being identifiable in the final report. A power imbalance between the researcher and the study participants did not prove to be an issue (Creswell, 2012).
The researcher structured the survey and focus groups or personal interviews to be respectful of the time required of participants. The survey (Appendix D) took about 10 minutes to complete, and the focus groups and one-on-one interview ran approximately one hour. The researcher promised to submit any follow-up questions to a study participant via email. He offered to share the final study report with any participant interested in receiving it.

Participation in a focus group is based on interaction that requires mutual self-disclosure (Morgan, 1996). Describing one’s experiences and opinions in front of a group of strangers can be uncomfortable and potentially intimidating, particularly when those descriptions run contrary to dominant views. Such an environment can cause individual participants to hold back on what they offer to the group. To avoid participant discomfort and the potential of individuals limiting their engagement, the researcher employed two techniques. One was to set the stage at the start of the focus group that all perspectives are equally valid. The other was to intervene in the discussion if he perceived that specific individuals had become reticent to participate. Similarly, the researcher made it clear at the outset of the one-on-one interview that he sought candid comments from the participant and was not trying to find confirming or disconfirming information for a preconceived notion.

The instructor sought and received Institutional Review Board approval for his proposed study through Northeastern’s College of Professional Studies. He anticipated the IRB would be primarily interested in the questions he planned to ask of the study participants and whether or not their responses could in some way put them in a compromised or undesirable position. Given that this was a qualitative study, the researcher needed to explain to the IRB that he could only provide them with starting questions, that follow-up questions and the direction of any discussion would be determined by what the respondents had to say (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). He
emphasized that regardless of how the interviews unfolded, he would be guided by the principle of ensuring a subject not be put in a position of risk to their job or reputation based on their input. In preparation for the study, the researcher completed IRB training through the National Institutes of Health’s online training program and holds the corresponding IRB certification. Here is a snapshot of how the researcher’s approach to protecting human subjects matched the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects’ (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979) three key principles:

- **Respect for persons.** The study participants were independent individuals capable of determining whether or not they wish to participate. No additional protection was required to accommodate for diminished capacities.
- **Beneficence.** With the basic protections the researcher put in place, the study met the requirement to do no harm to the participants. In addition, participants could see benefit from the study based on the sharing of information with colleagues through the focus group process.
- **Justice.** The study met the requirement to ensure fair and equitable treatment of participants by balancing the burden and benefits of their participation.

The researcher asked participants to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C). He did not encounter any difficulties in obtaining participant signatures.

**Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of an initial survey followed by focus groups and, in a single case, a one-on-one interview. Given the purpose of the study, this combination provided an effective means to answer the research questions. The researcher began by distributing a link to a survey (Appendix D) to individuals who met the profile of being part-time faculty. The survey
served three primary purposes. First, it provided data that could be used to begin answering the research questions. Second, it helped identify candidates for the focus groups. Third, it provided initial input to help the researcher plan his approach to the focus group discussions. This latter point mirrors Morgan’s (1996) description of the uses for a combination of focus groups as the primary method for data gathering and a survey providing preliminary inputs. He points to studies in which findings from an upfront survey “guide the more detailed interpretive analysis of the data from the group discussions” (p. 135). This approach matched the researcher’s intent for this study. The researcher pilot tested the survey with five individuals to see if the questions were clear and could be completed in the anticipated time (Niederhauser & Mattheus, 2010).

Creswell (2013) says interviews are one of the four main categories for data collection; this category was predominant for this study. Going one level deeper, Rubin & Rubin (2012), describe four forms of qualitative interviewing: focus groups, Internet interviews, casual conversations and in-passing clarifications, and semistructured/unstructured interviews. The researcher employed focus groups as the primary method and a semistructured interview as an alternative when not enough individuals were available to participate in a focus group.

The researcher selected focus groups as the primary approach to data collection for this study because they are an effective means for the “elicitation and clarification of perspectives” (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 237) and are well suited for exploratory research (Morgan, 1996; Ivey, 2011). In addition, focus groups help a researcher to understand a topic in depth and to gain more information than through a survey (Sharts-Hopko, 2001). As Creswell (2012) points out, focus groups are an effective tool “when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information” (p. 218). Also, focus groups typically offer the advantage of being fast, relatively easy to implement, and cost-effective (Beyea & Nicoll, 2000b).
One-on-one interviews served as the back-up method to focus groups for data collection to ensure the interviewer was able to collect sufficient data for the study. The researcher ended up using this data collection method in only one instance. While interviews do not allow for the interaction among participants that can lead to broader findings, they are similar to focus groups in terms of the rich and meaningful insights and viewpoints they can provide. As described by Rubin & Rubin (2012), interviewing allows researchers to “explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own” (p. 3). In terms of differences between the two methods, at least one researcher has found that interviews can generate more ideas than focus groups (Fern, 1982).

Information from the focus groups and individual interview were captured via digital recordings which were then transcribed to allow the researcher to code the content.

**Focus group and interview preparation.** Morgan (1996) says that obtaining quality data from interviews and focus groups requires the right participants, relevant questions, and a qualified moderator. Multiple authors make the point that participants need to be alike (Sharts-Hopko, 2001; Beyea & Nicoll, 2000b; Creswell, 2012). For this study, the participants shared two important characteristics: holding a professional job in industry as their primary role and teaching as an adjunct professor as a secondary role. The researcher’s target was to convene four to five focus groups, each consisting of four to six participants, in line with recommendations in the literature (Morgan, 1996; Sharts-Hopko, 2001; Creswell, 2012).

Whether conducting focus groups or individual interviews, the researcher focused on keeping questions conversational, clear, and short (Sharts-Hopko, 2001). In addition, he sought to keep questions open-ended, with the sequence of questions moving from the general to the specific (Sharts-Hopko, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For this study, a general opening question
would be along the lines of: “Why did you choose to get involved in adjunct teaching?” An example of more specific questions as the interview process unfolded would be: “Have you participated in your institution’s orientation or development programs? Why or why not? If yes, have they helped you in strengthening your teaching capabilities?” To facilitate comparability of responses, the researcher applied a generally consistent set of questions across the focus groups and one-on-one interview (Morgan, 1996). The researcher used semi-structured questions and relied heavily on listening to the dialogue among the participants. This helped reduce his influence over the discussion and promoted interaction among focus group members to spark insights that might not have occurred from any one individual alone (Wilkinson, 1999).

Conducting a focus group interview is “not as easy as it appears” (Beyea & Nicoll, 2000a). The moderator must be able to draw the participants out and make them comfortable with sharing their opinions and experiences (Sharts-Hopko, 2000; Beyea & Nicoll, 2000b). The moderator’s primary roles are to facilitate discussion among the group members, probe responses with the participants, intervene when the discussion is stalled or off track, and record key points raised during the session (Krueger, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The objectives for individual interviews are similar. For this study, the researcher served as focus group moderator and one-on-one interviewer.

Flexible conversations. The researcher followed responsive interviewing techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) in which his primary role was to listen to the research participants and ask follow-up questions based on what they had to say. He followed the principles behind Rubin & Rubin’s (2012) conversational guide and developed an interview protocol (Creswell, 2013) with several main questions that enabled him to create a consistent baseline across all the participants (Appendix E). In addition, the protocol included prompts that assisted the researcher
in following the stages of responsive interviewing, starting with an introduction or ice breaker, moving to easy questions to show empathy, moving on to more substantive questions, then toning down the questions so as not to overwhelm the participants, and closing with an invitation to add information that may have been missed and a request to maintain contact for further discussion (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

While the researcher prepared multiple discussion topics prior to the interview, he remained flexible to go where the responses led the focus group discussions and one-on-one interview. To be mindful of the participants’ time commitment, the researcher kept the length of the focus groups and one-on-one interview to one hour. In terms of logistics, the interviewer used a digital recording application on his iPad and worked from a paper copy of the interview protocol.

The focus groups and one-on-one interview took place from noon to 1:00 p.m. in company conference rooms. Each of the focus groups involved a portion of the members participating remotely, either through video-conferencing if based at another company location or audio-conferencing if not at a company site. The one-on-one interview was a face-to-face discussion. For each session, the researcher offered participants a boxed lunch, and several took him up on this offer.

While not all variations from a research plan can be anticipated, the researcher was aware of and prepared for common situations that other researchers have encountered with focus groups. For example, given that participation is voluntary, the researcher anticipated some individuals would not attend even after responding affirmatively (Beyea & Nicoll, 2000b). To counter this potential issue, the researcher chose to accept more individuals than the target size
for the focus groups. It turned out that every person who responded affirmatively showed up for their session, leading to two of the focus groups being larger than originally intended.

Also, the researcher paid close attention to interactions among group members to ensure the discussion did not get too far off track and head in directions that would not yield useful data. Towards this end, he focused on the first few minutes of the session in setting the stage for the discussion, encouraged all group members to participate, and supported participants in presenting varied and divergent points of view (Krueger, 2002; Creswell, 2012; Ivey, 2011).

Data Storing Methods

Two primary considerations come into play in terms of good data storage practice – protecting the privacy of participant data and having sufficient back-up to minimize the risk of the study falling apart due to the loss of important data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher digitally recorded the interviews and focus groups using both a portable digital recorder and an iPad with a digital recording application. As a first step following the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, he transferred the digital recording to his personal computer’s hard drive to have multiple copies of the files. The researcher personally transcribed the interviews to a Word document. He has stored the transcripts on his personal computer and saved copies to a removable storage device. In keeping with good practice, the researcher plans to delete the audiotapes and interview transcripts within one year of the study’s findings being published.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was based on overlapping ideas from Creswell’s (2013) data analysis spiral and Thomas’s (2006) general inductive approach to data analysis. The data analysis spiral involves the multiple steps in data analysis being intertwined and repetitive rather than linear (Creswell, 2013). Inductive analysis is defined as “detailed reading of raw data to
derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). These concepts fit well with this study because they provide a simple, non-technical set of procedures for deriving meaning that addresses the research questions.

The first step in the analysis was to review and compile responses from the survey. This included tabulating the demographic data and reviewing responses to the open-ended questions to inform the questions to be asked during the focus groups and individual interviews.

The analysis process for the focus group discussions and individual interviews involved five key steps: preparing and organizing the data, conducting multiple read-throughs of the transcripts, classifying the data through creation of categories and codes, interpreting the data to uncover deeper meanings, and representing the findings in narrative and visual forms. In a broader sense, as described by Rubin & Rubin (2012), the analysis had two main phases – descriptive and explanatory.

**Preparing and organizing the data.** The researcher organized the data from the focus groups and interview into transcripts, with each session having its own transcript. The researcher added his own commentary and observations to the transcripts.

**Conducting multiple read-throughs of the transcripts.** The researcher carefully read the transcripts multiple times to gain an intimate knowledge of what the participants said. Having conducted the focus groups and one-on-one interview, the researcher immersed himself in the resulting data. As part of this process, he jotted down notes describing initial impressions and identifying areas for further examination. In addition, he pulled out quotes that were catchy or stood out as important messages (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

**Classifying the data through creation of categories and codes.** Having prepared and closely read the transcripts, the researcher tagged what was most important in the raw data in
terms of what participants said about the topic being explored, what Moustakas (1994) refers to as significant statements. Next, the researcher looked for commonalities among these significant statements and linked them into clusters of meaning through common codes (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher essentially followed a two-cycle coding process, as outlined by Saldana (2013). For the initial coding of the data, the researcher used a Descriptive Coding approach -- summarizing data “in a word or short phrase” (Saldana, 2013, p. 88). For the second cycle, he used a Pattern Coding approach, which Miles and Huberman (1994) define as “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (p. 69).

These two coding schemes made sense for this study due to their simplicity and applicability to a wide range of studies. The two-step approach supported the researcher in capturing the essence of the participants’ statements and correctly interpreting underlying meanings.

Several other aspects of the coding process are worth mentioning. One relates to the iterative nature of assigning codes and developing categories. The researcher took multiple passes at determining the data that belonged with a given code, stopping when he reached a saturation point where no further insights were likely (Creswell, 2012). Two is that a given code contained the full spectrum of responses related to that particular idea, highlighting both similarities and differences in how participants view the topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Three is that the researcher acknowledged the impact of his own experiences as an industry professional who teaches as an adjunct and took steps to bracket or prevent personal bias from entering into data evaluation (Creswell, 2013). The primary method to accomplish this was to keep asking whether the codes reflected what the participants had to say versus the researcher’s own views related to the topics.
Interpreting the data to uncover deeper meanings. The process of coding and categorizing led the researcher to generate six themes that capture the major concepts and ideas expressed by participants across the focus groups and one-on-one interview. The researcher interpreted the themes to identify “the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). He accomplished this by looking closely at both direct and indirect meanings to identify how the participants truly think about learning to teach as adjuncts and making sense of their options for attaining and building their skills as teachers. It was during this step that the researcher began to makes the transition from a description of the data to an explanation of how the findings answer the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Presenting the findings in narrative and visual forms. The researcher’s final step in the analysis process was to determine how to present his interpretations and findings in the most effective way. This included choosing the right mix of narrative, tables, graphics, and other methods of presenting information. The resulting report is intended to take the reader on an informative journey that provides both the high points and key details of the entire research process.

Creswell (2013) advises that a qualitative research report should address four rhetorical topics. The first is that the researcher’s own personal views about the topic be clear in the writing, a concept referred to as reflexivity. This was highly relevant to this particular study in that the researcher belongs to the class of adjunct faculty who come to the role through a full-time professional position in industry. The second is that the researcher be clear on the intended audience. In this case, the target audience was an academic one, to include higher education administrators, program directors, and faculty. Closely related, the third topic covers the choice of language for explaining ideas within the research, a concept called encoding. Given that the
intended audience was academic, the researcher employed academic wording and style. The fourth topic relates to the type and amount of participant quotes used in the report. Given that the study is heavily dependent on the data drawn from the participants, the researcher prominently featured their own words in the report.

**Trustworthiness**

For the study to produce meaningful results, it is essential that the researcher establish procedures that promote trustworthiness, both in him as the researcher and in the process he develops and follows. With this in mind, the researcher followed Creswell’s (2013) broad definition of validation as the effort to assess and promote the accuracy of the findings. Towards this end, the researcher consciously attempted to be consistent in data gathering and meticulous in following a repeatable process to maintain data integrity. In addition, the researcher did not assume his interpretation was the only one possible.

The researcher took two main steps to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study’s findings, drawing upon commonly accepted practices (Creswell, 2013). The first step involved peer review, in which the researcher’s advisor and a second reader reviewed the final report, including both individual parts as they were developed and the whole of the report once fully constructed. These two individuals were well positioned to provide feedback on where the methods and data interpretation were on the mark and where the researcher may have overlooked disconfirming information or other potential conclusions.

The second step involved clarifying researcher bias. The researcher undertook the study based on first-hand experience with the subject and a desire to understand it better so as to expand the existing literature and potentially contribute ideas for improvement in practice. He informally conducted the equivalent of a self-interview at the outset of the study to better
understand his own point of view and acknowledge it as an influence in how he would hear responses from participants. For example, the researcher believes that adjuncts from industry frequently employ a trial-and-error approach to figuring out what works and does not work in their teaching. The data from the survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interview support this viewpoint. However, the researcher was careful not to share this personal view or others with participants during the research process. In reflecting on how the study unfolded, the researcher is confident that he both acknowledged and bracketed his biases, such that his views had minimal impact on the data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The researcher employed other techniques designed to support the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. For example, he described in substantial detail key ideas that the participants presented as a means to expose the richness of the data.

The potential risk of participants or others negatively affecting the validity of the study was low. However, the researcher considered what these possible negative effects might be in order to increase his awareness of warning signs. For example, given that the researcher used convenience sampling, he knew that he might end up with focus groups lacking a balanced mix of individuals based on gender, race, age, and nationality. This did not turn out to be an issue.

In addition, it was possible that participants would come to the study with ingrained attitudes and preconceived notions about the topic. In and of itself, this was not an issue in that the study sought to uncover participant beliefs and views. However, the researcher knew that participants who want to direct the findings to align with a personal agenda pose a potential concern. An example would be an individual who is angry or annoyed with the institution where he or she teaches as an adjunct. The researcher remained alert for any indications that a participant was trying to unduly influence the results. Similarly, the researcher kept an eye open
for individuals who seemed to be answering the questions not based on their own beliefs but on a desire to please the researcher. The researcher did not spot any concerns in either case.

Along these same lines, the researcher took care not to lead participants toward answers he was expecting or hoping to see. For example, when the researcher asked, “Tell me to what extent your institution’s orientation or development programs have helped strengthen your teaching capabilities,” he tried to do so in as neutral a way as possible. His goal was to avoid a participant interpreting the question as pointing towards a certain response, which could unintentionally taint the quality of the response.

Summary

This chapter presented the design for the study and the steps the researcher took to ensure it would produce meaningful and valid findings. In terms of methodology, the study was based on participants’ perceptions of reality, the relationship between the researcher and participants was one of peers openly exploring a topic of common interest, and the researcher made his own interests transparent to the participants.

Two research questions formed the core of the study. The first covered how industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors determine their approach to learning to teach and the resources they access in pursuing these skills. The second dealt with the challenges they face in acquiring and developing teaching skills. This was a general qualitative study employing a constructivist-interpretivist research design.

The participants for the study were professionals from industry who serve as part-time faculty. The researcher used criterion and convenience sampling to identify candidates and invite them to participate. The study design consisted of an online survey followed by focus
groups, with a one-on-one interview serving as a backup for an individual unable to join a focus group.

The researcher tapped into the company where he works to recruit participants for the survey. He obtained approval from his employer and the university where he is obtaining his doctoral degree to proceed in contacting individuals for the study.

While the risk of potential harm to study participants was low, the researcher took two steps to protect their interests. The first was to use pseudonyms to guard against specific comments included in the research report from being associated with a specific individual. The second was to ensure data accuracy by digitally recording and carefully transcribing participants’ comments.

The researcher followed responsive interviewing techniques to make participants comfortable and encourage them to openly share their thoughts and experiences. He has carefully protected the interview recordings and resulting transcripts to guard the privacy of the participants and employed back-up systems to make sure the study did not fail due to lost data.

The approach to data analysis was based on a combination of Creswell’s (2013) data analysis spiral and Thomas’s (2006) general inductive approach. The core of the analysis involved a process of coding the data and interpreting the codes to derive themes that provide deeper meaning about the participants’ views of acquiring and building their teaching skills. The researcher took two main steps to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings – peer review and clarification of researcher bias. Each of the individual design elements outlined above combined to form an overall approach that aligned with the researcher’s objective to accurately depict and interpret the views of study participants to generate findings of value to research and practice.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this research was to study how adjunct professors from industry acquire and build the skills required to successfully teach college students. One starting point for the study was that industry professionals who choose to teach as adjuncts have strong subject matter knowledge but likely have limited college teaching experience. Therefore, they must develop a new skill set in order to be effective in their role as an adjunct. To gain a sense of how adjunct professors from industry go about the process of learning how to teach, the researcher prepared the following core questions to guide the study:

1. How do industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors determine how they will initially learn and continuously enhance their teaching skills, and subsequently pursue resources to enhance their teaching skills and teaching competency?

2. What do industry professionals who serve as adjuncts perceive to be the greatest challenges to their learning and ongoing development as a teacher?

Findings from the research study have provided good insight into how adjunct professors from industry see the process of learning to teach and the resources and obstacles that affect that process. The researcher derived the findings from an online survey conducted in August 2015 and focus groups and a one-on-one interview conducted in September-October 2015. The research yielded three main themes for each of the study’s research questions, as will be described in this chapter.

The study participants, both for the online survey and the focus groups/one-on-one interview, all came from a single systems engineering and information technology company with principal locations in the South Atlantic and New England regions. The company employs more than 7,000 people, primarily technical staff with advanced degrees. In addition, the company
actively collaborates with colleges and universities, including providing a conducive environment for staff to serve as adjunct professors.

**Survey Participants**

A total of 56 participants completed the online survey. In terms of gender, 79% of the participants were male and 21% were female. Eighty-nine percent of the participants were white, followed by 5% black, 4% Asian, and 2% Hispanic. The largest portion, at 36%, fell into the 50-59 age group. The 60-69 age group and 40-49 age group were nearly identical, with each comprising just over a quarter of the total group.

Of the 56 participants, 37 (67%) identified their primary profession as being some form of engineering, typically in the areas of information systems or software development. Professions for the remaining 18 people (33%) typically were roles in specific disciplines not shared by other participants, ranging from human resources and legal to healthcare and economics. More than 90% of the group reported they have greater than 10 years of experience in their field. Just under 80% said they have more than 20 years of professional experience.

The participants teach at 39 colleges and universities, with a number reporting that they teach at more than one institution. These institutions can be grouped in the following ways (see Appendix F for complete list of schools):

- They are located in 11 states, primarily in the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England regions.
- Twenty-four are private institutions, 15 are public institutions, and five are for-profit institutions.
• In terms of size, four of the institutions have fewer than 5,000 students (small school category), 14 have between 5,000 and 15,000 students (medium school category), and 20 have more than 15,000 students (large school category).

• Five are community colleges.

• Eighteen are research universities.

Given their predominantly technical background, it is not surprising that most participants teach courses in science, technology, and mathematics. Examples of typical course titles include: Foundations of Systems Engineering, Introduction to Computer Systems and Database Design, Operations Research, Scientific and Statistical Data Visualization, and Networking and Telecommunications. When asked what courses they teach, respondents listed between one and three courses. All 56 respondents listed at least one title, 35 listed two titles, and 22 listed three titles.

In terms of length of time as an adjunct, 5-10 years came up as the most frequent band (36%), followed by 1-2 years (18%), 2-5 years (14%), and 10-20 years (14%). At 58%, the majority teach on campus, while 13% teach strictly online. Twenty-nine percent reported teaching both on campus and online. Regarding level of student program, 48% teach in graduate programs and 34% teach in undergraduate programs. Eighteen percent reported teaching both graduate and undergraduate students.

Nearly three in five of the respondents (58%) reported having some type of teaching experience before starting as an adjunct professor. These prior experiences came in several forms: having been a full-time professor previously, having been a teaching assistant, having taught at the high school level, and having conducted courses or workshops within a corporate or military setting.
Survey Responses

**Learning methods.** A focal area of inquiry within the survey related to the methods the adjunct professors from industry have used to learn how to teach. The survey presented 12 choices, plus provided an option to write in an answer not on the list. The researcher asked participants to respond to the question from three perspectives: methods they have tried, whether one or two methods predominate, and methods that have been most helpful.

The respondents reported trying all of the methods. Two of the choices achieved response rates of 70% or higher: trial and error: learning from own experiences, and self-learning: own reading and research. Two other choices received response rates higher than 50%: talking with other adjuncts and guidance from academic program director. (See Table 4.)

Table 4

*Most Frequent Methods Cited for Learning and Improving Teaching Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trial and Error: Learning from Own Experience</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-learning: Own Reading and Research</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with Other Adjuncts</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the other end of the spectrum, two of the choices received response rates of less than 10%: host institution paired you with mentor and host institution teacher resource center, with another choice -- taking a course on teaching practices -- receiving an 18% response rate. (See Table 5.)

The remainder of the responses were grouped between 36% and 46% and include host institution programs (46%), tips from friends: current or former teachers (46%), talking with full-time faculty (41%), college official giving feedback on teaching performance (39%), and
observing more experienced teachers (36%). The participants wrote in 17 additional responses, with eight of these describing student evaluations and feedback as the method used for learning and improving teaching skills.

No discernable differences were noted among different sub-groups of respondents, with one exception. Individuals who teach solely online (7 responses) reported higher rates of access to host institution programs (71% versus 46% for the group as a whole) and receiving guidance from the academic program director (86% versus 52% for the group as a whole).

In terms of the predominant methods participants reported using, only three choices achieved response rates of 10% or higher: trial and error: learning from own experiences (31%), self-learning: own reading and research (19%), and talking with full-time faculty (10%). In terms of methods the respondents pointed to as most helpful, the top three responses were identical, with the exception that “observing more experienced teachers” replaced “talking with full-time faculty” in the third spot.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least Frequent Methods Cited for Learning and Improving Teaching Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Host Institution Paired You with Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Institution Teacher Resource Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a Course on Teaching Practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reasons new adjuncts thought they could succeed at teaching.** In reflecting on their first adjunct teaching assignment, the respondents pointed to two primary reasons why they thought they would be successful. The first is being knowledgeable in the subject to be taught, which 57% of the respondents cited. Examples of responses in this category include: experience
in the topic, knowledge gained from working in industry, and expertise in the field. The second reason is prior or related teaching experience, which was cited by 50% of the respondents. Examples of responses in this category include: professional facilitation experience, was TA for course during preceding semester, and experience teaching short courses in industry and in the government.

Twenty percent of the respondents cited both subject knowledge and related teaching experience as reasons they felt confident they would be successful as an adjunct. Examples of this combined response include: knew the course material and used to be a high school and middle school teacher, had many years’ professional experience in the topic and many years teaching in a business environment, and work experience and mentorship roles in the military. Of the 56 respondents, only one mentioned the university’s training program for adjuncts as a contributing factor to teaching confidence.

**Readiness to teach.** Regarding readiness to teach their first adjunct course, 87% reported feeling neutral to positive about being prepared, while 13% said they were mostly unprepared. The breakdown for the first grouping was 27% very well prepared, 40% mostly prepared, and 20% equally prepared and unprepared. No respondents chose “not very well prepared at all.”

**Reference point to assess teaching.** The researcher asked the participants how they assess their teaching skills, that is, what reference point they use to determine how successful they are. The three most frequent responses to the open-ended question were: student evaluations (cited by 42% of respondents), student performance (cited by 27% of respondents), and feedback from the program director, a college or university official, or other more experienced faculty (cited by 18% of respondents).
Student evaluations differ from student performance. In the former, students are telling the instructor how effective they think he or she was. In the latter, the instructor is determining whether or not students are learning and understanding the course material. Examples of respondent answers related to student evaluations include: am reviewed each semester by the students, formal and informal feedback from students, and look at course evaluation (student) surveys on my performance. With respect to student performance, representative answers include: level of interaction in class, whether students seem to have “gotten it,” and student success and engagement.

Easy and challenging aspects of teaching. The researcher asked the survey respondents to indicate how challenging or easy they find different aspects of teaching, presenting them with a list of 11 common activities and responsibilities that an adjunct professor would face. Three of the items scored higher than 50% in terms of respondents describing them as easy or very easy to accomplish: figuring out technology, coming up with discussion questions, and creating a syllabus. (See Table 6.)

At the other end of the spectrum, the three items selected most frequently as challenging or very challenging to accomplish were: teaching students with widely different skills sets, getting students excited and engaged, and understanding what students know in entering the class. (See Table 7.) The three tasks respondents cited as most challenging all relate in some way to interacting with students. Adjuncts with 5-10 years of teaching experience were the group that most frequently said these tasks are challenging. The researcher found no differences in the responses of graduate instructors versus undergraduate instructors.
### Table 6

*Teaching-related Tasks Cited as Easy to Accomplish*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Very Easy to Accomplish</th>
<th>Easy to Accomplish</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figuring Out Technology</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming Up With Discussion Questions</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Syllabus</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The items that emerged with the highest scores in the middle (between easy and challenging to accomplish) include: dealing with individual student circumstances (44%), following the school’s course procedures (43%), and understanding what students know in entering the class (36%). (Note: This latter teaching task showed as high in both the Challenging and Between Challenging and Easy categories.) The remaining tasks on the list tilted primarily towards easy to accomplish, although at a lower rate than the highest scoring items presented above. They include: developing assignments; determining right level of readings, assignments, and testing; evaluating and grading student work; and dealing with individual student circumstances.

**Improvement recommendations.** The researcher asked participants to offer their thoughts on ways colleges and universities can improve their support of adjuncts developing their teaching skills. This took the form of open-ended questions around support to the brand new adjunct, support to the experienced adjunct, and one or two changes the respondent would like to see their host institution make. In terms of guidance for rookie adjuncts, the participants had three primary suggestions for administrators:

- set clear expectations on what you (the administrator) want from the adjuncts,
• provide a mentor who can guide a starting adjunct, and

• offer an orientation session that acclimates newcomers to the role and environment.

Table 7

*Teaching Tasks Cited as Challenging to Accomplish*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Very Challenging to Accomplish</th>
<th>Challenging to Accomplish</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Students with Widely Different Skill Sets</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Students Excited and Engaged</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding What Students Know in Entering the Class</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recommendations were different in terms of suggestions to help experienced adjuncts improve their teaching skills. The top three recommendations to administrators were:

• pay adjuncts better,

• increase adjuncts’ inclusion in the academic community for greater networking and idea sharing, and

• offer seminars and workshops on best practices in teaching.

Regarding one or two changes the respondents would like to see at the institution where they currently teach, three responses emerged with a nearly equal number of mentions. One relates to a desire for better compensation (9 mentions). A second area relates to teaching flexibility and scheduling (9 mentions). Specific suggestions in this category include: earlier scheduling and notification of teaching assignments, greater continuity in teaching classes, more leeway on teaching decisions, greater flexibility in choosing courses to teach, and more
convenient teaching times. The third area entails responses from respondents who believe their school is doing a good job supporting them and no changes are needed (7 mentions).

**Focus Group and Interview Participants**

A total of 21 people, all from the same systems engineering and information technology company as those who responded to the online survey, participated in focus groups or a one-on-one interview. The majority of these participants likely also completed the survey, although the researcher specifically stated this was not a condition of taking part. Of the 21 participants, 16 were male and five were female, with most of the people working at company locations in the Washington, D.C. area. The individuals teach or most recently have taught at 18 colleges and universities in seven states: Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, Texas, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, plus the District of Columbia. In terms of teaching experience, the range was large -- one person was preparing to teach her first course, while another participant has taught as an adjunct for more than 30 years. The majority of the group teaches engineering, information technology, and computer science courses. (See Table 8). Two-thirds of the participants hold a Ph.D.

All four sessions – three focus groups and one one-on-one interview – were held in September and October 2015. Each session lasted one hour. The focus group size ranged from five to eight participants. Given the multiple office locations for the participants, the individual focus groups consisted of a mix of people either being in the same room as the researcher, being in a remote conference room connected to the group via video conferencing, or being in a remote location connected to the group via audio conferencing.

To ensure the anonymity of participants, the researcher has assigned pseudonyms in reporting their ideas and comments. While the topics for the individual sessions varied to some
degree, certain topics generally were common across the focus groups and individual interview. These included: factors that impact how confident or nervous participants feel in teaching a class, what the host institution offers in terms of teaching support and to what degree the participants take advantage of it, teaching obstacles the participants have experienced, and advice the participants would give administrators to help both novice and experienced adjuncts in their teaching development.

**Themes that Emerged from the Research**

The researcher analyzed the discussions from the focus groups and the one-on-one interview and the results from the survey to identify key themes in what the research participants had to say. This process involved repeatedly reviewing the transcripts to cull and code key ideas, carefully examining the ideas to identify links between them, synthesizing related ideas to form broader concepts, and checking to ensure sufficient evidence to support these broader concepts or themes. The result was the emergence of six themes – three aligned to each of the two research questions.

**Research Question 1: How Do Industry Professionals Who Serve as Adjunct Professors Determine How They Will Initially Learn and Continuously Enhance Their Teaching Skills, and Subsequently Pursue Resources to Enhance Their Teaching Skills and Teaching Competency?**

The first research question covers the strategies and steps adjuncts from industry take to figure out what it means to be an effective teacher. It covers both what new adjuncts do to become acclimated to the role of college professor and what experienced adjuncts do to continue to grow and improve in their teaching. Three themes, as described in Table 9, are associated with the focus of research question one.
Table 8

Participants in Focus Groups and One-on-One Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Person Adjuncts Primarily At:</th>
<th>Person Teaches:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>One-on-One Interview (9/28/15)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Large public university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Database Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Large public research university - South Atlantic region; small public Canadian university</td>
<td>Business, Engineering, and Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Large on-ground university (region not specified)</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>Large community college - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>Large private research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Systems Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Small public college - South Atlantic region; large public university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group 1 (10/1/15)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Large public research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Systems Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Large public research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Databases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Large community college - South Atlantic region; large for-profit university; medium for-profit university</td>
<td>Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erwin</td>
<td>Medium private university - Mid-Atlantic region; large community college - Mid-Atlantic region</td>
<td>Software Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Large private research university - Mid-Atlantic region</td>
<td>Systems Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Large community college - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Business and Computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Medium public research university - New England</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Medium public research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group 2 (10/6/15)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lois</td>
<td>Large private research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Health Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.R.</td>
<td>Small private university - West Central South region; large public research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering and Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>Medium public university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mack</td>
<td>Medium public research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Large private research university - New England</td>
<td>Organizational Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Large public research university - South Atlantic region</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Medium private research university - Mid-Atlantic region</td>
<td>Systems Engineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Themes emerging from the question: How do industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors determine how they will initially learn and continuously enhance their teaching skills, and subsequently pursue resources to enhance their teaching skills and teaching competency?

Adjunct professors from industry learn how to teach on the job and use their own methods to figure out what works and does not work.

Adjunct professors from industry who speak positively about their development as teachers point to interactions with other people as key to their growth.

Adjunct professors from industry judge their effectiveness as teachers primarily by student feedback.

Adjunct professors from industry learn how to teach on the job and use their own methods to figure out what works and does not work. The researcher asked participants in the online survey about different methods they have tried, used most frequently, and found most helpful for learning and improving teaching skills. For all three variations of the question, the respondents cited the same two methods as predominant -- trial and error and personal research and reading. In other words, the adjuncts have turned to themselves in acquiring and building their teaching skills. Feedback during the focus groups was consistent with the survey results, with participants referencing a feeling of trial by fire and having to find their own sources of help. Jim, who teaches online courses for a large private research university based in New England, said, “I’d say at the time I started … you were pretty much on your own.”

This sense of being thrown into a new situation and having to figure it out on your own came up in several ways. Sam described his experience at a small public university in the Mountain region, one of his first adjunct teaching positions, in the following way:
There it really was sort of trial by fire. So they would tell you exactly what they wanted you to teach and then have you come in and teach a class. Other experienced professors would stand in the back of the room. If they liked it, great. You were on to do more. And for the vast majority of folks they didn’t like it, so those folks never came back.

Sam echoed a similar sentiment in talking about his current adjunct role at a large on-ground university. In this instance, the context deals with what’s expected of him from the department chair and others who oversee adjuncts. “In this particular position it’s sort of felt like the adjunct who was just sort of thrown into it and sort of sink or swim,” he said.

Elaine, who is an adjunct at a medium-sized public university in the mid-Atlantic region, pointed to the need to figure out how to engage undergraduate students. Her comments reflect a sense of being totally on her own in dealing with a task she found perplexing. “The difficulty of being an effective teacher to 20-year-olds for three hours…once a week, nobody even hinted about where you could get any information about that,” she said.

Kevin, who teaches for a public research institution in the South Atlantic region, told a story about trying to be innovative with his approach to teaching, only to find that he hit walls in finding staff who could help him. He wanted to move away from a typical in-class lecture followed by student at-home assignments. His vision, which he has pursued this past year, is to record short lectures that the students can view on their own and to use class time for hands-on exercises with the students. He indicated he has felt lost: “I have just found, this is the first year I’m trying it, and I don’t know what I’m doing.” And he described the inability to find help to make the idea work: “There is not really people who are willing to step outside of this lecture mode. I just feel like there are no resources for me to turn to and for me to ask people, ‘What worked and what didn’t work?’” The overall experience has left him feeling isolated: “I’ve just
been really frustrated with the fact there’s no real good support for teaching me how to teach but allowing me to innovate how I teach in the classroom.”

In describing why they thought they would be successful when taking on their first assignment as an adjunct professor, many survey participants revealed a confidence in their ability to figure out what’s needed. In other words, the idea that they might need to learn the new skill on their own did not throw these individuals. For example, one respondent commented: “I had the mastery of the course materials. It was just a matter of conveying my knowledge to students.”

In parallel with self-confidence, however, survey participants expressed anxiety over unknowns related to entering the world of college teaching. This ranged from nervousness about teaching at a university for the first time to concerns about apathetic students to worries about knowing how students are reacting in online classes. For example, Molly, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, said, “Most of my anxiety in teaching classes is not the material itself but rather the student body that you will end up getting.” Yet even in the face of these uncertainties, the participants described coping methods that center on self-sufficiency. Paul, who teaches at a small public university in the South Atlantic region, provided an example of this self-reliance: “I’m just trying to make sure I’m prepared, at least for the next week if not for the entire semester.”

In suggesting how higher-education institutions can improve their support to new adjuncts, survey respondents revealed what they feel was missing in their own experience. Several referenced the challenge of having to figure out different aspects of teaching on their own. Examples of comments that highlight respondent perception of the self-learning that was required include:
• While it's been a while it seems like I was just thrown into the process.

• A [m]entor would be helpful, or a packet that explains the administrative side of things. I kind of had to learn that as I go.

• Clearly communicate expectations and provide examples. Too often the adjunct is just thrown into the classroom without preparation.

**Adjunct professors from industry who speak positively about their development as teachers point to interactions with other people as key to their growth.** Research participants who feel good about their development as a teacher frequently pointed to contact with others as a fundamental contributor to their growth. Their descriptions did not follow one set formula. The connections could be through structured programs or personal networking, involve large-group meetings or one-on-one mentoring, result from university sponsorship or chance encounters, or entail discussions with tenured faculty or fellow teaching neophytes.

Examples of interactions that participants cited include workshops specifically for adjuncts, department meetings to discuss curriculum and common issues, social gatherings to start a semester, email lists to exchange ideas with colleagues, leadership outreach to solicit input on upcoming changes, contact with professors who have previously taught a course, and pairing with a mentor. While the activities are varied and diverse, what they share in common is the adjunct’s ability to learn by communicating with others involved in academia.

A comment from Mack, a participant who has taught at a private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, captures the sentiment about the value of exchanging ideas with others. He said, “[W]hat was especially helpful, the department chair would once or twice a year want to get together for discussion, give feedback on things they had heard, and also offer help if it was needed in any way. That was a nice plus.”
The reasons the participants find contact with others valuable to their teaching are almost as varied as the different types of interactions in which they participate. For example, one train of thought focuses on how connections with others can help reduce uncertainty, lessen anxiety, and build confidence. In describing when he started teaching, Mark, who serves as an adjunct at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, said, “[T]here was a more senior person in the room observing and reporting comments. I think that is invaluable.”

In a related way, the help that comes from interactions with others can be in the form of seeing examples of what the university considers to be good teaching. “When I started … years ago, they encouraged me to observe another professor, and I took advantage of that because it was my first time,” said Erwin, referring to his experience in starting to teach at a community college in the Mid-Atlantic region. Others linked the value of personal interactions to a lower risk of failing. Said one survey respondent suggesting how a college or university can assist a new adjunct: “If he/she has no prior teaching experience, giving your first class to several peers before even meeting the students would have been helpful.” Overall, this group sees confirmation of their methods and skills as key benefits of connecting with others around the teaching process.

Another subset of the research participants viewed mentoring or coaching as the best way to support adjuncts in achieving desired teaching outcomes. Survey respondents, for example, shared such ideas for helping new adjuncts as: offering a mentor experienced in teaching in the same method (on ground or online) as the newcomer; regular meetings with a full professor; and counsel from senior faculty. As Mark, who teaches at a public research university in the South Atlantic region, described it: “You get somebody who’s taught and maybe it’s your chair, somebody who can mentor, so I think mentorship is very important.”
A small number of the participants talked about the value of mentorship in reverse -- listening to what the adjuncts from industry have to say as a way for administrators to strengthen their academic programs. One survey respondent, for example, pointed to the value of “[h]aving the adjunct take mentorship roles; having the adjuncts have some regular interaction with the entire department.” Said another respondent: “Listen to their ideas for items that need improvement or correction.” Randy, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, expressed pleasure about being consulted on a new lab the university was opening. He said:

I was concerned with the way it was built out, and they actually invited me to come back and give my thoughts and do some design concepts as to how to reorient the rooms for the best approach. And I thought it was good that they actually reached out to me when I had expressed a concern.

Another group of participants pointed to inclusion, networking, and sharing of best practices as the reason connecting with others is important to the teaching process. In suggesting improvements, several survey respondents zeroed in on this idea:

- Do more to make the adjuncts part of the community (of faculty). If you are part of the community striving to achieve the same goals you are in it together.
- Help the adjuncts feel as if they are a part of the university.
- Provide a colloquia, forum, or invisible college to allow experienced faculty to exchange ideas and experience. This allows for the ability of the adjuncts to decompress, explore and energize in a professional manner.
- Continue to provide metrics and feedback, discuss the best approaches, build communities of practice, pollinate and transfer that which works best.
• [Provide] more opportunities to network with other adjuncts.

In some cases, the networking does not even involve face-to-face contact. Paul, who teaches at a small public college in the South Atlantic region, described the value of a group list among instructors in his department: “[W]e get a lot of ideas going back and forth among the group list, and it’s supported by our class and course manager. So that is a really good way that we get support.”

For some participants, the value of connecting with others resides in having resources they can access as needed. For one survey respondent, this involves a sounding board for testing ideas and knowledge: “Access to the program director and TA or audit options … provides [the] ability to explore the intent of the course and sequencing of key aspects of the syllabus as well as observe how the mechanics of the course could work.” For another respondent, the resource requirement is as straightforward as receiving the course notes from previous instructors.

It is worth noting that in some cases the connections the participants described involve university-sponsored programs and activities. In other cases, though, participants mentioned that their contacts were the result of happening to know someone at the university or within the specific department where they teach. One survey respondent, for example, talked about the benefits gained from discussions with an experienced professor: “My school did not offer this, but I am friends with a very enthusiastic professor in the same department.” Similarly, Patrick, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, distinguished between the help being provided by an individual professor and the lack of support from the university. He said, “[T]he professor I was working with…took a very one-on-one personal interest in me…he was supportive, but the university offered very, very little.” Another survey
respondent cited the good fortune of having contacts at the university: “I was lucky because I had friends who were adjuncts for many years at the school.”

**Adjunct professors from industry judge their effectiveness as teachers primarily by student feedback.** Research participants judge their efficacy as teachers based primarily on what their students say and do. Student evaluations are the number one means survey respondents cited for assessing their teaching skills; the 42% response rate for this view is significant given that the question was open-ended. Said one survey respondent, “Course evaluations from students in the class have provided useful feedback to let me know how well I met their needs and expectations.”

The second most frequent approach, cited by 27% of the respondents, is to assess their teaching skills based on student performance. Respondent comments reveal that performance can take one of two forms, either results on exams and assignments or engagement with the course material. One respondent described the following:

[I assess by] monitoring the student’s level of attention and involvement in the course. We have discussions and activities, so I can tell if they’re paying attention. A big part of the class is data projects and labs, so I can tell if the students understand the projects during the labs.

These two top responses both have to do with student feedback; nearly 70% of respondents cited one or both answers as to how they assess their skill level as a teacher. An important distinction exists between the two responses, however. In the case of student evaluations, the focus is on the adjunct and the student’s perception of his or her performance. In the case of student performance, the focus is on the student and the adjunct’s perception of whether he or she is understanding the material.
In addition to using feedback to assess performance at the end of a class, a portion of adjuncts view feedback as an element in learning how to teach. Seventeen of the survey respondents wrote in comments about the methods they have used to acquire and build their teaching skills. Just under half of these comments were about student evaluation and feedback. Jim, who teaches at a large private research university in New England, uses student feedback as an ongoing tool to make adjustments and improvements in his teaching. He said:

I found that a lot of students won’t speak up online, and they just end up with this train wreck at some point. I’ve adjusted by doing a weekly survey in my class. “Overall, how was the readings, how was the assignments, how was the class discussions, the lectures?” Two or three quick questions that I can gauge, “Ah, fell short on that thing, let’s do a little extra catch-up play.”

Overall, the common element in the different adjunct views is that feedback provides a means for defining success. Mark, who teaches at a large public university in the South Atlantic region, described his particular situation this way: “You know I’ve got fourteen years of stellar ratings on the course, [which means] students like the course.” Sam, who teaches online for a large on-ground university, connected student feedback to an institution’s own evaluation of adjuncts, referring to it as the “intense focus on student evaluations that all universities seem to be placing.”

Research participants also flipped the topic of student evaluations and provided their own feedback on student segments they believe make it more difficult for them to be successful in their teaching. One such segment is students who do not have the pre-requisite knowledge for the course the adjunct is leading. Kevin, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, expressed his frustration over students coming into his class ill-prepared:
Sometimes I have to spend some of my class time going back and re-teaching some of
these principles of non-linear optimization and probabilistic reasoning so that I can then
build on them to then show them how to do a risk assessment, to show them how to do
quantitative risk analysis. I’ve brought this up to the executive director, and he’s just
like, “What can I do about it?” And I talk to the other professors, and they’re like,
“Look, here’s how the class is structured, how can I fit it in? You know, I can only teach
so many things.”

Several research participants talked about the challenges of trying to teach students who do not
have a full command of English. Molly, who teaches at the same large public university as
Kevin, said:

The biggest challenge I’ve had so far is the level of education the students come to you
with, which can be extremely varied. Their command of English can be extremely
varied. Their command of just basic writing, extremely varied. Example, this was a final
paper that somebody submitted, the first sentence off the bat was “Due to …” with “due”
spelled “do” instead of “due.”

Additional adjunct complaints centered on students who expect to receive high grades
without putting in serious effort and demonstrating command of the subject. Sherry, who
teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, described negative feedback
she received from students regarding her expectations on citing references in papers. “[S]ome of
the students, especially in the online classes, they seem to think that they just want 4.0, right. If
you give them feedback, there’s a lot of writing and I’m a real stickler for APA guidelines…so
they kind of think I’m the bad guy.” One survey respondent captured the essence of adjunct
feelings about lack of student preparation and student entitlement this way: “[Ensure] students
have more consistent preparation and background. Without this, the struggling students consume a disproportionate share of my time and waste the time of their classmates in unproductive dialogue.”

While most participants cited the positive aspects they gain from student feedback, a small portion pointed to the desire to avoid a negative student experience. Felix, who teaches at a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, expressed the thought in the following way: “[My] anxiety was, ‘Are they going to feel like they are coming and wasting their time?’” Other adjuncts raised the point that they feel it is unfair that as the face of the university, students evaluate them in areas that have nothing to do with teaching. Louise, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, pointed to administrative and technical tasks as an example:

So if you are asking what support I’m giving to the institution, it would be very much actually the support that goes to the students as well, because if they don’t give it to the students then the burden is on me…what stems from that is another issue…is that I am the first one that they know. If I don’t know or I don’t help them, then the evaluation is against me, not against the system.

**Research Question 2: What Do Industry Professionals Who Serve as Adjuncts Perceive to Be the Greatest Challenges to Their Learning and Ongoing Development as a Teacher?**

The second research question focuses on the obstacles or roadblocks that adjuncts from industry experience in learning how to teach. Unlike the first research question, which focuses primarily on the positive actions that adjuncts take to acquire and build their teaching skill, this second question looks at what adjuncts believe is missing or preventing them from being as
effective in their instruction as they would like. Three themes, as described in Table 10, are associated with this question.

Table 10

Themes emerging from the question: What do industry professionals who serve as adjuncts perceive to be the greatest challenge to their learning and ongoing development as a teacher?

Adjunct professors from industry describe distinctly different needs between new adjuncts starting to teach and experienced adjuncts expanding their capabilities.

While many adjuncts from industry are upbeat about the support they receive from their institution, others feel underappreciated and say it affects the quality of the teaching they deliver.

Most adjuncts from industry believe their institutions invest little in adjunct training and could be doing more to build adjuncts’ teaching skills.

Adjunct professors from industry describe distinctly different needs between new adjuncts starting to teach and experienced adjuncts expanding their capabilities. Clear distinctions emerged from the survey in terms of the advice the respondents would give to university administrators on how best to support teaching skills for brand new adjuncts versus experienced adjuncts. Comments from the focus group participants reinforced the survey recommendations. For new adjuncts, the top three recommendations are to:

1. set clear expectations on what administrators want from the adjuncts,
2. provide a mentor who can guide a starting adjunct, and
3. offer an orientation session that acclimates newcomers to the role and environment.

One survey respondent had this to say, “[Provide] guidance on what’s expected. While it’s been a while it seems like I was just thrown into the process.”

In contrast, the top three recommendations to support experienced adjuncts are to:
1. pay them better,
2. increase their inclusion in the academic community for greater networking and idea sharing, and
3. offer seminars and workshops on best practices in teaching.

“Treat them with greater respect as contributors to the learning experience of their students; this can come in a variety of ways – one being pay,” said a survey respondent. Each of these six needs – three related to new adjuncts and three related to experienced adjuncts – are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

**Clear expectations.** A perceived lack of clarity regarding what university administrators and program directors want from adjuncts in terms of process and outcomes drives the comments about better defining expectations. As one survey respondent put it, “Adjunct teaching can be full of ambiguities about responsibilities and expectations when the instructor is not regularly on campus and interacting with department leadership and staff.” Similarly, during one focus group discussion about teaching roadblocks, Sam, an adjunct who teaches online courses for a large on-ground university, said, “With this latest position, it’s just been expectations, getting a good sense of expectations from the department chair or members ostensibly in charge.” Said Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region:

So it would be good, whether you are a brand new adjunct or you are a brand new adjunct to that university, I think some time spent upfront familiarizing that person with the techniques that work at that school, the ones that don’t work at that school, an understanding of the kind of people you are going to be working with, not the faculty, but the other students that are there.
Mentor. Several of the research participants raised the idea of linking a new adjunct with a mentor who can provide guidance on how to get started and understand both the role and the environment. As one survey respondent put it: “A mentor for the first class--with plenty of regular one-on-one time. Why? The first is very challenging--from knowing the right approach to assignments and grading, to the nuts and bolts of Blackboard.” Ryan, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the mid-Atlantic region, expressed a similar viewpoint:

So for new adjuncts I would recommend the administration consider some kind of partnership with sitting professors in the same course ahead of time. I think that provides a couple of things. One, understanding of how everything in the syllabus fits together. And then a great connection with someone who can answer questions, which in turn could be a safety net.

Orientation session. The research participants also cited orientation sessions as another resource that can help new adjuncts become acclimated and understand what is expected of them. One survey respondent described the recommendation this way: “Provide orientation to all adjunct faculty (mandatory participation) on standards, expectations, and communication methods that should and could be used to improve student engagements, communicate expectations, and maintain a healthy discourse for the better learning.” Sam, who teaches online for a large on-ground university, said the situation he encountered was the opposite of what makes for a good orientation session:

Where I’m teaching right now, it was just a few VTC sessions basically with setting expectations. It really wasn’t, a few helpful hints here and there, but it really wasn’t a practice session or anything like that. Sort of the bare minimum.
**Better pay.** The topic of pay elicited both strong reactions and a high volume of comments. Several participants brought up pay as a detractor to teaching effectiveness. Erwin, an adjunct who teaches at a small private Mid-Atlantic university, said,

> I just don’t think adjuncts get paid enough. But that’s not why I do it. I’m not here complaining about pay. I do it because I enjoy it. But I think a better pay structure may motivate people more to improve their teaching skills.

Molly, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, described feeling highly dissatisfied with the pay she receives: “I went from what I consider fairly reasonable acknowledgement/compensation to something that was less than what I would have ever given even to a kid mowing my lawn.” Said one of the survey respondents: “Part of the reason I don’t teach now is that the compensation for teaching the courses was the equivalent of $5/hour when you factor the research time, total [number] of hours of the course and the number of students being taught.” Added one of the survey respondents: “It really was like donating my time. That’s why I quit.”

Yet different points of view emerged regarding pay. When Mack, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the mid-Atlantic region, said “frankly it pays quite well,” Jim, who teaches at a large private research university in New England, responded sarcastically, “I forgot to say the lucrative salary also makes it really worthwhile.” A comment from Paul, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, probably best captures the general view of the research participants regarding pay: “It’s just something that I take as a reality…I’m not in it for the money…[i]t’s just not necessarily something you can make a career out of.”
**Greater inclusion.** Participant comments recommending greater inclusion for adjuncts in the activities of the university were driven by both access to knowledge and a desire to be part of the organization. Ryan, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, described a scenario where inclusion is working:

I’m on all the normal email distribution lists. I’m invited to all the faculty functions. I can see that happening. When I do get to campus I can join any one of those meetings if I like. Then my school inside the institute has specific dates for faculty and I’m invited. I was at one of those two semesters ago. So I definitely feel like part of the extended family, and I have complete access.

Chuck, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, echoed these sentiments regarding efforts to bring all teaching faculty together. He said:

The thing that I found most useful...is that they did have team meetings where all of the teachers would meet periodically. And they’d have separate sessions for each of the different topic areas. And those were very useful, being able to talk to some of the other teachers as to, “Hey, how do I get them to do this? Or what can I do about this?” It was group supportive therapy almost.

In contrast, other participants described situations in which the lack of inclusion has left them feeling like an outsider who is not valued. Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, told this story:

I teach an IT course, and so part of it is web-based design and they go through laboratory exercises and create a web page and post it up on the server of the school but they delete my server every semester. And so I have to go through the process of, “Hey, I’m still adjunct faculty here, I need my server access back” and then load my web pages back up.
Similarly, one of the survey respondents described the feeling of being invisible – “to feel more professionally a part of the institution rather than an unnamed, unknown guy at night.” J.R., who has taught as an adjunct at a small private university in the West South Central region, indicated the university regularly has named adjuncts to its advisory board, a move that promotes a sense of connectedness. He said, “[Y]ou can see my name, it’s in the advisory board. It’s not just when you are teaching, also even if you are not teaching right now.”

While participants expressed a clear interest in greater inclusion in university programs and activities, their comments also revealed that complete access is not always the desired goal. One survey respondent put it this way: “I want to feel connected to the institution. Showing up, parking, teaching, attending the occasional reception… I feel like I don't really belong. But yet, I don't know how to expand that. Do I really want to go to staff meetings? Probably not. Are there other University things I could do? Maybe, but I don't know about them. I will figure this out as time goes by.”

A side note related to the topic of inclusion has to do with a desire for greater freedom in how to teach a course. While a relatively small percentage of participants talked about perceived restrictions on teaching methods, enough raised the point for it to be noteworthy. One survey respondent succinctly defined the problem: “Stop placing restrictions on teaching methods.” Another survey respondent focused on the solution: “[L]et them teach the course in their own style and content order as long as all content is taught.” A third survey respondent recommended giving adjuncts from industry “a say, based on professional experience, in what and how courses should be taught.”

Felix, who teaches at a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, voiced a similar sentiment. He said: “[I]t still was this idea that they had a defined curriculum,
that they wanted you to use their curriculum. Maybe you could edit it some, but you still needed to stick to the core.” In contrast, though, Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, defined his situation as:

[T]he curriculum is defined by a course content summary, but other than that it is up to every individual instructor to create their own delivery. So there are probably fifty people teaching that course, so there are fifty different deliveries of that course.

Teaching workshops. Participants pointed to the value of workshops on teaching practices and expressed interest in their institutions either adding or expanding such sessions to help adjuncts in continuing to build their instructional skills. For example, survey respondents suggested “providing workshops that show model lessons and essential planning skills” and “continuing education about instructional techniques.” Paul, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, made it clear he would like to see the institutions where he teaches begin to add teaching workshops. He said, “And somebody mentioned earlier about the day-long class they had with multiple seminars throughout the day. I really like that idea. I wish my schools did that, that focused on teaching and learning for adjuncts.”

While the research highlighted differences in needs between starting adjuncts and experienced adjuncts, the two groups were in unison about universities being mindful of the time demands placed on them as adjuncts. Participant comments took several forms. One deals with the perceived lack of advance notice on teaching assignments. Elaine, who teaches at a medium-sized public university in the South Atlantic region, had the following observation about teaching assignments coming last minute:
Though the issue is time. How does an adjunct make time to attend that? I really like the idea of sitting with a professor a term before, but it seems like, at least at my school, that adjuncts are brought in at the serious last minute because they don’t have enough professors.

Another set of comments had to do with perceptions that the institution can waste the adjunct’s time by not providing the right information and training. Mark, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, described his frustration in learning how to use new software:

I’ve spent ten hours sometimes when there is a new release of the tool that you are using for teaching. And you knew how to do something. But you don’t know how to do it. And they figure you’ll figure it out.

He also cited that the reverse can be true, namely that the university can spend too much time explaining what an adjunct already knows:

I’ve turned in grades for 20 years…I know the policy on an incomplete and how to fill out those forms. I don’t want someone spending 50 minutes telling me how to do something I already know how to do. Time is precious.

Participants also described the challenges posed by quick turnaround requirements on grades, particularly related to juggling teaching with the responsibilities of their full-time jobs. Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, described his experience this way:

It’s difficult around final time with 24-hour turnaround when a final is on like a Tuesday and you have to have it done by Wednesday afternoon and you work Wednesday. Tuesday night gets late, or you make the final self-grading. You make it so it almost grades itself,
and you only grade the ones that are wrong. You have to kind of be creative on how you are going to get that done.

Mack, who teaches at a medium-sized private university in the mid-Atlantic region, indicated he tries to make the process of balancing the different aspects of his life transparent to the students. He said:

And it had to do with time management. That is, as an adjunct you have a day time job that is a big priority of course. But I always felt that when showing up in the classroom you’re coming across as, “Hey, this is my number one job, and I’m there to do my best for the sake of the school and for the students.” So always carefully manage my time so that I could do that and come across that way, but also if I gave a test in any way that I could very quickly get it back to them and hopefully try to get it back by the very next class session.

While many adjuncts from industry are upbeat about the support they receive from their institutions, others feel underappreciated and say it affects the quality of the teaching they deliver. The focus groups revealed a broad range of opinions on how satisfied adjuncts are with the support they receive from the college or university where they teach. One the one hand, many participants talked positively about the host institution meeting their needs, particularly related to the logistics of managing a course. “[They] offered a decent level of support,” said Brian, an adjunct for a public research university in the South Atlantic region, pointing to an office for adjuncts, administrative help, and assistance from a graduate teaching assistant as evidence. As another example, Randy, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, described his pleasure at a technical support staffer coming to his classroom within three or four minutes after he called the help desk with a problem.
A subset of this group expressed an even higher level of enthusiasm for the support they receive. Lois, an adjunct teaching for a private research university in the South Atlantic region, described her experience as “remarkable.” She said, “I have just found concierge-level service in terms of acclimation and support for creating content.” Another participant, Felix, brought to the focus group session five training manuals he had received from the institution where he teaches, a private research university in the South Atlantic region. He described seminars conducted by university staff that mirrored the content in the manuals, saying, “I was the student, they were teaching me to be the adjunct.”

On the other hand, several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the assistance provided by their host institution. When asked if the college or university offers support to adjuncts, Elaine, an adjunct at a public liberal arts university in the South Atlantic region, blurted, “Oh, gosh no.” She then added, “There is nothing offered as far as I know mentoring you to actually become an effective teacher.” Patrick, an adjunct at a large private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, was equally definitive about the lack of resources to help in managing courses. “The university offered very little in the way of administrative support,” he said.

The discrepancies in viewpoints appeared not only across the focus group participants as a whole but, in certain cases, within individuals who have taught at different schools. “I’ve seen quite the range,” said Sam, who teaches online courses for a large on-ground university. He first described his experience as an adjunct at a state engineering university in the Southwest as “sort of trial by fire,” and then compared it to his time as a full-time professor at a private research institution in the Mid-Atlantic region, an experience he described as “the other extreme” in terms of the preparations to begin teaching.
As further evidence of the variation in viewpoints, other participants expressed satisfaction with their situation while acknowledging limited support from the institution. For example, Bob, who teaches for a medium-sized public research university in New England, said he has always had to handle all aspects of the course but indicated the lack of support has not reduced his joy of teaching. “I always thought of being an adjunct as I always liked teaching,” he said.

In the prior theme, several participants expressed dissatisfaction with pay based on the belief that the compensation is not equal to the effort or experience an adjunct from industry brings to the role. With respect to the theme here of feeling underappreciated, a number of participants pointed to pay as an indicator of the university’s lack of respect for the contributions the adjunct makes to the university. One survey respondent stated, “Another reason for more pay is [a] feeling of respect. Universities wouldn’t be able to make ends meet without adjuncts teaching many of their courses at minimum wage. So we feel like we’re subsidizing the regular faculty.” Another survey respondent expressed a similar thought: “Treat them with greater respect as contributors to the learning experience of their students; this can come in a variety of ways – one being pay.” Molly, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, linked pay and tuition: “While I understand that the universities are struggling to make ends meet, they keep getting more for the courses, and they keep paying us less. So what is wrong with this picture?”

For others, the feeling of being underappreciated has less to do with pay and more to do with recognition. Stated one survey respondent: “Institutions would do well to better appreciate the combination of real world and academic experience their adjuncts provide.” Mark, who teaches at a large public university in the South Atlantic region, expressed a desire for greater
inclusion and recognition for adjuncts: “I don’t think there’s enough done for adjuncts. I think they are underappreciated and are a better resource than most universities make out of them.” He later added: “Sometimes you get the feeling that they don’t even know you’re there.” Molly, the adjunct at the large public research university in the South Atlantic region, said she has always felt like “a second-class citizen” as an adjunct, then added:

[T]hey [administration] need to make a determination if they are going to actually value the adjunct as straight-up faculty. The fact that you are adjunct simply means that you are not there all the time. And they have got to get themselves out of this model of thinking: ‘Oh, you’re just part-time, I don’t really need to pay any attention to you.’

Several participants used comparisons with full-time faculty as a metric for how they view their own situation. In some cases, the comparison was positive based on perceived equality with full-time professors. For example, Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, described the resources available to adjuncts: “You actually have anything the regular faculty have access to there as far as education you can use.” Erwin, who teaches at a medium-sized private university in the Mid-Atlantic region, expressed a similar viewpoint: “[A]dministrative support helps us quite a bit. They treat us just like we’re regular faculty.”

In other cases, the comparison with full-time faculty was neutral to negative. “Those services are not available to you as they would be if you were on campus as a full-time faculty member,” said Molly, the adjunct at the large public research university in the South Atlantic region. Mack, an adjunct at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, advocated for comparable treatment on teaching assignments:
For a seasoned person it’s important I feel that you get your fair share of excellent teaching assignments, some of the preferred course offerings and times and things of that nature, so you’re treated as maybe not as an equal but as a respected member of the overall faculty.

**Most adjuncts from industry believe their institutions invest little in adjunct training and could be doing more to build adjuncts’ teaching skills.** When asked to what degree the college or university where they teach is investing in orientation and development for adjuncts, 70% of survey respondents chose small investment or no investment. In contrast, less than 10% chose large investment or very large investment (see Table 11). The results are nearly identical when the topic is divided into orientation for new adjuncts versus continued developed for experienced adjuncts. Stated another way, the perception remains the same regardless of whether the question is about onboarding for newcomers or professional growth for seasoned adjuncts. As stated by one survey respondent, “It depends on the institution, but I have never heard of any institution making a large investment.”

Different patterns in participant perceptions of institutional investment appear based on sub-groups. For example, seven of the 52 respondents to the survey question asking what one or two changes they would like to see their host institution make indicated they would not change anything. This group of “satisfied” adjuncts reported that their host institution invests more in orientation and development programs than the average score for the survey group as a whole. In fact, the figures for this subset are nearly flipped with those for the overall group, with only 29% choosing small or no investment in both the new adjunct orientation and experienced adjunct development categories.
Similarly, individuals who serve as adjuncts at for-profit universities look to have a less negative view of the investment being made by their institutions. In terms of choosing small or no investment, the results were 43% for new adjunct orientation and 29% for experienced adjunct development.

On the opposite side, participants who teach at small colleges or universities (fewer than 5,000 students) almost universally reported that their institution makes little or no investment in adjunct training, either for newcomers or experienced staff. Only one respondent in this sub-group chose as high an option as moderate investment. It should be noted that the number of responses from the three sub-groups above (satisfied adjuncts, adjuncts at for-profit institutions, and adjuncts at small colleges and universities) is relatively low (7 participants in all three cases).

Participant stories and comments reveal what is important to the adjuncts when it comes to developing and enhancing teaching practices. Stated slightly differently, what they had to say correlates to areas where they have questions or would like help. Various aspects of how to interact and engage with students, for example, came up regularly in the focus group discussions. For Mark, who teaches at a large public university in the South Atlantic region, this took the form of seeking advice on how to get students to talk in class. He said:

You know I’ve tried this and nobody says anything, how do you get the students to participate more? Some of the advice I can remember, “Just keep quiet. Wait and they’ll get more and more uncomfortable in the silence and eventually somebody will say something.” But you know, you naturally just want to fill the air. And if you’re talking, they’re not going to, a lot of them just won’t.

Elaine, who teaches at a medium-sized public university in the South Atlantic region, echoed this same concern, saying: “I think the thing I struggled most with was getting these particular
students to engage. So it seemed like I was slipping between providing too much of the answer or not enough, so they were either lost or unengaged.” For Jim, an adjunct at a large private research university in New England, a key challenge of connecting with the students has had to do with motivation. He said:

Then there are some who aren’t in the field, I don’t think they have any interest in getting into the field and are sort of slogging along, sucking up energy and not being able to contribute much. I just want to say, “What the hell are you doing here?”

Another area where adjuncts from industry would like to see their institutions provide more guidance has to do with presenting models and examples of successful teaching practices. For example, in discussing the merits of pairing a new adjunct with a veteran professor, Jim, the adjunct at the New England university, said it “would have helped me visualize much better out of the gate what to do and what not to do, just by the observation.” Survey comments hit upon this same point. Said one respondent in describing what would help new adjuncts: “Make them observe at least one of the classes they are going to teach.” Another respondent offered a similar suggestion: “Hav[e] a minimum number of sessions an instructor must sit in on a more senior instructor’s offering of the class which is to be taught.”

Table 11

*Perception: Institutions Underinvest in Adjunct Development*

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Another respondent suggested a related idea and pointed to the overall value of this type of assistance: “Provide workshops that show model lessons and essential planning skills. Teachers emulate skills that they see as being effective when they experience them directly.”

Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, picked up on this same point in highlighting the benefit of an adjunct training day that his institution offers. In describing the range of sessions, he said, “They’re all teaching related and...they are ways to bring new things into your classroom or ideas that have worked.”

Participants cited access to materials that predecessors have developed and samples of key course components as another way institutions can help adjuncts in acquiring and expanding their teaching skills. Examples from the first category include access to prior syllabi and course notes from previous teachers. Samples of key course components that participants would like to see range from lesson plans and rubrics to reading assignments and exams. In addition, participants said access to tools for creating course materials is valuable. These include: a packet that explains the administrative tasks adjuncts need to know, a how-to on course development, guidance on how to solve common problems, tips on developing tests, techniques on classroom management, and a tutorial on basic educational principles the university expects the adjunct to know.

In addition to having a chance to visualize and preview good practices and materials prior to teaching, participants want feedback after teaching a course to gauge their development and consider ways to improve their performance. In some cases, this desire is specific. For example, one survey respondent asked for feedback on the student-teacher interaction, while another respondent recommended a senior instructor sit in on a set number of classes the new adjunct teaches. In other cases, the desire is more general, such as the respondent who simply would like
to see constructive feedback or the separate respondent who seeks feedback to affirm that how they have taught has been satisfactory.

An additional train of thought that emerged from the participants’ input relates to colleges and universities being aware of the limited teaching experience new adjuncts typically bring to the role. For example, Sam, the adjunct who teaches online courses for a large on-ground university, would like to see training offered specifically on the topic of teaching practices. He said:

It would make sense to me that teaching how to teach, especially when you are getting folks from the outside with expertise in a particular domain or skill set, teaching those people how to teach, not just to teach in general, yes teach how to teach in general, but also to teach more specifically to the flavor of the student body, the college or university etc. makes a lot of sense. Then ongoing opportunities you know to participate in something more focused. It makes a lot of sense and, it’s really in the school’s best interest.

Felix, an adjunct at a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, has attended training run by his institution that specifically examines the topic of what makes for good teaching. He described a session he attended as “an example of basically teaching me what active learning was, what it means to be an active teacher, providing active learning opportunities for students and why it’s important.”

**Summary of Findings**

The findings from this research study come from approximately five dozen individuals who work for the same high technology company and also teach part-time as adjunct professors. Their input is captured through responses to an online survey and comments during focus groups
and a one-on-one interview. The participants openly shared their views on resources they tap to develop and build their teaching skills, as well as on the challenges they have faced in acquiring and growing teaching proficiency.

With respect to resources and methods for learning to become effective college professors, the participants reported that for the most part they figure out what works and does not work on their own. This does not mean the individuals do not have a strategy. To implement this approach of relying on themselves, the participants described how they connect with other individuals who can offer guidance, analyze student feedback on course evaluations to determine where adjustments are needed, and selectively access programs and tools the host institution offers to adjuncts.

In describing their self-reliance in figuring out what teaching methods work, the participants said that the unknowns associated with engaging students is one of their biggest anxieties. The discussion about connecting with others in academia unveiled three motivating factors: reducing the uncertainties associated with teaching, observing examples of good teaching practices, and gaining inclusion into the broader community of instructors. The importance of student feedback covered not only what the students have to say about the adjuncts but also what the adjuncts have to say about the students. In this latter category, adjuncts expressed their frustrations about students who may not have the pre-requisite knowledge in entering a class, sufficient English language skills, or accurate expectations about the level of effort and accomplishment needed to earn a high grade.

In terms of challenges faced in learning how to effectively teach at the college level, the participants offered a mix of thoughts and reactions. The participants agreed that the needs of new adjuncts are distinctly different from those of returning adjuncts. For new adjuncts, the idea
of the university setting the right expectations on methods and performance emerged as the top recommendation. On the opposite side, participants pointed to greater pay as the number one way to help experienced adjuncts. Participants concurred on the importance of the university being more mindful of the time demands placed on adjuncts.

A portion of the participants described the support they receive from the host institution in positive tones. In contrast, though, others said they feel underappreciated and pointed to insufficient resources, pay, and recognition as evidence. In addition, several participants pointed to what full-time faculty receive as the measuring stick for where adjuncts stand.

Overall, the participants were in general agreement that the host institution invests little in adjunct training and could be doing more to help adjuncts become better teachers. Adjuncts who teach at for-profit universities were more positive about perceived investment than the group as a whole, while adjuncts who teach at small colleges or universities were more negative in their perceptions of institutional investment. Participants indicated they would like to see greater investment in areas that range from exposure to good teaching practices to structured feedback on their teaching performance.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Findings

In this final chapter the researcher will discuss the findings of the study and draw conclusions on how the findings answer the research questions. In addition, the researcher will review the implications of the findings for current practice and theory, as well as for future research. The chapter will briefly recap the problem of practice and study methodology, analyze the findings, look at the significance of the study and its validity and limitations, and present the researcher’s personal comments and recommendations.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Adjunct professors today represent the majority of instructors teaching at U.S. colleges and universities (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012), with industry professionals representing a significant portion of the adjunct population (Eagan, 2007). The shift to adjuncts being in the majority and full-time tenured faculty being in the minority reflects a trend that has steadily unfolded over the past several decades (Kirk & Spector, 2009; Liu & Zhang, 2013). Every indication is that this current model is here to stay.

Researchers have examined various aspects of why this shift has occurred and its impact on undergraduate and graduate learning. For example, the lower labor costs and greater real-world experience associated with adjuncts have been well studied (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014; Kato, 2011; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009). Similarly, student performance and attrition rates based on adjunct versus full-time instruction have been part of the main body of research (Schmidt, 2008; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Landrum, 2009; Jaeger & Hinz, 2008-09). One area that has received far less attention to date is how adjuncts go about learning to become effective teachers. Stated slightly differently, limited research exists on how adjuncts go from subject matter expert to professor.
This study has sought to fill that gap, specifically from the perspective of adjuncts who come from professional positions in industry. The starting point for the research is that adjuncts from industry, while well qualified in terms of their professional knowledge, often possess limited or no teaching experience (West, 2010; Coddington, 2005; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Berschback, 2010; Minter, 2011). Comparing and contrasting adjuncts with full-time professors provides a frame of reference. While full-time faculty have studied and trained to be professors, this is typically not the case for adjunct professors who come from industry.

The problem of practice touches two primary areas. First, being capable and proficient at what you do does not mean you are good at teaching others about that subject. The range of challenges involved in teaching, from gaining students’ attention to evaluating student understanding of key concepts, often is quite different from the work an industry professional performs. Second, teaching is a secondary job for adjuncts from industry, which raises questions about the level of commitment they are willing to make and level of frustration they are willing to accept.

The current study has intentionally focused on adjuncts from industry, rather than other groups that touch the problem of practice, such as administrators, full-time faculty, students, and even adjunct professors from non-industry backgrounds. Similarly, the research lens has been directed specifically at how adjuncts from industry think about the process of acquiring and building the teaching skills necessary to be successful as an adjunct. Two research questions, one looking at the resources adjuncts from industry access in their teaching development and the other looking at the obstacles they face in gaining desired levels of teaching proficiency, provide guideposts for the study.
Review of Methodology

The researcher developed a general qualitative study based on a constructivist paradigm to gather stories from and delve into the experiences of part-time faculty whose primary job is in industry. The study had two main parts. The first was an online survey that provided data on the types of resources adjuncts from industry use in learning to teach, their views of the most challenging aspects of building their teaching skills, and their suggestions on ways that higher education institutions can best support both new and experienced part-time faculty. A set of focus groups and a one-on-one interview followed the survey and enabled the researcher to gain broader and deeper insights into the experiences of adjuncts from industry.

Employing open-ended inquiry and responsive interviewing techniques, the researcher sought to gain insight from study participants to be able to answer two research questions:

1. How do industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors determine how they will initially learn and continuously enhance their teaching skills, and subsequently pursue resources to enhance their teaching skills and teaching competency?

2. What do industry professionals who serve as adjuncts perceive to be the greatest challenges to their learning and ongoing development as a teacher?

In seeking participants for the study, the researcher applied a combination of criterion and convenience sampling in which individuals who are both full-time professionals in their given field and teaching part-time as an adjunct could opt into the study. Tapping into the company where he works, the researcher was able to recruit close to 60 people who met the criteria.

The online survey included a mix of check-the-box and open-ended questions that could be completed in approximately 10 minutes. Fifty-six individuals participated in the survey. The second part consisted of three focus groups and one one-on-one interview, with each session
lasting approximately one hour. Twenty-one individuals participated in these sessions. While most of the focus group or one-on-one interview participants also completed the survey, a handful chose to participate only in the second part of the study.

The data generated from the study came in the form of compiled results from the online survey and transcripts generated from recordings of the focus groups and one-on-one interview. The researcher analyzed the data through a multi-step process to identify patterns and generate findings. This multi-step process included repeated reviews of the results and transcripts to become intimately familiar with the data, grouping the data based on similarities and differences, interpreting these groupings to uncover deeper meanings, and determining how best to present the results from this process.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

Six themes emerged from the synthesis and analysis of the data from the survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interview, as presented in chapter four. The researcher has further examined these themes to draw out the key findings that cut across the two main areas of inquiry in the research questions: resources to build teaching skills and roadblocks that interfere with building teaching proficiency. This analysis has produced three key findings:

- Adjuncts from industry are generally confident in their ability to teach college students and are for the most part self-sufficient in determining how to acquire the skills needed to be a successful instructor.

- Adjuncts from industry point to both direct and indirect obstacles that pose challenges to their ability to effectively teach their courses.
Most adjuncts from industry believe their educational institution could and should be doing more to support them, yet a minority are highly pleased with what their college or university offers them.

**Adjuncts from industry generally are confident in their ability to teach college students and are self-sufficient in determining how to acquire the skills needed to be a successful instructor.** Adjuncts from industry typically are experienced professionals with a well-established set of skills in their chosen profession. As such, it would be natural for them to bring a confidence to the role of adjunct teacher based on knowing the subject matter and understanding the foundational skills students need. The study participants match this profile. Close to 80% of the survey respondents reported having more than 20 years of experience in their profession; greater than 90% reported have 10 or more years of experience. Based on longevity, these are individuals who have achieved success in their careers.

Comments from the survey reflect a clear confidence in being able to serve as an adjunct professor. Examples include:

- I had more experience in the subject than the full-time professor who was teaching the course.
- I KNEW the material.
- I had a mastery of the course materials. It was just a matter of conveying my knowledge to students.
- I feel confident and prepared because I knew the subject area. So I felt fine and comfortable as far as delivering the material.
- I was taking courses and knew as much as the professors.
Even when a participant expressed concerns about his or her teaching capabilities, it typically was followed by a statement of confidence in being able to overcome those doubts. Felix, who teaches for a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, framed the thought this way: “The anxiety was less about the concept that I had, the credentials if you will, the knowledge base that I could share.” Similarly, a survey respondent said, “[I] had no confidence I could teach it. But from experience I’m great at mentoring and individuals seem to learn easily from me.”

The focus group participants mirrored the confidence of the survey respondents. For example, Mack, an adjunct for a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, said, “I always felt quite confident. All the courses I taught were very much within the core knowledge domain of my own previous studies and research.” Chuck, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, took this thought one step further in describing the confidence he gained once he had some experience under his belt. He said, “The second time I taught a topic it was like you walk in and you just sort of sleep through it. You’ve been through it, you’ve actually experienced the kind of questions and interactions the students would have.”

In many cases, prior teaching-related experience contributes to the confidence that study participants bring to their role as part-time faculty. Close to 60% of the survey respondents cited some form of instructional experience as a reason that they felt they would be successful as an adjunct. In some cases, the correlation between the previous experience and adjunct teaching is a close one. For example, focus group participants Kevin and Mack described having been a full-time professor and a graduate teaching assistant, respectively. In other cases, the connection between the past experience and adjunct teaching is less direct. For example, Mark, who
participated in the one-on-one interview, pointed to the value of giving briefings throughout his professional career. Focus group participant Molly pointed to a career path in which PC training served as a precursor to teaching at the college level. Ron, also a focus group participant, felt his experience as a military instructor helped prepare him for teaching college courses.

Study participants also reflected an innate confidence in themselves when talking about how they assess their performance as a college instructor. Several of the survey respondents misunderstood the question asking them to describe the reference points they use to assess their performance, interpreting it as asking about assessment results for them as college instructors. Their responses provide insight into the positive way they view their teaching. Examples include:

- My official feedback scores are consistently higher than the averages.
- [O]ther faculty, both full-time faculty and adjunct faculty, use my course material.
- Student evaluations of my teaching effectiveness placed me in the top two percent of all faculty [at the university].
- My student reviews have been at the top of my department for years.
- School evaluations showed me as one of the highest-rated instructors.

In addition to conveying a sense of confidence in their ability to be effective as an adjunct professor, participants also highlighted a need to be self-sufficient in learning how to acquire and expand the desired teaching skills. In the online survey, the three most frequent methods respondents cited for learning and improving teaching skills were:

- trial and error: learning from own experience,
- self-learning: own reading and research, and
- talking with other adjuncts.
The first two choices clearly reflect personal initiative by the adjunct to gain knowledge and insight about the teaching process. And at least a portion of the third choice, based on participant comments, reflects proactive outreach to learn from peers. Thus, the top three methods provide evidence that most of the study participants have been self-sufficient when it comes to learning how to be an effective teacher. Mark, who has taught for 20 years, provided an additional frame of reference regarding adjunct self-sufficiency. In reflecting on the knowledge and skills he possesses as a teacher, Mark attributed 85% of the credit for what he has learned to himself and 15% to the university.

The question that emerges is whether adjuncts from industry are self-sufficient in their learning by choice or necessity, or some combination of the two. The researcher did not specifically explore this area with the participants. Several participants, however, suggested that they had to figure it out for themselves in order to survive. For example, Sam, who teaches at a large on-ground university, said: “[I’ve] sort of felt like the adjunct who was just sort of thrown into it and sort of sink or swim.” In a similar vein, one of the survey respondents said, “Too often the adjunct is just thrown into the classroom without preparation.” This topic of being self-sufficient by choice or necessity merits further investigation. It is also the case that the environment of the company where the participants hold their primary job, which is highly supportive of academic endeavors, may positively contribute to feelings of self-confidence and self-sufficiency. This topic lends itself to further examination, including comparisons among employers with varying viewpoints about the value of their staff holding adjunct faculty positions.

Adjuncts from industry point to both direct and indirect obstacles that pose challenges to their ability to effectively teach their courses. Study participants described a
range of obstacles that get in the way of their teaching development. These obstacles can be divided into two main categories -- direct and indirect impediments to teaching development. Direct obstacles primarily relate to how the adjuncts interact with students and manage issues related to running a successful class. In contrast, the indirect obstacles deal with topics that are ancillary to teaching a class but can nonetheless significantly impact how positively or negatively adjuncts feel about the institution and the courses they teach.

**Direct obstacle: How to deal with students.** The direct obstacles raised by participants revolve around three main issues. The first relates to how to deal with students. Elaine, who teaches at a medium-sized public university in the South Atlantic region, provided a good example of how students can be perplexing to adjuncts from industry. She said, “These 20-year-old students were like little aliens, they were really hard to relate to and that social dynamic made me a little nervous.” Multiple participants described a feeling of uncertainty in knowing how to grab students’ attention and engage them in discussion. For example, Jim, who teaches at a large private research university in New England, pointed to the “uneven level of motivation, uneven sources of motivation by the students.” He said that he can divide a typical class into students who are interested in the field and those who are not, adding that the latter “are sort of slogging along, sucking up energy and not being able to contribute much.”

In a similar way, participants expressed frustration at what to do with students who are not prepared or qualified to handle the requirements of the course. For Molly, who teaches engineering and software courses at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, inadequate language skills are a frustration. She said: “I’m spending my time trying to be an English teacher.” She cited an example of a final paper that a student submitted: “[T]he first sentence off the bat was, ‘Due to’ …’ with ‘due’ spelled ‘do’ instead of ‘due.’” For Kevin, who
teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, the frustration comes in having to adjust his course outline to compensate for missing knowledge. He said, “I have to spend some of my class time going back and re-teaching….and sometimes that’s very difficult.”

A survey respondent expanded on this same point:

> Ensure students have necessary prerequisite knowledge before letting them enroll in the course. I continuously encounter graduate students who do not have a firm grasp of fundamental knowledge. This requires a great deal of effort to correct and limits what can be achieved in class.

**Direct obstacle: Understanding administration expectations.** The second direct obstacle has to do with understanding administration expectations. Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, put it this way:

> So every university is a little bit different, and obviously the folks who have been there know. So it would be good whether you are a brand new adjunct or you are a brand new adjunct to that university, I think some time spent upfront familiarizing that person with the techniques that work at that school, the ones that don’t work at that school, an understanding of the kind of people you are going to be working with, not the faculty, but the other students that are there.

A survey respondent echoed a similar sentiment: “Following the school’s course procedures, if you know what they are, this is easy. If you don't, then it is very difficult. Some schools are better than others at informing new adjuncts what the procedures are.” For other participants, understanding expectations revolves around a specific topic or concern. For example, Mark, who teaches at a large public university in the South Atlantic region, told the following story:
Are they really going to crucify me if I give more than half the class an A? What’s the policy on grading here really? I know the policy says give everybody the grade they deserve, but I’ve also heard you get in trouble for giving too many As. How do you know what too many As is?

Survey respondents also pointed to the benefits of better explanations to adjuncts on what is expected of them, citing this idea as a key suggestion for how administrators can help new adjuncts. Their recommendations, from the survey, on what the college or university should provide included:

- clear indication as to what level of rigor and academic standards is expected by the institution,
- clear expectations from department leadership,
- orientation course with a focus on expectations and guidance on how to resolve common problems,
- guidance on what the university wants from the classes and the instructor,
- clearly communicate expectations and provide examples, and
- vetted student performance expectations and metrics so the new instructor knows what the school expects.

While the preceding recommendations relate to communications before an adjunct teaches a course, the concept of better defining expectations also holds true during and after the course. For example, one survey respondent recommended “more regular contact/interaction/observation by Dean, Head of Adjunct Program, Dept Head to give feedback that performance is adequate.” One theme that emerged from the study is that adjunct professors from industry judge their effectiveness as teachers primarily by student feedback. Greater
institutional feedback offers the potential for adjuncts from industry to better understand administration expectations.

Direct obstacle: Academic freedom versus university support. The third direct obstacle has to do with the balancing point between freedom for an adjunct to teach a course as he or she sees fit and direction and support from the university on how to deliver the course. Survey respondents expressed the desire for greater academic freedom in multiple ways. Some framed it in terms of what the university should discontinue. For example, one respondent said, “Stop placing restrictions on teaching methods.” Others presented their view in terms of changes the university should make. Examples included:

- Recogniz[e] their academic freedom.
- Let them teach the course in their own style…as long as all content is taught.
- Experienced adjuncts should be allowed to regularly introduce fresh course material to keep the course relevant.
- I’d like a little more leeway on subjects to cover or at least the approach to the subject.
- Having a say, based on professional experience, in what and how courses should be taught, would be a good starting point.

For some participants, academic freedom involves a make-or-break decision on whether or not to teach. Brian, who teaches at a medium-sized public research university in the South Atlantic region, described a rift he had with a full-time professor regarding course content. “[H]e believed as a tenured professor he should have the right to set my curriculum,” said Brian. “And I told him if that was the curriculum he thought should be taught, he was going to have to teach it himself.”
On the flip side of the concern about independence in teaching methods, however, came input that the university provides too much freedom and not enough direction to its adjunct faculty. Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, described his experience in the following way:

> [T]he curriculum is defined by a course content summary, but other than that it is up to every individual instructor to create their own delivery. So there are probably fifty people teaching that course, so there are fifty different deliveries of that course that is required across the university.

One survey respondent hit upon both sides of the issue in offering a proposed solution to university administrators. New adjuncts should be allowed, the person commented, “to ‘color’ the course with their own personality and teaching style; [they] shouldn’t be faced with a ‘green field’ when picking up a new course, nor locked into a rigid teaching style.”

These direct obstacles are logical and not surprising in considering the experiences of an adjunct from industry. While study participants were nearly universal in describing confidence based on subject matter knowledge, what they do not know or cannot control causes them angst. Determining how to motivate students and address student skill gaps clearly falls into this category. It makes sense, then, that the three activities survey participants cited as most challenging to accomplish all have to do with student interaction:

- teaching students with widely different skills sets,
- getting students excited and engaged, and
- understanding what students know in entering the class.

Similarly, adjuncts from industry often feel in the dark when it comes to knowing what the university expects of them. And the strong desire by a subset of study participants for greater
academic freedom relates to an adjunct’s level of control over the teaching environment. In essence, this group is saying to administrators, “Give me guidelines, but put the control in my hands to teach this course as I see fit.”

In short, two common threads exist among the direct obstacles. The first is that the obstacles relate to how an adjunct from industry will actually teach his or her class. The second is that the adjunct is looking for the university either to step in to help fill a void in knowledge, as in the case of knowing how to engage students, or step aside to let the adjunct deliver the course as he or she thinks best.

**Indirect obstacle: Pay.** The indirect obstacles to teaching development can be grouped into three main categories. The first, and most prominent, centers on paying adjuncts from industry at a higher level. A portion of survey respondents gave short, to-the-point comments in making this recommendation. Examples include:

- Pay them more. No question.
- More $.
- Better compensation.
- Higher pay.
- Pay me better.

Other survey respondents and focus group participants went into more detail to describe the reasons behind their recommendation that universities increase adjunct pay. One train of thought relates to the large number of hours an adjunct invests in the job and the resulting low hourly pay rate. For example, a survey respondent said, “I did it because I liked it, but eventually I realized I was earning minimum wage for the all the hours I put in, and I decided to spend that time in
other ways.” Others linked their recommendation to arguments of respect and fairness. One survey respondent put it this way:

Another reason for more pay is a feeling of respect. Universities wouldn't be able to make ends meet without adjuncts teaching many of their courses, at minimum wage. So we feel we're subsidizing the regular faculty. Which shouldn't have to be the case. They're great colleagues and the economic disparity shouldn't be there.

Other participants talked about a need for increased pay in more subtle but equally forceful ways. While several individuals raised the point that they did not teach for the money, it was clear that they are bothered by what they consider sub-standard pay for the services they provide. Paul, who teaches at a small public college in the South Atlantic region, said:

I know none of us are doing adjunct teaching to make a million dollars, but obviously the pay is not super great… I know it will never get better. It’s just something that I take as a reality, that’s what it is and I’m not in it for the money.

Erwin, who teaches at a medium-sized private university in the Mid-Atlantic region, reflected the same sentiments as Paul and went one step further in describing why higher pay would be beneficial:

Overall, just the salary, I just don’t think adjuncts get paid enough. But that’s not why I do it, I’m not here complaining about pay. I do it because I enjoy it. But I think a better pay structure may motivate people more to improve their teaching skills.

*Indirect obstacle: Inclusion in the academic community.* The second indirect obstacle has to do with adjuncts from industry not feeling they are part of the university. Some seek a stronger connection in the department where they teach. Comments from survey respondents along these lines included:
• Make them feel included as part of the faculty team - by word and action.
• Have the adjuncts have some regular interaction with the entire department.
• Closer interaction with deans and managers.
• More interaction among faculty members to compare practice and performance.
• More collaboration with the full teaching staff would be great.

For other survey respondents, the desire for greater inclusion has to do more with the institution as a whole and its practices for dealing with adjuncts. One survey respondent advocated for “[i]nclusion in full time activities where possible. This tends to diminish the sense of separation from normal activities.” Another survey respondent advised, “Do more to make the adjuncts part of the community (of faculty). If you are part of the community striving to achieve the same goals you are in it together.”

In other cases, what study participants had to say about inclusion hit upon a combination of practical and symbolic concerns. For example, the lack of an office for adjuncts who teach on campus can be seen as an inconvenience or a message of relative worth. Ron, who teaches at a large community college in the South Atlantic region, seemed to hit upon both points in describing his situation: “It is a little bit of a hassle also not having an office, even a shared office. So when it comes time to do office hours, I make mine by appointment obviously because I don’t work there full-time.”

**Indirect obstacle: Demands on time.** The third indirect obstacle has to do with university demands on adjuncts’ time. Study participants would like universities to be more mindful of how their decisions, requirements, and procedures affect adjuncts’ time. Several made the point that they are there to teach what they know to students and want to focus on that task; they would like to see universities provide the support to cover ancillary activities.
One suggestion that came up multiple times is to automate grading or provide a teaching assistant who can handle this duty. “In general, I just wish in both courses that I had more grading support because it does take some time to grade and return things,” said Erwin, who teaches at a medium-sized private university in the Mid-Atlantic region. “With our busy work schedules it’s hard at night to go ahead and read twenty papers and review them.” A survey respondent echoed the thought: “Automate grading as much as possible to lighten my workload outside of the classroom.” In a related way, Lois, who teaches at a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, pointed out that having to take care of administrative tasks takes away from teaching. She said:

[W]hat I’m noticing is that more and more and more of the demand for the adjunct professors to do the work. For example, who is not showing up for class. I think there should be analytics that could provide the university so if the support they make it easier for me then I’m a better teacher.

Participants also want greater accommodation that starts with university recognition that adjuncts from industry are teaching in addition to their primary job. As stated by Mack, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, “[A]s an adjunct you have a day time job that is a big priority, of course.” Specifically, participants indicated they would like to see earlier notice on classes they may be asked to teach in upcoming terms, greater continuity in being able to teach from term to term, and teaching times that are more convenient to adjunct-from-industry schedules.

In addition, participants linked the issues of students who are unqualified to take their course and the negative impacts on time. One survey respondent argued for more rigorous entrance standards “so students have more consistent preparation and background. Without this,
the struggling students consume a disproportionate share of my time and waste the time of their classmates in unproductive dialogue.”

A common characteristic among these indirect obstacles is that all have to do with the degree to which adjuncts feel valued. When Erwin, who teaches at a medium-sized public research university in the Mid-Atlantic region says, “I just don’t think adjuncts are paid enough,” it is a statement of feeling both underpaid and undervalued. Similarly, efforts to include adjuncts within department or university activities correlate with a sense of being valued. Ryan, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, rattled off multiple ways he’s invited to participate, ending with the statement, “I definitely feel like part of the extended family, and I have complete access.” Also, adjuncts judge how the university values their time based on how easy or difficult it is to meet the demands associated with teaching. For example, Mark, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, shared his frustration in having to figure out new teaching management software. “[F]or something you thought was going to take ten or fifteen minutes, it ends up taking half a day,” he said. Feeling valued ties directly to the theme from the last chapter that describes how a portion of adjuncts feel underappreciated and say it affects the quality of the teaching they deliver.

It is worth noting that participant views on the indirect obstacles can be equivocal. For example, on the subject of pay, while adjuncts believe the compensation level is unfair, to some degree they offset the point by saying they are not in it for the money. Similarly, when it comes to inclusion, adjuncts from industry want a stronger connection to the university and their host department, yet at the same time acknowledge they are uncertain on the degree to which they can or will get involved.
Most adjuncts from industry believe their institutions can and should be doing more to support them, yet a minority are highly pleased with what their college or university offers them. Survey respondents were nearly universal in stating that university investment in adjunct development is on the lower end of the scale. Seventy percent of survey respondents said their institution makes little to no investment in orientation and development programs. Less than 10% went to the other end of the spectrum and said the investment is large or very large.

During the focus groups and one-on-one interview, the researcher asked the participants about the support they receive from their institution and the degree to which they take advantage of it. The initial responses often were positive, which puzzled the researcher in light of the survey findings. When the discussion shifted to concerns and changes the participants would like to see their institution make, however, the comments began to more closely align with the survey.

What emerged from the face-to-face discussions is that about a quarter of the participants are well satisfied with the level of teaching support they receive from their institutions. The researcher labelled a participant as well satisfied based on two factors. One is that the adjunct described resources and offerings that are substantial in quantity or quality, or both. Two is that the way the adjunct presented the information made it clear that he or she is pleased to be associated with the institution. For example, Lois, an adjunct for a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, said, “My experience at [the university] has been remarkable.”

The well satisfied adjuncts teach at five colleges and universities. The common elements of adjunct support spread among these five colleges and universities fall into three main
categories: training programs and resources, assistance to facilitate teaching, and inclusion in university and department activities.

**Training programs and resources.** The leading institutions for adjunct support offer programs specifically targeted at helping their part-time faculty learn to become better teachers. In some cases, this is group oriented. Felix, who teaches at a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, described a six-hour training session on a Saturday whose specific purpose was “to teach you how to teach.” In other cases, the training takes place via a mentor. Ryan, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, participated in a process he described as “right-seat ride” in preparing to teach his course. This process involved first serving as a teaching assistant for the course he would subsequently take on as lead instructor.

**Assistance to facilitate teaching.** The leading institutions for adjunct support provide multiple types of help designed to make it easier for their part-time staff to teach their courses. In some cases this takes the form of assistants who can either help the adjunct in preparing for or running the class. Lois, who teaches at a large private research university in the South Atlantic region, talked about three individuals within the academic program who would email her regularly and format the course content she provided to prepare it for delivery to students.

In other cases this help takes the form of access to more experienced professors and prior course materials to receive both guidance and ideas on how to run a course. Erwin, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, said he took advantage of opportunities the university presented to talk with professors who had taught the course he was starting. Another type of assistance in this category has to do with logistics that can be a help if present and a frustration if absent. Examples range from being provided an office to
having staff available to help with administrative tasks. Erwin, for example, pointed to both an adjunct office and administrative support as being in place at the university where he teaches.

Inclusion in university and department activities. The leading institutions for adjunct support involve adjuncts in campus-wide activities and department-specific planning and development, including peer exchanges among adjuncts. Chuck, who teaches at a large public research university in the South Atlantic region, described “extensive group meetings with all the adjuncts a couple of times a year,” followed by “separate sessions for each of the topic areas.” Similarly, Ron said the large community college in the South Atlantic region where he teaches hosts an adjunct day every semester, with the event offering multiple teaching-related sessions and adjuncts being paid to attend. He added that the college-wide sessions are followed by division meetings where “adjuncts gather to talk about the semester.”

Ron framed the overall offerings the college makes to its adjuncts in this way: “You actually have anything the regular faculty have access to there as far as education you can use. And they push that out.” The reference to equality with regular faculty is an indirect way of saying that the college consciously seeks to incorporate its adjunct faculty. Similarly, the reference to pushing out information is an indirect way of saying that the college not only allows adjuncts to participate, it communicates with its adjuncts on the resources that are available to them. Ryan, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, provided another example of this type of communication when he described being on “normal email distribution lists” describing what is happening in the department.

A thread -- connecting with others as part of growing as a teacher -- weaves through the three categories. From mentors in the training category to class assistants in the facilitation category to group meetings in the inclusion category, the ability to draw upon others to
strengthen one’s teaching is a common element within the top practices. It also mirrors a theme from the prior chapter, namely that adjunct professors from industry who speak positively about their development as teachers point to interactions with other people as key to their growth.

The above summary of top practices represents a collective list cutting across the five colleges and universities. Not all of the practices are in place at each of the institutions. In fact, no one college or university has examples that cover all three categories of training, facilitation, and inclusion. In a related way, while the study participants spoke highly of the practices on the list, it did not stop them from offering suggestions for improvements in other areas. For example, Ron, who spoke highly of the adjunct days and division meetings his community college holds, also expressed frustration about having to renew his computer network access every term and not having an office where he can have a private discussion with a student.

The top practices represented in the above list match closely with the desired investments other study participants would like to see at their institutions. The one notable exception relates to pay. No best practice emerged from the focus groups and one-on-one interview on this topic. Other than the desire for greater pay, no suggestions from study participants were missing from the list of top practices. In other words, the set of activities can serve as an exemplar for colleges and universities considering how to better serve their adjunct faculty.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Adult Learning Theory serves as the lens for examining how the study findings help to answer the research questions about the resources adjuncts from industry choose to build their teaching skills and the obstacles they hit in the process. The essence of Adult Learning Theory is that adults approach learning and acquire knowledge in distinctly different ways than children. In the context of this study, the researcher is applying Adult Learning Theory to examine how
adjuncts from industry learn to become proficient in an area where they likely have little to no experience, namely in the teaching of college students. As described by West (2010), adjuncts from industry are being asked to perform a job for which they are not prepared.

More specifically, the researcher is applying Adult Learning Theory to see if industry professionals turned adjunct faculty go about learning in the same way as adults returning to school for a degree or certificate. Adult Learning Theory is based on six underlying assumptions (Knowles, 1970; Knowles, 1984; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998), and the study findings generally align with each of these. Here is a brief discussion of the assumptions and how the findings match to them.

1. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before beginning to learn about it. With respect to this study, adjuncts from industry described how knowing what makes for effective teaching enables them to survive and thrive in the classroom.

2. Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, including related to learning. Within the context of this study, the assumption holds true for two reasons. One is that adjunct teaching is a choice that industry professionals make. Two is that they have both multiple options and the freedom to choose how they will go about learning to teach.

3. Adults come to an educational activity with a well-established set of experiences. The research showed this assumption to be accurate for adjuncts from industry, for two reasons. One, these individuals come to the role of adjunct with strong professional experience and knowledge they want to share with students looking to
enter and grow in the same field. Two, adjuncts from industry want to learn from their peers who have been teaching longer than they have.

4. Adults are ready to learn topics that help them cope with real-life needs. The study results showed that adjuncts from industry are ready and willing to learn the multiple facets of what’s required to step successfully into a teaching role and to grow and develop as a teacher.

5. Adults are problem centered, not subject centered, in their approach to learning. The study participants made it clear this assumption holds true for them. They want to figure out what motivates students and how to engage and interest them in the course topics. While educational theory might be a means to achieve this, the study participants are not interested in such topics simply for learning’s sake.

6. Adults are driven to learn primarily by internal motivations, such as enhanced self-esteem, job satisfaction, and quality of life. This assumption is partially true and partially untrue within the context of the present study. On the one hand, study participants stated that certain external motivations, such as pay, are not the primary reason they teach. On the other hand, many indicated that student success, also an external motivator, is an important outcome for them. Their comments also revealed that certain internal motivations, including figuring out and solving the ambiguities of teaching so they can be successful, drive their learning.

On the surface, it may look like an adjunct from industry is an atypical adult learner. After all, the adjunct is stepping into the role of instructor, not student. The implication is that whatever learning he or she needs to do must somehow be different from the learning of adults pursuing a formal education, including adult students who may be in the adjunct’s class. As
outlined above, though, the study findings show that adjuncts from industry are very much like other adults when it comes to the underlying motivation and readiness for learning.

A key concept associated with Adult Learning Theory is that the individual is self-directed in his or her learning. Cercone (2008) says that a self-directed learner demonstrates independence, a willingness to take initiative, persistence in learning, self-discipline, self-confidence, and the desire to continue to learn. The study findings strongly support this concept. The participants reported a high degree of self-reliance in the methods they pursued for learning and improving their teaching skills. At the top of the list, with a 77% response rate, was “trial and error: learning from own experiences,” followed by “self-learning: own reading and research” at a 70% response rate. These choices reflect characteristics associated with a self-directed learner, including showing independence, taking initiative, and exhibiting self-confidence.

The research results both align and contradict the findings of related prior studies. In terms of alignment, studies by Forbes, Hickey, and White (2010) found a strong adjunct desire for greater clarity in teacher role expectations and the elimination of inconsistent and ambiguous practices. A key finding in this study is that adjuncts from industry want to better understand administration expectations around such topics as level of academic rigor to place on students and class grade distribution. In terms of contradiction, Coddington (2005) found that adjunct enthusiasm and confidence waned as they experienced teaching issues they found difficult to resolve. No similar key finding emerged in the present study. While a portion of participants indicated that low pay or restrictions on how they teach could drive them to quit being an adjunct, none put teaching issues in the same category. Also, more than 60% of the survey respondents indicated they have taught as an adjunct for five years or more, which indicates that
the majority have stuck with adjunct teaching despite challenges they may encounter. It should be noted, however, that the respondents are adjuncts who were actively teaching or had recently taught at the time of the survey. The survey did not seek to include individuals who had chosen to discontinue teaching as an adjunct.

While Adult Learning Theory looks at the conditions that positively correlate with adult learning, various authors (e.g., Darkenwald and Merriam, as cited in Merriam and Brockett, 1997) have examined obstacles that block an adult's ability to learn. The researcher observed mixed results in the current study in terms of the presence of the most common obstacles, as follows:

- Situational barriers include lack of money or time. This type of obstacle applies in the current study as participants reported limitations on their time.
- Institutional barriers include inconvenient course scheduling or course prerequisites that are overly demanding. This type of obstacle applies more in the case of a student pursuing a formal degree; it is not relevant in the current study.
- Dispositional barriers include prior negative experiences related to learning or a feeling of being too old to learn. This type of obstacle does not apply in the current study.
- Information barriers include not knowing where to turn for help in planning new studies or knowing what learning resources may be available. This obstacle may apply to the current study, but not enough information is available to say definitively. Participants pointed to a desire for greater teacher training options. Given that the study did not gather input from administrators, however, it is unclear whether too few
training options are offered or adjuncts are unaware of the programs that are available.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

In chapter two the researcher presented the results of his literature review looking at various aspects of adjunct teaching. The literature review covered five major areas: expanded use of adjunct faculty, adjunct motivations for teaching, adjunct satisfaction levels, comparisons of full-time and part-time faculty, and recommendations for adjunct orientation and development. This section will examine findings from the present study in the context of the larger picture that emerged from the literature review. The overall conclusion is that the findings are highly consistent with the results of related research from the past.

This study’s finding that adjuncts from industry are generally self-confident and self-sufficient in their approach to teaching matches prior outcomes. Lei (2009), for example, found that full-time and part-time faculty develop their classroom skills differently, with full-timers relying more on traditional methods, such as workshops and courses, and part-timers relying more on informal resources, such as colleagues and their own personal experiences. This finding parallels the present study’s finding that adjuncts from industry point to trial and error and personal research as the primary ways they go about building their teaching skills. Also, nothing in the existing literature suggests that adjuncts from industry are unsure of their abilities or rely on others to direct their teaching.

The existing literature makes it abundantly clear that the predominant reasons people choose to teach part-time is the intrinsic value of the work, including a joy in teaching and satisfaction in helping students learn (Schiffman, 2009; Duncan, 1999; Gappa, 1984; Leslie, Kellans & Gunne, 1982). Intrinsic motivation is related to self-sufficiency in that those who
have a strong desire to experience something have a personal incentive to figure out how they can make that experience a reality. This orientation aligns with what participants from this study had to say about the reasons they are involved in part-time teaching. For example, J.R., who has taught at a small private university in the West Central South region, said, “So I like to continue teaching, that is my passion.” And Ryan, who teaches at a medium-sized private research university in the Mid-Atlantic region, described his involvement this way: “I love teaching. I think it is fun.”

The finding from the present study that adjuncts from industry experience both direct and indirect obstacles that impact their teaching has connections to prior research. For example, the study participants cited a strong desire for greater clarity on university expectations related to teaching methods and outcomes as a direct obstacle they face, mirroring a sentiment that has appeared before in the literature. Consider the similarities in the following two statements that are more 15 years apart. Caprio, Dubowsky, Warasila, Cheatwood, and Costa (1998-99) said it would be “a mistake to assume they [adjuncts] will know all that is expected of them at a particular institution and how they [adjuncts] can effectively satisfy these expectations” (p. 168). In the present study, a survey respondent echoed the point: “Following the school’s course procedures, if you know what they are, this is easy. If you don't, then it is very difficult.” In a related way, Smith (2007) presents adjunct teaching practices at Rio Salado Community College as an exemplar for the effective utilization and development of part-time faculty. One practice is for the college to communicate with adjuncts about its expectations around teaching performance and continuous improvement – exactly what participants in the present study would like to see.

One of the primary indirect obstacles to surface in the current study is a belief that the pay for adjunct teaching is inadequate. Participants frame their views around two main ideas –
that they aren’t in it for the money but that the level of pay does not seem right to them. Erwin, who teaches at a medium-sized private university in the Mid-Atlantic region, captures this view in the following way: “[W]hen you think about what adjuncts are being paid versus full-timers, to me I don’t think it’s fair but I’m not in a situation where that is my full-time job.” His description represents a close overlay with prior research. Gappa and Leslie (1993), for instance, point out that economic motives are not the principal reason people become part-time faculty. Yet The American Federation of Teachers High Education (2010) found that nearly three in five adjuncts are dissatisfied with their pay.

The finding from the present study that most adjuncts from industry believe their institution can and should be doing more to support their teaching is borne out by prior research and analysis. In some cases, the focus is on the overall strategy a college or university can follow to maximize its relationship with part-time faculty and achieve the highest value in the process. Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron (1996a), for example, present a six-point strategy for working with adjuncts. The thread for each of the six points stretches from the Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron work to the present study, as outlined in Table 12.

In other cases, the present study and existing literature are linked by specific recommendations on ways institutions can increase their support to part-time faculty. For example, several authors have focused on the value of mentoring to expedite and expand adjunct learning related to effective teaching practices (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazaar, 2010; Peters & Boylston, 2006; Diegel, 2010; Meixner, Kruck, & Madden, 2010; Langan, 2011; Roberts, Kasal Chrisman, & Flowers, 2013). In the present study, participants pointed to mentoring as one of the best means to help adjuncts, particularly newcomers, in their teaching development.
Table 12

A Comparison of the Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron Six-point Strategy with Key Messages from Participants in the Present Study

<table>
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<td>Hire adjuncts with a clear purpose in mind.</td>
<td>Be clear on what you want from adjuncts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Require adjuncts to participate in an orientation program.</td>
<td>Provide an orientation program that facilitates adjuncts’ entry to college teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require adjuncts to participate in ongoing professional development.</td>
<td>Provide development programs that help adjuncts expand their teaching skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate adjuncts into the institution.</td>
<td>Include adjuncts in department-level meetings and campus-wide activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a program to evaluate adjunct performance.</td>
<td>Provide adjuncts with performance feedback upon course completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide equitable pay for adjuncts.</td>
<td>Structure pay to recognize adjuncts’ real world experience and hours invested to deliver the course.</td>
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Implications of Findings to Practice

The primary audience that potentially could benefit from the findings of this current study are college and university administrators who are responsible for overseeing adjunct programs and making decisions related to the conditions of adjunct employment. This list includes deans, department heads, and program leads. Others who have regular interactions with adjuncts may also be interested in the study results. These include instructional designers, student academic advisors, and program or department administrative staff.
One of the first implications to practice is whether or not the findings align with what administrators expect adjunct faculty would say regarding how they go about developing their teaching skills and the obstacles they face along the way. For example, most survey respondents said they learn how to teach on the job and rely on their own devices to pick up the necessary skills, using such techniques as trial and error and doing their own research and reading on topics where they have questions. Does the approach match with what administrators think is happening? Or do they believe that a greater percentage of adjuncts are taking advantage of the programs and resources a college or university may offer? If it is the latter, then the study reveals a gap between perception and reality that administrators can consider more closely to determine what actions they may want to take. Similarly, administrators can review both the reasons for and the impact of adjuncts’ self-sufficiency in acquiring and building teaching skills. Questions they may want to explore include: Are our adjuncts self-sufficient by choice or necessity? What level of self-sufficiency is ideal, i.e., what should we be helping them with versus what should they be learning on their own?

The study highlighted that the functions or tasks that the adjuncts from industry find most challenging all have to do with methods for dealing with students. The top three challenges survey respondents cited are how to teach students with widely different skill sets, how to get students excited and engaged, and how to understand what students know in entering the class. The implications for college and university administrators is that this is an area ripe for providing adjuncts with programs and resources to help them craft strategies for dealing with diverse students and developing materials and exercises that draw students into the learning process. If a college or university already has such programs and resources available, the task may be to promote them more frequently. If such programs and resources do not exist or are limited,
administrators may want to increase their investment in this area as a way to better serve adjunct needs.

In a similar way, the study also brought out that the adjuncts from industry want greater clarity and insight into what the college or university expects of them. This is particularly true in areas where unspoken rules may be different from what is written in a policy handbook. Examples include expectations around the number of students earning an A, the level of flexibility in accommodating students who submit work late, and whether the adjunct is expected to distinguish between intentional and unintentional plagiarism. The implications for college and university administrators is that the finding provides the basis for examining the institution’s level of communication with adjuncts on these subjects. Given that many of the topics may not have a universal answer, the college or university may need to consider ways to communicate general guidance to all adjunct faculty and provide a resource to help adjuncts work through specific circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

The desire by the study participants to better understand administration expectations extends to how the college or university evaluates adjuncts. The majority of survey respondents said they evaluate how they are doing based on student feedback, either in the form of student evaluations or student success in the course. This finding provides administrators with an opportunity to either confirm that the adjuncts’ perspective is accurate or to clarify that the university’s approach involves different elements in evaluating adjunct effectiveness.

Two of the study results are related. On the one hand, adjuncts who speak positively about their development as teachers point to interactions with others as a positive factor. On the other hand, adjuncts would like the college or university to include them more in campus-wide and department-focused events. Given that such events often combine teaching and learning
subjects with intra-university collaboration and knowledge sharing, the two results provide an opportunity for administrators to gain a dual benefit in the ability to meet adjunct needs. How the college or university chooses to promote adjunct connections with others can take many different forms. For example, it could be an orientation session that introduces new adjuncts to one another, a mentor program in which a new adjunct is paired with an experienced faculty member, a standing invitation for adjuncts to be part of department meetings, periodic one-on-one meetings with the department chair, inclusion in faculty professional development days, the opportunity to attend and potentially even present at campus-wide lectures, or any number of other activities designed to promote adjunct interactions with the college or university. What makes the most sense will depend on such factors as adjunct proximity to campus, the institution’s mix of on-ground and online classes, and the extent of current relationships between full-time and adjunct faculty.

Another implication of the study relates to how administrators should interpret and react to the majority of participants saying they do not believe their college or university invests enough in adjunct orientation and development. Do administrators believe this perception is misguided and want to try to change it? Do they understand why adjuncts feel this way and want to explain why the college or university is investing as much as it can? Or do they want to note and ignore the feedback, either because no good answers exist or because they determine the topic is not worth addressing? In evaluating this finding, administrators need to ask the fundamental question, “How do we want our adjuncts to describe the level of orientation and development we provide to them?” Answering this core question will define the path as to what actions, if any, administrators may want to take.
Perhaps the most significant implication for practice comes in the exemplars that popped up during the focus groups and one-on-one interview. As described earlier in this chapter, these best practices fall into three categories: training programs and resources, assistance to facilitate teaching, and inclusion in university and department activities. The participants who presented these practices talked about them excitedly and with pride. And a strong correlation exists between the best practices and the gaps other participants said they would like to see their college or university fill. Administrators can use the information about these best practices to evaluate where they stand on the programs and resources they offer their own adjuncts. Going one step further, they can use the examples presented within this study as a checklist to determine if they want to add to or modify their own offerings.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine how adjuncts from industry, who represent a major portion of the overall adjunct population (Eagan, 2007), go about learning a new skill that is not part of the core capabilities associated with their professional job – namely, how to teach college students. Two main questions guided the study:

1. How do industry professionals who serve as adjunct professors determine how they will initially learn and continuously enhance their teaching skills, and subsequently pursue resources to enhance their teaching skills and teaching competency?

2. What do industry professionals who serve as adjuncts perceive to be the greatest challenges to their learning and ongoing development as a teacher?

The researcher followed a general qualitative design for the study that involved two main methods for gathering data to answer the research questions. The first was an online survey that drew 56 participants. The second was a series of focus groups and a single one-on-one interview
that involved 21 participants. The participants for both the survey and in-person discussions all work at the same company and teach at more than three dozen colleges and universities as adjunct faculty. The researcher analyzed the survey results and focus group and interview transcripts to identify overarching themes capturing the participants’ experiences as to how they have gone about building their teaching skills and what has worked and not worked along the way.

The study yielded three major findings. The first is that adjuncts from industry bring a self-confidence to the role of teaching college students and a self-reliance to the task of acquiring and building the required teaching skills. The second is that adjuncts from industry say their ability to effectively teach is affected by both direct obstacles, that is, impediments related to the actual class they are teaching, and indirect obstacles, that is, items that more broadly detract from their growth and development as teachers. The third is that adjuncts from industry overwhelmingly say that their institutions invest little in adjunct orientation and development programs, yet a minority speak very highly of what their college or university offers. Exemplars that other higher education institutions might follow can be found in this latter grouping.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be found at both the micro level, that is, the knowledge gained on how adjuncts from industry go about learning to teach college students, and the macro level, that is, the implications on how the findings fit into larger trends regarding instructional delivery to college students. At the micro level, the study revealed at least three viewpoints that the researcher did not find in the literature on adjunct experiences.

The first viewpoint is that adjuncts from industry learn how to teach on the job and primarily rely on themselves to figure out what is effective versus what is ineffective. This
viewpoint might not be a major surprise, but it appears to be the first time it is being documented through direct adjunct input. The expression of this state of affairs does not necessarily mean that a problem exists. Further study could show that both administrators and adjuncts are comfortable with the independence and self-sufficiency that study participants said defines the environment for developing teaching skills. The importance of the viewpoint is that it puts the topic in public view for discussion and analysis. In particular, administrators can determine what weight to place on the topic and decide whether or not responsive actions are warranted.

The second viewpoint is that adjuncts from industry find various aspects of dealing with students, from figuring out what they know when starting a class to developing activities that will interest and engage them, to be the most challenging aspects of learning to teach. This input makes sense in that interacting with students often can involve unknowns in terms of what they are thinking and how they choose to respond. The value of this insight is that administrators can use the information to structure training programs and resources to meet a priority need as defined by the instructors themselves. By way of contrast, adjuncts from industry cited teaching-related tasks that are more within their control, such as figuring out technology and coming up with discussion questions, as easy to accomplish. Colleges and universities can benefit from such input by allocating more training dollars to areas adjuncts find to be difficult and fewer training dollars to areas they find to be easy.

The third viewpoint is that adjuncts from industry believe that the college or university where they teach underinvests in adjunct orientation and development. This viewpoint would seem to be logically connected to participants stating that they learn on the job and rely on their own devices to determine the teaching methods they will employ. Taken together, the two viewpoints suggest that adjuncts from industry are self-sufficient in their teaching development
by necessity rather than choice -- they rely on themselves because the institution’s offerings are insufficient. Whether this perception is accurate is not the primary question. It is more important for administrators to determine the value they place on the feedback and whether or not to review and potentially revise their approach to adjunct training.

At the macro level, the significance of the study is that it is part of a much larger trend that has seen adjuncts become the dominant group instructing college-level students (Kirk & Spector, 2009; Liu & Zhang, 2013). In other words, while the research focused on a specific group of faculty (adjuncts from industry) and examined a specific topic (how they acquire and build teaching skills), it was not a study investigating a niche area. The research participants represent the face of instructors that undergraduate and graduate students today see in most of their classes. As such, how these adjuncts think and what they have to say has broader implications. For example, the outcomes from a study such as this one can help administrators build a better understanding of how their perceptions of the adjunct experience match with the reality adjuncts describe. As another example, the methods that colleges and universities historically have used to develop full-time faculty, such as on-campus colloquia, and to recognize outstanding performance, such as granting tenure, likely are inadequate in working with today’s part-time faculty. It is through studies such as this one that administrators gain insight into the practices that best support adjunct faculty and promote effective instruction to students.

**Limitations**

The study met or exceeded the researcher’s targets in terms of number of participants in the online survey and focus groups. It also generated data rich with descriptions of actual experiences related to learning to teach and continuing to build teaching skills. At the same time,
the recruitment process for participants and study methodology presented several limitations that serve as a boundary for the findings and a starting point for potential future research.

One set of limitations has to do with the study participants themselves. The participants all work at the same high technology company for their primary job. The potential limitation with this mix is that this company might be an aberration in terms of the experience of adjuncts from industry. For example, the company supports higher education in multiple ways, from conducting joint research with universities to providing generous reimbursement to employees who pursue an undergraduate or graduate degree. Similarly, the company is comfortable with its employees serving as adjunct faculty, seeing this as an additional way to strengthen ties with academia. The question that arises for consideration in future research is how the views of adjuncts who work at other companies, particularly where the connections to higher education might not be as strong, would compare to the views of participants in this study.

In addition, the majority of the participants in the study hold positions in engineering or information technology and teach courses in those same fields. The potential limitation of this heavy emphasis on one professional area is that individuals in other types of jobs may see the process of acquiring and building adjunct teaching skills in a different light. Stated slightly differently, do those who work in technical disciplines approach the challenge of learning how to teach college students in the same way as those who come from non-technical fields? The question provides the basis for helping define future research that can shed light on the degree of consistency across adjuncts holding diverse jobs and teaching courses in different disciplines.

It also is the case that two-thirds of the participants in the focus groups and one-on-one interview hold PhDs. The potential limitation of this fact is twofold. One, college-level teaching is one of the career paths a PhD candidate can pursue. Two, a person who earns a PhD gains
insight into the academic process based on the time and effort required to qualify for the degree. Taken together, these two factors suggest that individuals who have earned their PhD are likely to be more comfortable taking on college teaching than those who have not gone through that process. Future research can help shed light on whether adjuncts from industry think and act in similar or dissimilar ways based on whether or not they hold a PhD.

The methodology for the study relied on convenience sampling, with the researcher reaching out to a group of people who met the defined criteria. Those receiving the invitation then chose whether or not to participate in the study. One risk associated with this method is that it included only individuals who were currently teaching or had taught in the recent past. It did not include individuals who may have stopped teaching as an adjunct due to challenges and obstacles associated with picking up the necessary teaching skills. As such, the views expressed by the participants may not reflect the full range of experiences of adjuncts from industry. A future study gathering input specifically from professionals who tried out part-time teaching and left, along with their reasons for doing so, would help to determine whether or not a gap exists.

The researcher had sought to have four to six participants in each individual focus group. In addition, the researcher had anticipated that up to a quarter of those who said they would participate in a focus group on a given date might not actually attend, leading him to accept up to eight people per session. It turned out that everyone did attend on the date they selected, which resulted in two of the focus groups being larger than planned, with seven and eight participants, respectively. Combined with the fact that the researcher promised the participants that the sessions would go no longer than one hour, the larger-than-expected focus groups meant less time per person for participants to describe their experiences. The resulting impact was more on the quantity of the feedback than the quality of the responses. Stated slightly differently, the
participants provided solid input related to the core topics under investigation, but the time constraint left the researcher wanting to hear more of what they had to say.

**Validity**

The validity of the study is based on the participants and their contributions and the researcher and his process for acquiring and analyzing the data. The participants all met the criteria of holding a primary job in industry and teaching as an adjunct as a secondary role. They voluntarily participated in the research. The researcher did not try to persuade anyone to participate and knew only one of the study participants before the research began.

One risk in a study of this type is that the participants may include individuals who have their own agenda and want to influence the results in a certain way. The researcher did not see signs of a personal agenda by any of the participants. Another risk is the participants may want to help the researcher achieve desired findings and construct their input to support those outcomes. The researcher made it clear to participants he had no pre-conceived notions of what the research might reveal and encouraged them to be as candid as possible. The researcher did not spot indications of any participant trying to steer the results in a certain direction. A further risk is the potential of group think in which the majority of the focus group participants follow the train of thought of one or two vocal individuals. The researcher observed that participants typically would acknowledge a colleague’s point, then proceed to either expand it or move the discussion in a new direction based on their own experiences.

The researcher took multiple steps to ensure his process of acquiring and analyzing the research data was as objective as possible. A key measure related to acquiring data was to use open-ended questions that would enable the participants to take the discussion in a number of different directions. The researcher emphasized this approach in facilitating the focus group
discussions to avoid participants thinking he was looking for a specific type of answer. He made the point at the start of the sessions that he was looking for top-of-mind responses that the questions prompted. Sometimes participants would apologize for how they responded, such as saying, “I’m not sure I answered your question.” When this would happen, the researcher would affirm that how the participant had responded was fine.

As an industry professional who has taught as an adjunct for eight years, the researcher brought a bias to the study based on his own experiences. To counter-balance this bias, the researcher paid close attention to ensuring that his thoughts and perspectives did not influence the participants or drive the discussion toward certain conclusions. The researcher feels confident that if the participants were polled, they would say he did not express specific opinions or take a stance on the subjects under discussion.

The researcher followed comparable validity measures in analyzing the research data. He personally transcribed the focus groups and one-on-one interview and exercised care to ensure everything the participants said was recorded as accurately as possible. Given that he wanted to convey participant experiences in their own words, he took similar care to ensure quotes he used in his report were true to both the spirit and context of what the speaker intended. In addition, the level of importance he placed on comments from participants was based on how closely those comments related to the research questions. For example, he gave greater weight to a story from one participant about his struggles in finding support to implement innovative ideas in his classroom than to a story from another participant about the need to scramble in one class due to a textbook delivery problem.
Future Research

The prior section on research limitations describes areas the current study did not reach, which provides multiple starting points for future research. These limitations include the fact that all the study participants came from a single company, they teach at East coast colleges and universities, their professional experience is in engineering and information technology, and more than half hold PhDs. Future research could draw adjuncts from multiple companies who teach at colleges and universities in other sections of the country. In addition, the participants could hold various types of professional positions and thus teach a variety of courses. Participants could also come from a broader mixture of academic backgrounds and tilt more towards adjuncts from industry who have not earned a doctorate. Also, future research could check into whether any significant differences exist between online and on-campus instructors in terms of how they go about developing their teaching skills. With all of these variables, the goal would be to expand the current study through greater participant variety to see what results stay the same and what results change.

Future research also could build upon the outcomes of the current study to both refine and broaden the findings. For example, study participants believe that their institutions invest little in adjunct orientation and development. Future research could examine this topic in more detail. Why do adjuncts from industry feel this way? How much more do they think the institution should be investing? Where do they think the greater investment should be focused? As another example, participants are most apprehensive about responsibilities that are ambiguous or not within their direct control, such as how to motivate students. Future research could delve deeper into this area. What are the most common examples of these situations? What goes
through the mind of an adjunct when faced with such a situation? What coping mechanisms do they consider?

The audience that can benefit most from the current study includes administrators, department heads, and program leads – those in leadership responsible for overseeing adjuncts at their institution. Future studies could turn the table to get the viewpoints of these individuals. Research questions could revolve around parallel topics to the current study, such as leadership perceptions of how adjuncts from industry go about acquiring and building the skills to teach college students and the challenges they face in gaining this competency. The value of mirroring the current research focus is that it would provide the opportunity to see where administration and adjunct perspectives converge and diverge.

Study participants cited what they see as best practices for developing teaching skills, providing another area for future study. Specifically, the research could examine the colleges and universities that provide these best practices and their strategies for offering such programs and resources to adjuncts. Going a step further, the research could explore correlations between the best practices and measures of adjunct performance and satisfaction. In a related way, an increasing number of adjuncts are finding that their circumstances are starting to change with the introduction of union representation at their college or university. Future research could explore the impact of this trend on adjunct perception of the level of teaching support they receive.

The participants in this study indicated that they desire greater clarity around administration expectations, from insight into unwritten rules prior to starting a class to performance feedback in an evaluation after a class. Future research could examine administration-adjunct communication systems and their effectiveness. What channels does a college or university use to communicate with its adjuncts? Are different channels used for
different purposes? Where is the message not getting through and why? Are channels for two-way communication in place?

**Personal Comments and Recommendations**

I pursued this particular research topic for two main reasons. First, I am an adjunct professor from industry, so the subject is both relevant and of interest to me. Along these lines, I was curious as to whether my experiences in adjunct teaching were the exception or the rule. What I found is that many of the participants’ stories match my own, particularly in terms of developing teaching skills and figuring out how best to work with students.

Second, I wanted to explore an unexamined area of an issue that is big and significant. The more I learned about the fundamental transition from full-time to part-time faculty, along with higher education’s corresponding dependence on adjuncts from industry, the more I realized the research topic fit the bill. From the beginning, I hoped the research findings could add something meaningful to the literature and lead to ideas for improvement in practice. The overarching umbrella for my work in industry and academia has been organizational leadership and communication. With that focus in mind, I envisioned this research, if successful, could promote greater understanding by administrators of how adjuncts from industry experience their role as teacher. In turn, this greater understanding could serve as a catalyst for new and expanded dialogue between administrators and adjuncts on the art and science of teaching. If these outcomes were to occur, even to a small degree, I would be excited.

In conjunction with reflecting on the research findings, I would like to offer two recommendations that could be mutually beneficial to administrators and adjuncts from industry. The first is to talk regularly. I was struck by how willing the participants were to share their experiences. And I have the distinct impression they would have responded exactly the same
way if an administrator or program director from their college or university were in the room. Furthermore, while participants did have complaints and vented to some degree, it was clear to me that they like being an adjunct professor. It was similarly clear they want to be good teachers who do the best job possible for students. These characteristics provide fertile ground for engaging in productive discussion. Also, administrators should not underestimate the benefit of asking adjuncts what they think and listening to what they say in response. As stated by Judy Colwell, vice president of academic affairs at Northern Oklahoma College, “Giving these faculty members [adjuncts] the opportunity to voice their opinions is, in itself, engaging” (Kelly, 2013, p. 7).

The second recommendation is to not assume. This suggestion applies to both administrators and adjuncts from industry. For example, administrators might assume that adjuncts from industry do not need much help with teaching because they are smart, successful people. Similarly, adjuncts from industry might assume colleges and universities offer them limited orientation and development options because they do not want to spend the money. In both examples, the assumptions could be way off base.

Conducting this study has shaped me as a researcher, a practitioner, and a person. I now have a better appreciation of how the elements of research tie together and why it is necessary to follow a standard protocol. It occurred to me that I could have informally asked colleagues the same questions as I did of the participants in the study. The value of the research process I followed, though, is that the responses are grounded in a recognized structure that provides validity and context. Stated slightly differently, with the informal chats I would be getting opinions of limited short-term value, and with the research study I am getting data that ties into a bigger body of knowledge with a longer-term value. As an adjunct from industry, I have been
exposed to a broader set of ideas than what I held when I started the research. Specifically, I have heard from participants who think and act differently than I do, from how they pursue their teaching development to how they think about their experience as a part-time faculty member. I am richer for having this expanded knowledge. From a personal perspective, I am excited to be completing this study, which has been a major focus in my life for the past two years. I feel the equivalent of the runner’s high upon finishing a marathon. In a similar way, I am proud of having the discipline to complete a rigorous academic undertaking and of being able to take a spot within a larger community of researchers that have examined other aspects of this problem of practice.
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Appendix A – Invitation to Participate in Online Survey

Email to [COMPANY] Employees Who Have Identified Themselves as Being Part-time Faculty

To: Employees Who Teach as Adjuncts (List)

From: Ed Powers

Subject: Research on Views of Adjunct Professors

Would you be interested in participating in research examining how adjunct professors from industry acquire and build teaching skills?

My name is Ed Powers, and I am a Department Head in Corporate Communications at [COMPANY] who is pursuing a study on this subject as part of earning a doctorate at Northeastern University. The Legal Department here at [COMPANY] has given me approval to invite employees to participate in the study. As a first step, I am reaching out to individuals who have listed adjunct professor in their Tech Stature profile.

I would like to invite you to participate in an online survey that should take about 10 minutes to complete. The survey runs from Aug. 7 to Aug. 17. Participation is completely voluntary. Your identity will not be associated with the responses you provide, nor will your name be used in my research report. (For further information about the study and what to expect, see the attached consent document.)

By clicking on the survey link, you are providing your consent to participate in this study.

Survey Monkey link: LINK HERE

After the survey is completed I plan to organize focus groups and will be back in touch at that time.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask me. You must email me at my student email address as any other email addresses are not allowed; please use powers.e@husky.neu.edu. Thank you for considering my request.

Ed Powers
Doctoral Candidate
College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Appendix B – Invitation to Participate in Focus Groups or Individual Interview

Email to [COMPANY] Employees Who Have Identified Themselves as Being Part-time Faculty

I want to thank folks for the tremendous response to my doctoral survey examining how adjunct professors from industry acquire and build teaching skills -- 56 responses! Not only did the participation exceed my goal, your comments provide rich and insightful data. One interesting finding is that the 56 respondents teach at three dozen different colleges and universities.

I would like to invite you to participate in the next phase of my research. I will be organizing focus groups of 4-6 people to exchange ideas and views on their experiences teaching college courses. The session will last approximately an hour.

If you are interested, please reply to this email and indicate where you are located. I envision setting up one to two focus groups at mid-day over pizza or sandwiches in [LOCATION] and [LOCATION]. For people who work at sites, I plan to arrange a video or audio conference.

You do not need to have completed the survey from the first part of the study to participate in a focus group.

Your participation is strictly voluntary and your comments will be anonymous, with no identification to you. At the start of the focus group, I will review your rights as a participant and ask you to sign a consent form. I've attached a copy for your reference.

Thank you for considering my request. If you have any questions, please let me know via my Northeastern University student email address -- powers.e@husky.neu.edu.

Ed Powers
Northeastern University Doctoral Candidate
Dept. Head in Corporate Communications at [COMPANY]
Appendix C– Consent to Participate Form – Focus Group or Individual Interview

Powers Doctoral Research Study:
How Industry Professionals Learn to Become Effective Adjunct Professors

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in being a participant in my doctoral research study. The purpose of this form is to tell you about the study and your rights as a participant, as well as to obtain your written consent to participate.

The purpose of the research is to gather and analyze input from professionals in industry and other non-academic fields who choose to teach as adjunct professors. Specifically, the study will focus on the perceptions and views of these individuals regarding how they have acquired and developed their teaching skills. The research is designed as a qualitative study in which I will gather data from participants primarily through focus group discussions or one-on-one interviews.

Your participation in the study is strictly voluntary and you can choose to withdraw from the research at any time. To protect confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym rather than your real name in the report. In addition, I will use general descriptions rather than specific names in identifying where you work and where you teach.

Part of a researcher’s responsibility is to identify for participants what the potential risks and benefits of a study may be. For this study, I believe the risk of participation is low, particularly given the anonymity measures I plan to use. The benefits of participation include the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues from similar backgrounds and to contribute to research that may offer new insights related to adjunct teaching.

Please feel free to ask me questions at any point in the process. Also, I would be happy to share my final report with you, if you are interested.

If you would sign and return this form to me in the attached self-addressed envelope, I would appreciate it. I look forward to your participation.

Date: _________

Participant Name: ________________________________________

Participant Signature: _____________________________________
Appendix D – Survey: Industry Professionals Who Teach as Adjuncts

Welcome to My Survey

This survey is part of a doctoral research study looking at how adjunct instructors from industry and other professions acquire and build their teaching skills. It should take about 10 minutes. Your responses will be anonymous, with no identification to you.

By completing the survey you are giving permission for your responses to be included in the research. If you have any questions, please contact Ed Powers at powers.e@husky.neu.edu or 978-897-2184.

1. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male

2. What is your race or ethnicity?
   - White
   - Black or African-American
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - Asian
3. To which age group do you belong?
   - 20-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60-69
   - 70 or over

4. What is your primary profession (e.g., Engineering, Accounting, Human Resources, etc.)?

5. How many years have you worked in this profession?
   - 0-2 years
   - 3-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-20 years
   - More than 20 years

6. Where do you teach (or most recently have taught) as an adjunct?

7. What course or courses do you teach?
   - Course 1:
   - Course 2:
   - Course 3:

8. How long have you taught as an adjunct?
9. What is the format for the courses you teach?
- On campus
- Online
- Both

10. What level students do you teach?
- Undergraduate
- Graduate

11. Had you had any experience teaching before starting as an adjunct?
- Yes
- No

12. Which of the following methods for learning and improving teaching skills have you tried or participated in? (Check all that apply.)
- Host institution programs (orientation, workshops, etc.)
- Talking with other adjuncts
- Guidance from academic program director
- Self-learning: own reading and research
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips from friends: current or former teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trial and error: learning from own experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing more experienced teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host institution paired you with mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with full-time faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host institution teacher resource center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a course on teaching practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College official giving feedback on your teaching performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Using this same list, has one method been predominant for you? (If yes, check that box. If no, leave blank.)

- Host institution programs (orientation, workshops, etc.)
- Talking with other adjuncts
- Guidance from academic program director
- Self-learning: own reading and research
- Tips from friends: current or former teachers
- Trial and error: learning from own experiences
- Observing more experienced teachers
- Host institution paired you with mentor
- Talking with full-time faculty
- Host institution teacher resource center
- Taking a course on teaching practices
- College official giving feedback on your teaching performance
- Other (please specify)
14. Using this same list, which of the methods have been most helpful to you? (Check up to three.)

- Host institution programs (orientation, workshops, etc.)
- Talking with other adjuncts
- Guidance from academic program director
- Self-learning: own reading and research
- Tips from friends: current or former teachers
- Trial and error: learning from own experiences
- Observing more experienced teachers
- Host institution paired you with mentor
- Talking with full-time faculty
- Host institution teacher resource center
- Taking a course on teaching practices
- College official giving feedback on your teaching performance
- Other (please specify)

15. Remembering when you decided to accept your first assignment as an adjunct, what made you think you could teach the course?

16. How do you assess your skill level as a college instructor? (Note: This is not asking you to assess your teaching skills. Rather, it is asking what your reference point is in determining how well you are doing.)

17. In your opinion, what is the most helpful support a higher-education institution can provide to an adjunct? Why?
18. Similarly, what do you think a higher-education institution should be doing to best support its experienced adjuncts? Why?

19. Thinking of your own teaching situation, what one or two changes would you most like to see your institution make to better support you? Why are these at the top of your list?

20. How challenging do you find the various aspects of college teaching?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required</th>
<th>Easy to accomplish</th>
<th>Between easy and challenging</th>
<th>Challenging to accomplish</th>
<th>Very challenging to accomplish</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a syllabus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding what students know in entering the class</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required</th>
<th>Easy to accomplish</th>
<th>Between easy and challenging</th>
<th>Challenging to accomplish</th>
<th>Very challenging to accomplish</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coming up with discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting students excited and engaged</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following the school’s course procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with individual student circumstances</td>
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<tr>
<td>Figuring out technology</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Determining right level of readings, assignments, testing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating and grading student work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching students with widely different skill levels</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21. For the first course you taught as an adjunct, how well prepared did you feel you were to teach?

- [ ] Very well prepared
- [ ] Mostly prepared
- [ ] About equally prepared and unprepared
- [ ] Mostly unprepared
- [ ] Not very well prepared at all

22. Thinking of where you teach, to what degree do you think the institution invests in orientation for new adjuncts? How about for continued development of experienced adjuncts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invests in orientation for adjuncts</th>
<th>Makes a very large investment</th>
<th>Makes a large investment</th>
<th>Makes a moderate investment</th>
<th>Makes a small investment</th>
<th>Makes no investment</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invests in continued development for adjuncts</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How Industry Professionals Learn to Become Effective Adjunct Professors

Thanks!

Thank you for your participation! Your input is extremely useful to this study. Please be sure to click "Done" to submit the survey.

I plan to follow up in the next couple of weeks with an invitation to participate in a focus group. This second phase of the research will build on the survey results to delve deeper into how adjuncts from industry attain and build their teaching skills.
Appendix E – Interview Protocol

Powers Doctoral Research Study:
How Industry Professionals Learn to Become Effective Adjunct Professors

Part 1: Background Information

Type of data collection
- Focus Group
- Individual Interview

Date:

Time:

Method:
- In Person
- Videoconference
- Phone
- Other

Interviewer:

Participant(s) – include Names, Industry Titles, Institution Where Currently an Adjunct
Part 2: Introduce Participant(s) to Study

- Purpose of study: To understand how industry professionals who become adjuncts go about learning to teach, including views on both resources and obstacles.
- Qualitative study: Primary data comes from what you have to say and what it may reveal about how adjuncts from industry think about learning to teach.
- I am an adjunct who comes from industry and am undertaking this study to fill a gap in the research literature.
- I have no preconceived notions on what your answers will be, nor am I looking for you to prove or disprove any theory – no right or wrong answers exist.
- I encourage you to be as candid as you possibly can.
- I will use pseudonyms in my report rather than actual participant names.
- Similarly, I will describe the teaching institutions in general terms rather than using actual names.

For Focus Groups:
- My role is to do the following:
  - Ask initial questions that get the discussion going.
  - Ask follow-up questions that probe further on key points you raise.
  - Provide clarification if any topic or question is confusing.
  - Encourage all of you to participate.
  - Redirect the discussion if we start to go too far afield.
- I will be transcribing what you have to say, so would ask for your help:
  - Please start by saying your name; this will help ensure I attribute comments to the right speaker.
  - Try to avoid speaking at the same time; this makes it difficult to distinguish who is speaking.
- Any questions before we get started?

For Individual Interviews:
- My goal is to have this be a discussion as much as possible, rather than be a formal interview.
- Any questions before we get started?
Part 3: Initial Questions

Introduction/Ice Breaker

- For focus groups:
  o Introductions: Who you are, where work, where teach?
  o What got you involved in adjunct teaching?

- For individual interviews:
  o Tell me a bit about yourself.
  o What got you involved in adjunct teaching?

Relatively Easy Questions

- How important is subject matter knowledge to the ability to teach?

- How confident or nervous are you when you are about to teach a course?

- What are the biggest contributors to the confidence or nervousness that you feel?

More Substantive Questions

- How have you gone about figuring out how to become a teacher?

- Where have you turned for help in building your teaching skills? What have you found most useful? Have you found the support you need?

- What have been the biggest roadblocks to improving your teaching skills?

- What do you think of the orientation and development programs offered by the college or university where you teach?

- In terms of your own learning style (i.e., how you approach learning about teaching), do you prefer to do it:
  o On your own or attend a structured program?
  o Online or in person?
  o As a one-time workshop or an ongoing training program?
  o Other aspects that are important to you?
Return to Easier Questions

- What advice would you give a new adjunct about learning to teach?
- What advice would you give administrators about helping a new adjunct learn to teach?

What Did We Miss?

- What haven’t we talked about that you think would be helpful for me in understanding how adjuncts think about and approach their role as teacher?

Note: The questions may change based on responses to the survey that precedes the focus groups and individual interviews.
## Appendix F – List of Colleges and Universities Where Participants Teach as Adjuncts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgetown University</td>
<td>DC</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>DC</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>George Washington University</td>
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<td>Research</td>
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<td>Research</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Maryland</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>Baltimore County</td>
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<td>MD</td>
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<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Southern Maryland</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Community College</td>
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<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>Johns Hopkins University</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>Community College</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>University of Fairfax</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Online</td>
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<td>Stevens Institute of Technology</td>
<td>NJ</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>Brookdale Community College</td>
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<td>Florida Institute of Technology</td>
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<td>University of Central Florida</td>
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<td>University of South Florida</td>
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<td>Research</td>
</tr>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
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**Size of Institution:**

- **Small**: Fewer than 5,000 students
- **Medium**: Between 5,000 and 15,000 students
- **Large**: More than 15,000 students