Doctoral Thesis:
The Role of Institutional Support in Leading to Job Satisfaction and Limiting Turnover Intentions of Experienced Online Adjunct Faculty in Business-Related Disciplines

by

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to

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Abstract

The purpose of this basic quality study was to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions among experienced online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines at a private university in the Northeast of the United States. Three research questions were identified to fulfill the purpose of this study: 1) What motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online? 2) What institutional support leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs? and 3) How does institutional support impact turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site? Data included transcripts from twelve semi-structured interviews, observational notes, and support documents from the site institution. Data was analyzed using a general inductive approach, open and axial coding, and constant comparison. Participants represented a variety of characteristics in order to provide variation in the sample.

Findings show that experienced online adjuncts are motivated to teach online by balancing their personal and professional lives, feeling rewarded by students’ growth in understanding, and investing in students for long-term success in life. The types of institutional support that lead to the job satisfaction of experienced online adjuncts include providing the right help at the right time, trusting online adjuncts with academic freedom, appreciating online adjuncts, offering faculty development, and minimizing implementation challenges. The turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts are minimized when mutuality and congruency between themselves and the institution leads to their comfort, when they have variety in their work assignments, and when treating them well creates positive contrasts with other institutions. From these findings, five conclusions were drawn: 1) foundational values of the institution play a key role in the job satisfaction and retention of online adjuncts; 2) motivated online adjuncts
invest in students and the institution beyond teaching assignments; 3) congruency of values allows academic freedom and higher order management practices; 4) personalized support and professional development is integral to the satisfaction and retention of online adjuncts; and 5) experienced online adjuncts in business-related disciplines have similar, but not identical support needs and desires as other adjuncts.
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CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Online education is a rapidly growing segment of higher education (Bichsel, 2013). Over the past decade enrollment in online education has grown faster than overall enrollment in higher education, with 33.5% of all higher education students, or 7.1 million students, taking at least one online course as of the fall of 2012 (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Considering that approximately two-thirds of academic leaders indicate that online education is a critical long-term strategy for their institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Bichsel, 2013), it is an important topic for research because the long term trend seems to demonstrate further growth in online offerings. In fact, Sener (2010) predicts that nearly all higher education students will experience online education in some form during their college years and that online courses will eventually comprise 20% or more of total credit hours in higher education.

To address the growth of online education many institutions have turned to online adjunct faculty members to meet the demand for online instructors (Bedford, 2009; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazzar, 2010; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). Concomitant with growth in online instruction is an increase in the use of adjuncts across higher education. Adjuncts are individuals who are temporary, non-tenure-track faculty employed less than full-time (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). The terms ‘part-time’ and ‘contingent’ are also used when referring to this group of faculty. From the fall of 1991 to the fall of 2011, the number of adjuncts teaching in higher education increased by 162%, as compared to 42% for full-time faculty (Kena et al., 2014). As a result of this growth, about 50% of higher education faculty in the United States are employed as adjuncts (Kena et al., 2014).

An issue for institutional administrators has been voluntary turnover among online
adjuncts (Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009), which means that the online adjuncts voluntarily leave their positions. The competition among online education programs can be intense for attracting the most qualified adjuncts since proximity to a campus is not a factor and online adjuncts can teach for any institution (Hardy, 2007). Attracting and retaining high quality online adjuncts allows institutions to build consistency and quality into online programs (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Hardy, 2007). Quality of online programs is particularly important because some employers have a general impression that online courses are easier, making graduates less prepared for jobs (Adams, 2008). Some research indicates that quality is indeed at risk when adjuncts are hired, pointing to evidence that grades are inflated (Johnson, Pitts & Kamery, 2006; Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005; Kirk & Spector, 2009; McArthur, 1999; Sonner, 2000), active-learning techniques are used less frequently (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Umbach, 2007), and students are less successful as measured by grades, retention rates, and graduation rates (Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Mueller, Mandernach, & Sanderson, 2013).

The literature suggests that institutional support is critical for reducing turnover of adjuncts, but institutions often do not provide online adjuncts with the level or types of support they desire (Bedford & Miller, 2013; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007). Studies show that both traditional and online adjuncts are generally satisfied with their positions, but they are dissatisfied with some forms of institutional support, such as pay, policies, and treatment by administrators (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Gullickson, 2011; Hopkins, 2013; Hoyt, 2012; Schroeder, 2008). The turnover literature indicates that better support of employees can improve their satisfaction and reduce turnover (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973; Webb & Carpenter, 2012). Literature on organizational support theory also indicates that when employees perceive high levels of support,
job satisfaction increases, resulting in improved performance and lower turnover rates (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003; Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001), which may also help address the quality risks of hiring online adjuncts. Institutional support, which refers to the policies, practices, and procedures effecting online adjuncts and the human interactions that occur between institutional administrators and staff and the online adjuncts, is thus an important topic for research as institutions grapple with reducing turnover of online adjuncts.

In order to more fully understand the research topic, it is critical to understand who adjuncts are and their background relevant to teaching. The following section discusses the characteristics of adjuncts, of which online adjuncts are a subset.

**Characteristics of Adjuncts**

The previously stated increase in the number of adjuncts teaching in higher education is due to changes in the higher education landscape, including the greater availability of higher education to the masses, the shift from an industrial to a service-oriented economy, reduced government funding for higher education, and costs that have risen as institutions have adapted to increased enrollment and the demand for more student services (Kezar & Sam, 2010; Williamson & Greenwood, 1989). Adjuncts save labor costs for institutions due to lower pay and the absence of benefits (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Kezar & Sam, 2010, Lefebvre, 2008; Thedwall, 2008). Adjuncts also allow institutions to easily adapt to enrollment fluctuations (Thedwall, 2008) and they bring experience into the classroom that full-time faculty may not have (Cross & Goldenberg, 2003; Lefebvre, 2008).
According to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW), adjuncts in the United States are predominantly Caucasian, female, and between the ages of 36 and 65 (CAW, 2012). Adjuncts are highly educated with 57% having a doctorate or other terminal degree and another 40% with a master’s degree (CAW, 2012). Adjuncts generally teach one or two courses at a time for an average pay rate of $2,700 for a three-credit course, which is significantly lower than the pay rate for full-time faculty (CAW, 2012). Approximately 22% of adjuncts teach simultaneously at multiple institutions (CAW, 2012).

Adjuncts are commonly portrayed in the literature as a disgruntled and marginalized group of faculty with little job security, short notice of teaching assignments, no promotion opportunities, no input on departmental issues, limited professional development, a lack of information on how to do their jobs, and a lack of respect from colleagues and administrators (Kezar & Sam, 2014; Nutting, 2003). Some literature also depicts adjuncts as harried academics driving from campus to campus as they try to piece together a living by teaching at multiple institutions (Benjamin, 2002; Green, 2007; Nutting, 2003). Such depictions of adjuncts have led to efforts to unionize adjuncts across the United States in an effort to obtain better working conditions (Bradley, 2013; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Lewin, 2013). Unfortunately some literature seems to have overgeneralized such depictions to include all adjuncts without considering specific contexts or specific groups of adjuncts (Bedford & Miller, 2013; Eagan et al., 2015). The reality is that only a small percentage of adjuncts teach simultaneously at multiple institutions as they seek full-time academic positions (Christensen, 2008; CAW, 2012; Leslie & Gappa, 2002). Additionally, some studies have found that adjuncts tend to be generally satisfied with their part-time teaching roles (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Hoyt, 2012).
Many of the common depictions of adjuncts are due to literature that treats adjuncts as a homogeneous group, but they are actually a heterogeneous group (Kezar & Maxey, 2012), which is why there are contradictions between the literature that portrays them as disgruntled and the literature that portrays them as largely satisfied. Gappa and Leslie (1993) developed a categorization scheme for adjuncts that is still widely used in the adjunct literature. Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) four categories of adjuncts include career enders, specialists/professionals, aspiring academics, and freelancers. Gappa and Leslie (1993) demonstrated that adjuncts in each category have different career aspirations and reasons for teaching, which means they do not all view employment-related issues in the same way. Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) categories may apply to online adjuncts as well as traditional adjuncts. Many online adjuncts likely fall into the specialists/professionals category since 43% of them have full-time non-academic teaching positions (Shiffman, 2009). A new category called professional online adjuncts has been identified by Bedford (2009). Such individuals are entrepreneurs who are very good at teaching online and they have chosen to make their living teaching online for multiple institutions (Bedford, 2009).

Given the fact that the adjunct literature overgeneralizes and fails to consider specific institutional contexts, it is important for new research on online adjuncts and institutional support to consider context. This study explored the research topic within a specific institutional context, which is described in the following section.

**Background of Study Site**

The study site is a private, nonprofit four-year university in the northeastern United States with approximately 16,000 students across four campuses. The institutional mission over the past 100 years has focused on career preparation, hands-on education, and lifelong learning. The
university offers associate’s degrees, bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees in a variety of fields, and one doctoral degree. The student body is mostly comprised of traditional undergraduate students in the age range of 18 to 22, with the majority living on or near a campus. The university offers part-time evening programs to approximately 600 adult continuing education students and on-campus graduate programs to approximately 600 additional students.

The university employs approximately 300 full-time faculty teaching across the four campuses. Employment of full-time faculty is based on contracts. There is no tenure system in place at the university. Most full-time faculty contracts are one year in length, although some faculty are granted two and three-year contracts when meeting criteria for length of service and faculty rank. Contracts are generally renewed, except in instances where performance is an issue. Full-time faculty duties include teaching, professional development, and service to the university. The university does not have a research-focused mission and faculty members are generally not involved in research. Faculty and most staff at the university are not unionized.

The university employs approximately 300 adjunct faculty in its on-campus programs, which means that about half of the approximately 600 faculty at the university are adjuncts. Adjunct faculty are not offered contracts and are hired on a term-to-term basis. Each academic department hires, orients, and supports adjuncts independently from other departments, with varying levels of support provided by the different departments. For example, in one academic department, on-campus faculty are provided with a group orientation prior to the start of the academic year, they are assigned faculty mentors, and they receive documentation and communication on a regular basis from an assistant dean. In another academic department, the department chair reaches out to on-campus adjuncts individually, providing checklists relevant to doing their jobs. In general, on-campus adjuncts have difficulty parking, meeting with others in
their departments, and getting technical support due to the fact that they often teach at night when academic and administrative offices are closed.

In 2013 the university’s leadership created a new academic unit to expand online offerings geared towards working adult professionals. In this study, this new academic unit is referred to as the online school. The business plan for the online school calls for increasing online enrollment from 100 undergraduate students in 2013 to 3,400 graduate and undergraduate students combined by the end of the 2018-19 academic year. The number of online degree programs is expected to expand from one program in 2013 to 70 or more online programs by 2018-2019, with the most growth anticipated in business-related disciplines that build upon the university’s brand strengths. As of the fall quarter of 2015, approximately 500 students were enrolled in 20 online degree programs at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Since its inception in 2013, the online school expanded from a team of eight staff members to 29 staff members at the start of the Fall 2015 term. Staff members are organized into admissions, student services, and instructional support teams, with additional staff leading and supporting the online school. In addition to offering degree programs to students completing their degrees fully online, the instructional support team also supports online course sections that are designated for on-campus students as a flexible scheduling option. Approximately 70% of online course sections are for the online degree programs and the remaining 30% are for on-campus students.

The course staffing strategy for the online school is to use full-time faculty when they are available and interested. The online school does not employ full-time faculty of its own and the full-time faculty that teach online primarily teach traditional on-campus courses and use online courses to fill their contractual load when on-campus sections are cancelled or to obtain a
teaching overload. As of the fall of 2015, approximately 50% of the online courses are taught by full-time faculty and the other 50% are taught by approximately 50 online adjuncts hired by the online school. There are no plans to hire more full-time faculty to teach online courses due to a decision by administrative leadership to only hire additional full-time faculty to expand on-campus degree program offerings, so the planned growth of the online school can only be accomplished by hiring online adjunct faculty. It is estimated that by 2018, 90% of the online courses will be taught by adjuncts. In addition to filling the gap in course offerings that full-time faculty cannot cover, adjuncts allow the online school flexibility in its scheduling. As the online school matures, new student recruiting and retention techniques are being introduced. Since the impact of new techniques on enrollment are not always predictable, using adjuncts allows the school to more easily add and cancel sections than it could if only full-time faculty were used to teach online courses. Online adjuncts are also hired to teach in subject areas for which the university does not have qualified full-time faculty. For example, there are no full-time faculty at the university with the appropriate credentials to teach in nonprofit management or network administration graduate programs, so online adjuncts teach those courses.

Online adjuncts are recruited primarily through the university’s online recruitment system, with job notices posted on national job sites aimed at higher education and faculty audiences. Some online adjuncts are hired through referrals from other faculty and staff. Interviews are generally conducted on the phone. The online school only hires adjuncts that have obtained a degree that is one level above the academic level at which they will teach and that is in the discipline in which they will teach. For example, adjuncts hired to teach undergraduate business courses must have at least a master’s degree in business or a closely related discipline. Many of the adjuncts hired to teach undergraduate courses have doctoral degrees. This policy
exists to ensure appropriate academic preparation of online adjuncts.

The online school’s leadership, which includes the student researcher for this study, recognizes that online adjuncts need to be treated and supported well in order for the online school to offer quality online programs and achieve its goals. To this end, in her professional role at the site institution, the student researcher has been charged with oversight of the hiring of and support for online adjuncts. A strategic decision is to only hire experienced online adjuncts with a proven online teaching record in order to avoid the extensive support needed by novice online instructors and to ensure high quality online instruction. An experienced online adjunct is defined as an adjunct who has taught online for at least two years at one or more other institutions and who can provide student evaluations that reflect quality online teaching performance. So far voluntary turnover among the online adjuncts has not been an issue for the online school, but it is anticipated that as the number of online adjuncts increases, voluntary turnover could become an issue. Due to the fact that no studies have been done on online adjuncts at the study site, very little is known about their satisfaction and support needs. Some anecdotal evidence from emails and personal conversations between staff members and online adjuncts indicates that they are generally satisfied, but it is not clear what leads to this satisfaction. It is not known if the online adjuncts have any dissatisfaction. Of interest to the researcher for this study and the online schools’ other leaders is how support of online adjuncts leads to their satisfaction and reduces the likelihood they will consider leaving their positions.

Support for the online adjunct faculty is primarily provided by the instructional support team, comprised of a director, who is also the student researcher for this study, instructional designers, instructional technologists, a content developer, and an administrative position. Ancillary support is provided by human resources professionals, information technology staff
members, and librarians. Support for online adjuncts is centered on a model of providing robust administrative and instructional support. An instructional designer is assigned to each online adjunct and a one-on-one relationship personalizes support specifically to the needs of the individual adjunct faculty member. The relationship is ongoing during the course preparation phase and teaching phase. Other team members are included as needed to consult and provide support. The director communicates with all online adjuncts through weekly emails with practical tips on navigating the university policies and teaching their classes. Additionally the instructional support team provides four professional development sessions via online conferencing during each academic year. A face-to-face symposium in which online faculty meet on campus is scheduled each summer to provide additional professional development and networking opportunities. All online faculty are evaluated by students at the end of each course. The online adjuncts are supervised by the director of the instructional support group or an academic director, depending on discipline, and the supervisors send feedback to the online adjuncts at the end of each term that combines the student feedback with observations from the staff. Comprehensive orientations, communities of practice, and mentoring are forms of support recommended in the literature that are not provided to online adjuncts.

Various policies and practices that come from both the university and the online school affect online adjuncts. Recent benchmarking of faculty pay rates has resulted in adjunct pay rates which the human resources department considers competitive among other institutions. Adjunct pay averages $4,200 for a 4.5 quarter credit 11-week course which is capped at 25 students. No benefits are offered to adjuncts and in order to avoid paying healthcare benefits under the Affordable Care Act, adjuncts are limited to teaching two courses per each 11-week term. There are no advancement opportunities for adjuncts, although on the traditional campuses adjuncts are
occasionally hired into open full-time faculty positions. Within the online school, online adjuncts are offered online course development or curriculum development stipends when full-time faculty are unavailable, taking the place of a teaching assignment. The online school aims to assign faculty to teach at least six weeks prior to the start of a term to allow for ample preparation time, but adjuncts are often given teaching assignments within a shorter timeframe due to the fact that online students often delay their registration. Online adjuncts occasionally have their teaching assignments switched in the weeks before a term starts due to unplanned shifts in enrollment or the need for the online school to accommodate full-time faculty members who need to teach online courses to fulfill their contractual loads.

The university uses a master course model of developing and deploying courses. A master version of a course serves as the starting point for any instructor teaching the course. All instructors are encouraged to personalize the master course, allowing for academic freedom of faculty without the need to support course development from scratch for every course section. Master course development includes a very robust support model based on one-on-one consultations between the faculty member and an instructional designer.

The online adjuncts teaching at the study site have also taught online for other institutions. Unsolicited, anecdotal feedback from the online adjuncts indicates that they experience a higher level of support at the study site than they have experienced at other institutions. Although this is encouraging feedback, it is not known if the support provided at the site institution actually affects the satisfaction and turnover intentions of the online adjuncts. To better understand the relationship between support, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, this study used a conceptual framework based on organizational support theory, which is described in the following section.
Conceptual Framework

Since the goal of this study was to determine how institutional support impacts the satisfaction and turnover of online adjuncts, organizational support theory provided the basis for the conceptual framework of the study. Institutions of higher education are organizations, so the term “organizational support” in this theory is synonymous with the term “institutional support.” With origins in the social exchange literature, Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) conceived organizational support theory based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). According to social exchange theory, human relationships are based on social exchanges which generate obligations that are in turn based on the trust that goodwill will be reciprocated (Emerson, 1976; Setton, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). According to the norm of reciprocity, individuals feel obligated to respond positively to favorable treatment by others (Gouldner, 1960). Based on these concepts, organizational support theory suggests that employees’ commitment to an organization is strongly influenced by their perception of the organization’s commitment to them (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986).

Perceived organizational support (POS) is the central construct of organizational support theory and refers to the degree to which employees believe the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Baran, Shanock, & Miller, 2012). According to the theory, employees experiencing strong POS feel the need to reciprocate favorable treatment with attitudes and behaviors that benefit the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Factors contributing to POS include: organizational rewards, such as recognition, pay, promotions, job security, autonomy, and training; procedural justice, such as rules and policies, employee input into decision-making, and the receipt of accurate information; and supervisor support, including
appropriate direction, evaluation, and caring treatment (Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Favorable treatment that is seen as discretionary and sincere has a positive impact on POS, whereas treatment that is given generally to all employees or as a result of external forces, such as unionization, has less impact or possibly a negative impact on POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Numerous studies have examined the relationship of POS to job satisfaction and employee retention. A positive relationship has been found between POS and job satisfaction, so that as POS increases, job satisfaction also increases (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Tetrick, 1991). Studies have also shown that POS is negatively related to turnover intentions, so that as POS increases, the intention of employees to leave their jobs decreases (Allen et al., 2003; Dawley et al., 2010; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009). Additional studies show that POS has positive relationships to other organizationally-desirable outcomes, including increased affective commitment of employees, reduced absenteeism, increased employee involvement, and enhanced job performance (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Maertz et al., 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002).

Organizational support theory provided an appropriate conceptual framework for this study due to its ties to both the adjunct literature and the turnover literature. The literature on adjuncts and online adjuncts indicates that although they are generally satisfied with their jobs, they have many concerns with institutional support that are closely related to the antecedents of POS (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Gullickson,
For example, POS is increased by organizational rewards, such as pay, promotions, job security, autonomy and training (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), which are all mentioned as concerns of adjuncts and which are areas where institutions may consider providing more support. Organizational rewards desired by adjuncts include pay that is comparable to that of full-time faculty, opportunities to increase their roles within institutions, academic freedom, and access to professional development (Antony & Valadez, 2002; Dolan, 2011; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Gullickson, 2011; Hopkins, 2013; Hoyt, 2012; Schroeder, 2008; Shannon, 2011). POS is also enhanced by procedural factors, such as rules and policies and the receipt of accurate information (Rhoades et al., 2001; Wayne et al., 2002). The adjunct literature mentions the need for rules and policies pertaining to early teaching assignments and academic freedom, as well as the need for institutional information that allows faculty to appropriately advise students on policies and resources (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Gullickson, 2011; Hoyt, 2012). Finally, POS is largely impacted by supervisor support that is caring and that provides direction (Allen et al., 2003; Maertz et al., 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The adjunct literature indicates that ongoing communication is needed between adjuncts and their supervisors to keep adjuncts informed and to provide personalized performance feedback (Dolan, 2011; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Thus, the types of support that lead to POS intersect with the types of support mentioned in the adjunct literature. Also, not only does POS have a negative impact on turnover, but it has a positive relationship to employee commitment and job performance (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Maertz et al., 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Wayne et al., 2002). It is possible that increased employee commitment and job performance will help mitigate the risks of hiring
adjuncts, such as reduced student success and grade inflation.

There are also ties between organizational support theory and the literature on employee turnover. As noted previously, studies on POS show a negative relationship between POS and turnover. (Allen et al., 2003; Dawley et al., 2010; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Maertz et al., 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009). Additionally, the turnover literature indicates that organizational and job-related factors which are controlled by employers and affect job satisfaction and turnover include pay, promotion, supervisor support in the form of recognition, feedback, and communication, job autonomy, and participation in decision-making (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973). These factors that increase satisfaction and reduce turnover closely echo the concerns of adjuncts and the recommendations for supporting adjuncts.

Given the intersections between the streams of literature reviewed for this study, a conceptual framework centered on organizational support theory and its construct of POS provided a solid foundation for examining the problem identified in the next section of this chapter. Although the literature streams on adjuncts, employee turnover, and organizational support theory are mostly distinct, there is considerable overlap that allows for a conceptual framework to emerge. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between institutional or organizational support, POS, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. The relationship between support and POS is a positive one, so that as appropriate levels of support which are provided with sincerity increase, an employee’s perception of organizational support increases (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS is positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2003; Dawley et al., 2010; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009),
so that as an employee’s positive perception of organizational support increases, the employee experiences higher levels of job satisfaction and fewer thoughts of leaving his or her position.

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework*

![Conceptual Framework Diagram]

A limitation of the literature on organizational support theory related to this study is that the theory assumes an ongoing, full-time employment relationship between an employee and an organization (Baran et al., 2012). Eisenberger, Jones, Aselage, and Sucharski (2004) have not studied part-time or contingent employees, but they infer from other studies that part-time, contingent employees respond favorably to any rewards or favorable treatment, possibly because they have fewer expectations of employers. This study attempted to identify the expectations of online adjuncts at the site institution.

The following section outlines the problem addressed in this study, which is based upon concerns that when adjuncts are hired, the quality of instruction may suffer and voluntary turnover can be an issue. As the number of adjuncts increases across higher education and at the study site, these are important concerns to address. Given that a lack of appropriate institutional
support may contribute to the concerns, this study considered the role of institutional support in attracting and retaining high quality adjuncts. The conceptual framework informs the research problem by demonstrating that high levels of institutional support increase the perception of support among employees, which enhances their job satisfaction and reduces their turnover intentions, which in turn addresses the original concerns of quality and turnover.

**Problem Statement**

Online education is growing rapidly and many institutions are addressing the growth by hiring online adjuncts (Bedford, 2009; Bichsel, 2013; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Rogers et al., 2010; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). This is the case at the study site because enrollment in online degree programs is expected to grow by more than 3,000 students over five years and it is estimated that 90% of online course sections will be taught by online adjuncts by the 2018-19 academic year. Given the high rate of growth in online course offerings taught by adjuncts and concerns about the quality of instruction when adjuncts teach, it is important to understand their needs and desires for support by the institution.

Compared with traditional full time faculty, adjuncts have special concerns about aspects of their positions, such as pay, supervisor communication, academic freedom, and the lack of early teaching assignments, professional development, and performance evaluations (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Gullickson, 2011; Hopkins, 2013; Hoyt, 2012; Schroeder, 2008). Some institutions have struggled with voluntary turnover of online adjuncts since they can easily teach for any institution that meets their needs (Green et al., 2009). Institutions such as the site for this study have great incentive to retain online adjuncts; however, the literature indicates that adjuncts are significantly under-supported by their institutions, which can encourage turnover when adjuncts leave for better conditions (Gappa &
Leslie, 1993; Hoyt, 2012; Kezar & Maxey, 2013; Meixner, Kruck, & Madden, 2010; Nutting, 2003). Inadequate support for adjuncts is also leading to unionization efforts across the United States so that adjuncts can secure better support (Bradley, 2013; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Lewin, 2013). Ironically, when adjuncts turn to unionization, their perceptions of their institutions and the support they receive may not change (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Thus, it behooves institutions to learn how to appropriately support adjuncts before they consider unionization or leaving their jobs. Proactively addressing support may result in more satisfied adjuncts that will reciprocate the support with high quality teaching and continued employment at an institution.

To address the apparent lack of appropriate support, numerous studies and articles make recommendations for providing good support to adjuncts that increases their satisfaction and reduces their turnover. Providing benefits and pay that is equitable to that for full-time faculty are the top recommendations (Eney & Davidson, 2012; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt et al., 2008; Kezar & Maxey, 2013). Policies and practices regarding academic freedom, assigning additional responsibilities, and providing advance notice of teaching assignments are also important (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Green et al., 2009; Hoyt, 2012). Other support recommendations include providing comprehensive orientations, regular communication, professional development, mentoring, an evaluation and feedback process, and communities of practice that create connections between full-time and adjunct faculty teaching online (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Maier, 2012; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009; Tipple 2010). Face-to-face meetings between online adjuncts, academic leaders, and administrators are also recommended (Dolan, 2011).

Although the site institution offers some of these forms of support, it does not offer all of
the recommended types of support. Some support types, such as mentoring, professional
development, and communities of practice are time consuming to implement and logistically
challenging with benefits that are not clear. The staff of the online school struggle to understand
what types of support are truly desired by experienced online adjuncts and what types of support
have the most significant impact on their job satisfaction and employment retention. The
literature does not provide clear answers; thus, an empirical study was important for providing
insight into adjunct support. Conducting a qualitative study on the support needs and desires of
the experienced online adjuncts at the study site allows for a deeper understanding of how to best
support this growing population. Therefore, this study explored whether or not the online
adjuncts employed at the study site are adequately supported to encourage satisfaction and
reduce turnover, or if the support needs to be changed or enhanced.

Additionally, there are concerns about the literature that led to this study. As previously
mentioned, an issue is that much of the literature on adjuncts, and online adjuncts in particular,
appears to be based on generalizations. For example, recommendations for supporting online
adjuncts are similar to the recommendations for supporting traditional adjuncts. Additionally, the
literature claims that traditional and online adjuncts are heterogeneous groups (Bedford, 2011;
Bedford & Miller, 2013; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Kezar & Maxey, 2012; Shiffman, 2009), but the
support recommendations in the literature seem to apply to all adjuncts without considering
differences among them. Two studies have found that online adjuncts are not interested in some
of the recommended types of support (Runyon, 2008; Schroeder, 2008), further supporting the
possibility of generalizations. Additionally, Velez (2009) indicates that as online adjuncts gain
experience with teaching online, their need and desire for support diminishes. A significant
amount of the literature is focused on adjunct faculty that are fairly new to teaching online and
not on those with experience. Since only experienced online adjuncts are hired at the study site, it is possible that their needs differ from those mentioned in much of the literature. Thus, an opportunity existed to study the support needs of adjuncts that only teach online and that have prior online teaching experience.

Given that the use of online adjuncts is a fairly new phenomenon in higher education, many of the studies conducted on online adjuncts have been quantitative in nature, using surveys to broadly identify what motivates and satisfies them (Green et al., 2009; Gullickson, 2005; Runyon, 2008; Schroeder, 2008). Support recommendations largely address the dissatisfiers of traditional and online adjuncts that are identified in survey findings. Very little qualitative research has been done in this area to explore how online adjuncts really feel about institutional support and their continued employment at an institution. This qualitative study attempted to provide new information about how online adjuncts experience institutional support and how that support may or may not influence their employment decisions.

Additionally, the links between the literature on adjuncts, employee turnover, and organizational support theory suggest that the recommended types of support for online adjuncts will increase their job satisfaction and reduce their turnover, but there are no studies that examine the effect of support on the turnover of online adjuncts. Thus, it is not known if the recommended support types actually reduce turnover, as they are presumed to do. This study attempted to provide new information on online adjuncts by exploring the link between support types, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions.

In summary, voluntary turnover and instructional quality may be issues when adjuncts are hired. These issues can be exacerbated by a lack of appropriate institutional support, so institutions should proactively determine what types of institutional support lead to increased job
satisfaction and reduced turnover of employees. To date, studies on the support of adjuncts have been mostly quantitative and have overgeneralized findings, making it difficult to know how to best allocate resources to provide appropriate support to adjuncts. This study adds to the literature and addresses the research problem within the specific context of the study site, leading to the following purpose statement and research questions.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions among experienced online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines at a private university in the Northeast of the United States. A qualitative study explored the following research questions:

1. What motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online?
2. What institutional support leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs?
3. How does institutional support impact turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site?

**Significance of the Study**

This research is relevant to several audiences at the study site and in higher education in general. First, the study is relevant to online adjuncts teaching at the study site who would prefer more or different institutional support. It is also relevant to online adjuncts across higher education who find they are not getting the institutional support they desire. Online adjuncts have diverse backgrounds with support desires that can vary greatly (Bedford, 2011). Regardless of their background or situation, online adjuncts selectively choose institutions that represent the best fit for them professionally and personally (Bedford, 2009; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006). A study
by Green et al. (2009) reveals that 81% of online adjuncts are motivated by increased institutional support. Although orientations, good communication, professional development, mentoring, performance evaluations, and communities of practice are mentioned in the literature as being best practices for managing online adjuncts (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Maier, 2012; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009; Tipple 2010), little detail is known about what exactly these best practices mean to this group of faculty and whether or not they address all that online adjuncts desire in terms of institutional support. This study leads to a better understanding of experienced online adjuncts among online education administrators.

From the perspective of online education administrators at the study site and across higher education, a greater understanding is needed of the support desires of online adjuncts and how support increases their job satisfaction and limits their turnover. The focus of the study was specific to online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines at the study site since those are the disciplines where the most growth is anticipated in the online programs, and thus the most hiring of adjuncts will occur. It is important to retain online adjuncts in those disciplines to provide stability, consistency, and quality to programs (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007). Failure to support online adjuncts may result in losing them to competitors (Hardy, 2007). The direct and indirect costs related to faculty attrition are expensive and can negatively affect the sustainability of online programs (Betts & Sikorski, 2008). This study provides a better understanding of experienced online adjuncts, which may assist online education administrators with developing support options that adapt to the desires of individual online adjuncts so they can be retained (Bedford & Miller, 2013).

Online students will also benefit from this study. Adjunct faculty often teach more students than full-time faculty do and students suffer when adjuncts do not get the support they
need (Nutting, 2003). Studies show that when adjuncts teach, less effective teaching techniques are used (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Umbach, 2007) and student retention and graduate rates decline (Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Mueller et al., 2013). Students’ academic success depends on guidance and support from faculty, yet many adjuncts are not properly prepared to help students be successful (Baron-Nixon, 2007). Increased institutional support may better prepare adjuncts for teaching and advising online students, which will result in students receiving better instruction and a better overall academic experience.

In the past 20 years there has been dramatic growth in the number of part-time faculty so that approximately 50% of higher education faculty are now employed part-time (Kena et al., 2014). This trend has occurred across higher education and not just in online education. Hoyt (2012) indicates that institutions often fall short in supporting adjuncts. There is a significant need for greater adjunct oversight and support to encourage retention that will result in a more highly qualified adjunct pool over the long term (Hoyt, 2012). Thus, from a broad higher education perspective, adequately supporting adjuncts is an issue across the board. By revealing the support desires of experienced online adjuncts, this study also sheds light on how to support adjuncts teaching in traditional on-campus settings and has a broader impact beyond online education to higher education overall.

Positionality Statement

Hankins and Yarbrough (2008) indicate that positionality is an understanding of the world based on our experience. As the researcher for this study, I have biases as a result of my experience as a practitioner and my own personality. My interest in this problem of practice stems from experience in my current role at the study site. As the director of the instructional support group in the online school, I am tasked with supporting online adjuncts. My staff and I
make a significant investment in supporting online adjuncts, so we want to preserve our investment by retaining them. I realize that making the online adjuncts feel well-supported is important to retaining them, so I strive to create an adjunct-friendly environment that provides them with job satisfaction and interests them in continuing to teach online for the university.

Due to my role at the study site, I realize that there may be perceived risk to participants. Participants may have felt obligated to participate due to concerns that I would report their non-participation to their supervisor. Additionally, reviewers of the study may view the findings unreliable or invalid due to concerns that my position has skewed participant responses during the interviews or that I have skewed the findings to represent the university in a favorable light. To address these potential risks, I have been transparent regarding my position and my awareness of the risks. I followed all methodology procedures explicitly to ensure participant confidentiality. Member checking ensured that I accurately represented participant perspectives. Rich, thick description of the findings which includes participant quotes allows the participants’ voices to speak for themselves and reduces the perception that I have skewed the findings. More details on the steps taken to minimize risk to participants and to ensure validity are provided in chapter three.

In addition to considering my positionality relative to my role at the study site, I have considered biases that I bring to the study as a result of my own personality and prior experiences. A personal bias I brought to this problem of practice is that online teaching and learning is intuitive to me and always has been, so the types of support that others may need is not immediately obvious to me. I am also a very independent and self-sufficient person who rarely feels the need for employer support, so the support needs of others are not obvious to me for this reason as well. Furthermore, after 24 years as an administrator of distance and online
education, I have tried providing different types of support and I have found that online instructors rarely take advantage of them and prefer to just call or email a reliable staff member when they need support. Therefore, I am skeptical about the validity of some of the recommendations that are mentioned in the literature for providing online adjunct support since I think those forms of support will seldom be used.

A perspective that I have on this problem based on my review of the literature is that I suspect positionality by other researchers and authors has caused misrepresentations of online adjuncts in the literature. Fennell and Arnot (2008) discuss that researchers can generalize results that fail to consider the context of some groups. Much of the literature paints adjuncts as a group that is poorly treated and under-supported (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Kezar & Sam, 2013; Meixner, Kruck, & Madden, 2010; Nutting, 2003). Some of the literature extends this representation of adjuncts in general to the specific group of online adjuncts (Dolan, 2011; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Maier, 2012). Bedford and Miller (2013) claim that adjuncts teaching exclusively online have a different experience than adjuncts in traditional settings and therefore the generalizations in the literature provide limited understanding. Based on my experience, I agree with Bedford and Miller (2013), which I realize may make me too dismissive of support recommendations in the literature. I have attempted to embrace the literature and focus on adding to it.

As the researcher for this problem, I am aware of the fact that my views on adjunct support may not be the views of others. Briscoe (2005) discusses the concept of *othering*, indicating that one form of *othering* is viewing individuals as abnormal or inferior. Hankins and Yarbrough (2008) indicate that an aspect of positionality is recognizing the multiple positions that others bring to a situation. While conducting research on this topic, I tried to remain
objective and considered participants’ perspectives in my analysis of the data. My goal was to accurately represent the views of online adjuncts and not skew either the gathering or interpretation of the data to meet my personal views. Machi and McEvoy (2009) indicate that bias can cause a researcher to jump to conclusions and I was careful not to do so.

Fortunately, by identifying biases, researchers can often control for them and become open-minded when conducting research (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). I have been aware of my biases and perspectives on online adjunct support from the moment I first considered the topic, so I feel that I was in a good position to take them into consideration during my study. Throughout my career I have often sensed that my personal preferences are not representative of the majority and I have always been careful not to make decisions on my views alone. I am actually grateful for my personal views on this topic, as they may have helped me identify ways in which I can contribute to the literature. My ultimate goal was to produce useful research that can help practitioners, including myself, support and retain online adjuncts.

**Definition of Terms**

**Adjunct:** A temporary, non-tenure-track faculty member employed less than full-time. The terms ‘part-time’ and ‘contingent’, are also used to refer to adjuncts.

**Contingent Faculty:** Faculty members who work full-time or part-time for a college or university, do not hold tenured or tenure-track positions, and work on a contract basis with no guarantee of continued employment. Adjuncts are a large segment of the contingent faculty population.

**Distance Education:** Instruction that occurs while instructors and students are remote from each other.

**Employee Retention:** The ability of an organization to keep its employees. Employee retention
is the opposite of employee turnover.

**Employee Turnover:** The phenomenon of employees leaving their jobs.

**Experienced Online Adjunct:** An adjunct who has taught online for at least two years at one or more institutions that are not the study site and who can provide student evaluations that reflect quality teaching performance.

**Institutional Support:** Policies, practices, and procedures affecting the online adjuncts and the human interactions that occur between university administrators and staff and the online adjuncts.

**Job Satisfaction:** A positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences (Dahlstrom, 2013).

**Online Adjunct:** An adjunct teaching online courses.

**Online Education:** A form of distance education in which instruction is delivered primarily online through the use of technology.

**Organizational Support Theory:** A theory indicating that employees’ commitment to an organization is strongly influenced by their perception of the organization’s commitment to them (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

**Perceived Organizational Support:** The central construct of organizational support theory, referring to the degree to which employees believe the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Baran et al., 2012; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

**Traditional Adjunct:** An adjunct teaching traditional, on-campus courses.

**Turnover Intention:** An employee attitude representing the employee’s intent to leave his or her job; an immediate and critical antecedent to actual voluntary turnover (Perryer, Jordan,
Firns, & Travaglione, 2010).

**Voluntary Turnover:** The phenomenon of employees leaving their jobs by choice.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions among experienced online adjunct faculty at a private university in the Northeast of the United States. A qualitative study explored the following research questions:

1. What motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online?
2. What institutional support leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs?
3. How does institutional support impact turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site?

Introduction

Institutions of higher education that offer online degree programs and use online adjuncts to deliver those programs can ensure the consistency and quality of their programs by retaining highly performing online adjuncts (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Hardy, 2007). The turnover of online adjuncts has been an issue for some institutions (Hardy, 2007), but fortunately literature on employee turnover and organizational support indicates that improving the support provided to employees reduces their turnover and improves their performance (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003; Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Webb & Carpenter, 2012). This study explores how support of experienced online adjuncts leads to their job satisfaction and makes them want to continue working for an institution rather than seeking out similar positions at other institutions. To
provide the background for the study, this chapter reviews the literature on both traditional and online adjuncts, employee turnover, and organizational support theory. Intersections between the literature streams are noted, as well as topics on which little is known which this study was intended to address.

Scope of the Review

This literature review examines four themes in the literature: adjunct faculty, online adjuncts, employee turnover, and organizational support theory. The review begins by discussing literature on adjunct faculty in general, the benefits and risks of hiring them, their characteristics, their working conditions, their motivation and satisfaction, and their support needs. This section of the literature review provides background for the literature on online adjuncts. The section on online adjuncts covers their characteristics, their motivation and satisfaction, their support needs, and recommendations for supporting them. The employee turnover literature is reviewed, covering numerous turnover process models to identify individual, organizational, and economic factors contributing to turnover, how turnover may differ for part-time and remote employees, and strategies for reducing turnover. Finally, the literature on organizational support theory is reviewed for its ties to the turnover literature and the problem being studied. The review concludes with a discussion of the literature, identifying generalizations and topics needing further exploration that this study is designed to address and indicating how the literature has led to a qualitative study and the chosen theoretical framework.

An extensive and exhaustive review of the literature was conducted on adjunct faculty and online adjunct faculty turnover and support. Terms such as adjunct faculty, adjunct support, contingent faculty, online adjuncts, online adjunct support, faculty retention, faculty turnover and adjunct turnover were used in searches conducted primarily through the EBSCO Integrated
Search, EBSCO Host Search, and Scholar OneSearch tools, each of which allow for the simultaneous searching of key literature databases, including JSTOR, PsycInfo, Academic Search Premier, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, Business Source Complete, and ERIC, among others. Reference lists for articles were reviewed for further identification of relevant resources.

The literature on employee turnover is expansive and the topic can be explored from many angles. The employee turnover literature reviewed in this study is limited to the most frequently mentioned turnover process models. Literature on retention of part-time and remote employees is reviewed due to the part-time and remote nature of online adjunct faculty work. Strategies for reducing turnover are also reviewed. Literature on organizational support theory was explored due to its apparent ties to the antecedents of employee turnover and its relevance to the problem being studied. Terms such as employee retention, employee turnover, part-time employee turnover, remote employee turnover, organizational support theory, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, turnover interventions, and turnover prevention were used in searches conducted in the same manner as noted above. Reference lists for articles were also used to identify resources. The literature review begins in the next section by covering the adjunct faculty literature stream to provide background and context for the literature on online adjuncts that follows.

**Adjunct Faculty Trends and Issues**

Changes in higher education over the past several decades have required institutions to adapt. One such change has been the growth of student enrollments (Kezar & Sam, 2010). The GI Bill, issued in 1944, and the 1947 President’s Commission on Higher Education opened up post-secondary education to the masses, resulting in enrollment surges that became particularly
significant in the 1960s and 1970s (Kezar & Sam, 2010). The late 1980s and 1990s brought about increases in the number of nontraditional students entering college due to the shift from an industrial to a service-oriented economy that required new skills, and a rising cost of living that caused many women to pursue college degrees that lead to careers in the new economy (Williamson & Greenwood, 1989). The availability and attraction of higher education resulted in 17.5 million undergraduate enrollments in the United States in 2013, up from 12 million in 1990 (Kena et al., 2015). By 2024, undergraduate enrollment is projected to be 19.6 million (Kena et al., 2015). This enrollment growth has required institutions to adapt by hiring more faculty and by offering new programs and services to new populations of students working in changing industries. Online education programs are an example of how institutions have adapted.

Another change in higher education has been a shift in resources (Kezar & Sam, 2010). In the late 1980s and 1990s institutions experienced reductions in government funding at the same time that the costs of running institutions were increasing (Kezar & Sam, 2010). Cost increases have largely been due to the addition of highly qualified administrators and support staff that are hired to meet student and faculty expectations for better services in areas such as the library, instructional support, and student services (Waggaman, 2001). Mandated cost increases in benefits, such as health insurance, workers compensation premiums, and retirement programs, have significantly impacted institutional budgets (Ehrenberg, 2006; Waggaman, 2001). The maintenance of aging facilities, consumer demand for modern facilities, and technology that frequently needs updating also contribute to increasing costs (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). Institutions with a research mission have seen research-related costs increase for grant administration, research assistants, and equipment and facilities (Waggaman, 2001). Additionally, research institutions must often pay start-up packages in the range of $500,000 to
attract top researchers (Ehrenberg, 2006). To deal with the rising costs, many institutions have raised tuition and sought new revenue sources, such as research grants and alumni donations, but they have also had to cut costs to close resource gaps (Kezar & Sam, 2010). Hiring full-time non-tenure-track faculty and part-time adjunct faculty who command lower salaries and fewer benefits than tenured faculty has been one approach to limiting the costs of hiring more faculty to handle increased enrollment (Kezar & Sam, 2010).

The following subsections explore the literature on adjunct faculty in detail to provide background for a following section that focuses specifically on online adjunct faculty. Literature is reviewed on the benefits and risks of hiring adjuncts, their characteristics, the nature of their work, and their motivations and satisfaction. Recommendations in the literature for supporting adjuncts are also covered.

**Benefits of Hiring Adjuncts**

Institutions see both economic and non-economic benefits of hiring adjunct faculty. Due to the economic issues created by rising enrollment, increasing costs, and reduced government funding, labor cost savings is the primary reason for hiring adjuncts (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Kezar & Sam, 2010). Adjuncts earn significantly lower salaries than full-time faculty and typically are not offered benefits, such as health insurance or retirement funds, leading to cost savings (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012; Kezar & Sam, 2010; Lefebvre, 2008; Thedwall, 2008). The hiring process for adjuncts is also more cost-effective than the hiring process for full-time faculty since institutions generally hire on-campus adjuncts from local applicant pools instead of nationwide searches (Kezar & Sam, 2010) and online adjuncts can easily be hired through online job advertisements and technology-enabled interviews.
There are numerous non-economic benefits of hiring adjuncts. One of the most commonly mentioned benefits is flexibility. Adjuncts provide institutions with the ability to adapt to enrollment fluctuations (Thedwall, 2008). Many institutions have higher enrollments in the fall semester and lighter enrollments in the spring, making it impractical to hire full-time faculty that would not have a full teaching load, so adjuncts allow institutions to meet greater demand in the fall semester (Christensen, 2008). Some institutions see course enrollments fluctuate right up to the start of a semester, so the use of adjuncts allows greater flexibility since courses taught by adjuncts can be cancelled more easily than those taught by full-time faculty due to the absence of workload formulas for adjuncts (Christensen, 2008). Adjuncts also allow institutions the flexibility to respond to the needs of full-time faculty who are granted course buyouts due to funded research or special projects, sabbatical leaves, and family or medical leaves of absence (Thedwall, 2008).

Adjuncts are also hired for the benefits they bring to academic programs. Hiring practitioners as adjuncts allows institutions to bring experience and skills into the classroom that full-time tenured faculty may not have (Cross & Goldenberg, 2003; Lefebvre, 2008). Such adjuncts are especially effective in fields tied to specific professions, such as education or engineering, because of the significant industry experience they bring to the classroom (Bettinger & Long, 2010). Adjuncts often teach specialized classes that full-time faculty do not have the background to teach, (Cross & Goldenberg, 2003), such as courses covering recent technology or trends in the industry. At the study site, adjuncts are particularly useful in the culinary, hospitality, criminal justice, and technology disciplines due to current or recent industry experience and exposure to the latest developments in those fields. Some institutions allow tenured and tenure-track faculty to focus on research and teaching upper-level undergraduate and
graduate courses, leaving lower-level undergraduate students with less access to faculty (Cross & Goldenberg, 2003). Many adjuncts are highly qualified teachers who can fill the void in lower-level courses and allow full-time faculty to focus on research and the upper-level students that may be involved in research (Bettinger & Long, 2010; Cross & Goldenberg, 2003). However, at teaching-focused institutions where faculty are not engaged in research, such as the study site, adjuncts and full-time faculty may teach courses at all levels.

**Risks of Hiring Adjuncts**

Despite multiple benefits of hiring adjuncts, some literature raises concerns about hiring them. Several studies have reported evidence suggesting lower quality instruction and reduced student success when adjuncts are employed (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Umbach, 2007), while others studies indicate that grades are inflated in courses taught by adjuncts (Johnson, Pitts, & Kamery, 2006; Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005; Kirk & Spector, 2009; McArthur, 1999; Sonner, 2000).

**Student Success.** In a study of graduation rates at community colleges, Jacoby (2006) used data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, which includes graduation rates, faculty employment status, and student demographics. Data from 1,209 community colleges from all 50 states in 2001 were included. Using multiple regression analysis, the main finding of the study is that as the ratio of adjuncts to full-time faculty increases, there is a highly significant and negative effect upon graduation rates. Jacoby’s (2006) study does not identify why adjuncts lead to lower graduation rates, but the data suggest that educational qualifications are likely not the cause at community colleges since most adjuncts and full-time faculty have master’s degrees. Educational qualifications are also likely not an issue at the study site since most adjuncts hired to teach online have terminal degrees.
Umbach (2007) conducted a study exploring the impact of contingent faculty on undergraduate education using data collected from the 2003-2004 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement administered by Indiana University. The survey was designed to measure faculty expectations for student engagement and how faculty members structure their classroom and out-of-class work. The data set included 17,914 faculty members from 130 institutions. Umbach (2007) found that adjuncts interact less frequently with students than full-time faculty, especially when looking at non-class-related interaction, such as advising. Findings also indicate that adjuncts use active and collaborative learning techniques less often, spend less time preparing for class, and have lower academic expectations than full-time faculty. Although Umbach’s (2007) study does not indicate reasons for the findings, he points to social exchange theory and suggests that adjuncts reciprocate the support they receive from institutions. Since adjuncts tend to receive low wages and little support, Umbach (2007) suggests they are less committed and perform less effectively than their full-time peers.

Jaeger and Eagan (2011) conducted a study examining the effects of adjunct faculty on first-year student retention. Quantitative data from six universities included the retention rates of students starting in the fall of 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005, as well as faculty employment data. Retention was measured from the fall of the freshman year to the fall of the sophomore year for first-time, full-time students. Findings indicate that students with more than half of their courses taught by adjuncts in the first year have a 10% to 30% lower probability of retention than students taught primarily by full-time faculty. However, the findings also indicate that at doctoral-intensive institutions, adjuncts had positive effects on student persistence. Jaeger and Eagan (2011) indicate that the doctoral institutions in their study shared a philosophy that adjuncts are important contributors, they addressed the challenges of adjunct faculty, such as the
lack of knowledge about campus resources, and they acknowledged that supporting adjuncts is critical for encouraging student learning. This observation by the authors is particularly relevant to this study since it demonstrates that institutional philosophy and approach to adjuncts may mitigate some of the risks of hiring adjuncts.

A study by Baldwin and Wawrzynski (2011) examined differences between adjuncts and full-time faculty and their teaching strategies. The study used 2004 data from the National Center for Education Statistics that included 9,783 faculty at four-year institutions. Findings indicate that adjunct faculty are more likely to use subject-centered teaching strategies, such as multiple-choice and short-answer exams, whereas full-time faculty are more likely to use learning-centered teaching strategies, such as student peer evaluation, essay exams, research papers, oral presentations, and group projects. Findings also indicate that adjuncts are less likely than full-time faculty to use technology to interact with students, including e-mail and course websites within course management systems. Although the data does not provide reasons for the findings, Baldwin and Wawrzynski (2011) suggest that adjuncts may have less time to use learning-centered teaching strategies and technology due to full-time or part-time jobs elsewhere. It is possible that these findings would not apply to online education due to the fact that online education requires the use of technology. Additionally, at the study site, course design standards require the use of learning-centered teaching strategies and there is considerable oversight of how adjuncts teach online.

The studies mentioned above offer few, if any, explanations for why the quality of instruction is lower or students are less successful when adjuncts teach. Other literature offers potential explanations. Haeger (1998) suggests that the quality issues are mostly related to the general institutional environment supporting adjuncts, which was supported by the Jaeger and
Eagan (2011) study. Low pay leads some adjuncts to work for multiple institutions, which means they commute between institutions and spend less time on campus interacting with students and colleagues (Benjamin, 2002; Green, 2007). Adjuncts often lack office space where they can work on campus and hold office hours with students, also limiting their interactions with students (Benjamin, 2002; Haeger, 1998; Kezar & Maxey, 2013). In general, full-time faculty spend two to four more times as many out-of-class hours on student-related interactions than adjunct faculty (Benjamin, 2002). Some of these explanations may not be relevant to online education since commuting is not an issue, faculty do not need on-campus office space for meeting with students, and interactions between faculty and students are often via phone and email, so there may be fewer differences between full-time and adjunct faculty.

Considering other explanations, a lack of new faculty orientation sessions and professional development opportunities may limit exposure of adjuncts to effective instructional techniques that could make them more effective teachers (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). Also, many academic departments do not include adjuncts in meetings where academic policies, student support, and curriculum are discussed, leaving adjuncts poorly prepared to advise students seeking advising from their faculty (Haeger, 1998). Additionally, adjuncts are subject to less thorough selection and evaluation during the hiring process (Benjamin, 2002). They are also less likely to have advanced degrees and they are less involved in research or scholarship, which means they are often less familiar with subject matter and possibly less prepared to teach effectively (Benjamin, 2002). As noted previously, the adjuncts at the study site mostly have terminal degrees and the institution does not have a research mission, so some of Benjamin’s (2002) explanations may not apply to this specific study.

Overall, the studies reviewed provide concern about instructional quality and student
success when adjuncts are hired. Some of the factors involved may not be relevant due to the nature of online education, especially at the study site. Commuting and office space do not affect interactions with students. Effective teaching strategies and the use of technology are built into online master courses. Student and faculty interaction in fully online programs is done via email and phone, so faculty status may have less impact than it does in on-campus programs. The literature also suggests that the institutional environment can contribute to or limit the concerns of faculty. Since the site institution has a philosophy that values adjuncts, this study may be useful for showing how such a philosophy and the resulting support of online adjuncts limits their turnover.

**Grade inflation.** Grade inflation is another possible risk of employing adjuncts. Studies have shown that grades tend to be higher in courses taught by adjunct faculty (Johnson, Pitts, & Kamery, 2006; Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005; Kirk & Spector, 2009; McArthur, 1999; Sonner, 2000). McArthur (1999) conducted a study at a small community college in New Jersey that looked at grades in humanities courses during three consecutive spring semesters which were taught by six full-time faculty and twelve adjuncts. To determine if factors other than faculty status affect grades, the study also looked at grades by faculty gender and age and by day versus evening classes. Faculty age and the time of day of the class had no impact on grades. Grades were consistently higher in courses taught by adjuncts, with some indication that male faculty members grade slightly higher than female faculty.

Sonner (2000) studied adjunct grading practices at a small public university that uses adjuncts to teach about 70% of course sections. Grades were examined in 395 business courses taught over eight quarters. The study also examined other potentially biasing factors, including class size, instructor credentials, course subject, and course level. Class grade averages were
found to be higher in smaller classes, subjects of a quantitative nature, and in upper level courses, with instructor credentials having no impact on grades. When controlling for class size, subject, and course level, the findings indicated that grades were higher in courses taught by adjuncts than in those taught by full-time faculty.

Instead of looking at course grades, Kezim, Pariseau, and Quinn (2005) examined the GPAs of business students at a small private undergraduate college over a 20 year period. During the 20 years, 29% of the business courses were taught by adjuncts. Findings showed that the GPAs of students who were taught more frequently by adjuncts were higher than those taught more frequently by full-time faculty.

Johnson, Pitts, and Kamery (2006) looked at grades in English composition courses at a private comprehensive university which were taught by seven full-time and five adjunct faculty members. Independent variables included instructor status, day or evening status of students, student major, student gender, student age, student class standing, and student GPA. The only independent variables related to higher grades were student GPA and instructor status, with adjuncts giving higher grades than full-time faculty.

A final study on adjunct grading practices was conducted by Kirk and Spector (2009). Their study looked at grades of 2,597 students completing a corporate finance course at a four-year state college. Students in the corporate finance course had already completed two basic accounting courses. Findings indicated that students taught by full-time faculty in the basic accounting courses had higher grades in the corporate finance course than those taught by adjuncts in the basic accounting courses. The findings also indicate that adjuncts assign higher grades than full-time faculty and students taught by adjuncts in their first basic accounting course were less likely to choose accounting as a major.
None of the studies finding grade inflation among adjuncts provide empirical evidence of why adjuncts tend to assign higher grades. Only McArthur (1999) and Sonner (2000) make suggestions for this phenomenon, although they have no direct evidence for their suggestions. Sonner (2000) suggests that full-time faculty are more likely than adjuncts to have terminal degrees and know the subject matter better, so they have higher expectations of students, resulting in lower grades when full-time faculty teach. Also, Sonner (2000) and McArthur (2000) both suggest that adjuncts may give higher grades to avoid student complaints that could result in not receiving offers to teach in future academic terms.

Grade inflation is a concern because it can damage a program’s or institution’s reputation when students graduate with grades that do not reflect their level of knowledge or competency. Given such solid empirical evidence of grade inflation among adjuncts, it is a serious issue to be addressed. Grade inflation is particularly serious in online education since employers perceive that online courses are easier, making students less prepared employees (Adams, 2008). Support of adjuncts through orientations that set expectations for an institution’s rigor standards and grading practices, regular performance evaluations, and other forms of support may help address the issue.

**Characteristics of Adjunct Faculty**

Given the benefits and risks of hiring adjuncts, it is important to get a picture of who adjunct faculty are in order to evaluate the literature. The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012) provides a range of data on adjunct faculty in higher education, including those teaching online and in the traditional classroom. According to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW), 62% of adjuncts are women and nearly 90% are Caucasian. More than 70% of adjuncts are between the ages of 36 and 65 (CAW, 2012). Adjuncts tend to be highly educated, with 40%...
reporting attainment of a master’s degree, 30% have a doctorate, and 17% have a professional degree or other terminal degree (CAW, 2012). The CAW (2012) reports that 43% of adjuncts teach only one course at a time and 27.5% teach two, with 22% of adjuncts teaching at multiple institutions. The median pay for a three-credit course is $2,700, which is significantly lower than the pay rate for full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty (CAW, 2012). Few adjuncts report being paid for work-related activities outside the classroom, such as attending departmental meetings, advising students, and holding office hours (CAW, 2012). When adjunct pay rates are annualized, adjuncts earn significantly less than other professionals with similar credentials (CAW, 2012). In addition to low pay rates, benefits are lacking for adjuncts, with only 22% reporting health benefits (CAW, 2012).

Community colleges have the highest percentage of adjuncts compared to other institution types, although research and doctorate-granting institutions have seen an increase in the number of adjuncts in recent years (CAW, 2012; Kezar & Sam, 2010). The Coalition on the Academic Workforce (2012) reports that 44% of adjuncts teach in the humanities, with 20.5% of adjuncts teaching in professional fields, followed by 14.1% in the sciences and 13.8% in the social sciences. The fields with the highest percentage of adjuncts to overall faculty are education, with 48.7% of faculty being adjunct, followed by fine arts (47%), business (46%), and humanities (34.6%) (Kezar & Sam, 2010).

Although the data and literature tends to treat adjunct faculty as a homogeneous group, they are actually a heterogeneous group (Kezar & Maxey, 2012). Gappa and Leslie (1993) attempted to demonstrate heterogeneity by identifying four categories of adjuncts that are still widely used in the literature for exploring characteristics, motivations, and satisfaction of adjuncts. The four categories are: (1) career enders; (2) specialists, experts, and professionals; (3)
aspiring academics; and (4) freelancers. Career enders are professionals who start teaching part-time as they phase into retirement. Specialists, experts, and professionals are usually employed full-time elsewhere and teach part-time because they enjoy teaching. Aspiring academics usually have doctoral degrees and desire full-time tenure-track employment. Freelancers are individuals seeking part-time work due to their lifestyle.

Regardless of what category an adjunct falls into, they all bring unique backgrounds which can benefit institutions (Halfond, 2000). Gappa and Leslie (1993) note that institutional administrators often treat all adjuncts the same and suggest that administrators should learn which category each adjunct falls into so appropriate incentives and support can be provided.

**The Plight of the Adjunct**

A significant amount of the literature on adjuncts portrays them as a disgruntled, marginalized group of faculty who are treated poorly by administrators and other faculty. Kezar and Sam (2014) and Nutting (2003) note that many studies have demonstrated that the working conditions of adjuncts are generally marginal, with little job security, notification of teaching assignments with little lead time, salaries that are significantly lower than those for full-time faculty, limited or no benefits, no opportunities for promotion, no input on departmental decisions, limited or no professional development, a lack of clear guidelines for doing their work, and a general lack of respect from colleagues. Adjuncts also lack institutional support for office space for meeting with students, supplies, equipment, and access to clerical services (Kezar & Sam, 2010; Nutting, 2003).

Some literature paints the picture of adjuncts as “freeway-fliers” because they spend a good deal of time commuting from one institution to another because of the need to teach multiple classes at multiple institutions to piece together living wages (Benjamin, 2002; Green,
This depiction of adjuncts, along with the perceived mistreatment and poor working conditions of adjuncts are leading to efforts to unionize adjuncts to obtain working conditions that are more equitable to those of full-time faculty (Bradley, 2013; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Lewin, 2013). A review of collective bargaining agreements between adjunct unions and institutions reveals a range of areas where adjuncts have negotiated for better treatment and working conditions. Frequently mentioned in the agreements are minimum per course compensation rates, access to health, retirement, and disability benefits, policies regarding job security and workload, requirements for departments to notify adjuncts of their teaching assignments as early as possible, statements giving adjuncts academic freedom, requirements for student evaluations and performance evaluations to be conducted regularly, attendance at department meetings, and access to professional development and support services (Rhode Island College Adjunct Faculty Union, 2012; Service Employees International Union, 2014; Union of Adjunct Faculty Local 1596; 2010). Advocates of unions argue that these agreements establish greater equality among all faculty and strengthen the role of faculty, while opponents argue that unions further divide faculty and turn adjuncts into laborers instead of professionals (Kezar & Sam, 2010).

When adjuncts are hired for purely economic and flexibility reasons, abuse of adjuncts may occur, possibly leading to unionization of the adjuncts. The number of adjuncts belonging to unions has risen significantly in the last decade (Belkin & Korn, 2015; Derousseau, 2015; Miller, 2015; Schmidt, 2012). As of the 2012-13 academic year, about 172,000 adjuncts were unionized (Belkin & Korn, 2015), which equates to about one-fifth of all adjuncts in the United States (Schmidt, 2012). Despite some experts claiming that unionization of adjuncts could result in improved instruction, most institutions prefer to avoid adjunct unionization due to concerns that
it could increase labor costs, which may increase costs for students, and it could limit the ability of administrators to respond to enrollment fluctuations (Derousseau, 2015). Also, given the prior mention that online programs often compete for the best adjuncts, it is important for institutions with online programs to avoid abusing adjuncts and implement practices that counter the common portrayal of adjuncts. For these reasons, understanding how the support of online adjuncts leads to their satisfaction and continued employment is critical.

**Motivation and Satisfaction of Adjuncts**

Cross and Goldenberg (2003) suggest that the literature on adjuncts and their marginal working conditions is largely focused on advocacy rather than scholarship, relying too heavily on aggregated data and voluntary survey data. Eagan, Jaeger, and Grantham (2015) note that the literature on the satisfaction of adjuncts ignores specific campus contexts, lacks measures of institutional support, and lacks strong theoretical frameworks. Bedford and Miller (2013) further note that the literature on adjuncts overgeneralizes and gives the impression that all institutions are deficient in their support of adjuncts. These approaches in the literature have led to the common myth that adjuncts are strongly dissatisfied with their jobs and feel exploited by their poor working conditions (Kezar & Sam, 2010). The more likely reality is that there is only a small percentage of adjuncts who are freeway-fliers, seeking full-time positions and living on starvation wages while teaching multiple classes at multiple institutions (Christensen, 2008; Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012; Leslie & Gappa, 2002). If fact, studies have shown that adjuncts tend to be satisfied as much or more than full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Hoyt, 2012), although adjuncts may have different reasons than full-time faculty for being satisfied, as described in the following reviews of four key studies.
Gappa and Leslie (1993) conducted a mixed methods study during the 1990-1991 academic year to identify the myths, issues, and problems associated with employing adjuncts. Although Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) work is more than 20 years old and may be perceived as outdated, it is important to mention their work since it set the tone for much of the literature that followed on adjunct faculty and led to many of the recommendations for supporting adjuncts that are found in the literature. Their categorization of adjuncts, which was previously mentioned, is still widely used in studies of adjuncts. Their study involved site visits to seventeen colleges and universities in the United States and included institutions from all regions of the country, all classifications of institutions, private and public institutions, and unionized and nonunionized institutions. A variety of administrators, academic leaders, full-time faculty, and part-time faculty were interviewed. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty was also used to supplement data from the participating institutions. In their findings, Gappa and Leslie (1993) indicated that adjuncts are most motivated by the opportunity to gain teaching experience and that the vast majority are somewhat or very satisfied with their teaching jobs. The level of satisfaction is about the same as that for full-time faculty, with the greatest source of satisfaction being the intrinsic rewards of teaching. The adjuncts in their study reported being excited and challenged by their students and many of them particularly enjoyed teaching adult students that bring real world experience to the classroom. Despite the intrinsic satisfaction among the adjuncts, they expressed less satisfaction than full-timers with specific aspects of their jobs. The adjuncts almost universally mentioned dissatisfaction with their second-class status, which refers to petty and thoughtless treatment by administrators and tenured faculty, and a lack of appreciation for their efforts. They expressed frustration about the temporary and indefinite nature of their appointments, salaries lower than
those of full-time faculty, and the lack of benefits. Many also expressed annoyance over their lack of involvement in departmental discussions.

Antony and Valadez (2002) conducted a study that also paints a different picture than the one found in much of the literature. Their widely cited quantitative study used data from the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) and included more than 20,000 full- and part-time faculty across multiple institutions in the U.S. The study provides no evidence that part-time and full-time faculty differ in satisfaction with their workloads, job security, opportunities for advancement, pay, and benefits. The findings indicate that adjuncts are motivated by the opportunity to teach, which provides them with much enjoyment, and their only reasons for leaving one institution for another would be greater opportunities to teach and opportunities to be more involved in an institution through administrative duties, such as advising, curriculum development, or committee work. Although adjuncts in their study indicated some concern with pay, benefits, job security, and opportunities for advancement, full-time faculty were found to be as equally concerned with those issues. Antony and Valadez (2002) conclude that adjuncts are not as disenchanted with their positions as much of the literature indicates and that they get great satisfaction from work they enjoy.

Antony and Hayden (2011) replicated the Antony and Valadez (2002) study nearly a decade later to determine if the findings in the prior study were still valid. The Antony and Hayden (2011) study again used NSOPF data from more than 18,000 full-time and part-time faculty across multiple institutions. The findings of the follow-up study were consistent with the findings of the first study. Antony and Hayden (2011) found that adjuncts are satisfied with many aspects of their jobs, adjuncts and full-time faculty have roughly equal levels of satisfaction, and in some cases adjuncts are more satisfied than full-time faculty. They also found
that despite the general satisfaction of adjuncts, they are dissatisfied with some aspects of their jobs, with the lack of benefits being the primary dissatisfier. Antony and Hayden (2011) suggest that the satisfaction of adjuncts is largely due to the fact that nearly two-thirds of them choose to work part-time and do not aspire to full-time academic careers, as other literature suggests.

Hoyt (2012) also conducted a study that found that adjuncts are satisfied with their teaching positions. Hoyt’s study of 358 adjunct faculty at Brigham Young University used a survey to understand the characteristics of adjuncts, their reasons for teaching, faculty support and development needs, teaching methods used, and their satisfaction and loyalty. The adjuncts were found to have high levels of loyalty to their institutions and overall job satisfaction. About 98% of the adjuncts indicated that they enjoy teaching and that they are motivated and satisfied by the nature of the work itself. Only 17% of the adjuncts expressed dissatisfaction with some aspects of their job, including low pay for the time spent teaching, a lack of raises and benefits, their desire to participate in departmental meetings and committees, and a desire for mentoring, classroom observations, and more interaction with their department chairperson. The adjuncts noted ways to improve the work environment, such as having control over what they teach and what textbooks are used, having office space, better parking privileges, and better communication from administrators.

Generally, studies on the motivation and satisfaction of adjuncts indicate that they are intrinsically motivated to teach and are intrinsically satisfied by teaching. Although they are concerned with many of the issues in the literature that contribute to the portrait of adjuncts as marginalized instructors with poor working conditions, the joy of teaching seems to outweigh the frustration that many of them feel with those aspects of their jobs. The studies reviewed in this section were conducted with adjuncts teaching on campuses. Although they are generally
satisfied, adjuncts who are interested in finding institutions that offer better support may be limited by their proximity to other institutions, which in turn may limit their turnover. It is possible that online adjuncts that are not restricted by location may be intrinsically satisfied by teaching, but look for opportunities at other institutions that address their concerns.

Supporting Adjuncts

Since the 1990s when poor working conditions of adjuncts were starting to come to light, in part due to Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) work, researchers and practitioners have been making recommendations for better supporting adjuncts in order to provide better working conditions, improve instruction, and retain the best adjuncts. By better supporting adjuncts, their teaching may improve and they may become more satisfied and loyal, leading institutions to retain highly qualified adjuncts (Hoyt, 2012). The top recommendations for better supporting adjuncts are to establish pay rates equitable to those for full-time faculty and to offer benefits (Eney & Davidson, 2012; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt et al., 2008; Kezar & Maxey, 2013). New faculty orientation sessions should be offered to adjuncts to share information about the institutional mission, library resources, grading expectations, tutoring services, student disability services, advising, counseling, technical help, and policies and practices that are relevant to doing their jobs and advising students (Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Green, 2007; Hoyt, 2012; Umbach, 2007). Such information may make faculty better prepared to teach and advise students, addressing the issues related to student success and grade inflation. Other well-established recommendations include developing better communication between administrators and adjuncts, offering professional development on teaching practices, mentoring by full-time faculty or more senior adjuncts, regular performance evaluations, early notification of teaching assignments, the provision of office space for on-campus adjuncts, and methods for
recognizing adjuncts’ contributions (Balch, 1999; Eney & Davidson, 2012; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Green, 2007; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt et al., 2008; Nutting, 2003). Additionally, adjuncts should be included in curriculum decisions and departmental meetings (Kezar, 2013). Interestingly, these recommendations seem to be made in reference to all adjuncts and they fail to address the heterogeneity of adjuncts.

**Summary**

The hiring of adjuncts has become a key way in which institutions adapt to changes in the higher education landscape. Since adjuncts are generally paid less than full-time faculty and receive few benefits, they allow institutions to save labor costs while covering fluctuating enrollment and accommodating scheduling limitations of full-time faculty. The literature presents opposing views of the impact of adjuncts in institutions. Several studies indicate that instruction may be of lower quality and students may be less successful when adjuncts teach, as measured by graduation and retention rates, grades, the time spent interacting with students, and the use of learning-centered teaching strategies (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Umbach, 2007). Other studies indicate that grade inflation is rampant among adjuncts, which can damage an institution’s reputation (Johnson, Pitts, & Kamery, 2006; Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005; Kirk & Spector, 2009; McArthur, 1999; Sonner, 2000). These criticisms of the use of adjuncts are countered by other literature claiming that some adjuncts are highly qualified instructors that fill valuable niches in institutions, especially in disciplines where they bring significant industry experience to the classroom (Bettinger & Long, 2010; Cross & Goldenberg, 2003; Lefebvre, 2008). The discrepancies between the benefits and risks of using adjuncts demonstrate the need for targeted support of adjuncts. Adjuncts can be very valuable to institutions, but student success concerns and inappropriate grading can reduce their value.
Appropriate support of adjuncts may mitigate the risks and allow adjuncts to effectively fill teaching gaps at institutions. Unfortunately, as Jaeger and Eagan (2011) indicate, institutional environments may be the source of the risks of hiring adjuncts since many institutions fail to provide adjuncts with appropriate support, such as adequate wages, office space, orientation sessions, professional development, and early teaching assignments, among others. Institutions that value adjuncts and provide adequate support have been shown to have fewer negative aspects of employing adjuncts (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011).

Adjuncts are a heterogeneous group with different motivations for teaching and different sources of satisfaction. Despite a great deal of literature that paints adjuncts as a disgruntled, marginalized group of faculty, studies have shown that on-campus adjuncts are largely satisfied with their adjunct teaching positions despite concerns about certain aspects of their jobs, such as wages and treatment by administrators (Antony & Valadez, 2002; Antony & Hayden, 2011; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Hoyt, 2012). Since online adjuncts are not constrained by proximity to institutions and they can essentially teach anywhere, they may also be largely satisfied, but more likely to seek out institutions that cause them fewer concerns. For these reasons, institutional support of online adjuncts may be particularly important, and such support may need to consider differences among adjuncts.

**Online Adjuncts**

Although distance education was first recognized by the University of Chicago in 1892, educators did not appreciate its potential for educating people around the world until the launch of the World Wide Web in 1991 and the creation of course management systems in the late 1990s (Casey, 2008). Since the early 1990s online course offerings have increased dramatically (Casey, 2008). Flexibility of space and time is essential for learning in the current knowledge-
oriented environment (Stallings, 2001). Online courses and programs have increased in popularity due to the ability of students to complete course work anywhere at any time without being away from their jobs and families (Magjuka, Shi, & Bonk, 2005). Globalization has also contributed to the growth of online learning now that technology spans distance and provides the ability for individuals to connect from around the world (Stallings, 2001).

Just as increases in on-campus enrollments led to the increased use of adjuncts on campuses since the 1960s, the growth of online education since the 1990s has created demand for qualified adjuncts to teach online (Bedford, 2009). Many institutions cannot fill online teaching assignments with full-time faculty due to workload issues or faculty reluctance to use new technologies, so they have turned to adjunct faculty (Bedford, 2009; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Hardy, 2007; Magjuka et al., 2005). The following subsections explore the literature on online adjuncts in detail, covering the benefits and risks of hiring online adjuncts, their characteristics, motivation, and satisfaction, and recommendations for supporting them.

**Benefits and Risks of Hiring Online Adjuncts**

In addition to meeting the demands of growing enrollment, online adjuncts provide other benefits to institutions, including low cost labor, flexibility in hiring and making teaching assignments, the ability to offer specialized courses, and a wide range of qualifications, experiences, and backgrounds of instructors (Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Lefebvre, 2008; Orlando & Piotrus, 2005). These reasons are similar to those for hiring on-campus adjuncts. Adjuncts may be more attractive to nontraditional students that are enrolled in the majority of online courses due to the real-life experience they bring to their teaching (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). Additionally, online adjuncts have been better at adapting to the online environment than many traditional full-time faculty because many have experience working independently and with
technology in other settings, such as corporate environments (Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). Online adjuncts also help institutions preserve traditional faculty roles in their on-campus programs while expanding their institutional missions (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). In general, online adjuncts are a highly valued resource and they are critical for growing online education (Hardy, 2007; Puzziferro-Schnitzer, 2005). This is especially true at the study site since the full-time faculty does not have the capacity to support the projected growth of the online programs.

Given the benefits of employing online adjuncts, it is important for institutions to retain them. Unfortunately an issue for online education administrators has been adjunct turnover (Green et al., 2009). There is strong competition among online programs, including competition for quality instructors, so it is important for administrators to learn how to retain online adjuncts or risk losing them to the competition (Hardy, 2007). Retaining online adjuncts builds stability, consistency, and quality in online programs, helping to build a positive reputation and competitive advantage (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Hardy, 2007). Retention of adjuncts is also important due to the costs associated with recruiting, hiring, and training them (Betts & Sikorski, 2008; Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al., 2009). At the study site, online adjunct voluntary turnover has not been a problem, but given the time invested in hiring online adjuncts and the time and effort spent acclimating them to the curriculum and online course delivery standards, administrators want to ensure turnover does not become an issue.

The literature on online adjuncts does not mention the previously reviewed risks of hiring adjuncts, with the exception of Mueller, Mandernach, and Sanderson (2013). Mueller et al. (2013) conducted one of the only studies to look at the differences between adjunct and full-time faculty teaching online courses. The study compared online sections of a required, introductory
course designed to prepare students to be effective learners in a college setting which were taught by full-time and adjunct faculty. The instructional content, activities, assessments, and grading rubrics were identical across sections, with faculty individualizing instruction through the addition of supplemental material, interaction with students, and feedback. During two semesters data were collected from 396 sections, with half taught by full-time faculty and half taught by adjuncts. The full-time faculty held a faculty position requiring them to work traditional 8-hour days teaching only online courses. Students taking the course from full-time faculty were more likely to complete the course, they received slightly higher grades in the course, they were more likely to enroll for the following semester, and they were more satisfied with their online learning experience than students taught by adjuncts. Mueller et al. (2013) suggest that full-time faculty are more likely to invest in their teaching as an integral component of their jobs. They also suggest that since most adjuncts teaching the online course are supplementing other income, they have less time to invest in the online classroom and less time for professional development. Additionally, Mueller et al. (2013) indicate that due to uncertainty about enrollment, adjuncts are assigned to teach later than full-time faculty, which leaves them with less time to prepare and may negatively impact student learning. The findings mentioned in this study may not be applicable to other institutions that do not employ full-time faculty to teach only online courses during normal business hours.

The risks of hiring adjuncts, which include low quality instruction, reduced student success, and grade inflation, are potentially not as relevant in online education as they are in on-campus instruction. For programs that are entirely online and students that are never on campus, there may be fewer differences between full-time and adjunct faculty, especially in regards to time spent with students and the use of active learning techniques that are required in most online
courses. At the study site, advising is done by professional staff and all courses must adhere to quality standards that promote active learning. Therefore, it is possible that the online education environment mitigates the risks of hiring adjuncts, at least to some extent.

**Characteristics of Online Adjuncts**

Similar to adjuncts teaching traditional courses, online adjuncts are a heterogeneous group, making it difficult to identify their needs and desires and understand how to retain them (Bedford, 2011). Many online adjuncts are employed elsewhere with full or part-time jobs (Adams & Dority, 2005; Lefebvre, 2008). Shiffman (2009) found that 43% of online adjuncts have full-time jobs in addition to their teaching responsibilities. Many of them work in corporate environments, so they are often more technically competent and innovative than full-time faculty (Gaillard-Kenney, 2006), and they tend to be comfortable with structure and working independently, making them ideally suited for teaching online (Orlando & Piotrus, 2005). Online adjuncts tend to be highly qualified with graduate degrees and years of real-world experience, providing administrators with a rich pool of professionals from which they can hire (Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Lefebvre, 2008). Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) categorization of traditional adjuncts, which was previously described, may also apply to online adjuncts.

A growing segment of the online adjunct pool is comprised of individuals who are considered professional online adjuncts (Bedford, 2009). These individuals do not hold full-time jobs and rely on multiple adjunct positions to provide the equivalent of full-time employment. Many of these professional adjuncts also engage in independent scholarly activity to advance their fields and maintain connections to the subject matter outside of teaching (Bedford, 2011). In a study of professional online adjuncts, Bedford (2009) found that they see themselves as entrepreneurs who are in a position to be selective about the institutions for which they work.
Since they spend most of their time teaching online, they tend to be very good at it and thus are valuable resources to institutions. Due to their entrepreneurial spirit and wealth of experience, they can be difficult to attract and retain. Bedford (2009) indicates that it is critical for institutions to address the needs of this group of adjuncts differently from other adjuncts.

**Motivation and Satisfaction of Online Adjuncts**

To understand how to retain online adjuncts, studies in recent years have focused on their motivation and satisfaction using different theoretical frameworks. A qualitative study by Hopkins (2013) uses Maslow’s self-actualization theory and Nakamura’s theory of vital engagement to determine what motivates online adjuncts to work in the online teaching environment. According to Maslow, the highest level of motivation is self-actualization, which is the need for a sense of self-worth and fulfillment (Hartsell, 2006). Vital engagement occurs when individuals have an intense and positive reaction to engagement in an activity (Nakamura, 2001). Hopkins (2013) found that online adjuncts are attracted to teaching online by the flexibility and convenience it provides and that once they are teaching online, they are motivated by the sense that they are making a difference in the lives of students and that they are connecting with students more than they do in face-to-face classes. The online adjuncts also indicated that their institutions offer adequate resources for teaching, but that their pay is low and they lack the ability to plan on future teaching opportunities. Hopkins (2013) concludes that online adjuncts feel a sense of self-actualization by making a difference for students and they experience vital engagement through their interactions with online students. The findings in this study are similar to findings on the studies of traditional adjuncts in which adjuncts were intrinsically satisfied by their positions (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993).

Gullickson (2011) explores the motivation and satisfaction of online adjuncts more
concretely by applying Herzberg’s theory of motivation. Herzberg (1968) identifies motivators that lead to job satisfaction, including achievement, advancement, recognition, responsibility, and the nature of the work itself. Herzberg (1968) also identifies hygiene factors that can either prevent or lead to job dissatisfaction. The term “hygiene” commonly refers to maintenance measures one takes to avoid disease, but Herzberg (1968) uses the term to refer to maintenance measures that an organization takes to avoid employee dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors include job security, compensation in the form of pay and benefits, policies affecting how adjuncts do their jobs, interpersonal relationships with peers and superiors, job status, and working conditions (Herzberg, 1968). Gullickson’s (2011) findings suggest that online faculty are motivated by recognition of performance and the feeling that they are accomplishing something positive and that job dissatisfaction results from poor quality students, institutional policies that are not adjunct-friendly, such as the late assignment of courses, the lack of interpersonal relationships with other faculty, pay rates that are lower than those for full-time faculty, challenges using technology, and heavy workload. These dissatisfiers are similar to those noted in the literature on traditional adjuncts. Since Gullickson’s (2011) study is quantitative in nature, detail about what exactly leads to motivation, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction is not available.

Schroeder (2008) uses Deci and Ryan’s motivational theory of self-determination in a quantitative study to determine what factors motivate adjuncts to participate in online education and what factors limit their continued participation in online education. In self-determination theory the content of goals and the process of pursuing them impacts the quality of life, with the most motivation coming from the pursuit of goals that meet basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In Schroeder’s (2008) study the top motivating factors were flexible working conditions, intellectual challenge, and opportunities to
teach and reach new students. Adjuncts were not motivated by a sense of community and institutional belonging, career exploration, or the pursuit of scholarly activities. The top inhibiting factors were limits on how much adjuncts can teach, workload, and the lack of face-to-face interaction with students, faculty development, training, and support. Schroeder (2008) indicates that the motivating factors are mostly intrinsic in nature and thus teaching online allows adjuncts to satisfy their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as identified in self-determination theory. The findings are also similar to the previously reviewed literature on traditional adjuncts.

Additional studies address the motivation, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction of online adjuncts more generally without ties to specific theoretical frameworks. Studies indicate that a motivator for online adjuncts is the flexibility that teaching online provides (Green et al., 2008; Runyon, 2008; Shannon, 2011; Shiffman, 2009). Other motivators or satisfiers include opportunities to assist with course development (Green et al., 2008), guaranteed scheduling (Larcara, 2010; Runyon, 2008), recognition and respect from full-time faculty and administrators, being given a choice of course preference (Larcara, 2010), and the personal connections that are formed with students (Reeves & Brown, 2002).

Considering dissatisfiers from additional studies, online adjuncts are generally unhappy with their compensation and would be motivated by the perception that they are receiving fair compensation (Dolan, 2011; Green et al., 2008; Shannon, 2011). The lack of benefits, job security, and advancement opportunities also lead to dissatisfaction (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). Additionally, work environment factors can lead to dissatisfaction, including feelings of isolation and disconnect from peers and administrators, a lack of recognition, and a sense that they are being taken for granted (Dolan, 2011; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Maier, 2012). In Dolan’s (2011)
study, some online adjuncts indicate that they are only acknowledged when there is a problem and not when they are deserving of praise. Technology failures, technical support, insufficient training, and concerns about being evaluated only on the basis of student surveys are also mentioned as dissatisfiers (Maier, 2012; McLean, 2006; Shannon, 2011).

The nature of the online programs and related policies also lead to dissatisfaction. Students who are not qualified or who are underprepared discourage online adjuncts from continuing to work for an institution (Green, et al., 2009; McLean, 2006; Shannon, 2011). The inability to exercise academic freedom can impact adjunct satisfaction (Shannon, 2011). Some institutions have rigid policies about how online courses are run, limiting or eliminating the ability of online adjuncts to alter the course content (Lefebvre, 2008). Some institutions hire faculty to create master online courses that are used by all faculty teaching the courses (Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012). This master course approach ensures consistent delivery and quality (Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012), but discourages online adjuncts who may disagree with the approach or quality of the course content (Shannon, 2011).

The literature on the motivation and satisfaction of online adjuncts is similar to that on traditional adjuncts. In general, online adjuncts are motivated and satisfied by teaching and interacting with students, but like traditional adjuncts, they are dissatisfied with some aspects of their jobs. The key dissatisfiers seem to be low pay, uncertainty about future teaching assignments, last minute teaching assignments, and a lack of professional development and institutional support.

**Recommendations for Support**

Research on the motivation, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction of online adjuncts has led to recommendations for supporting them, although much of the literature on support comes from
articles that are not tied to empirical studies and instead come from theoretical articles or professional publications. A key aspect of supporting online adjuncts is providing a comprehensive orientation (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003; Tipple, 2010). Each institution has its own priorities and goals, so orientation programs should aim to inform and assimilate online adjuncts into the institutional community (Puzziferro-Schnitzer, 2005; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). An orientation should cover the culture and mission of the institution, program goals, information on instructional practices, administrative and technical support contacts, administrative procedures, copyright guidelines, and the curriculum process (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003; Tipple, 2010). Details of the specific course management system in use should also be covered (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Maier, 2012).

The literature indicates that ongoing communication between administrators and online adjuncts is critical (Adams & Dority, 2005; Biro, 2005; Hogan & McKnight, 2007; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). Dolan (2011) found a discrepancy between what administrators consider good communication and how online adjuncts perceive communication. Clear and frequent communication through a variety of means eliminates feelings of isolation on the part of online adjuncts (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Dolan, 2011; Green et al., 2009). Rogers et al. (2010) indicate that telephone communication in particular is very effective with online faculty. A key aspect of communication is an ongoing evaluation and feedback process (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009; Tipple, 2010). Weschke and Canipe (2010) encourage formative evaluations of faculty that build the foundation for communication. Instead of providing personalized feedback, many institutions use standardized feedback forms or rubrics that fail to recognize unique teaching strategies and provide limited feedback (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009).
Many institutions only offer online adjuncts technical and instructional design training (McLean, 2006; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009; Velez, 2009). More comprehensive training and professional development programs may be needed to retain online adjuncts and foster quality online teaching (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). Professional development should be provided for online adjuncts at all levels, from beginner to experienced (Green et al., 2009; Vaill & Testori, 2012). Topics should focus on challenges online adjuncts face, such as dealing with students and identifying new teaching strategies (Rogers et al., 2009).

Communities of practice are recommended as a strategy for supporting faculty and making them feel connected to an institution (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Dolan, 2011; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Maier, 2012; Velez, 2009). Studies show that online adjuncts feel it is important for them to share experiences and ideas about teaching with other online instructors (Dolan, 2011; Larcara, 2010; Maier, 2012). Maier (2012) notes that interaction among online faculty is greatly overlooked by most institutions. Communities of practice can easily be created via online communication tools (Hardy, 2007).

Mentoring by more experienced adjuncts or full-time faculty is another recommendation for supporting online adjuncts (Biro, 2005; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Maier, 2012). Maier (2012) indicates that nearly half of online faculty have a strong interest in a mentoring program. Biro (2005) interviewed online adjuncts who felt that mentoring had been helpful when they taught their first online course. Mentoring provides online adjuncts with peer support and contributes to community-building (Puzziferro-Schnitzer, 2005).

Strong instructional support to assist online adjuncts with their teaching is also recommended (Maier, 2012). A team of instructional designers, technologists, and media experts are needed to support effective, student-centered online instruction (Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012).
Instructional designers working with faculty on pedagogical issues are important for providing a quality educational experience (Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012). Instructional designers can provide online faculty with the personalized communication, evaluation, and feedback they may desire (Vaill & Testori, 2012).

Additional support recommendations include providing fair compensation, opportunities for career advancement, and new responsibilities (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al, 2009). Providing opportunities to participate in curriculum development or the creation of new courses in the online format are examples of responsibilities that are attractive to some online adjuncts (Green et al., 2009). Face-to-face meetings where online adjuncts visit the institution’s campus and meet administrators and full-time faculty are also recommended (Dolan, 2011).

The recommendations mentioned in this section are almost identical to the recommendations for supporting traditional adjuncts. The on-campus work environment of traditional adjuncts and the independent, remote work environment of online adjuncts is quite different, so differences among recommendations for supporting the two groups could reasonably be expected. The similarities among the recommendations for supporting both types of adjuncts lead to questions about the validity of the recommendations for supporting online adjuncts. The literature on traditional adjuncts has mostly preceded the literature on online adjuncts, so it is possible that the recommendations for supporting traditional adjuncts have simply been generalized to online adjuncts without significant consideration of how the two groups of adjuncts are different.

Another reason to question the validity of the recommendations for supporting online adjuncts is that two empirical studies indicate that some recommended support types may not be what online adjuncts desire (Runyon, 2008; Schroeder, 2008). Runyon conducted a study of
online adjuncts at a university in the Midwest that only offers online programs. The quantitative study used a survey to determine the motivations of online adjuncts according to Herzberg’s theory, which was described earlier in reference to Gullickson’s (2011) study. Online adjuncts in the study were mostly motivated by intrinsic rewards, such as intellectual challenge and feeling that they had shared knowledge with students. Most online adjuncts in Runyon’s (2008) study were not interested in activities outside of their teaching duties, such as mentoring, communities of practice, and professional development. The online adjuncts also indicated that communicating with other instructors and administrators does not increase their feelings of association with the institutional community.

Schroeder’s (2008) study, which was described previously in more detail, used a survey to determine the motivations, perceptions, and needs of adjuncts who have taught online at a Midwestern university. The findings also showed that online adjuncts are motivated by intrinsic factors, such as intellectual challenge, the opportunity to teach, and the opportunity to develop new ideas. Extrinsic motivators included a flexible work schedule and the lack of a commute. Schroeder’s (2008) findings also indicate that communities of practice and mentoring may not be desired since online adjuncts are not motivated by having a sense of community or institutional belonging.

These discrepancies between the support recommendations made in numerous articles and the studies by Runyon (2008) and Schroeder (2008) may arise from differences in the support desired by online adjuncts due to their background and prior experience. Few studies have explored differences in the support desired by online adjuncts. Shiffman (2009) used Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) four categories of adjuncts to identify the motivations and satisfaction of online adjuncts. The largest category was specialists (43%), followed by freelancers (27%),
career enders (9%), aspiring academics (8%), and an additional 13% that did not identify with any category. Online adjuncts in the specialist and career ender categories were more satisfied with their teaching roles and their treatment by institutions. Those in the aspiring academics category differed the most from online adjuncts in the other categories, ranking salary, career advancement, and job security as satisfiers more often than other online adjuncts. Shiffman’s (2009) study supports the claim that online adjuncts are a heterogeneous group, but does not contribute to the literature on supporting them.

Bedford and Miller (2013) conducted an exploratory study of online adjuncts to identify them by professional employment category and professional needs. The professional employment categories grouped online adjuncts by their education and work situation, such as recent graduates looking for employment, full-time part-timers, and those using adjunct teaching as a stepping stone to full-time positions. The findings indicate that online adjuncts in the different professional employment categories have different levels of need for career advancement and flexible work schedules. Bedford and Miller (2013) suggest that their findings may also apply to other types of support.

Given that most of the support recommendations in the literature are not tied to empirical studies, there is an opportunity for a study to explore how online adjuncts feel about the different types of support and what other types of support they may need. Interestingly, the studies that have been conducted on online adjunct support (Runyon, 2008; Schroeder, 2008) indicate that some of the recommended types of support may not contribute to motivation or satisfaction.

Summary

Online adjuncts are valuable resources for institutions that are experiencing growth in online education. Turnover of online adjuncts has been an issue for some institutions (Green et
al., 2009). Online adjuncts are a heterogeneous group with many having advanced degrees and employment in corporate environments, although there is a growing population of professional online adjuncts who make a full-time living by teaching part-time for multiple institutions (Bedford, 2009, 2011; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006). To understand how to retain this diverse group of adjuncts, studies have looked at the motivation and satisfaction of online adjuncts. Findings show that online adjuncts are intrinsically satisfied, but they have some dissatisfaction from factors such as salary, workload, institutional policies, isolation, and a lack of recognition (Gullickson, 2011; Hopkins, 2013; Schroeder, 2008). Many recommendations for supporting online adjuncts are present in the literature, including providing orientations, regular communication, evaluations and feedback, training and professional development, communities of practice, mentoring, and instructional support (Adams & Dority, 2005; Biro, 2005; Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Dolan, 2011; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Hogan & McKnight, 2007; Maier, 2012; McLean, 2006; Puzziferro-Schnitzer, 2005; Rogers et al., 2009; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003; Tipple, 2010; Vaill & Testori, 2012; Velez, 2009; Weschke & Canipe, 2010).

Despite the significant amount of literature making these recommendations, there are reasons to question the validity of the support recommendations for online adjuncts. The recommendations for supporting online adjuncts are very similar to the recommendations for supporting traditional adjuncts, making it seem that the recommendations have been generalized without investigating how the differences among the work environments for the two populations may lead to the need for different types of support. Also, some studies suggest that the recommended types of support do not meet the needs of all online adjuncts and some online adjuncts are not interested in some of the recommended support types (Runyon, 2008;
Schroeder, 2008). Furthermore, the recommendations for supporting online adjuncts do not mention how support can accommodate the heterogeneous nature of online adjuncts, despite there being literature that makes it clear that they are a heterogeneous group. In the following section, literature on employee turnover is explored in order to consider how the literature on online adjuncts relates to their turnover.

**Employee Turnover**

The literature is rich with claims for why institutions should strive to retain online adjuncts, including the need for stability, consistency, quality, maintaining reputation, and avoiding the high costs of turnover (Betts & Sikorski, 2008; Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Pinkovitz, Moskal, & Green, 1997). In order to understand how to limit adjunct turnover, myriad studies have looked at the motivation and satisfaction of both traditional and online adjuncts, implying that by understanding what motivates and satisfies adjuncts, institutions can provide support that motivates and satisfies them, leading to their retention (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Gullickson, 2011; Hopkins, 2013; Hoyt et al., 2008; Kezar, 2013; Maier, 2012; Runyon, 2008; Satterlee, 2008; Schroeder, 2008; Shiffman, 2009). Given the goal of many institutional administrators to retain online adjuncts, including the researcher of this study, a closer examination of the employee turnover literature was conducted to determine if the literature on adjuncts has parallels to what is known about employee turnover.

Turnover is a common phenomenon across organizations, so it is no surprise that there is a well-established literature stream on turnover that spans several decades. Numerous researchers have developed models that describe the antecedents of turnover and turnover intentions. Those models and the antecedents they include are described in the following subsection, with the
summary section grouping the antecedents into categories. Subsections on the turnover of part-
time and remote employees and strategies for reducing turnover are also included.

**Turnover Process Models**

One of the earliest turnover process models was developed by Porter and Steers (1973) based on their review of turnover literature during the prior decade. Porter and Steers (1973) indicate that overall job satisfaction is consistently and negatively related to turnover intentions, so that as an employee’s job satisfaction increases, the likelihood of that employee voluntarily leaving his or her job decreases. Porter and Steers (1973) identify numerous factors that lead to job satisfaction. Organizational factors are those that impact employees, but which are determined by individuals external to an employee’s work group. Organizational factors include the perceived fairness of pay and perceived opportunities for promotion that lead to employee expectations that continued participation in the organization will result in pay and/or promotion-related rewards. Work environment factors were also explored, including those related to supervision and peer groups. The perceived fairness and equity of treatment of employees and the degree to which supervisors meet employees’ needs for recognition and feedback were found to be related to satisfaction and turnover. Peer group interactions were found to have mixed results as they relate to satisfaction and turnover, possibly because some people have a lower need for affiliation than others. Job content factors that were found to positively impact turnover include task repetitiveness and the perceived lack of job autonomy. Personal factors were also found to impact satisfaction and turnover, such that employees with longer tenure in their jobs and with jobs that meet their career interests have lower turnover rates, while employees with large families or significant family responsibilities have higher turnover rates. Porter and Steers (1973) indicate that the concept of “met expectations” is important in a turnover model, as every
employee has expectations related to pay, promotion, supervision, peer group interactions, and job content. The degree to which those expectations are met influences the turnover intentions of the employee. Porter and Steers (1973) suggest that organizations can better meet expectations by increasing the rewards that are available, improving supervisory and co-worker interactions, and tempering employees’ expectations by communicating about what is realistic. Although the Porter and Steers (1973) model is more than 40 years old, it has relevance to adjuncts. Based on the literature about adjuncts’ satisfaction and dissatisfaction, it is reasonable to conclude that adjuncts are having expectations met in some areas, such as the work content, but expectations are not met in other areas, such as wages, job stability, interactions with peers and supervisors, and policies and procedures impacting working assignments. Therefore, understanding what online adjuncts expect from their jobs may be important to limiting their turnover.

Mobley (1977) developed a simplistic model also identifying satisfaction as an antecedent of turnover and describing the thought process of an employee from the point of feeling dissatisfied to the point of leaving his or her job. Mobley (1977) indicates that a dissatisfied employee has thoughts of quitting that leads him or her to evaluate the likelihood that a job search will result in a better alternative. The employee considers the cost of quitting, such as the loss of seniority and benefits, and the ease of moving to a new position. If an employee proceeds to a job search, all alternatives are compared to the present job and the employee may or may not leave depending on whether or not an alternative is perceived as superior to the present job. The availability of acceptable alternatives and the costs associated with changing jobs are the key components of Mobley’s model. Considering online adjuncts, the growth of online education has led to an abundance of adjunct teaching positions, so alternatives are readily available. Since online adjuncts have few benefits, there are also relatively few costs associated
with leaving their positions.

Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino (1979) expanded on the work of Porter and Steers (1973) and Mobley (1977), introducing the notion of job attractiveness as an antecedent to turnover in addition to job satisfaction. According to their model, Mobley et al. (1979) recognize that individual employees differ in their perceptions, expectations, and values, which leads to personalized evaluations of job alternatives. They note that work values and interests relative to non-work values and interests and the non-work consequences of leaving or staying in a job are carefully considered by employees. These perceptions and evaluations by the employee lead to a sense of both job satisfaction and job attractiveness. Mobley et al. (1979) indicate that job satisfaction is related to how an employee feels about a job in the present, whereas job attractiveness is future-oriented and is based on expectations that the job will lead to the attainment of valued outcomes. For example, an employee may be dissatisfied with a job, but have reason to believe that staying with the job will lead to desired goals (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979), such as increased pay or promotion. For an adjunct, job attractiveness may mean fair pay, early teaching assignments, and guaranteed teaching assignments. Based on the Mobley et al. (1979) model, it is not clear if other recommended types of support mentioned in the adjunct literature would enhance job attractiveness.

In an attempt to clarify how dissatisfaction leads to turnover, Hom and Kinicki (2001) built upon Mobley’s (1977) model by integrating three new constructs: interrole conflict, job avoidance, and unemployment. Interrole conflict occurs when there is a conflict between an employee’s work and non-work roles. For example, a demanding job may drain time, energy and attention away from a non-work role, such as parenting or volunteering, which increases feelings of job dissatisfaction for the employee (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). Job avoidance is a behavioral
reaction to dissatisfaction, such as being tardy or absent. Although job avoidance is not presumed to impact dissatisfaction, it is behavior that strengthens the likelihood that an employee will quit (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). Finally, unemployment was introduced into the model as a moderator between dissatisfaction and turnover, so that as unemployment rates decrease, an employee may perceive that more job alternatives are available, increasing the likelihood of job searching or quitting (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). A survey of managers, salespersons, and auto mechanics supported the addition of the new constructs. Considering adjuncts, this model may not be overly relevant. Given the part-time, temporary nature of adjunct work, it is unlikely demands of the job cause interrole conflict, unless the conflict is due to the lack of full-time permanent work. Job avoidance is unlikely to occur among adjuncts hoping for future teaching assignments. Unemployment rates also may not affect online adjuncts much due to the apparent abundance of such positions.

The importance of economic factors is highlighted in a model by Muchinsky and Morrow (1980). Their model identifies many of the same turnover factors as Porter and Steers (1973), categorizing them as individual factors and work-related factors. Individual factors such as age, length of service, and family size are negatively related to turnover. Employees that are primary wage earners for their families are less likely to leave their jobs. Work-related factors involve the interface between the employee and organization and include the receipt of recognition and feedback, job autonomy, supervisor style, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, pay, role clarity, organizational size, task repetitiveness and the size of the work unit. Employees are less likely to leave their jobs if they receive feedback and recognition, have nurturing supervisors, get along with co-workers, are paid fairly, are clear on their role within the organization, work for smaller rather than larger organizations and work groups, and have variety in job tasks.
Muchinsky and Morrow (1980) also identify economic factors as having the strongest impact on turnover, including the unemployment rate, the industry in which the employee works, and the geographical location of the organization. Muchinsky and Morrow (1980) suggest that even if individual and work-related factors make employees think of quitting, most will not do so if alternative jobs are not reasonably available in the industry and geographical location where they work. In other words, low unemployment rates lead to higher turnover rates (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980). This model is particularly relevant to online adjuncts because the identified work-related factors are similar to the factors identified in the literature as satisfiers and dissatisfiers of online adjuncts, such as pay, recognition, feedback, supervision, and job autonomy, which is similar to academic freedom.

Building on the models previously mentioned, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001) introduced the construct of job embeddedness into turnover theory. Mitchell et al. (2001) describe job embeddedness as being similar to getting stuck in a net or a web due to many linking elements. Job embeddedness is determined by an employee’s social, psychological, and financial links that include work and non-work friends, family, the community, and the physical environment in which he or she lives and works (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). The more links a person has, the more bound he or she is to the organization. Also affecting job embeddedness is the notion of fit, which is the employee’s perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization. Personal values, goals, plans for the future, and compatibility with the community and environment determine the level of fit with an organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). Sacrifice is also a component of job embeddedness, which involves the perceived costs of leaving an organization. In their study of supermarket and hospital workers, Mitchell et al. (2001) found a negative relationship between job embeddedness and turnover, and each
component of job embeddedness was independently found to negatively relate to turnover, indicating that low job embeddedness is an antecedent of turnover. Given that online adjuncts do not come to campus and likely have few, if any strong connections to other faculty and staff, it is possible that their job embeddedness is low.

As turnover models evolved from the 1970s, they gradually became more complex, considering more variables as antecedents to turnover. Maertz and Griffeth (2004) present one of the more recent and more complex models in which eight motivational forces impacting turnover are presented. Affective forces are emotional responses to membership in an organization, so that an employee who feels positive emotions about the organization will want to maintain membership, but an employee with negative emotions about the organization may considering leaving to avoid emotional discomfort. Calculative forces involve the cognitive evaluation of how future membership in the organization can allow an employee to meet goals and values. Contractual forces are perceptions of obligation to the organization as a result of rewards that have been granted, the receipt of fair treatment, or other perceived organizational support. Behavioral forces involve the perceived costs of leaving the organization, including the loss of benefits and the goodwill that employees build with an employer over time. Alternative forces involve self-efficacy beliefs about the ability to obtain an acceptable alternative job. Normative forces involve perceptions of what family and friends expect an employee to do regarding continued employment with the organization. Moral forces involve an employee’s values regarding turnover, such as believing that it is good to persevere or that change is good. Constituent forces involve an employee’s relationships within an organization, such that they may want to stay with the organization in order to maintain affiliation with individuals or a work group. Maertz and Griffeth (2004) indicate that the forces are interrelated in many different
ways, such that events or cognitions may concurrently affect multiple forces and may cause such forces to act in the same or opposite directions on turnover intentions of an employee. Given the complexity of this model and the heterogeneous nature of adjuncts, it is likely that the forces will be different for each online adjunct, depending on individual motivations, personal situations, and other factors.

**Turnover among Part-time and Remote Employees**

Most turnover research has been conducted with full-time, on-site employees. Online adjuncts are part-time employees usually working from home, so literature on part-time and remote employees was reviewed to determine if turnover processes are different for those groups of employees. One of the few studies examining turnover among part-time employees is by McBey and Karakowsky (2000), which has findings indicating that the reasons for turnover among part-time employees are largely different than the reasons for turnover among full-time employees. Findings indicate that among part-time employees, job satisfaction does not relate to turnover as it does for full-time employees, which McBey and Karakowsky (2000) suggest is because non-work factors, such as family life, have a stronger impact on turnover than satisfaction. The impact of individual characteristics on turnover was similar for part-time and full-time employees, with employees who stay with an organization being older, more highly educated, married, and financially responsible for supporting a family. Job performance was not significantly related to turnover among part-time employees, likely because the ability to work part-time is more important to the part-time worker than performance (McBey & Karakowsky, 2000). McBey and Karakowsky (2000) conclude that many of the reasons for turnover among part-time workers are related to non-work factors which are beyond the control of management. The McBey and Karakowsky (2000) study assumes that part-time workers only have part-time
employment, but data on adjuncts indicate that many of them have full-time employment elsewhere. Therefore, the applicability of this study to online adjuncts may be limited.

Senter and Martin (2007) also studied turnover among part-time employees at a retailer by using an employee survey and turnover data collected from union records over a four year period. Their study found differences in turnover rates for different groups of part-time employees. Job satisfaction was related to turnover only for married part-time employees who contribute less than 50% of their household income and those who have an additional job. The economic quality of job alternatives was related to turnover for all part-time employees, except for single individuals with less than 50% of their income coming from their part-time jobs and married individuals who contribute less than 50% of household income. Considering the reasons for turnover, Senter and Martin (2007) determined that part-time employees with more fixed attachments, such as families and responsibilities for household income, are more similar to full-time employees than to part-time employees with fewer fixed attachments. Senter and Martin (2007) suggest that part-time employees cannot all be treated the same when considering how to reduce turnover. This study has more relevance to online adjuncts since it allows for heterogeneity among employees. Online adjuncts who have other jobs may place a lot of emphasis on job satisfaction since their other job may provide most of their income.

Since online adjuncts are remote employees, studies of turnover on remote employees were reviewed. Turnover literature refers to remote employees as telecommuters. Few studies have been done on telecommuters and turnover, in part because telecommuting is a fairly recent work option starting in the 1990s. One of the earliest studies was conducted by Igbaria and Guimaraes (1999), which looked at the turnover of 225 remote salespersons from a large company. Findings indicate that telecommuters were more satisfied than non-telecommuters.
with their work overall and their supervisors, they were less satisfied with their co-workers and promotion opportunities, and they had higher overall satisfaction and a reduced likelihood of leaving their jobs. The telecommuters indicated that working from home made them more satisfied because they had reduced role conflict between their work and non-work roles (Igbaria & Guimaraes, 1999).

Other studies of teleworkers and turnover have had similar findings. Golden (2006) studied telecommuters at a large company and found that the amount of telecommuting was negatively related to turnover, so that as employees telecommuted more, their likelihood of leaving their jobs decreased. Golden (2006) suggested that the absence of commuting and the flexibility to accommodate family needs makes telecommuters more satisfied with their work situations than non-telecommuters. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) conducted a meta-analysis which indicated that telecommuters perceive greater autonomy and lower role conflict between work and non-work roles. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) also found that telecommuting does not impact social ties to others at work and that telecommuters perceive high quality relationships with their supervisors. Job satisfaction was higher and turnover intentions were reduced among telecommuters (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Given the nature of online adjunct positions and these studies on remote workers, it is possible that online adjuncts will be greatly satisfied by their work arrangements and they may also have different perspectives on their jobs than traditional adjuncts do.

**Strategies for Reducing Turnover**

The models mentioned previously looked at what causes or prevents turnover, but did not explore strategies that organizations can take to reduce turnover. In fact, the turnover literature is generally lacking empirical studies of the effectiveness of interventions for reducing turnover.
(Webb & Carpenter, 2012). One of the few studies considering strategies for reducing employee turnover was a meta-analysis by McEvoy and Cascio (1985). Their study examined the effectiveness of realistic job previews and job enrichment as turnover reduction strategies. McEvoy and Cascio (1985) define realistic job previews as giving job applicants realistic views of the job prior to accepting a job offer, although they do not indicate how such previews are provided to applicants. They suggest that realistic job previews give applicants appropriate expectations of the job and limit future discrepancies between employee expectations and the actual nature of the job and work environment. Job enrichment is focused on existing employees instead of applicants and involves enhancing the decision-making authority, task variety, and autonomy of employees. McEvoy and Cascio (1985) found that job enrichment strategies were twice as effective at reducing turnover as realistic job previews, leading them to suggest that management should focus on enhancing jobs for existing employees.

The effect of supporting employees’ autonomy on turnover was explored by Liu, Wang, Zhang, and Lee (2011) in a study of workers at a manufacturing plant. The concept of “autonomy support” involves allowing employees to have some say in how and when they complete job tasks and not constantly monitoring them (Liu, Wang, Zhang, & Lee, 2011). Liu et al. (2011) found that autonomy support increases employees’ sense of empowerment, which in turn reduces the probability of turnover. Liu et al. (2011) suggest that managers should find ways to increase autonomy support and foster the sense of empowerment by offering training programs were employees can learn to be autonomous and by not pressuring employees as they complete their work. The notion of “autonomy support” in the Liu et al. (2011) study could be considered synonymous with allowing adjuncts to practice academic freedom.

Efforts to bolster self-efficacy of employees and the impact of those efforts on turnover
were explored by McNatt and Judge (2008). Their study with financial accounting auditors used a meeting and written communications with firm management which were designed to augment self-efficacy by letting employees know that the managers were familiar with the job tasks, they were sympathetic to employees’ concerns, and they had experienced similar challenges in their careers (McNatt & Judge, 2008). Comparing the experimental group with a control group, the interventions were found to improve employees’ job satisfaction and reduce turnover, leading McNatt and Judge (2008) to suggest that social support from management is effective in reducing turnover.

Noting that the turnover literature suggests that mentoring may reduce employee turnover, Hall and Smith (2009) conducted a study of employees at a public accounting firm to determine if mentoring does indeed reduce turnover. Mentoring was defined as an interpersonal exchange between a senior employee, the mentor, and a junior employee, the mentee, in which the mentor provides direction, support, and feedback to the mentee regarding career plans and personal development (Hall & Smith, 2009). Two forms of mentoring were studied, including career development mentoring that prepares the mentee for career advancement by providing assistance with learning the job and sponsoring the mentee for important assignments, and psychosocial mentoring that aims to develop the mentee’s identity and sense of self by sharing personal experiences and acting as a friend and role model (Hall & Smith, 2009). Results indicate that psychosocial mentoring reduces turnover intentions, but career development mentoring increases turnover intentions because it increases the mentee’s confidence and perception that they can find alternative employment elsewhere (Hall & Smith, 2009).

A systematic review of research in social work, teaching, and nursing was conducted by Webb and Carpenter (2012) to identify interventions that reduce employee turnover. Their
review indicated that interventions aimed at employees, such as realistic job previews and training, have little effect on turnover rates. Organizational interventions, such as orientation programs, mentors, employee evaluations and feedback, and having groups of employees work in teams to solve organizational issues, substantially improved turnover rates. Administrative interventions also significantly reduced turnover, including reducing paperwork, changing working hours to offer flexibility, providing clerical support, improving communications between management and staff, and including employees in collaborative decision-making with management (Webb & Carpenter, 2012). The results of this study and other strategies for reducing turnover are in line with many of the support recommendations in the adjunct literature, lending support to the recommendations.

**Summary**

The turnover process models focus on the negative relationship between overall job satisfaction and turnover and attempt to identify antecedents to the job satisfaction and turnover relationship. The antecedents can be categorized as individual factors, organizational factors, and economic factors. Individual factors affecting turnover are related to characteristics of individual employees that are largely out of the control of employers. Economic factors, such as the unemployment rate, are also out of the control of employers.

Numerous organizational and job-related factors are mentioned in the literature as impacting turnover. Such factors can be controlled by employers, so these types of factors are most relevant to this study. Pay and promotion opportunities are important factors (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973), so that employees who perceive they are being paid fairly and who have reason to believe they will receive future pay increases and promotions are more likely to stay in their jobs. Issues related to supervisors and management in general impact
turnover, including recognition, feedback, communication, and other forms of organizational support (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973). Thus, employees who are recognized for their efforts, who receive feedback that helps them improve, and who receive regular, helpful communications from management have lower turnover rates. Job-related factors, such as task repetitiveness, autonomy, decision-making, and role clarity impact turnover (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973), so that employees with more task variety, the autonomy to decide how and when to complete job tasks, and roles that are clearly defined have lower turnover. Some of these organizational and job-related factors connect to issues mentioned in the literature as satisfiers and dissatisfiers of adjuncts.

Few empirical studies have been conducted on strategies or interventions for reducing turnover. Of the studies that are available, the strategies that have been implemented correlate to many of the antecedents noted in the turnover literature and have negative relationships to turnover. Strategies mentioned in the literature that have been shown to reduce turnover include increasing task variety, allowing employees to have some autonomy and a role in decision-making, supportive communications with supervisors, providing performance evaluations with substantive feedback, and mentoring (Hall & Smith, 2009; Liu et al., 2011; McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; McNatt & Judge, 2008; Webb & Carpenter, 2012). Most of these strategies are consistent with recommendations in the literature for supporting adjuncts.

In general, the turnover literature makes it apparent that institutions need to understand what online adjuncts expect from their jobs and what factors make an online adjunct teaching position at one institution more attractive than a position at a different institution. This information can help administrators tailor support and employee retention strategies to meet the needs of online adjuncts. This study explores these issues as they relate to turnover intentions of
online adjunct faculty.

One of the antecedents of turnover that is mentioned in the literature is perceived organizational support (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004), which is a construct of organizational support theory. Given the importance of support to the problem being studied and the mention of organizational support in the turnover literature, the literature on organizational support theory is reviewed in the following section, revealing many connections to the antecedents of turnover.

**Organizational Support Theory**

Given this study’s purpose and the mention of perceived organizational support in the turnover literature, the research problem was studied through the lens of organizational support theory as a theoretical framework. This section of the literature review focuses on organizational support theory, the theory’s central construct of perceived organizational support (POS), and the antecedents and consequences of POS. Since institutions of higher education are organizations, the use of the term “organizational support” in this theory can be considered synonymous with the term “institutional support.”

Organizational support theory was introduced by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa in 1986. Building upon the social exchange literature, their theory uses concepts from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). According to social exchange theory, social exchanges among individuals generate obligations that are based on a trust that goodwill will be reciprocated in the future (Emerson, 1976; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). According to the norm of reciprocity, individuals feel obligated to respond positively to favorable treatment received by others (Gouldner, 1960). The norm of reciprocity is considered a cultural mandate and a universal principle, with degrees of reciprocity varying across cultural and individual differences (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Extending the theory
to the work environment, the concepts of social exchange and the norm of reciprocity indicate that employees respond positively to favorable treatment from employers (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). The theory also implies that poor treatment can be reciprocated. As previously mentioned in the section of this literature review that covered the risk of hiring adjuncts, Umbach (2007) suggests that adjuncts spend less time with students and use fewer active learning techniques because they are reciprocating the poor support they often receive from institutions.

Eisenberger et al. (1986) introduced organizational support theory in their two-part study that looked at the globality and strength of perceived organizational support and its impact on the absenteeism of employees. Perceived organizational support (POS) is the main construct of organizational support theory, referring to the degree to which employees perceive that an organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. The first part of the study included a sample of 361 employees from nine organizations in the United States, including manufacturing firm white-collar workers, credit bureau clerical workers, telephone company line workers, bookstore bookkeepers and clerks, law firm secretaries, high school teachers, financial trust company workers, and postal clerks. The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support was created by Eisenberger et al. (1986). The survey included 36 statements representing various possible evaluative judgments of the employee by the organization and discretionary actions the organization might take to benefit or harm the employee. Examples of survey statements are “if the organization could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary, it would do so” and “the organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.” Eisenberger et al. (1986) did not indicate the source of the survey items and did not indicate how it was validated. Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement
with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale. The major finding of the first part of the study is that employees form global beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Global beliefs are those beliefs that are attributed to the organization as a whole, rather than beliefs about individuals within the organization.

In the second part of the Eisenberger et al. (1986) study, seventeen items from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support were combined with a five-item Likert-type questionnaire to measure exchange ideology, which refers to an employee’s beliefs regarding reciprocating treatment received by the organization. Examples of the exchange ideology survey items include “an employee who is treated badly by the organization should lower his or her work effort” and “an employee’s work effort should have nothing to do with the fairness of his or her pay.” The survey instrument was administered to 71 high school teachers. The absenteeism records for the teachers were also obtained. A finding is that POS reduces absenteeism, so that teachers perceiving higher levels of support from their schools were absent less often. Another finding is that the effect of POS is greater for teachers with a strong exchange ideology. Teachers with a strong exchange ideology and positive perceptions of organizational support were absent less than teachers with weak exchange ideologies.

In their discussion of the study’s findings, Eisenberger et al. (1986) indicate that POS increases an employee’s affective attachment to the organization and the expectation that greater work and desirable behaviors will be rewarded. POS is increased by the receipt of praise, approval, and material rewards and the sense that the praise, approval, and rewards are given with sincerity. Combining the findings of the study with social exchange theory’s premise that reciprocation of social exchanges depends on the perceived sincerity of the parties involved, Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggest that praise and approval given generally to all employees have
less impact, or perhaps even a negative impact on POS, whereas praise, approval, and favors given to specific employees increase the POS of those employees. Applying Gouldner’s (1960) notion that the motive of the support donor impacts the norm of reciprocity, Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggest that material rewards, such as pay, benefits, and influence over policy increase POS when they are seen as the result of the organization’s positive disposition towards employees, but such rewards decrease POS when they are attributed to external influences, such as unions. Findings of the study indicated that employees reciprocate organizational support that they perceive as positive by altering their behavior to meet organizational goals, such as reducing their absenteeism. Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggest their findings support the concepts of social exchange and reciprocation by indicating that employees’ commitment to an organization is strongly influenced by the perception of the organization’s commitment to them. The following section examines studies that explore the antecedents and consequences of POS.

**Organizational Antecedents and Consequences of POS**

Since Eisenberger et al. (1986) conceived organizational support theory, numerous studies have looked at organizational antecedents of POS, such as management or supervisor actions, and the consequences of POS, such as employee attitudes and behaviors. Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro (1990) were one of the first groups of researchers to extend the research on POS in their study of six different occupational groups, including high school teachers, brokerage firm clerks, manufacturing workers, insurance representatives, university residence assistants, and police officers. The study used a shortened version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support and additional questions on affective commitment and work-related expectancies. Their findings indicate that high POS among employees results in lower absenteeism, better performance on job tasks, and stronger feelings of affiliation and loyalty to
the organization. The degree to which an employee perceives organization support was also positively related to employee innovation, so that employees experiencing high POS were more likely to make suggestions for improving the organization. Confirming the prior Eisenberger et al. (1986) study, this Eisenberger et al. (1990) study also indicates that employees experiencing high levels of POS expect that their high effort will produce material rewards, such as pay and promotion, and social rewards, such as approval and recognition. Additionally, Eisenberger et al. (1990) suggest that POS promotes affective attachment to an organization and increases performance by raising the tendency of employees to see the organization’s gains and losses as their own, creating a bias in how employees view the organization, and increasing employees’ internalization of the organization’s values and norms. They also suggest that POS creates trust that the organization will notice and reward employee efforts, resulting in employees that are more committed to their jobs and less inclined to seek jobs elsewhere.

Given the prior research indicating that POS positively impacts affective attachment to an organization, Shore and Tetrick (1991) explored whether POS is distinct from the constructs of affective commitment and satisfaction. In their study of 330 employees holding a variety of jobs in a large firm, Shore and Tetrick (1991) found that POS has a strong positive relationship with affective commitment, so that as employees perceive more support from the organization, they exhibit more commitment to the organization. Findings also showed that POS and commitment are distinct, as employees can distinguish between their own commitment levels to an organization and their perception of the organization’s commitment to them. Despite a lack of empirical evidence, Shore and Tetrick (1991) note that POS may directly affect job satisfaction, but they suggest that POS and job satisfaction are distinct from each other because POS is a cognitive assessment about organizational caring and job satisfaction is an affective reaction to
elements of a work situation.

The relationship of POS to job satisfaction was further explored by Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997), along with the favorableness of job conditions. Their study used a survey with questions from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support and questions on the favorableness of job conditions, the organization’s discretionary control over job conditions, and overall job satisfaction. The study included 295 randomly selected alumni from the University of Delaware. The findings indicate that POS is strongly and positively related to job satisfaction and to favorable job conditions that are readily controlled by the employer. Job conditions over which the employer is perceived to have little control have a weak relationship with POS. Eisenberger et al. (1997) also confirmed the distinctness of POS and job satisfaction that was first noted by Shore and Tetrick (1991). For example, an employee may have high POS because he or she believes the organization strongly values his or her contributions and cares about his or her well-being, but have low overall job satisfaction because poor economic conditions may prevent pay raises. In such cases where an employee has high POS and low job satisfaction, the employee may still reciprocate the support they receive with positive work-related behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 1997). Eisenberger et al. (1997) suggest that managers and supervisors can strengthen employees’ POS by making it clear when favorable treatment of employees is discretionary and made with good intentions and explaining the external constraints that restrict the organization’s ability to change unfavorable job conditions.

Two additional studies in 2001 reinforced prior findings that POS is positively related to affective commitment. Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, and Rhoades (2001) conducted a study to determine the relationships between POS, felt obligation, employee exchange ideology, affective commitment, and positive mood. A survey was administered to 413 postal workers in
the United States. Their supervisors also completed surveys rating the employees on job performance, organizational spontaneity, and withdrawal behaviors that typically precede quitting. The findings indicate that POS is positively related to affective commitment and the relationship is mediated by employees’ felt obligation. In other words, high levels of perceived organizational support make employees feel obligated to reciprocate with strong commitment to the organization. The sense of obligation was stronger in employees with strong exchange ideologies, which means that they believe in treating others as they have been treated.

Eisenberger et al. (2001) note that POS is based on the employee’s determination of the malevolent or benevolent nature of an organization’s policies, norms, procedures, and actions, and that an assessment of benevolence meets the employee’s socio-emotional needs by providing assurance that the organization will aid the employee when needed and will reward the employee’s efforts.

In another similar study, Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli (2001) conducted a study to determine if POS is a moderator between organizationally-determined work experiences and affective work commitment. Organizationally-determined work experiences were defined as the receipt of organizational rewards, including raises, procedural justice, which concerns the fair distribution of resources, and supervisor support, such as supportive and caring treatment. Rhoades et al. (2001) surveyed 367 alumni from a university in the eastern United States to obtain a sample with diversity of job types and organizations. Findings of the study indicate that organizational rewards, procedural justice or the fairness of procedures, and supervisor support were positively related to POS, which mediates the relationship between those work experiences and affective commitment. Rhoades et al. (2001) suggest that their findings are consistent with other studies of organizational support theory and social exchange theory, with employees...
reciprocating favorable treatment with greater commitment and performance and reduced turnover.

Following on the work of Rhoades et al. (2001) and their finding that POS increases affective commitment and decreases turnover, Allen, Shore, and Griffeth (2003) looked at the impact of specific supportive practices on affective commitment and turnover, including the practices of allowing employee participation in decision-making, providing employees with opportunities for career growth, and providing fair rewards and recognition. An attitudinal survey measuring participation in decision making, fairness of rewards, growth opportunities, POS, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions was administered to 264 salespeople in a large department store and to 442 insurance agents in a large national insurance company. Findings indicate that supportive practices increase POS and lead to affective commitment to the organization because employees perceive that the organization supports and cares about them. Findings also indicate that POS is negatively related to turnover intentions of employees, although the relationship of POS to turnover is significantly mediated by affective commitment. Allen et al. (2003) suggest that the supportive practices studied do not directly affect turnover, but they affect POS, which is a critical antecedent to affective commitment, which in turn negatively impacts turnover intentions.

Wayne, Shore, Bommer and Tetrick (2002) conducted a study of 211 employees and their supervisors at metal fabricating plants to look at the antecedents and consequences of POS. The findings indicate that procedural and distributive justice are antecedents of POS. Procedural justice refers to the fairness of procedures and distributive justice refers to the fair allocation of rewards among employees. In terms of consequences, POS was found to be positively related to the organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior of employees.
Organizational citizenship behavior refers to discretionary employee behaviors that go beyond normal job duties and that positively benefit the organization, such as helping others, alerting co-workers to potential problems, and putting in more effort than is minimally required by the job (Organ, 1997). Wayne et al. (2002) suggest that managers should establish fair procedures and use rewards and recognition to enhance feelings of trust.

Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, and Allen (2007) also looked at turnover and its relationship to both POS and a subset of POS called perceived supervisor support (PSS). Their study included 225 social workers in the U.S. that were surveyed on their affective commitment to their organization, perceived job alternatives, POS, PSS, and turnover intentions. The findings indicate that POS has a stronger negative relationship to turnover intentions when PSS is low and the relationship of POS to turnover intentions is weaker when PSS is high. In other words, when support by a supervisor is weak, employees look to the overall organization to provide support. Maertz et al. (2007) also found that the relationship between POS and turnover is not always mediated by affective commitment and that the relationship can also be mediated by the norm of reciprocity and a sense of obligation that doesn’t necessarily mean that the employee is affectively committed. Maertz et al. (2007) suggest that to reduce turnover, supervisors should be supportive and should publicize their efforts to improve support by asking employees about what they need to do their jobs better and by allowing exceptions in extreme circumstances to help employees.

Meta-analyses by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) and Riggle, Edmondson, and Hansen (2009) reviewed prior studies on organizational support theory to identify the antecedents and consequences of POS. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that fair treatment, supervisor support, and organizational rewards and job conditions, such as recognition, pay, promotions, job
security, autonomy, and job training, are all considered antecedents of POS with strong positive relationships to POS. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) note that fairness has the strongest positive relationship to POS and they suggest that this is because fairness, which includes having the opportunity to voice opinions and being treated with dignity and respect, is highly discretionary treatment controlled by management. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that affective commitment is the consequence with the strongest positive relationship to POS, followed by job satisfaction, positive mood, and job performance, and that POS has a negative relationship with withdrawal behaviors, such as tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) note that employees with high POS feel an obligation to the organization, find their job more pleasurable, experience a better mood at work, and have higher attendance and punctuality. Similarly, the meta-analysis by Riggle et al. (2009) focused on consequences of POS, finding that POS has a strong positive relationship to organizational commitment and job satisfaction, a moderate positive relationship to job performance, and a strong negative relationship to turnover intentions.

The concept of job fit was introduced into the organizational support theory literature in a study by Dawley, Houghton, and Bucklew (2010), in which job fit is defined as an employee’s perceived comfort level or fit with co-workers and the culture and values of the organization. Surveying 346 employees at a manufacturing facility in the U.S., Dawley et al. (2010) found that perceived supervisor support is positively related to POS and that the relationship is four times greater when moderated by job fit. Findings also indicated that POS is a predictor of turnover intentions, so that employees with high POS are less likely to have turnover intentions. Dawley et al. (2010) suggest that to enhance job fit and POS, organizations should hire individuals with values similar to the organization’s values and that supervisors should create a nurturing culture
in which employees feel their talents are being used.

Mentoring is one of the types of support recommended in the adjunct faculty literature. The role of mentoring in creating POS was explored in a study of substance abuse counselors by Baranik, Roling, and Eby (2010). Findings indicate that mentoring creates a social exchange process in which POS is created because mentees see their mentors as representatives of the organization. Mentoring is positively related to POS only when mentees feel that their mentors publicly endorse their mentees to organizational management and not when the mentors provide coaching and challenging assignments, indicating that only mentoring activities that give mentees a sense of recognition by the organization leads to POS (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010).

**Part-time and Contingent Employees and POS**

Given that adjuncts are employed on a part-time contingent basis, the literature on POS was reviewed for studies on part-time and contingent employees, yielding no studies. The literature was also searched for studies on the POS of remote employees and none were found. Baran, Shanock, & Miller (2012) note that the literature on POS and nontraditional work assignments is just beginning, which explains the dearth of studies on these populations of employees. Eisenberger, Jones, Aselage, and Sucharski (2004) did not study part-time, contingent employees, but they reviewed literature on related constructs and inferred how POS may operate among this group of employees. They noted that employers often invest fewer resources in part-time and contingent employees than they do in full-time, permanent employees and that they are less likely to acknowledge individual accomplishments of such employees. They also suggest that part-time, contingent employees still respond favorably to socio-emotional and impersonal rewards. Eisenberger et al. (2004) further suggest that part-time, contingent employees have fewer expectations of employers, so any reward or favorable
treatment increases POS. Also, employees who voluntarily work in a part-time and/or contingent position are more likely to experience POS than those who work part-time or on a contingent basis, but desire full-time permanent positions (Eisenberger, Jones, Aselage, & Sucharski, 2004). Since organizational support theory assumes full-time, permanent employment and research has not been conducted on part-time, contingent or remote employment, a limitation of this study may be that organizational support theory has less applicability than it would if full-time faculty were studied. However, the absence of studies on part-time, contingent, and remote employees provides an opportunity for this study to contribute to the organizational support theory literature.

**Summary**

Organizational support theory suggests that employees form beliefs about how much an organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, based on the perceived sincerity and discretionary nature of approval, praise, and material rewards (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employees develop perceived organizational support (POS), which creates a sense of obligation among employees to reciprocate with attitudes and behaviors that benefit the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). As previously noted in the review of the adjunct literature, adjuncts are starting to unionize to get better treatment and support from institutions (Bradley, 2013; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Lewin, 2013). Ironically, favorable treatment of employees as a result of unionization does not lead to POS and its associated outcomes because the treatment is not seen as sincere or discretionary (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997).

The antecedents of POS are a variety of material rewards and actions emanating from direct supervisors or organizational management, such as fair pay, opportunities for promotion,
job security, job autonomy, and discretionary praise and approval (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Support from direct supervisors that gives an impression of general caring for the employee is particularly important because supervisors are considered representatives of the overall organization, so supervisor support is seen as an extension of the general disposition of the organization toward an employee (Maertz et al., 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Fair procedures and policies are also important antecedents to POS (Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Wayne et al., 2002).

When employees feel high levels of POS, there are numerous positive consequences, or outcomes, that benefit the organization. The most commonly mentioned consequence of POS is increased job satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009), followed closely by increased organizational commitment (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009; Shore & Tetrick, 1991). Behavioral changes include lower absenteeism and tardiness, better job performance, and reduced turnover or turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2003; Dawley et al., 2010; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Maertz et al., 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009). Employees also have a better mood, they are more loyal to the organization, they are more innovative, and they are generally good organizational citizens, looking out for others and contributing more to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Wayne et al., 2002).

The literature on organizational support theory provides a strong link between the literature on the support of online adjuncts and the turnover literature. Many of the recommended types of support correlate to the antecedents of POS and the organizational factors affecting
turnover. For example, fair pay, job security, and job autonomy are all mentioned in the POS literature, the turnover literature, and the adjunct literature. Discretionary praise and approval, as mentioned in the POS literature, correlates to the adjunct literature indicating the importance of recognizing adjuncts for their contributions and giving them performance evaluations. The adjunct literature mentions that ongoing communication between administrators and adjuncts is critical, which is similar to the POS literature on the importance of supervisor support. Applying the POS literature to adjuncts, it would be reasonable to have dedicated supervisors for online adjuncts who develop personal relationships and portray a sense of caring in order to give adjuncts the type of supervisor support that creates POS. Considering the outcomes of POS, it is possible that POS could make online adjuncts more committed to an institution, more interested in meeting quality expectations, and perhaps less likely to inflate grades due to their positive feelings about their supervisors and the institution. Thus, POS may be the key to reducing the risks associated with hiring adjuncts. The following section discusses how the literature streams that have been reviewed inform the problem being studied, the chosen methodology, and the theoretical framework.

**Summary and Discussion**

The literature on online education indicates that adjuncts are increasingly becoming a key component of the strategy for institutions that offer online programs due to the significant growth of online enrollments and competing priorities among full-time faculty (Bedford, 2009; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Rogers et al., 2010; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). Some literature indicates that there is competition among institutions for the best online adjuncts and that turnover of online adjuncts has been an issue for some institutions (Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007). Attracting and retaining the best online adjuncts is important for enhancing online program quality, consistency,
and reputation (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Hardy, 2007). Literature on traditional adjuncts indicates that there are potential risks when adjuncts are hired, including poor quality instruction, grade inflation, and lower levels of student success as measured by grades, retention rates, and graduation rates (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Johnson, Pitts, & Kamery, 2006; Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005; Kirk & Spector, 2009; McArthur, 1999; Sonner, 2000; Umbach, 2007). Although the applicability of these risks to online education is largely not addressed in the literature and it is possible that the nature of online education mitigates some of the risks by minimizing the differences between full-time and adjunct faculty, institutions must take these risks seriously. Applying the literature on organizational support theory to adjuncts, it is reasonable to suggest that when adjuncts perceive high levels of organizational support, they perform better and their turnover is reduced. Thus, good institutional support of online adjuncts may be the key to reducing their turnover and having them perform better, possibly reducing the potential risks associated with hiring them.

The literature on online adjuncts addresses the issue of turnover by making many recommendations for supporting online adjuncts, with the assumption that good support will increase their job satisfaction and reduce their voluntary turnover. The support recommendations are largely tied to surveys of adjuncts about what satisfies and dissatisfies them, with recommended support addressing the most commonly mentioned satisfiers and dissatisfiers (Green et al., 2008; Gullickson, 2011; Schroeder, 2008). Table 1 provides a summary of the satisfiers and dissatisfiers of adjuncts and online adjuncts that are commonly mentioned in the literature and the associated recommended institutional support types that either enhance the satisfiers or address the dissatisfiers.

The turnover literature and the organizational support literature suggest that the
recommended support for online adjuncts should aid with improving job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2003; Dawley et al., 2010; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Maертz et al., 2007; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009). As employees perceive higher levels of support, their job satisfaction should increase and turnover intentions should decrease. High levels of organizational support would be perceived when organizations give praise, approval, pay increases, promotions, and other materials rewards to specific employees with discretion and sincerity, when procedures and resource allocations are fair, and when supervisors provide strong support that gives employees autonomy and a role in decision-making (Allen et al., 2003; Dawley et al., 2010; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Low levels of organizational support would be perceived in the absence of the previously mentioned conditions, or when the organizational support is given to all employees without discretion or when it is attributed to external forces, such as unions (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Unfortunately, little is known about the effect of support on the turnover intentions of online adjuncts. This study attempted to determine if different types of support meet the expectations of online adjuncts, contribute to their job satisfaction, and make them more inclined to continue their employment with the site institution.
Table 1

Summary of Satisfiers, Dissatisfiers, and Recommended Institutional Support Types for Adjuncts and Online Adjuncts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfiers vs. dissatisfiers</th>
<th>Recommended institutional support</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfiers</strong> – the recommended support types enhance the following satisfiers noted in the literature:</td>
<td>Evaluations of teaching performance</td>
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<td>Recognition of performance</td>
<td>Opportunities for new responsibilities, such as curriculum development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career advancement</td>
<td>Career advancement opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased responsibility</td>
<td>Recognition of adjuncts’ contributions by supervisors/administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Academic freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dissatisfiers</strong> – the recommended support types address the following dissatisfiers noted in the literature:</td>
<td>Pay rates equitable to those for full-time faculty</td>
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<td>Low pay</td>
<td>Benefits, including health, tuition, and retirement benefits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of benefits</td>
<td>New faculty orientations covering institutional mission, policies and practices</td>
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<td>Job security; inability to plan on future teaching opportunities</td>
<td>Clear and frequent communications between administrators and adjuncts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late assignment of courses</td>
<td>Comprehensive training and professional development on technical tools and online teaching practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of interpersonal relationships with other faculty and with administrators</td>
<td>Communities of practice in which adjuncts can share ideas about teaching with their peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient training and professional development</td>
<td>Mentoring by experienced online adjuncts or full-time faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of involvement in departmental discussions</td>
<td>Instructional support from instructional designers and instructional technologists</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Face-to-face meetings where online adjuncts can meet administrators, support personnel, and other faculty</td>
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<td>Inclusion in departmental discussions, such as curriculum discussions</td>
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<td>Guaranteed scheduling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Early notification of teaching assignments</td>
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</table>

**Sources:** Adams & Dority, 2005; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Biro, 2005; Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Dolan, 2011; Eney & Davidson, 2012; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Green, 2007; Green et al., 2009; Gullickson, 2011; Hardy, 2007; Hogan & McKnight, 2007; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt et al., 2008; Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Maxey, 2013; Larcara, 2010; Maier, 2012; Nutting, 2003; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009; Rogers et al., 2009; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003; Schroeder, 2008; Tipple, 2010; Vaill & Testori, 2012; Velez, 2009; Weschke & Canipe, 2010
Concerns with the literature on traditional and online adjuncts were also addressed in this study. One such concern was that the literature on supporting online adjuncts relies heavily on generalizations. For example, the recommendations for supporting online adjuncts are nearly identical to those for traditional on-campus adjuncts and they do not address the dissatisfiers of online adjuncts noted in the literature. The recommendations for supporting online adjuncts that are similar to the recommendations for supporting adjuncts in general include providing orientations, good supervisor communication, evaluation and feedback, mentoring, communities of practice, professional development, appropriate pay, and job advancement (Adams & Dority, 2005; Biro, 2005; Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Dolan, 2011; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Hogan & McKnight, 2007; Maier, 2012; McLean, 2006; Puzziferro-Schnitzer, 2005; Rogers et al., 2009; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003; Tipple, 2010; Vaill & Testori, 2012; Velez, 2009; Weschke & Canipe, 2010). The fact that the recommendations for online adjuncts mirror those for traditional adjuncts leads to concern that researchers have generalized the support needs of traditional adjuncts to online adjuncts without considering differences between the two groups. Schroeder (2008) suggests that similarities in the recommendations are due to many studies including adjunct faculty that teach both online and face-to-face. Therefore, research is needed on adjuncts who only teach online. The sample in this study included adjuncts who only teach online at the study site.

An additional concern this study addressed is the assertion in the literature that online adjuncts are a heterogeneous group, but the support recommendations seem to apply to all, further supporting the notion of generalizations in the literature. Shiffman (2009) and Bedford and Miller (2013) found that online adjuncts are indeed a heterogeneous group coming from different educational and career backgrounds and having different aspirations with regards to
academic careers. The literature, however, generalizes recommendations for supporting online adjuncts and does not mention how the recommendations may or may not apply to online adjuncts with different motivations and backgrounds. Runyon (2008) and Schroeder (2008) found that some online adjuncts are not interested in recommended support services, lending validity to the notion that the literature generalizes and doesn’t account for differences among adjuncts. Kezar and Sam (2011) indicate that many researchers approach their studies with the assumption that adjuncts are dissatisfied and in need of more support, so they seek to demonstrate this with research. The reality may be the opposite since some studies show that both traditional and online adjuncts are generally satisfied (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Hoyt, 2012; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Maynard & Joseph, 2008; Satterlee, 2008). The literature also does not differentiate between online adjuncts with varying amounts of experience teaching online. Bedford (2011) notes that online adjuncts have varying levels of instructional expertise and experience and Velez (2009) indicates that experienced online adjuncts need and desire less support. Therefore, it stands to reason that one-size-fits-all approaches to supporting online adjuncts may leave some of them under-supported or with irrelevant support.

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study based on the approach that other studies have taken to understand the satisfaction of online adjuncts. Most studies have been quantitative and have used surveys with pre-defined categories of support that were selected by researchers (Bedford & Miller, 2013; Green et al., 2009; Gullickson, 2011; Maier, 2012; Runyon, 2008; Satterlee, 2008; Schroeder, 2008; Shiffman, 2009). This approach does not necessarily lead to an understanding of what satisfies online adjuncts, nor does it give online adjuncts an opportunity to express their thoughts on support types outside of the pre-defined
categories. A qualitative study was appropriate for more fully exploring the types of support that online adjuncts expect and their thoughts on their future employment at the study site.

The generalizations in the literature and the approaches taken to study online adjuncts provide opportunities for additional research. This study contributes to the literature on the support of online adjuncts by looking at the institutional support desires of experienced adjuncts who only teach online. The study also considered how online adjuncts perceive institutional support to impact their satisfaction and their intent to continue working for the site institution. Prior studies have looked at what types of support online adjuncts indicate are motivating or satisfying to them, but studies have not looked at their perception of support received and how it may or may not impact actual satisfaction and turnover intentions. Additionally, the issue of online adjunct turnover has never been studied with such a strong emphasis on the turnover and organizational support theory literature. Furthermore, the organizational support theory literature does not include studies of part-time, contingent, remote employees, so this study contributes to that body of literature.

Organizational support theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. There are many points of overlap between the organizational support theory, turnover, adjunct, and online adjunct literature streams that support this framework. The employee turnover literature started more than a decade before the organizational support theory literature, but later turnover literature mentions organizational support theory as an organizational factor negatively impacting turnover (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004), while many studies of organizational support theory mention reduced turnover as a consequence of POS (Allen et al., 2003; Dawley et al., 2010; Maertz et al., 2007; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009). Considering the turnover and organizational support theory literature, many factors and
antecedents are the same, negatively affecting turnover and positively impacting POS. For example, pay, promotion, supervisor support, recognition and approval, autonomy, and job fit are related to both turnover and POS, although the fairness of organizational actions is a critical component of POS. Many of the recommendations for supporting online adjuncts are consistent with the turnover and organizational support theory literature. Also, the antecedents of POS and the organizational factors contributing to turnover correspond to several complaints of adjuncts, such as the lack of autonomy and recognition, poor pay and benefits, and poor communications from supervisors. If online adjuncts are dissatisfied with those aspects of their teaching positions, their POS may be low and they may consider leaving their jobs. These links between POS, turnover, adjunct complaints, and support recommendations validate organizational support theory as an appropriate conceptual framework for examining turnover of online adjuncts.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions among experienced online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines at a private university in the Northeast of the United States. A qualitative study explored the following research questions:

1. What motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online?
2. What institutional support leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs?
3. How does institutional support impact turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site?

Given the existence of prior quantitative research on adjunct faculty satisfaction and a general lack of qualitative research on the topic, this qualitative study was proposed to contribute to the literature and to guide local decision-making at the research site. The study aimed to explore the perspectives of experienced online adjuncts in business-related disciplines at the site institution more deeply than a quantitative study would allow. This chapter discusses the chosen research methods by addressing the following: research paradigm, qualitative research, the research design, participants and sampling, recruitment and access, data collection, data storage, data analysis, and validity and reliability.

Interpretivist Paradigm

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs that guides the design of a study and determines the standards by which the study will be evaluated (Morrow, 2007). Research paradigms include philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, how knowledge is discovered, and the inclusion of researcher values (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). This study
used the interpretivist paradigm, which is also associated with the constructivist paradigm. Interpretivism includes a relativist ontological assumption, indicating that there is no one single truth or reality and that there are as many realities as there are participants since reality is constructed in the mind of the individual (Butin, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). Individual realities cannot be directly observed and must be interpreted (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). To allow for interpretation, interpretivist studies include the epistemological assumption that there is an interactive relationship between the researcher and each participant (Creswell, 2013; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007) and that meaning or interpretation is co-constructed by participants and the researcher through their interaction (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007). Interpretivism suggests that the role of the researcher is to accurately and thoroughly document the perspective of the participants; however, the axiological assumption of interpretivist research is that the researcher’s values and subjectivity are assumed to influence the research (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007).

Interpretivism was an appropriate paradigm for this study because the study aimed to construct knowledge from the perspectives of participants and the interpretations that resulted from interaction between the researcher and participants. The study was informed by the researcher’s relationship to the research problem. As described in the positionality statement in chapter one, the student researcher has a professional role in which she supports online adjunct faculty. Although the student researcher has represented the perspectives of participants as accurately as possible, her positionality undoubtedly impacted the study.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research refers to linguistically-based social science research approaches that
focus on studying the human experience (Polkinghorne, 2010). The interpretivist paradigm underpins qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people make sense out of their lives and how they interpret their experience (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is concerned with the process of how meaning is generated and how and why behavior occurs, rather than the outcomes of a process which are commonly measured in quantitative studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative research is appropriate when a phenomenon is not well understood or when a detailed, in-depth view of a phenomenon is desired (Morrow, 2007). This type of research is emic, which means that it is characterized by categories or constructs that emerge from the insider perspective of participants (Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) and it is idiographic since it focuses on producing knowledge about one or a few individuals, groups, or institutions (Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). A qualitative study is also appropriate when a study has a practice-oriented purpose focused on illuminating specific problems or improving specific practices (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

Given the characteristics of qualitative research, a qualitative approach was appropriate for the purpose of this study. This study aimed to understand how experienced online adjuncts teaching in business-related disciplines at the study site interpret their experience of receiving institutional support and how their interpretation of the experience impacts their job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Since little was known about this phenomenon at the study site, a detailed understanding was needed to ensure that high quality online adjuncts are retained by the institution. As a result of this practice-oriented study, specific practices and policies regarding online adjunct support may be improved at the study site.

A qualitative approach was also appropriate given the lack of qualitative studies that
deeply explore what online adjuncts really think about the support provided to them and how that support impacts their desire to continue employment with an institution. Many studies on online adjunct faculty support and turnover have been quantitative in nature, using surveys in which faculty select types of support that they desire or that motivate them (Green et al., 2008; Gullickson, 2011; Runyon, 2008; Schroeder, 2008). A limitation of these studies is that participants typically select support preferences from a predefined list of support options which may not fully represent their perspectives. Additionally, such quantitative research explores the effects of instructional support, but does not explore the experience of receiving institutional support (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). The quantitative approach also does not allow for the exploration of why online adjuncts have support preferences or how those preferences impact their employment decisions. This qualitative study explored the thought processes of online adjuncts so they can be better understood.

There are additional characteristics of qualitative research that align well with this study. Qualitative research allows for context sensitivity and takes into account the fact that human behavior is strongly influenced by the setting in which the behavior occurs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher of this study was interested in understanding the meaning that online adjuncts make from the support that is given to them specifically by the site institution. The problem explored in this study is very specific to one institution.

In qualitative research, data analysis starts with inductive reasoning and shifts to deductive reasoning as the analysis approaches saturation (Merriam, 2009). Through analysis, findings are developed from the ground up, rather than from the top down (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The initial inductive data analysis allows for new understanding to be created, whereas the predetermined hypotheses of quantitative research can
limit data collection and cause bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). At the site institution, there has been little understanding of how online adjuncts respond to support and how it impacts their job satisfaction and turnover intentions, so the inductive components of data analysis in a qualitative study allow for understanding to be created.

An additional characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is a key instrument of the research, even though other research instruments may be used, such as an interview protocol (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2013). The researcher embeds him or herself in the setting of the participants and has direct interaction with the setting, participants, and associated documentation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the researcher was already embedded in the setting through her role at the site institution and had deep knowledge of the support that is provided to online adjuncts, the practices and policies that affect them, and the contextual elements that the online adjuncts referred to during data collection. Although this embeddedness of the researcher in the study’s setting could be a threat to the validity of the study (Seidman, 2006), by fully disclosing her position and relationship to the participants, the researcher’s role at the site institution can be viewed as a benefit to the development of understanding.

In summary, the nature of qualitative research makes it a good fit for the problem being studied. A quantitative study would not allow for the understanding that is needed in order to appropriately support and retain the online adjuncts at the site institution. A qualitative study allowed for the development of understanding of how online adjuncts interpret their support experiences within the specific context of the site institution.

**Research Approach**

The research design that best fits the research problem is a basic qualitative study, which
is also referred to as a “basic interpretive study” by Merriam (2009, p. 22) and as “general inductive analysis” by Thomas (2006, p. 238). This research approach uses a straightforward set of procedures that are not limited by a specific tradition of qualitative study, such as phenomenology, ethnography, or case study research (Thomas, 2006). It is the most common type of qualitative study found in education (Merriam, 2009) and it is also used extensively in social science research (Thomas, 2006).

Merriam (2009) indicates that the researcher of a basic qualitative study is interested in how people interpret their experiences and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. She further notes that the overall purpose of this type of study is “to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). Merriam’s (2009) description of a basic qualitative study is in alignment with the purpose of this study, which is to understand how online adjuncts interpret the support provided to them by the site institution and how their experience of being supported impacts their satisfaction and turnover intentions.

The inductive approach of a basic qualitative study allows research findings to emerge from the frequent or significant themes in the data (Thomas, 2006). Through an inductive coding process, which is described in more detail in the data analysis section of this chapter, themes or categories that answer the research questions are identified (Thomas, 2006). The themes or categories are presented through rich, thick description incorporating quotes from participants that convey the understanding that has been gained from the study (Thomas, 2006). Since the goal of this study was to understand the perspective of participants, but also to identify common ground among them, the data analysis process and the method of reporting findings allowed for the goals of the study to be achieved.
Participants and Sampling

It was anticipated that ten to twelve participants would be included in the study. The final sample included twelve participants. The participants were adjunct faculty members teaching online at the site institution. Due to programmatic and ethical issues, only online adjuncts teaching in business-related disciplines were included, although that population was also strategic since significant growth is expected in those disciplines. Consistent with the site institution’s hiring practices, all participants had prior experience teaching online at other institutions and they had attained at least a master’s degree in their field of expertise. The adjuncts in the study are supervised by a colleague of the student researcher.

Support for the online adjuncts is primarily provided by the instructional support team of the online school, comprised of a director, who is also the student researcher for this study, instructional designers, instructional technologists, a content developer, and an administrative position. Ancillary support is provided by human resources professionals, information technology staff, academic advisors, and librarians. All of the online adjuncts work remotely and do not have regular in-person contact with the researcher or the support providers. Communication with the online adjuncts generally takes place through email, phone, and web-based conferencing, such as Skype or Zoom. Some of the participants attended a two-day symposium on the campus of the site institution, during which they met the student researcher and other support providers in person. It was anticipated that participants that attended the symposium may have a different view of institutional support than those who did not attend and they may have had a greater sense of rapport with the student researcher.

Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to select participants who can purposefully inform an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam,
2009; Morrow, 2005). Criterion-based and range and variation sampling are two types of purposeful sampling that were used to match the study’s purpose. Criterion-based sampling should always be used in qualitative studies to ensure the sample includes individuals that have experienced the phenomenon under study and that can help answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Morrow, 2005). The criteria for inclusion or exclusion of participants was as follows:

- The participants must be adjunct faculty members at the site institution teaching in business-related disciplines.
- The participants must teach exclusively online for the site institution and not in the traditional classroom so their experience of being supported by the institution is solely related to online teaching. This criterion existed so that participants would not confuse support received as an online adjunct and support received as an on-campus adjunct.
- The participants must be teaching in at least their second academic term at the site institution. This criterion existed so that the study would include participants who had made the decision to continue their employment with the site institution beyond their initial teaching assignment and so participants had had enough exposure to institutional support to be able to comment on it.

A list of online adjuncts meeting the inclusion criteria was obtained from their supervisor.

As of the Spring 2016 quarter, 27 online adjuncts met the criteria noted above. Among those 27 online adjuncts, range and variation sampling was used to include participants with a range of characteristics. A sampling matrix is provided in Table 2, indicating the characteristics that were sampled and the targeted quota for each characteristic.
### Table 2

**Sampling Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Sampling Quota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>At least 2 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 2 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>At least 1 aged 30-39 or younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 1 aged 40-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 1 aged 50-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 1 aged 60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Education Attained</strong></td>
<td>At least 2 with masters degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 2 with doctoral degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Level</strong></td>
<td>At least 2 teach undergraduate courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 2 teach graduate courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Discipline</strong></td>
<td>At least 1 in accounting/finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 1 in general business/management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 1 in hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of employment at site institution</strong></td>
<td>At least 2 with less than 1 year of employment at the site institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 2 with 1 or more years of employment at the site institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online teaching experience</strong></td>
<td>At least 2 with less than 5 years of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 2 with more than 5 years of experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A limitation of the small size of the pool of potential participants was that maximum variation sampling would be difficult to achieve. Thus, a range and variation sampling strategy was used to achieve variation, while acknowledging that maximum variation would likely not be possible. The rationale for the selected participant characteristics and quota is described as follows:

- **Sex**: The pool of potential participants was heavily male, but females were included to the extent possible.
- **Age**: Age was included because adjuncts in different age ranges may have different levels of comfort with technology and the online environment, leading to different views on certain types of institutional support.
- **Level of education attained**: Participants with masters degrees and doctoral degrees were included.

- **Teaching level**: Online adjuncts teach at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The study included participants representing both levels since student characteristics vary between the levels and may lead to different support needs of faculty.

- **Teaching discipline**: Within the business-related disciplines from which the sample was drawn, faculty teach in accounting/finance, management, hospitality, and technology fields. The student researcher attempted to include participants from the various fields.

- **Length of employment at the site institution**: The pool of potential participants had online adjuncts that had worked at the site institution for more than one year and those that had worked at the site institution for less than one year. Participants from both groups were included.

- **Online teaching experience**: Due to the hiring practices of the site institution, all online adjuncts have taught in a fully online mode for a minimum of two years at one or more other institutions. An online adjunct who has taught for just two years may have a different perspective on institutional support than one that has taught online for several more years, so a range of participants with less than five years and more than five years of online teaching experience were sought.

The final sample is indicated in Table 3. The quota set forth in the sampling matrix was achieved. As expected, the final sample was heavily male since the pool of potential participants was also heavily male. Since the site institution’s online programs with the most students fall into the graduate business and management disciplines, it is not surprising that three-quarters of
the participants teach graduate business and management courses, although five of those
participants also teach at the undergraduate level. As the site institution requires faculty teaching
at the graduate level to have a terminal degree, the fact that two-thirds of the participants have
doctoral degrees was expected. Although the sampling quota was met, one characteristic of the
sample that was not anticipated is that more than half of the participants were in their fifties, with
only one in his thirties and only one in his sixties. The interviews did not explore age as a factor
in motivation, job satisfaction, or turnover intentions, so the reasons why so many participants
were in their fifties and how this could have affected the findings is not clear. A possible
explanation stemming from the findings for why so many online adjuncts in this study were in
their fifties is that by the time they reach their fifties, the participants have had significant
practical job experience and they look to have new experiences and share their experiences with
others, which online teaching allows them to do. This distribution of ages may be specific to the
site institution since it is a career-focused institution that values the practical career experiences
of faculty. As such, the perspectives of the participants in this study may differ from the
perspectives of online adjuncts at institutions with a different mission.

Table 3

Final Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Count of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>2 females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1 participant aged 30-39 or younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 participants aged 40-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 participants aged 50-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 participant aged 60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education Attained</td>
<td>4 participants with masters degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 participants with doctoral degrees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teaching Level               | 3 participants teach only undergraduate courses  
|                            | 4 participants teach only graduate courses  
|                            | 5 participants teach both undergraduate and graduate courses |
| Teaching Discipline         | 2 participants teach accounting/finance  
|                            | 9 participants teach business/management  
|                            | 1 participant teaches hospitality |
| Length of employment at site institution | 6 participants had less than 1 year of employment at the site institution  
|                            | 6 participants had 1 or more years of employment at the site institution |
| Online teaching experience  | 5 participants had less than 5 years of experience  
|                            | 7 participants had more than 5 years of experience |

Seidman (2006) indicates that sufficiency and saturation are the two criteria for determining sample size. Sufficiency refers to having a range of participants with varying experiences in relation to the phenomenon under study (Seidman, 2006). Saturation refers to the point in analysis of data where no new information is learned (Merriam, 2009). In this study sufficiency was obtained by including participants with different characteristics, as indicated in the final sample matrix provided in Table 3. Twelve participants were included to achieve saturation.

**Recruitment and Access**

Access to the research site was initially discussed with the dean of the online school at the site institution during the initial conceptualization of the study. Since the study addresses a problem of practice faced at the research site, the dean indicated that her support of the study was strong. Formal approval for the study was sought from the Research Review Committee at the site institution.

Consistent with the sampling strategy described earlier, potential participants were sent a recruitment email with an attached recruitment letter from the student researcher’s email account
Recruitment emails were sent in small batches of two to three at a time in order to stagger interviews and allow time for analysis during data collection. A follow-up recruitment email was prepared in case potential participants did not respond, but the follow-up email was not used since enough participants responded to the initial recruitment email. The recruitment emails are provided in Appendix A and the recruitment letter is provided in Appendix B. Individuals were asked to email or call the student researcher to indicate their willingness to participate and all responded via email. The student researcher scheduled interviews with individuals that responded.

**IRB Approval and Protection of Human Subjects**

The site institution does not have an institutional review board, but approval of doctoral research studies is granted by the Research Review Committee. To obtain approval from the committee, an online Institutional Research Project Request form was completed and the doctoral thesis proposal was submitted via email to the committee’s generic email address, per instructions on the university’s website. After approval was received from the site institution, approval was obtained from the institutional review board (IRB) at Northeastern University prior to participant recruitment.

The concern of an institutional review board is to ensure the protection of human subjects used in research (Rose & Pietri, 2002). Protection of human subjects is provided through ethical principles related to respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Steps taken to address each ethical principle are provided in the following paragraphs.

**Respect for persons.** The respect for persons principle indicates that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents and individuals with diminished autonomy are entitled to
protections (Beattie & VandenBosch, 2007; NIH Office of Extramural Research, 2011).

Informed consent is a key component of the respect for persons principle. Informed consent requires that possible participants have sufficient time to consider their participation, have had all of their questions answered, and are not recruited or placed in situations in which they might feel undue pressure to participate (Beattie & VandenBosch, 2007).

Potential participants were given two weeks to respond to the recruitment letter, although most responded within a couple days and none took the full two weeks to respond. Informed consent was obtained by sending an IRB-approved informed consent document (provided in Appendix C) to all individuals indicating a willingness to participate. The interview guide (Appendix E) was also sent with the consent document so participants would know the questions ahead of time. Participants were given the opportunity to receive an oral explanation by contacting the student researcher to arrange a phone call to discuss the study, although none required an oral explanation. Participants were asked to electronically sign the consent document via a link to a SurveyMonkey survey (Appendix D). Contact information for the student researcher, Principle Investigator, and IRB representative at Northeastern were included in the consent document so that individuals could ask questions as needed. At the start of each interview, information from the signed consent document was reiterated and each participant had an additional opportunity to ask questions about it. Participants were recorded giving additional consent to participate at the start of the interviews.

A potential vulnerability of employee participants in research is that they may feel pressure to participate or to respond to a study in a way that is advantageous to the organization (Rose & Pietri, 2002). Since the student researcher provides and oversees instructional support for all online adjuncts, it is possible that the potential participants felt obligated to participate or
to respond favorably regarding the support provided to them. Potential participants may have been concerned that details of their participation would be shared with others and that any negative comments about their support experiences may limit their future teaching assignments. To mitigate this issue, the student researcher conducted the study as a doctoral student at Northeastern University and not as an employee at the site institution. The recruitment letter and consent document indicated to participants that their participation was voluntary and confidential, they could quit the study at any time or choose to skip questions, and that no harm would come to them for their participation. Additionally, the web-based interviews were conducted at the student researcher’s home to eliminate the impression that the study was associated in any way with the student researcher’s professional position. It is not clear that the researcher’s location during the interviews or the use of the researcher’s student email address had any actual impact on the participants’ impression of the researcher’s role in the study, as they are all familiar with the researcher in her professional position.

**Beneficence.** The principle of beneficence requires that researchers do no harm and that they maximize the possible benefits and minimize the possible harms for participants (Beattie & VandenBosch, 2007; NIH Office of Extramural Research, 2011). A key consideration is whether the risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits (Beattie & VandenBosch, 2007). To minimize risk, all documents used in this research, such as transcripts and observation notes, refer to the participants with pseudonyms. Other identifying information, such as course names and the names of staff members with whom they interact, were removed or replaced with generic terms. The student researcher will never confirm the participation or nonparticipation of participants, except as required by law. The recruitment letter and consent document acknowledged that the participants may feel slight discomfort if providing negative views of the
institutional support they have received, but they were assured that they may benefit from the study, as the study may result in support improvements.

Justice. The principle of justice involves the fair distribution of burdens and benefits of the research (Beattie & VandenBosch, 2007; NIH Office of Extramural Research, 2011). A method for achieving justice involves sampling participants that reflect the diversity of the potential population (IH Office of Extramural Research, 2011). As described in the section of this chapter that covers the participants and the sampling strategy, this study attained a final sample with a range of characteristics.

Data Collection

This study used data collected through interviews with participants, observations of the participants being supported by staff members at the site institution, and reviews of documents that are provided to online adjuncts at the site institution. Merriam (2009) notes that data collected in these ways allow a researcher to address the problem and research questions. Additionally, the use of multiple data sources and types allows for the triangulation of findings, which enhances the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 2009). The following sections indicate how each type of data was collected.

Interviews

Interviewing is an important qualitative data collection strategy (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Interviews produce data that allow researchers to explore the experiences, motives, feelings, thoughts, intentions, and opinions of others, all of which cannot be directly observed (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Suzuki et al., 2007). Given the study’s purpose, data from interviews was necessary for answering the research questions. Therefore, the primary data source for the study was interviews.
There are three primary types of interviews: highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Merriam, 2009). Highly structured interviews are standardized with no flexibility in the order or wording of questions and unstructured interviews have no predetermined questions and are largely informal and exploratory (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) suggests the use of semi-structured interviews, which are frequently used in qualitative studies to allow for the perspective of the participant to emerge. A semi-structured interview is guided by a list of questions to be explored, but the order of the questions and exact wording of the questions is flexible (Merriam, 2009). Following Merriam’s recommendation, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with the student researcher acting as the interviewer. The interview protocol in Appendix E was developed using the interviewing guides provided by Butin (2010) and Merriam (2009). Butin (2010) notes that interview questions should be aligned with the research questions of the study, so the questions on the interview protocol are arranged by research question. Seidman (2006) and Merriam (2009) recommend piloting interview questions before using them in a study. The interview protocol was piloted in a mock interview with an adjunct faculty not included in the study to test it prior to collecting data. After completing the first two non-pilot interviews, the transcripts were coded and analyzed using the data analysis techniques described in the following section to determine if changes were needed to the interview protocol. No changes were identified.

One interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes was planned with each participant. This limited interview length was planned to encourage participation by the busy professionals in the potential sample. None of the actual interviews exceeded 60 minutes, as all questions and follow-up prompts from the interview protocol were asked within that timeframe and further probing was producing no new information. Since the online adjuncts work from their home or another
off-campus location, often in states that are not within driving distance of the site institution, all interviews were conducted and recorded using web conferencing software that allowed the researcher and participants to see and hear each other. A characteristic of qualitative research is that data is collected in the natural setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Due to the fact that the online adjuncts work remotely and often receive support from staff via web conference, a remote interview via web conference allowed for data collection in the natural setting of the participants. The student researcher has an account with Zoom, a web conferencing service, and used that account for the interviews. Through the password-protected Zoom account, individual web conferencing sessions were set up for each interview and a link to each session was generated. The student researcher emailed each participant with the link that was specific to his or her interview session. The student researcher conducted each interview from her home. Each session was recorded via Zoom. The interview guide was sent to participants prior to the interview so they were aware of the questions that would be asked.

In addition to asking the research questions, the researcher took written notes during the interviews with observations or comments. Merriam (2009) indicates that researchers often take written notes during an interview to record a reaction to what the participant says or does, or to note an important aspect of the interview. For this study, written notes during the interviews were used to record possible follow-up questions which were posed to the interviewees at later points in the interviews.

**Observations**

Observation is a process through which researchers learn about the activities of study participants in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities.
Observation allows researchers to observe situations participants have described in interviews and to gain a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study (Kawulich, 2005). Observation often involves the researcher participating in routine activities of the participants and observing participants and other members of the community with whom they interact in various contexts (Suzuki et al., 2007). To address the research questions of this study, routine activities in which online adjuncts receive support from institutional staff members were observed, including phone and web-based instructional design consultations, web-based sessions in which online adjuncts received technical tutoring on the use of the course management system, and web-based professional development sessions. Selection of the observed activities were guided by comments of participants during the interviews. Not all participants were observed in a support situation and some of the observations were made with non-participants. Access to the selected activities were gained through conversations with the staff members providing the support. No identifying information for faculty members or staff members was recorded in the field notes.

Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2013) indicate that there are multiple types of observation, with the researcher playing a different role in each type. The type of observation used in this study was that of observer as participant, in which the researcher’s observer activities are known to the group and participation in the group is secondary to the role of observer (Merriam, 2009). This type of observation was appropriate for this study because it allowed the student researcher to gather data that is controlled by the individuals being observed, rather than the student researcher contributing to the data to be observed (Merriam, 2009). This observation method also allowed the researcher to focus on taking field notes and analyze what was observed.

During an observation, the researcher notes the setting of the activity being observed, the
participants and their roles, the activities that occur, the nature of the interactions, the content of conversations, and nonverbal communications (Merriam, 2009). During an observation, the researcher typically jots down notes and then afterwards records in detail what has been observed (Merriam, 2009). Field notes based on observation are highly descriptive and include descriptions of the setting, people and activities, direct quotations or the substance of conversations, and the observer’s reflections or comments (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2013) recommends using an observational protocol with details of the event and space for recording descriptive and reflective notes. An observational protocol was developed for this study and is provided in Appendix F.

**Documents**

Documents are an additional data source in qualitative research that help researchers uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, documents provide a data source that can aid with triangulation (Suzuki et al., 2007). In order to develop greater understanding of the support experiences conveyed by the online adjuncts in the interviews and to allow for triangulation, the student researcher sought out documents that are used by the site institution in providing support to the online adjuncts. Such documents added context and understanding for the student researcher.

Sampling of the documents was driven by the data obtained during the interviews and observations. For example, the online adjuncts referenced weekly informational emails received from the director, checklists used for quality assurance of online courses, training materials, institutional web pages, and employee handbooks. Permission to enter such documents into the research record was requested from the Research Review Committee at the site institution and permission was granted. All documents were coded and cataloged for easy access during data
Data Storage

Interviews were recorded using a web-based service called Zoom, which records video and audio-based web conferences. Access to the recordings on the Zoom website is protected by a password that is known only to the researcher. Following each interview, the interview files were saved to the researcher’s personal computer and recordings on the Zoom website were deleted.

Transcription of the interviews was conducted by a third-party transcription service called Rev. The digital files of the interviews were uploaded to Rev’s secure website using an account associated with the researcher’s email address and a password known only to the researcher. Rev’s website indicates that all files shared with them are secure and are never shared with anyone other than the client, which in this case was the student researcher. Rev’s transcriptionists are held to strict nondisclosure agreements. Rev provides 24-hour turnaround and transcripts are delivered as Microsoft Word documents. Upon receipt of the transcripts, the student researcher reviewed them for accuracy and replaced the participants’ names with pseudonyms. The accuracy of the transcripts was verified by listening to the recordings and reading along on the transcript, with changes being made by the researcher, as needed.

The interview files, transcriptions, and analysis documents were kept on the researcher’s personal computer, which is password-protected and kept in her private residence. Paper copies were printed at her residence and stored in a locked drawer at her residence. Backup copies of files were kept in a secured web-based Dropbox account with the student researcher and Principal Investigator being the only persons with the Dropbox password. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and the pseudonyms were used in all analysis.
documentation. Files will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study through the deletion of electronic files and shredding of paper copies.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of data by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what has been observed or read in order to answer research questions (Merriam, 2009). All data collected in the study were analyzed manually using a general inductive approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2013; Thomas, 2006). Data analysis was conducted first on the transcripts. Field notes and documents were analyzed later in the process and compared to the analyzed transcripts.

Data analysis begins with a close reading of the text of the raw data so that the researcher becomes familiar with the content (Thomas, 2006). The close reading of the text is followed by multiple cycles of coding and constant comparison of the data (Boeije, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). Table 4 shows a visual depiction of the inductive analysis process that was followed. Descriptions of coding, constant comparison, and category generation are described in the following sections.
Table 4

**General Inductive Analysis Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Close reading of raw text</th>
<th>Segments of text that may answer the research question are identified</th>
<th>Codes assigned to each text segment; codebook created</th>
<th>Codes sorted into categories; categories combined and reduced</th>
<th>Final categories created that represent themes answering the research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Axial Coding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Coding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Coding**

A code is a word or short phrase that summarizes or captures the essence of a line, paragraph, or page of text (Saldaña, 2013). The coding cycles are *open coding* and *axial coding*.

**Open coding.** Initial coding is referred to as *open coding* by Merriam (2009), Corbin and Strauss (2015), and Boeije (2002) and *first cycle coding* by Saldaña (2013). Codes are assigned to segments of text that are potentially relevant for answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). Two types of codes are often used: *in vivo* codes use the participant’s own words and *descriptive* codes summarize the topic of the excerpt being coded (Saldaña, 2013). Since a study may initially generate numerous codes, a record of the codes are entered into a codebook (Saldaña, 2013).

For this study, open coding was conducted on print outs of the transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Transcripts were analyzed as they were completed. Text that appeared to
be relevant to the research questions was highlighted and a code was written in the margin. Both descriptive and in vivo codes were used initially. As open coding proceeded, some codes were changed to better represent the essence of the segments with which they were associated. Codes were stabilized as analysis proceeded. Stabilized codes are associated with adequate supporting data, are distinct from each other, and are unlikely to change. The stabilized codes were entered into a codebook that contained each code, a definition of the code, and a representative sample from the data. For example, after the first two interviews, it was found that participants shared experiences related to the academic freedom of online adjuncts. A code of “academic freedom” was assigned and stabilized by identifying additional data in later interviews that supported it. This code eventually led to a theme in the findings related to academic freedom.

**Axial coding.** The next cycle of coding is called *axial coding* by Merriam (2009) and Corbin and Strauss (2015) and *second cycle coding* by Saldaña (2013). Axial coding involves arranging and rearranging codes into groups or categories and assigning codes that represent the group or category (Boeije, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). This cycle of coding was conducted on the first transcript by transferring the coded segments of text to a Microsoft Word document and then reorganizing the segments of text into groups with headings that served as group codes. The open codes for the second transcript were then compared to the groupings from the first transcript, with new segments being added to groups and new groups being created. For example, codes from the first transcript regarding academic freedom and trusting online adjuncts were grouped under a heading called “being treated professionally.” After reviewing the second transcript, a code of “fairness,” which is related the fair treatment of online adjuncts, was added to the “being treated professionally” group. Axial coding continued after the open coding was completed on each transcript, observation notes, and
documents.

**Constant Comparison and Category Construction**

The grouping of codes and development of categories is accomplished through the use of constant comparison, which is a data analysis method that comes from the grounded theory tradition of qualitative research (Boeje, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam, 2009). In constant comparison, pieces of data are compared in order to identify similarities and differences and similar data are grouped together (Boeje, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam, 2009). Constant comparison begins immediately with analysis of the first transcript and continues throughout the analysis of all data, including all transcripts, observations, field notes, and documents, continuing until final categories and themes that answer the research questions are identified (Boeje, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) notes that the early phases of constant comparison are highly inductive as codes are assigned and tentative categories are developed. The process becomes increasingly deductive as the researcher reviews additional data and checks to see if the new data falls into the categories or discounts the categories (Merriam, 2009). Saturation is reached when additional data produces no new information or insights (Merriam, 2009).

Constant comparison was used throughout analysis of the data in this study. As each transcript was completed, data from the transcript was compared to previously codes segments of text to determine similarities and differences and to allow for the grouping of codes into initial categories. Multiple rounds of constant comparison were conducted, comparing codes and their supporting segments of text to identify overarching categories in the data. For example, the codes “trusting online adjuncts to do their jobs,” “appreciating online adjuncts,” and “treating online adjuncts as important members of the institution” were eventually grouped together in a category
called “empowering online adjuncts.” Later, the constant comparison method made it apparent that a separate category called “valuing academic freedom” was related to the “empowering online adjuncts” category, so those two categories were combined. Category names and definitions were revised multiple times to capture the essence of the categories. Continuing with the same example, it was determined that the category of “empowering online adjuncts” stems from values of the site institution, so the category name was changed to “valuing the empowerment of online adjuncts” and the definition was adjusted to reflect this value of the site institution. Similar adjustments were made to other categories as the meaning of the coded segments in each category were compared and considered.

Merriam (2009) provides guidelines for constructing and limiting the number of categories. She indicates that although a study might initially have twenty or more categories, they should be combined and reduced to be more manageable and easier to communicate to readers. She further states that categories should be responsive to the research questions, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and conceptually congruent. Referring to Lincoln and Guba (1981), Merriam (2009) mentions four guidelines for developing comprehensive categories that answer the research questions: 1) the frequency with which a concept or category arises in the data should be considered; 2) the audience for the study should be considered in determining which categories will appear most credible; 3) categories that are unique should be retained; and 4) categories that reveal information about the phenomenon not previously identified should also be retained. These guidelines were considered when determining the final set of categories to present as findings of the study. The final findings included ten categories to answer the three research questions.
Analytic Memos

Analytic memos are similar to journal entries and they are used by the researcher to document and reflect on the coding process, code choices, and emerging categories, themes, and concepts (Saldaña, 2013). Examples of analytic memos include reflections on the interviews and the relationship between the student researcher and participants, definitions of codes and the rationale for assigning them, reflections on emerging patterns in the data, reflections on personal or ethical dilemmas, and reflections on the implications and future directions for the study (Saldaña, 2013). For this study, analytic memos were written related to the coding process, category construction, and questions about the meaning of segments in the texts. For example, when rearranging codes into categories, I made notes about the reasons why I combined codes for trusting adjuncts, appreciating adjuncts, and treating adjuncts as important members of the institution into the category of “empowering online adjuncts.”

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is concerned with evaluating its quality and worth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness involves establishing the credibility of the findings, the transferability or applicability of the findings in other contexts, the dependability of the findings, which refers to the degree to which the findings could be repeated, and the confirmability of the findings, which is the extent to which the findings are not based on researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Much of the literature on qualitative research refers to trustworthiness as validity and reliability, which are terms typically associated with quantitative research (Creswell, 2013). This study used several techniques for establishing trustworthiness, including triangulation, member checking, audit trails, peer debriefing, thick and rich description, and reflexivity.
Triangulation

Triangulation is the process of using multiple data sources, methods, investigators, or theories to corroborate evidence in a study (Creswell, 2013). One of the more common methods of triangulation involves using multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents (Carlson, 2010). The premise of data triangulation is that interpretations and conclusions can be substantiated by evidence from multiple data sources (Carlson, 2010). Triangulation involves the systematic process of sorting through data to find common themes or categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In this study, triangulation used data from interviews, observations, and support documentation from the site institution. Categories were identified in the interview data and then data from the observations and documentation were searched for evidence that supports the categories. For example, participants discussed the professional development opportunities that are available to them at the site institution. Evidence supporting the participants’ claims about professional development was obtained by reviewing a recorded professional development workshop and reviewing a variety of documents that are intended to support the development of online instructors, such as teaching checklists and step-by-step guides on using technology tools used in online course delivery.

Member Checking

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is the most critical strategy for establishing credibility of a qualitative study. Member checking is the process of sharing data, analytic categories, and interpretations with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although member checking can occur at multiple points during a study, it is usually a single event that occurs with early interpretations (Carlson, 2010). Both Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009)
recommend taking preliminary analyses to the participants and asking if the interpretation rings true and is on the right track.

To conduct member checking in this study, the student researcher documented the preliminary themes that emerged from the data and provided supporting quotes from the data that supported each theme. The document was sent to participants via email. Participants were asked to provide written comments via email to validate, correct, and/or challenge the interpretations. A period of two weeks was allowed for participant responses. All twelve participants responded to the member checking and all agreed with the preliminary findings. Two participants supported the findings with additional comments and examples that added rich data to the study. Those comments and examples were incorporated into the final narrative of the findings.

Both Angen (2000) and Sandelowski (1993) promote caution when using member checking. Sandelowski (1993) notes that when reviewing interpretations, participants may look for concrete descriptions of their own experiences and they may not be able to comment meaningfully on abstract synthesis that incorporates multiple participants’ experiences. Angen (2000) notes that participants may disagree with the researcher’s interpretations, which opens the issue of who is right. Since the interpretivist paradigm holds that there is no one truth, it is challenging for interpretations to be validated through this process (Angen, 2000). Fortunately, none of the participants disagreed with the preliminary findings, although only two participants provided meaningful comments on the findings.

Audit Trail

Maintaining an audit trail is a method for establishing credibility (Carlson, 2010; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail involves documenting all aspects of the study, including how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how
decisions were made (Carlson, 2010; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2009). The audit trail also includes transcripts, observation notes, interview notes, analytic memos, records, calendars, and drafts of the interpretations (Carlson, 2010). Merriam (2009) suggests keeping a journal in which the researcher documents all actions, thoughts, and decisions related to the study. Following Merriam’s (2009) suggestion, the student researcher kept notes on all aspects of the study. Additionally, all transcripts and other relevant documents will be saved for a period of three years.

**Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing, also referred to as peer review, is a strategy for determining the credibility of a study (Creswell, 2013; Johnson, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer reviewers are other researchers or individuals familiar with the topic with whom the researcher discusses the findings, interpretations, and conclusions (Johnson, 1997). Peers may serve as “devil’s advocates” to challenge the methodology and findings and to provide new insights (Creswell, 2013; Johnson, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing is most effective when it is used throughout a study, with peers acting as a sounding board for ideas (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Peer debriefing was conducted with the student researcher’s peers at her place of employment, which included the assistant director of online education, who reports to the student researcher, and instructional designers reporting to the assistant director. These individuals were used for the peer debriefing because they are familiar with the research topic and the findings will benefit their work. The same document that was used for member checking with participants was shared with the student researcher’s peers and they were asked to comment either in email or in person on the preliminary findings. Most feedback was received in person, as the peer reviewers wanted to discuss the findings in more detail than had been included in the document.
The peer reviewers all found the findings interesting and illuminating and agreed that the findings make sense in light of the institutional context. Peer debriefing provided no new insight, but did validate the findings.

**Thick and Rich Description**

Thick, rich description allows readers to determine the transferability of the findings to other settings (Creswell, 2013). Rich, thick description provides detailed descriptions of the participants and the setting, as well as the findings (Merriam, 2009). Ponterotto and Grieger (2007) indicate that thick description leads to “thick interpretation,” which leads to “thick meaning.” Additionally, referencing Denzin (1989), Ponterotto and Grieger (2007) indicate that thick, rich description establishes the significance of an experience by including detail, context, and emotion so that the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of individuals are heard. To that end, thick, rich description of findings includes evidence in the form of quotes from participant interviews and other data collected (Merriam, 2009). This study used rich, thick description in the presentation of findings. Several quotes from the participants’ interviews were incorporated throughout the findings.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity refers to the researcher’s disclosure of his or her own biases and assumptions which could influence interpretation of the data (Carlson 2010; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Although the interpretivist paradigm assumes some researcher bias, researchers have a duty to be transparent about their bias (Carlson, 2010) and they should try to suspend their biases as they conduct the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This strategy involves the researcher including a section of the study in which he or she discusses his or her personal background and beliefs as they relate to the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Johnson, 1997; Morrow, 2005). In this study
the student researcher’s biases were described in a positionality statement in chapter one. During data analysis, the student researcher remained aware of potential biases and how they may cloud the interpretation of the data. For example, the student researcher manages faculty support at the site institution and is proud of the support, so she was careful to make sure that the data clearly and overwhelmingly supported themes in the findings related to high quality support.

**Limitations of the Study**

All empirical research has limitations and this practice-based study is no exception. The researcher for the study works at the site institution and supervises online adjuncts teaching in the humanities and sciences. Therefore, due to ethical considerations, the pool of potential participants for the study was limited to online adjuncts teaching in business-related disciplines who are not supervised by the researcher. Additionally, the pool of online adjuncts from which the participants were drawn is heavily weighted with males, so the participants in the study are mostly males. In fact, the group of participants is largely homogeneous in that fact that more than half are males aged 50-59 and two-thirds have doctoral degrees. It’s possible that the inclusion of online adjuncts from the humanities or science disciplines, as well a larger number of female participants and a greater variety in age and education levels would result in different findings.

Although the researcher does not directly supervise the participants in the study, many of the participants are familiar with the researcher in her professional position, which is a role that provides support to online adjuncts. Many of the participants have also met the researcher in person at one of the online faculty symposiums at the site institution. Due to their familiarity with the researcher, it is possible that participants gave socially-desirable answers to the interview questions because they did not want to be seen as being critical of the researcher or her staff. There may have also been concern among participants that any criticism of the institution
would be conveyed to their direct supervisor and result in different treatment. Thus, the reliability and validity of the data may be limited.

A final limitation is that the researcher’s familiarity with the institution, the participants, and the phenomenon under study may have limited her ability to adequately conduct the interviews and analyze the data. Given the researchers personal knowledge of what the participants described in the interviews, opportunities for probing follow-up questions may have been missed because she felt an intuitive understanding of their comments. Also, during analysis, the researcher may have looked for data to support her own perceptions of the support that she and her staff provide to the participants, so the analysis may have been skewed. Despite efforts by the researcher to control for her own bias, there is no guarantee that some bias did not impact the study.

**Summary**

Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, this qualitative study sought to understand how online adjuncts at the site institution make sense of their support experiences and how that support impacts their turnover intentions. A basic qualitative study was an appropriate research approach that matches the study’s purpose. Purposeful sampling ensured the inclusion of participants who could answer the research questions and which were representative of the potential participant pool. Data was collected from interviews, observations, and documents, and was analyzed using a general inductive approach that used coding and constant comparison to create categories and themes from the data that answer the research questions. Trustworthiness was established through a variety of techniques. The study has implications for decision-making regarding online adjunct support at the site institution and it may inform decision making of online education administrators at other institutions.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions among experienced online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines at a private university in the Northeast of the United States. A qualitative study explored the following research questions:

1. What motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online?

2. What institutional support leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs?

3. How does institutional support impact turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site?

This chapter begins with an introduction of the twelve participants in the study, followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings for each research question. Each research question section closes with a summary of findings for the question. The chapter ends with an overall summary of the findings.

Study Participants

Data for this study were primarily collected through interviews with twelve participants who are all online adjunct faculty members in business-related disciplines at the site institution. Data were also collected by observing staff members at the site institution providing support to online adjuncts and by reviewing documents, training materials, and web sites at the site institution related to the support of online adjuncts. These additional data sources provided greater understanding of the data collected during the interviews and allowed for triangulation of findings.

The following participant descriptions are arranged in the order in which the interviews
were conducted. The range and variation sampling strategy set forth in chapter three was achieved. Table 5 presents a visual presentation of the key demographic information, which was compared to the sampling strategy to verify achievement of the strategy.

Table 5

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Teaching Level</th>
<th>Teaching Discipline</th>
<th>Length of employment</th>
<th>Online teaching experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate &amp; undergraduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate &amp; undergraduate</td>
<td>Accounting/Finance</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Accounting/Finance</td>
<td>15 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate &amp; undergraduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate &amp; undergraduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate &amp; undergraduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Business/Management</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant 1: Mary**

At the time of her interview, Mary had been teaching online undergraduate and graduate business courses at the site institution for only four months and was teaching in her second
academic term. She has been teaching online at other institutions for six years. Mary is the chief executive officer of a management consulting firm with clients worldwide. She also teaches online for several institutions. She is in her late fifties and has a doctorate in organizational leadership. Mary started teaching online when an institution where she was teaching on-ground asked her to try teaching online. Mary has grown to love teaching online and feels that she is good at it. She spent a good portion of her interview contrasting the support she receives at the site institution with the support she receives at other institutions, indicating that some institutions do a lot of monitoring of her teaching, which she finds demeaning. Fortunately, Mary has not had that same experience at the site institution, noting, “I don’t need the kind of rigid monitoring that I get from other schools… The support at [the site institution] makes me feel like I am important and respected for what I know and what I do.”

Participant 2: Bill

Bill has been teaching online graduate business courses at the site institution for two years. He has over twenty years of experience teaching partially online and fully online courses, making him the most experienced online adjunct in the study. Bill is a former member of the Air Force who now works full-time teaching and conducting research for the department of defense. He is in his forties and has a doctor of business administration degree. He got into teaching online as part of his full-time position. Bill says he has had “nothing but great experiences” at the site institution. When considering how the institutional support he receives impacts him, Bill indicated, “It makes me motivated to continue and fulfill the responsibilities associated with my position.”

Participant 3: Helen

Helen has been teaching online graduate and undergraduate accounting and finance
courses at the site institution for two years. She has eight years of experience teaching online. She is in her fifties and has a Ph.D. Helen retired from a full-time faculty position at a state university. She runs a tax accounting practice out of her home and teaches as an online adjunct. Helen got into teaching online when she was one of the first faculty members to volunteer to teach online at the state university from which she retired. When asked what it means to her to be supported by an institution, Helen stated, “To me it’s very plain and simple. When you have a question, you know you can turn to somebody and get a response… That’s what support means to me.” Helen indicated that her support expectations have been met at the site institution.

**Participant 4: Jerry**

Jerry has been teaching graduate online finance courses at the site institution for fifteen months. He has two years of experience teaching online at one other institution. He has a master’s degree and is pursuing a Ph.D. at a state university through a program that is delivered mostly online with limited residencies at the campus. Jerry started teaching online when he was asked to do so by the institution where he is getting his doctorate. He was referred to the site institution by a colleague in his doctoral program who works as a full-time faculty member at the institution. Jerry works full-time writing curriculum for a for-profit institution. He has also done curriculum development for the site institution. When comparing his curriculum development experiences at the site institution and the institution where he works full-time, Jerry says that the support at the site institution has been superior and that “I’ve realized what I wasn’t getting on the other side [in my full-time position].”

**Participant 5: Alan**

Alan has been teaching online graduate management courses at the site institution for one year. He has over three years of experience teaching online. Alan is in his early thirties, making
him the youngest participant in the study. Alan has a Ph.D. and is engaged in a variety of professional and volunteer activities, including teaching at other institutions, consulting with non-profit organizations, and publishing and presenting. Alan became interested in teaching online when his father taught early distance learning courses at a university while he was growing up. After earning his Ph.D., he decided to follow in his father’s footsteps. The support he receives at the site institution gives Alan a feeling of comfort that he doesn’t have with other institutions where he teaches. When discussing the support at the site institution, Alan noted, “It really just is that feeling of knowing in the back of my head that I can be comfortable to teach or interact with the backing of the institution.”

**Participant 6: Arthur**

Arthur has been teaching online graduate and undergraduate management courses at the site institution for eight months. He has thirteen years of experience teaching online, making him the second most experienced online adjunct in the study. He is in his late fifties and has a Ph.D. Arthur calls himself an “entrepreneur teacher.” He is a full-time faculty member at a state university, an adjunct faculty member at several institutions, an author of six books, a career coach, and a motivational speaker. He is a former executive senior manager for a technology company and he left the corporate environment in the late 1990s to pursue his passions in life, one of which is teaching. Arthur had had positive experiences with the support at the site institution and specifically called out the instructional design support, noting, “I spent time with [the instructional design staff] in developing two courses out of the four I’ve taught so far and it’s been the best experience ever in terms of the support from instructional design. Normally, I’m just kind of thrown into it.”
Participant 7: Carl

Carl has been teaching online at the site institution for 2.5 years, which is longer than any of the other participants. He is in his fifties and has a total of seven years of experience teaching online courses. Carl has a master’s degree and is currently working on a Ph.D. He teaches undergraduate courses in hospitality management. In addition to working at the site institution, Carl also teaches in person and online at three other institutions. Carl first got into online teaching when a friend who was teaching online encouraged him to do so. Carl is pleased with the support he has received at the site institution, noting, “It’s been an all-around very positive experience from the day that I started. Everybody who is on [the] staff is doing the right thing at the right time.”

Participant 8: Bob

Bob has been teaching undergraduate business technology courses at the site institution for six months and he has nine years of experience teaching online. He is in his fifties and has a master’s degree. In addition to teaching online, Bob engages in a variety of professional work, consulting, and teaching activities. He started teaching online when an institution where he was teaching on-campus started an online program and asked faculty to volunteer to help out. One of the things that Bob looks for in terms of support is the ability to talk to people at the institution, noting, “I really like to talk to people. If I go through a whole orientation and interview process and I really don’t speak to anyone after that, I generally just stop working for [the institution].” Bob indicated that he is able to speak to individuals at the site institution, which factors into his satisfaction with his position.

Participant 9: David

David has been teaching graduate and undergraduate online business courses at the site
institution for nine months. He has four years of experience teaching online. David has a full-time job with the federal government and teaches online for two institutions, including the site institution. He is in his fifties and has a Ph.D. David's first doctoral course was online and he enjoyed the experience of being an online student, which later inspired him to teach online. He has only taught online and has never taught in a traditional classroom. When talking about support, David indicated that getting quick responses to questions is important to him. Admitting to having a technology phobia, David said, “When it comes to technology, the fact that I have people there to support me with the technology is just great.”

**Participant 10: John**

John has been teaching graduate and undergraduate online business courses at the site institution for two years and he has a total of eight years of experience teaching online. John is in his early sixties and is the oldest participant in the study. He has a doctor of business administration degree. John is a former corporate executive who started a profitable consulting business after his corporate position was eliminated six years ago. He has been doing adjunct teaching for thirty years, with most of it occurring on-ground in the evenings at institutions near his home. John started teaching online when one of the institutions asked him to teach a blended course delivered partly online and partly in a traditional classroom. He then moved into teaching fully online courses. He started teaching online at the site institution when he applied for an on-campus adjunct position and his resume was passed on to administrators for the online program. When asked what support means to him, John indicated, “Support means when I send a note to someone, they respond. Truly, they respond so quickly. That to me is incredible support and that’s so valuable because I don’t see that everywhere else.”
Participant 11: Jim

Jim has been teaching undergraduate business courses at the site institution for nine months. He has a total of two years of experience teaching online. Jim is in his forties and works as a real estate broker and licensed community association manager, although he is looking to transition out of his current career into an academic career. He has a master’s degree and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. Jim was recruited to teach online at the site institution by a colleague in his doctoral program who is a full-time faculty member at the site institution. Jim feels positively about the support he has received, indicating, “[The site institution] provides a team of support personnel that are so attentive to your needs as an instructor… The support staff understands that you are out there teaching a course and they are there to help.”

Participant 12: Frank

Frank has been teaching graduate management courses at the site institution for nine months. He has been teaching online for a total of three years. He is in his forties and has a Ph.D. He works full-time as an administrator at a state institution and teaches online at the site institution as a side job. Frank fell into teaching online when a faculty member at the institution where he works had to drop out of teaching an online course and he was asked to fill in. When talking about why he teaches online, Frank says, “I believe we are doing almost the Lord’s work in a sense. We’re training people to do good things in this world.” Frank has low expectations for support as an online instructor and says for him it really matters if he is having an impact on students that will lead to them doing good things in the world.

Findings

Table 6 presents a visual representation of findings listed in the order of the research questions they answer. Ten themes have been identified to answer the research questions, with
one theme having two sub-themes. An additional finding is included at the end of the chapter. Although the additional finding does not directly answer a research question, it is considered relevant and noteworthy because it has ties to the literature on adjunct faculty.

Table 6

Summary of Findings

1. **What motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online?**
   - Balancing personal and professional lives
   - Feeling rewarded by students’ growth in understanding
   - Investing in students for their long-term success in life

2. **What institutional support leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs?**
   - Providing the right help at the right time
   - Valuing the empowerment of online adjuncts
     - Trusting online adjuncts with academic freedom
     - Appreciating online adjuncts
   - Offering faculty development
   - Minimizing implementation challenges

3. **How does institutional support impact turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site?**
   - Mutuality and congruency create comfort
   - Having a variety of work assignments
   - Treating people well creates positive contrasts with other institutions
Motivations to Teach Online

Three themes were identified to answer the first research question regarding what motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online: 1) balancing personal and professional lives; 2) feeling rewarded by students’ growth in understanding; and 3) investing in students for their long-term success in life. The following three thematic sections describe the motivations of experienced adjuncts teaching online and include excerpts from the interview transcripts that illuminate the themes.

Balancing Personal and Professional Lives

The first motivational theme is Balancing Personal and Professional Lives, which is defined as online adjuncts using the flexibility that is inherent in online teaching to provide harmony in their lives. Some participants shared that the flexibility that teaching online provides in terms of time and location allows them to balance their schedules and fit teaching in around other commitments. A representative quote comes from Mary, who described how the flexibility allows her to balance teaching with consulting:

The pluses are that I have a very free schedule. I can grade when I want to. I don’t have to show up to class. It’s at my discretion when I do my work. There’s a lot of freedom there. Given that I travel as much as I do, it never matters where I am. I can be in any country, any part of the world, as long as I have Internet. That’s the motivating part of this for me.

Mary’s comments about teaching when and where she wants to or needs to is representative of the comments of other participants who also need to accommodate schedule and location logistics.

The need for scheduling flexibility in order to balance and harmonize everything in their
lives was mentioned more frequently than location flexibility as a motivator for teaching in an online environment as opposed to a traditional classroom environment. Frank indicated that the flexibility of online teaching allows him to do most of his teaching in the early morning hours before going to work. Frank noted, “I do most of my [online teaching] between 5:00 a.m. and 6:30 a.m.” Jim is pursuing a Ph.D. and is in the process of transitioning his career, so he needs a flexible schedule to accommodate academic work and professional activities. Jim indicated “Right now online is a little better for my schedule. That is the main motivation, the flexibility of it.” Carl is also pursuing a Ph.D. and had similar sentiments as he described fitting online teaching in with doctoral work, full-time on-campus teaching at another institution, and other adjunct teaching.

For some participants, online teaching allows for balance among the types of individuals that they are exposed to in their professional and personal lives. Carl, David, and John all described a personal interest in interacting with a wide range of individuals in order to broaden their scope of experience and network. Carl noted that by teaching online he is exposed to both traditional young undergraduate students and to older nontraditional students with more life experience. In terms of relating to the nontraditional students, he specifically noted that he is “able to relate to those students utilizing the experiences that I’ve had in the culinary and hospitality industries, so that is part of the motivation to teach online.” Similarly, David enjoys the range of students he is exposed to through online teaching, indicating:

To me, education is not necessarily meeting an individual face-to-face, but is exchanging ideas, whether it’s right next to me or thousands of miles away. I love online because it gives me the opportunity to exchange ideas with students all over the world and I don’t think anyone can get me into a [traditional] classroom right now. That’s the reason that I
teach online.

For David, interacting with a range of students through online teaching exposes him to a broader range of ideas, providing balance with the ideas that he is exposed to in other facets of his life. Similarly, John noted the range of students, indicating that through teaching online, “I wound up enjoying the variety of people that I was coming in contact with, that I didn’t otherwise have contact with in my own little local community.” For John, online teaching provides balance in terms of who he interacts with in his personal and professional lives.

Other participants expressed that online teaching helps them balance the need to stay current in their field with other commitments. Work and personal commitments do not always provide opportunities for them to stay current in their area of expertise and teaching online provides needed access to professional development. Bob mentioned, “Teaching online has given me the ability to continue to teach even when I’m not teaching in front of folks, keeping my skills sharp.” David noted that online teaching, “Keeps me on the cutting edge… the fact that I have to be in a constant mode of study, that has been rewarding to me.” David specifically indicated that the access that he gets to academic libraries by teaching online is a motivator, as he uses library resources to stay current in his field.

Teaching online can also provide balance for participants by either providing an outlet from other commitments or filling time with meaningful work. Frank has a demanding full-time job and does not have many interests outside of work, such as sports or other activities. For Frank, online teaching “is almost a hobby” that provides an outlet from his regular job and that he can fit into his life around a busy work and family schedule. Online teaching provides balance for Frank by allowing him to focus on something other than a demanding job and family commitments. On a different note, Helen has an interest in keeping busy. Retired from full-time
teaching with a tax business that is not busy year-round, Helen uses online teaching to keep busy with meaningful work and to keep her mind engaged. Online teaching provides Helen with balance by giving her some relief from the boredom she experiences with retirement and seasonal work.

**Feeling Rewarded by Students’ Growth in Understanding**

A second motivational theme is Feeling Rewarded by Students’ Growth in Understanding, which is defined as online adjuncts experiencing positive emotions by observing students learning course content and extending their learning through application and putting their new knowledge into action. Several participants indicated that it is motivating to observe that students are learning. Some participants specifically mentioned the reward they feel when they can tell that a student has finally learned a key concept, which they refer to as seeing a light go off in the students’ heads. David relayed:

To me there is nothing like instructing someone and seeing them get that eureka moment, that light goes off in their head or in their eyes. Taking someone from point A to point C or to point D and seeing them grow… to me, that’s the greatest thing that one can hope for.

Likewise, Carl is rewarded by interacting with students, explaining concepts to them, and seeing evidence that they comprehend the concepts. Carl says that he notices the comprehension a bit more in online classes than he does in face-to-face classes, which is interesting since he can’t actually see the students and needs to rely on submitted assignments to gauge learning:

All of a sudden there’s that light bulb turn on moment when they’re like, “Okay, I get it now,” and seeing that… it’s very similar to what happens face-to-face, but online it just seems to be a little more of an a-ha moment. It shows in the work they submit that they’re
actually starting to understand the principles that we’re talking about.

For both David and Carl, evidence that students are learning is rewarding because it lets them know that their efforts and teaching strategies are effective. This reward is motivating, making them want to repeat the experience.

Other participants are more rewarded and motivated by students’ growth in understanding over the duration of a course, rather than the sudden moments of understanding. Bill explains:

The most rewarding part of [teaching online] is seeing the difference from day 1, even if it’s an advanced class and they already know what they’re doing, so to speak, or if it’s a beginner class, seeing the difference from week 1 to week 10, how far they’ve come, how much their confidence has increased. Then, having the good fortune of the students at the end of the course reach out and express their sincere gratitude and thanks for what has gone on in the course. It’s very rewarding to have that at the end of the course and see how far they’ve come. I would say that’s what motivates me to keep going.

Bill’s reward is in seeing students at different levels learn throughout a course and also in the students’ recognition that they have learned. Similarly, Jerry is also rewarded by students realizing that they have learned in a course, noting, “What I enjoy is students saying and communicating to me in different ways that it took them a while, but now they understand what the concept was and why it’s important to them and what they can do with it.”

Additional participants commented that it is rewarding to them to not only have evidence that students have learned concepts, but to also have students indicate that they understand how concepts they have learned can be applied outside of class in their careers and lives. John feels that his practical industry-related experience is one of his strengths as a teacher and that sharing
that experience with students and having them apply it is one of his key rewards and motivators:

When I get reviews from students they almost always mention my practical experience in being able to apply the theory in the real world. That’s what they seem to like in my classes and that’s what I want them to like in my classes. I see myself as more of a facilitator in the classroom, helping students understand the concept and apply it to the real world. When I feel I’m not able to connect with students to help them understand concepts and bring them to life, then that’s when it’s time to stop teaching.

John recognizes that as an educator, he needs to prepare students for their careers by helping them connect what they are learning to how it will be applied in practice in their future jobs. Other participants had similar comments. The participants all have practical industry-related work experience, so they understand what students need to know and be able to do in their careers. Although this study did not examine the effectiveness of the participants as online instructors, they are likely good at preparing students for careers through their teaching.

Jerry expressed similar sentiments about the reward he experiences when students understand how they can apply course concepts:

When you look at the evaluation of the course and you see comments in there about students thanking you for the challenge of the course and how much they learned and how much they’re going to apply it and they give you certain circumstances about how it helped and where they can apply it means they’re not just giving you platitudes. That, I think, is the reward I’m seeking. How can I present content material to a group of students that they can actually apply in their careers to make themselves more successful?

That, I think, is great.

Although Jerry’s comments are similar to John’s, Jerry’s reward is having students describe
specific circumstances in which they will be able or were able to apply the concepts from his class, whereas John seems rewarded by just knowing that students see how concepts could be applied. Since many of the online classes at the site institution enroll working adult professionals, many students may have opportunities to immediately put concepts they are learning into action in their jobs.

Mary shared a story about how a student in her ethics class not only learned concepts that she can apply in her career, but also in her life, which was very rewarding and motivating for Mary:

I got a note from a student at the end of the semester saying how the class had changed her life. That before the class she had thought she had really understood what was right and what was wrong. That now she understands there are different points of view and it doesn’t serve her or the people around her for her to have a rigid idea of right and wrong. That listening to others sometimes makes a difference. Understanding where others are coming from makes a difference. I got this amazing note from her… [the class] changed how she’s going to work with people, how she’s going to treat her friends and family.

That’s the reason I do this, for an occasional student who will drop me an email like that. Mary indicated that she likes to connect emotionally with her students. One of her rewards is having that emotional connection help students develop new personal perspectives and having the students understand how to apply their new perspectives to both professional and personal aspects of their lives.

For the participants indicating that students’ growth is rewarding, it’s possible that they could have similar experiences in any teaching environment, but as noted in the previous theme, teaching online allows them to experience the rewarding emotions while balancing teaching with
other commitments.

**Investing in Students for Their Long-Term Success in Life**

The third and final motivational theme is Investing in Students for Their Long-Term Success in Life, which is defined as online adjuncts being motivated by the sense that their efforts lead to student achievement in different aspects of their lives beyond the class. This theme differs from the prior theme in that it extends beyond the notion of learning course concepts and applying them. This theme is about online adjuncts being motivated by their desire to have long-term positive impacts on the lives of students by the way they treat students.

One way in which online adjuncts have a positive impact on the lives of students is by nurturing them, with the intent that a little nurturing can go a long way in helping a student be successful both inside and outside of class. Nurturing students for long-term success is a form of investment in students which involves reaching out to them, letting students know that their instructor cares about them, and being understanding of students facing challenges. For some online adjuncts, nurturing is focused on getting a student through a specific course with the awareness that helping the student in one course may help him or her get through the degree program or have other lasting impacts. Mary talked about how nurturing and helping students motivates her:

> I try to make sure [students] know that I am there for them. For the students who might be falling behind or not doing well, I try at least once a week to reach out to them and say, “Hey, I’m here for you. Is there something I can do to help?” I’ve got four students I’m concerned about and if I can save even one of them, that makes me feel good. One of them wrote back. He said, “Wow, you really seem to care about what’s going on with me.” Sure enough, he got some assignments in and he went from a failing grade to a C
grade. I think he might be able to really make it through this class.

For Mary, having students recognize that she cares about them and having that make a difference in how the students do in her class is motivating to her. By personally connecting with students, she hopes to also make a difference that extends beyond her class.

Bob is motivated by the sense that he can help students through difficult times in their lives. He conveyed a story about being patient with a student facing a difficult life circumstance:

My responsiveness to the students [makes me a good online instructor]. I’m very responsive because they deserve it. I don’t know what’s going on in their lives, so if I can help… Just before this semester ended I had a student whose grandmother passed away and he knew it was coming. He had four things he owed me and I told him, “If you get it to me before the end of the term, that’s fine. If not, give it to me whenever and I’ll still give you the grade that you deserve.” This is an A student anyways. I told him, “Take your time, don’t rush. Take care of your business. Take care of your family.” He got it done probably two days before the end of the semester where most students who were not like him did not. I feel that my responsiveness to students is very helpful.

Bob realizes that sometimes life circumstances get in the way of students staying on track, but he sees helping students handle difficult circumstances as an investment in helping them be successful in general, not just in his class.

Jim has an interest in investing in students because he relates to their personal situations. Jim participated in higher education as a nontraditional student, starting his associate’s degree at the age of 32 when he was married and a new father. Due to his experience as a nontraditional student, Jim feels that he relates to the nontraditional students that make up the bulk of the online students at the site institution. He nurtures his students by putting in extra effort to help them,
realizing the challenges they face as they pursue their degrees.

Since I’ve never been a conventional student, I relate to the online student. I relate to the adult student. I understand, wholeheartedly, what that student needs to go through, what sacrifices they go through in order to learn. I admire it, I respect it, and I feel that I’m pretty much doing something that I feel really good about, really passionate. When I teach for the university I think it comes across to the students that I really do care. I really do understand those obstacles that they’re going through to get a degree. If I can make it a little bit easier for them by being accessible, by explaining things a little more, then that’s what I plan to do.

Due to his own experience as a student, Jim realizes that nurturing students to help them through courses will have longer impacts, helping students complete their studies and continue on to successful careers.

Other participants did not talk about nurturing students, but rather they discussed the desire to help students develop in their personal and professional lives. These participants talked about getting to know students and being able to help them grow where they need to grow. Frank conveyed how he gets to know his students and develop them:

I enjoy working with the students. I am very motivated by my students. I’ve had some of the same students in several courses. I’ve never met them and probably never will meet them, but I feel like I know them in many respects. I know their talents. I know their strengths, where they need to develop personally and professionally. I guess [motivation to teach online] really comes down to, “Do I enjoy it personally? Do I feel like I’m impacting the students in their personal and professional growth and development?”

Frank recognizes that teaching is not only about getting students through a specific course, but
also about helping them grow in ways that will benefit them outside of class. He sees teaching as an investment in students’ lives in general.

Other participants talked generally about wanting to impact the lives of students outside of class. For Bill, teaching online is about giving back to the educational process and mentoring students the way he was mentored when pursuing his academic degrees. Arthur has “a desire to write and speak and teach as much as possible, to help people make a difference in their lives.” And finally, Jim says “I am the type of person that always likes to share what I know. I need to share, teach, instruct.” For these participants, investing in students in order to impact their lives is an inherent part of who they are as individuals.

**Section Summary**

This section presented three themes describing the motivation of experienced adjuncts to teach online: 1) balancing personal and professional lives; 2) feeling rewarded by students’ growth in understanding; and 3) investing in students for their long-term success in life. Although these themes are presented separately, they are very much connected. The participants in the study have a sincere and deep interest in seeing students learn in their classes and succeed in their lives. Online adjuncts seem to understand that helping students learn and getting them through a single class is one step towards greater achievement in life. Since the participants have other interests and commitments in their lives, they are still able to reap the rewards of observing students learning and impacting students’ lives thanks to the flexibility that teaching online provides and the ability it provides to balance all aspects of their lives.

**Job Satisfaction**

Four themes were identified to answer the second research question regarding institutional support that leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs: 1)
providing the right help at the right time; 2) empowering online adjuncts; 3) offering faculty development; and 4) minimizing implementation challenges. The following thematic sections describe the types of institutional support that lead to job satisfaction for experienced online adjuncts. Representative excerpts from the interview transcripts are included to provide greater understanding of each theme.

**Providing the Right Help at the Right Time**

The first theme related to job satisfaction is Providing the Right Help at the Right Time, which is defined as a range of staff members anticipating and responding to faculty needs in a competent and timely fashion. This theme is supported by a vast amount of data from participants relaying their support experiences at the site institution and contrasting those experiences with what they’ve encountered when teaching online at other institutions. The data overwhelmingly indicates that the site institution does a very good job of supporting online adjuncts with the right help at the right time.

The timeliness of help and the ease of getting help at the site institution stood out to many of the participants as satisfiers. Bob provided a quote representing the ease and timeliness of getting help:

Support at [the site institution] is awesome because you can just pick up the phone and call somebody and they’ll actually talk to you or you can send out an email and it’s pretty much immediately answered for the most part. I have never had a run in with anything that hasn’t been answered pretty quickly. I would say that the support that [the site institution] gives is really stellar.

Bob’s comments were echoed numerous times throughout the interviews, with participants relaying examples of getting quick responses from staff. For example, David noted that the quick
turnaround eases frustration that he sometimes has with the technology used for online teaching, stating, “The fact that folks respond in a quick manner, that eases the frustration. I can’t ever remember requesting something from the university and having to wait three, four days. It’s mostly in twenty-four hours.” Additional examples of timely help are plentiful, including Helen mentioning getting help setting up a new course over Thanksgiving weekend and Mary indicating that she often gets help from a whole team of people the same day she asks for help.

Help that is proactive in nature also stood out to participants, as such help anticipates the needs of faculty and eliminates the need to ask some questions. One form of proactive help mentioned frequently are weekly emails from the director of online education. A review of these emails revealed content about institutional policies and procedures, reminders about key dates, and tips for teaching online. Many participants commented on the helpful nature of the emails, indicating that they “are so right on” and the “emails have been really, really helpful.” Arthur noted “the amount of communication that [the institution] puts out has been really good to educate me on all the background processes that are happening. That’s been really, really helpful.”

Proactive help also takes the form of checking on faculty and their courses to make sure everything is going smoothly and pointing out where action is needed. Frank relayed how one time when he set a course up for the academic term and he thought it was all set, staff members did a quick review of the course and found some minor settings he had forgotten. Catching and fixing those incorrect settings ahead of time saved Frank and his students from later frustration. David mentioned how helpful it has been to have a staff member check his grade book to ensure grades are adding up correctly. David noted that when staff check the courses, “They catch a lot of stuff that I may miss, and that helps a lot. It takes a lot of the stress off.”
Some participants contrasted the support received from the site institution with support they have received as online adjuncts at other institutions, noting that support at the site institution is superior and they don’t feel abandoned, as they often do with other institutions. Bill noted:

At a lot of institutions with adjuncts, there can be a tendency, whether intentional or unintentional, to just, you’re out there on your own. You’re in the middle of the ocean and you’re just all by yourself on a life raft. I don’t feel that’s the case [at the site institution]. You don’t, at all, feel like you’re just left out in left field and hoping that you get everything right. I feel there is a great element of support within the institution.

Bill’s comments about being left alone without much support are similar to those expressed by other participants in reference to experiences at other institutions. Even if online adjuncts don’t regularly have questions or need much support, knowing that they can ask questions and get help when they need it is satisfying and eliminates the feeling that they are alone.

Jerry’s first experience with the site institution was developing a master course from scratch, rather than teaching. He has experience developing online courses at another institution where the support has not been as good as at the site institution:

The level of support that I’ve received from the instructional design folks at [the site institution] has been startling to me in a very positive way… When I first signed on to develop the first course and the instructional designer and I were chatting about it, I sat there on that first phone call with my mouth open, thinking, “Wow, they’re going to do all this? This is great.” I used to do it all myself, and not do it well, by the way… At [another institution], I’m basically on my own… If I have a question about something, I have to find the answer myself. I don’t have a resource to turn to.
To better understand Jerry’s comments about course development, the instructional designers were observed and course development documents used at the site institution were reviewed. The observations and document reviews revealed a detailed process with a variety of resources to guide faculty through course development, as well as weekly meetings with instructional designers to discuss pedagogical approaches. Other participants who have developed courses at the site institution also expressed appreciation for the solid instructional design guidance they receive. Their comments indicate that course development is generally not intuitive to them, so without that guidance, they are often just guessing about how to design a quality course. At other institutions, instructional support is often just technical in nature, supporting the use of the learning management system. Observations at the site institution indicated that instructional design support is focused on pedagogy and coaching of faculty, which is a type of support many participants have not had before in such depth. Observations and document reviews indicated that instructional technology support on the learning management system is provided as an additional support at the site institution.

Interaction with academic advisors who support students was also mentioned as helpful support. Some participants indicated that when they have a student doing poorly in class, advisors can be wonderful resources in terms of reaching out to students to find out what is happening with them and what kind of support they might need. Helen relayed that one advisor that she has worked with plays the middle man in some cases where a student has become unresponsive, often getting a response from students when she can’t. Helen noted “I know they feel very comfortable with him and I feel comfortable with him. He’s very, very needed.” Interaction with student advisors is not a form of support offered by all institutions, so participants are pleased to find it at the site institution.
In general, the right help provided at the right time seems to create a very positive environment for the participants in the study. Bill notes, “There’s a great atmosphere that creates the mindset that you’re able to ask if you have questions, ask for help, ask for support.” Jim says that the support makes one feel like there is a safety net that benefits not only the faculty, but also the students:

It’s comforting to know that you have the support there at all times, because in the end, you yourself, as an instructor, you’re always learning as well. Obviously you don’t want to go through that learning curve at the expense of students. Students are paying really good money to get an education. The last thing that an instructor needs to do is mess up because of something that an instructor doesn’t know or isn’t aware of. Having that support is great, not only for the instructor, but for the students as well. It feels good to know that you have that safety net.

The value of having the right help at the right time to ultimately help the students carried throughout participants’ comments about support. In general, faculty what to help students learn and grow and getting the right help in a timely manner helps the faculty help the students.

**Valuing the Empowerment of Online Adjuncts**

The second theme related to job satisfaction is Valuing the Empowerment of Online Adjuncts, which is defined as an institutional culture that recognizes the professional abilities of online adjuncts. Participants indicated a desire to be treated as a professional and relayed many stories of not being treated professionally at other institutions where they also teach or have taught online. Two strong sub-themes emerged within this larger theme of empowering online adjuncts: 1) trusting online adjuncts with academic freedom; and 2) valuing and appreciating online adjuncts. The sub-themes are presented in the following sections with representative
Trusting online adjuncts with academic freedom. Trusting online adjuncts to do their jobs was found to empower them. The participants overwhelmingly indicated that they feel trusted by administrators at the site institution and many made their points regarding this sub-theme by sharing stories of their experiences at other institutions.

A key way in which institutions demonstrate that they trust online adjuncts to do their jobs is by allowing them to have academic freedom. Participants indicated that they want some control over course content, they want to be able to add their own experiences to courses, and they want some discretion over grading practices. Participants conveyed their thoughts by mentioning experiences at other institutions where their academic freedom has been limited. Several of the online adjuncts in the study explained that academic freedom is stifled at other institutions through strict monitoring of faculty and being prohibited from changing anything in a course, which causes them to have negative feelings about an institution. For example, Helen described her feelings about a prior online teaching experience at another institution where she was demanded to follow strict rules about interacting with students and delivering course content:

I felt very discouraged, demotivated. I felt like I was being disrespected too. My Ph.D. and my license don’t really count for much if I’m going to be told how to [teach]. I realize things have to be done, but I should also have the freedom to say, “I know how to teach my class. I’ve been doing it for a long time. You can at least give me a little bit of leeway here.”

Helen stepped away from that particular online adjunct teaching position because of the lack of academic freedom. Bob conveyed similar experiences at other institutions which make him
wonder why he was hired:

Some institutions are very tight with their content, meaning I can’t really add too much. Now that bothers me to an extent. I understand that we have to teach what we have to teach, but I have 25 years of experience. I know how it is to walk into a job and do the job. I don’t need to read it out of a book and I certainly don’t want to be teaching the students out of a book. That bothers me when I’m told I can’t change anything. Then why are you hiring me, because then I become a grader and just grade all day and that’s it, I’m not asked to think. Those are the things I don’t like. The thing I do like about universities is the opposite. A little bit of academic freedom, not that I’m going to sit there and change the complete course shell, I’m not going to do that. But if I have something to add, I want the ability to add it. I want to have the ability to have a little discretion on my grading.

Like Helen, Bob has stopped teaching for institutions that limit his academic freedom and he chooses to only teach online with institutions that allow academic freedom. Both Bob and Helen as well as other participants, have found academic freedom at the site institution. When discussing academic freedom at the site institution, Helen said, “I just love it here.” Bob relayed that the first time he taught at the site institution, an instructional designer said she would work with him on any changes he wanted to make to the course, which was surprising and pleasing for him.

The micromanagement of faculty as a method of limiting academic freedom was also mentioned by several participants. Arthur described micromanagement as having monthly performance reviews and receiving a variety of reports on his performance that he feels do not add value to his teaching. Mary was very vocal about sharing frustrations she’s had in other
online adjunct positions where she was micromanaged:

I would say I’m treated like a professional [at the site institution]. I am treated like
someone who knows what they’re doing. I’m treated like someone who is given the
benefit of the doubt. Just to contrast with other situations, I am watched like a hawk.
Every little thing is watched. It’s almost like guilty until proven innocent. I have to prove
myself as being a good instructor. I’ve been teaching at some of these schools for a long
time and they are still watching me. At [the site institution] it's assumed that I’m good
and that I’m topnotch and I feel that way. There’s one school that actually grades me
every week. They decide I’ve met expectations, I’ve exceeded expectations, I have not
met expectations. A lot of those I had to find them and I had to say, “Here’s the problem
and here’s how I answered it.” They didn’t even look in the right places to see the work
that I had done. I had to go out of my way to work. I am being graded and I have to waste
my time on that? Give me the benefit of the doubt on some of those other things that
maybe you think are missing or ask me first. Don’t send me some report that really
depresses me. I was so depressed when I got some of those reports, because I was trying
so hard and they just weren’t looking in the right places. Instead of asking me, they were
telling me I wasn’t meeting their expectations.

For Mary, the lack of trust and the micromanagement was not only demotivating, but it was also
depressing. She indicated that she still teaches for the institutions that don’t show they trust her
because she loves to teach and will take any opportunity to do so, but if she had more
opportunity at the site institution or institutions that trust her to do her job, she would leave the
other institutions. Similar experiences with micromanagement were reported by Helen, Alan, and
Arthur.
Bill shared a different perspective, indicating that he looks for an institution to back him up when students have grievances. Frank perhaps summed up the desire of online adjuncts to be trusted when he said, “The institution has hired me to do a job. I hope the people involved in the program will trust me to do a good job with that.” Although Bill and Frank did not directly mention academic freedom, their comments imply that they want academic freedom.

**Appreciating online adjuncts.** The second sub-theme related to empowering online adjuncts is making them feel appreciated. One way to make online adjuncts feel appreciated is to recognize them for their teaching abilities. Mary expressed her need for recognition and appreciation well by stating, “I have a passion for this work and I really, really care about it. I guess I really want a school that recognizes my passion and my talents… The support at [the site institution] makes me feel like I am important and that I’m respected for what I know and what I do.” Other participants who commented on this topic indicated that they also feel appreciated and valued by the site institution.

Sometimes it is a simple interaction that makes an online adjunct feel valued. John relayed a time when his supervisor contacted him after the student course evaluations had been completed and said, “You should be proud. You scored higher than just about any other faculty who has taught this class and it’s one of the most difficult classes for faculty.” For other online adjuncts, feeling valued and appreciated comes from overall interactions with a variety of individuals at the site institution. Carl explained:

I’m not just someone who lives in [my state] and no one at the online campus cares about me. They care about me a lot and I see that, not just from technical support, but also from the advisors to my students. I’m not just someone, I’m not a number. I’m a person with a name and someone who is appreciated and that goes a long way when we’re appreciated.
It’s different because if I was teaching face-to-face [at the main campus], I’d be interacting with all sorts of people, but I’m not, and so while it seems sometimes it’s a lonely place to teach online, no, it’s not really, because we do have tangible evidence of being appreciated by the school.

Carl’s comments about being appreciated tie back to the previous theme about getting help when it is needed and not being left alone. This demonstrates that providing a high level of support is one way for an institution to let adjuncts know they are appreciated.

Treating online adjuncts as important members of the institution also makes them feel valued and appreciated. Participants mentioned being referred to as part-time faculty instead of as adjuncts, being included as a team member on new initiatives, and being invited to events with full-time faculty, as ways in which they feel important either at the site institution or other institutions where they’ve worked.

The site institution holds an annual Online Faculty Symposium each summer, which was found to be particularly empowering for participants because it makes them feel included and valued. The symposium is held at the institution’s main campus and both full-time and adjunct online faculty are invited to attend. Travel costs are paid for those who live outside the local area. The symposium features a variety of sessions led by administrators and online faculty focused on informing attendees about the work of the online school, teaching practices, and technology tools. Participants mentioned that they see the symposium is an investment in them, making them feel valued. Although he had not yet attended a symposium at the time of his interview, David noted, “The symposium… that was an eye-opener for me. I felt as though, when I saw that invitation, I felt as though the university was investing in me.” Jim indicated that he feels valued and appreciated, noting, “I have felt respected and valued for my abilities from
everyone at [the site institution]. That was so evident at the recent symposium. I came away with
the validation that the institution really cares about its adjunct faculty.” Responding to a request
for feedback during the member checking phase of this study, Mary commented on her recent
experience at a symposium:

Now that I have met my colleagues face-to-face, I can see that there is a sense of support
and family that is unlike other institutions. I have actually been told by other institutions
to not even try to fit in… to meet other faculty because it is too “cliquish.” That is not a
place for the best investment of my time. I would rather work for a place like [the site
institution] where I am recognized and accepted as part of the group.

Considering Mary’s quote, along with the others, there appears to be a strong culture at the site
institution about valuing and appreciating online adjuncts. As the site institution expects that its
future growth depends on hiring and developing online adjuncts, a culture of this nature is to be
expected.

When participants were asked what support they would recommend, many mentioned the
only thing they would have recommended would be a face-to-face meeting, but they noted that
the site institution already does that with the symposium. Many expressed that they wish other
institutions they work for would hold a similar event.

**Offering Faculty Development**

The third theme related to job satisfaction is Offering Faculty Development, which is
declared as using multiple methods and resources for advancing the online teaching knowledge
and skills of online adjuncts. The online adjuncts in the study want to do their jobs well and they
want to grow as online instructors, but they need assistance from the institution in determining
how they should do their jobs and how they can improve. They look for an institution to offer
faculty development options in a variety of formats to fit their needs.

One way in which online instructors can be developed is by providing them with teaching expectations and feedback on their ability to meet those expectations. Bill talked at length about his need to know what is expected of him, acknowledging that the site institution does a good job setting expectations:

I know at the end of the day I’m going to be provided the tools needed in order to succeed and I’m going to know what is expected of me. If you, as the institution, supply your employees with the information that they need in order to know what is expected of them, I feel like they can then work to live up to and exceed those expectations… I feel like the institution does a very good job in explaining what these standards are, which helps me to strive to meet and exceed the standards, and makes me more motivated to do my job because I know what is expected of me and I know what I need to do.

A review of documents used by the online school revealed that expectations such as those mentioned by Bill are provided in checklists about course preparation and teaching that are provided to online faculty each term they teach. A course preparation checklist lets faculty know what they should do to ensure their course is ready to teach and include items such as: create a schedule of assignments with due dates; post an instructor introduction with your picture; check all links in your course to make sure they still work; and post a welcome announcement for students. A checklist of teaching expectations lets faculty know what they need to do during the term and includes items such as: post a weekly announcement; respond to student questions within 24 hours; grade all assignments within seven days of the due date; and reach out to students who are at risk of failing to offer additional support. A professional development site is also provided in Blackboard with additional resources about teaching practices, including
suggestions for instructors on how to add their presence to an online class and how to design assignments.

Providing feedback on whether or not the online adjuncts meet expectations is also a way to develop them. Participants expressed an interest in feedback from students as well as staff or administrators. Arthur notes, “The best feedback is from my students. Ideally I want to know what the students are saying.” Participants indicated a desire for more feedback either from the instructional design staff or from administrators. Jerry commented that he has never had any feedback from administrators on the student evaluations which are completed at the end of every course. He is interested in discussing the feedback on the student evaluations with someone at the institution who can guide him on making improvements. Jerry did note that an instructional designer does a mid-term check in with him to review the teaching expectations and to let him know if he is meeting them, but he feels the feedback he gets is formula-based and he desires a more authentic conversation about teaching. In general, participants appreciate the student feedback on course evaluations, but want more feedback from institutional staff and administrators.

Formal training opportunities, such as webinars, were also found to be of interest to participants as a form of professional development. A review of the resources provided for online faculty at the site institution revealed recordings of past webinar sessions on a variety of topics about online teaching strategies and institutional resources. Interestingly some of the participants mentioned participating in the webinars and finding them of value, whereas others seemed to not know that they had been offered.

There was an interest among participants in more technical training sessions to build skills on using the Blackboard course delivery platform. A review of training resources indicated
that the site institution does not offer general Blackboard training sessions since it prefers to
tailor training to the specific needs of each instructor, but perhaps the needs of instructors are not
well known and general Blackboard training would help. Participants noted that even if they’ve
used Blackboard at other institutions, it may have been a different version or the course
templates may have been set up differently, so training is needed to orient them to how
Blackboard is used at the site institution. Frank summed up the need for better Blackboard
training, stating:

The challenge I’ve had with [the two institutions I teach at] was the initial challenge of
becoming familiar with the online platform. They use different platforms. I don’t find
Blackboard to be overly intuitive… Every time I go to do the setup [of a course] it’s like
I’m teaching myself for the first time, every time… Maybe some training on the front-
end would probably be, for me, personally, what I might appreciate.

As many online adjuncts teach at multiple institutions, it is easy for them to be confused by
differences in technical functionality among institutions, so greater effort to train online adjuncts
and refresh their memories on a regular basis may be beneficial.

**Minimizing Implementation Challenges**

The fourth and final theme related to job satisfaction is Minimizing Implementation
Challenges, which is defined as reducing hassles and barriers related to teaching online.
Participants described hassles and barriers that frustrate them both at the site institution and at
other institutions where they work or have worked.

Technical issues at the site institution were mentioned by several participants. Problems
with the email system were mentioned by both Mary and Arthur. When Mary first started
working at the site institution, she was very frustrated by receiving double emails and having to
wait for several weeks before the information technology (IT) department could resolve the issue. The IT department at one point asked Mary to solve the problem herself, which made her feel as though the department lacked problem-solving skills. Arthur indicated that the email system doesn’t always work for him, which makes him anxious that he isn’t able to access emails that students may have sent him. Other technical issues included web conferencing accounts that have time limits and the lack of support and system compatibility with Macintosh computers. A review of documents indicates that the site institution is aware of the challenges and is working to mitigate them, although progress is slow. One recent advancement, which was reviewed in a weekly support email to faculty, is that online faculty can now sign up for shared access to web conferencing accounts that do not have time limits.

Issues with obtaining the textbook for a course and having the correct textbook available at the institutional bookstore were also mentioned as implementation hassles that online adjuncts have to deal with both at the site institution and other institutions. David indicated, “What I find most frustrating is, when I have to teach a course, and I can’t get the textbook on time so I can do my prep.” David’s comments refer to lag time when an instructor requests a desk copy of a textbook from a publisher. To mitigate this issue, observations of support providers indicate that the site institution is sending textbook information to faculty earlier than in the past so they will have more time to request the desk copy, but this will only be effective if the online adjuncts are assigned to teach with adequate advance notice.

John described an experience with the bookstore stocking the incorrect textbook, causing students to have to return the book and purchase the new one. Some students in his class did not have the correct textbook until the third week of his course. He now plans to accommodate textbooks issues in his courses. Informational emails sent to faculty indicate that the site
institution is helping with this issue by placing the first week’s reading in each Blackboard course site so students don’t fall behind if they end up with the wrong textbook at the start of the class. Additionally, Carl mentioned that new editions of textbooks make it necessary to update a course, which he sees as an administrative challenge. A review of support documents indicates that the site institution is moving towards using open educational resources, which are freely available on the Internet or through the institution’s library, to replace traditional textbooks. This new practice will reduce reliance on textbooks, minimizing the impact of changes to textbook editions. Unfortunately, open educational resources may introduce new implementation challenges, as links to Internet resources may unexpectedly change and the resources may become outdated.

John shared a frustration he had at the site institution when teaching from a master course shell which was developed by another faculty member. He found several errors in the course that caused frustration for him and the students. Examples of errors included inconsistent assignment instructions in multiple areas of the course site and a grade book that was set up incorrectly, resulting in final grades being calculated incorrectly. John noted that the support staff at the site institution was very responsive and helpful in resolving all of the issues he encountered, but he expected to be given a better course to teach from. John indicated that the students didn’t realize he was teaching from a course developed by someone else, so he worried that the issues in the course reflected poorly on him. John noted:

My reviews by students are very important because it’s the only thing the school really has to address whether I’m doing my job and whether they’ll invite me to teach again. It just bothers me that so many of these questions came up and each time, I look stupid.

John does not expect this type of implementation challenge and he thinks these types of
challenges should be minimized. John is of the opinion that the institution had paid someone to develop the master course and it should have been that person’s responsibility to make sure it was done well. He felt that the errors in the course got in the way of teaching effectively and that it makes both him and the institution look bad. Observations of instructional design consultations and a review of course design documents indicate that efforts are being made by staff to ensure master course quality.

A desire for longer-term scheduling of teaching assignments was mentioned by some participants as a challenge that they wish could be avoided. Due to the nature of online enrollments at the site institution, some teaching assignments are not made until just before an academic term starts and teaching assignments are sometimes switched at the last minute when courses need to be cancelled. Since all of the participants are teaching online in addition to other responsibilities, and some have grown accustomed to the additional income, advanced notice of teaching assignments would help them plan their schedules and income flow. Arthur noted:

I’m in the last three weeks of the class now. This is the first semester out of three semesters that I didn’t get two classes, but I designed a class, so that kind of made up for it. Now I’m kind of waiting for the next shoe to drop. For example, I have no idea when the next term starts, and if I’ll be offered any classes. Just in terms of forecasting income, and preparation time, on top of other things I do, so that’s a problem. Ideally I would know about all that well in advance.

Arthur touched on preparation time for teaching and Jerry echoed the need for preparation time, indicating that if knows he’ll be teaching a course again, he would take the time to update it. When teaching schedules are unknown, it makes it more difficult for instructors to plan ahead for changes that will improve the quality of their courses. Late scheduling also makes it difficult for
instructors to obtain the textbook before the course starts. Scheduling in advance with a high degree of reliability would minimize challenges associated with last minute scheduling and boost the job satisfaction of online adjuncts.

A final implementation challenge that participants mentioned facing at other institutions but not at the site institution is dealing with bureaucratic requirements, such as unnecessary meetings and processes. Alan relayed his experience working as an online adjunct for another institution that asked him to spend a lot of time attending meetings in addition to his teaching responsibilities. Alan found that most of the meetings were irrelevant and “a waste of time.” Likewise, John described being invited to “lame meetings” with little value so that “somebody in the school administration checks off the box that they had an adjunct meeting.” None of the participants expressed frustration with bureaucratic requirements at the site institution, which is one of the reasons they like working for the site institution. Arthur noted, “I would say that our processes are very, very good. I can’t think of any bureaucracy that is imposed upon us that is just not really necessary, but causes a lot of work.”

Section Summary

This section discussed four themes describing institutional support that leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs: 1) providing the right help at the right time; 2) valuing the empowerment of online adjuncts; 3) offering faculty development; and 4) minimizing implementation challenges. Getting timely and competent help was overwhelmingly reported as the type of support that is most satisfying to online adjuncts. It is also something that the site institution seems to do well. Working for an institution that empowers online adjuncts by trusting them to do their jobs and valuing and appreciating them is also satisfying for online adjuncts. Online adjuncts want to be developed by being given clear expectations, feedback, and
opportunities to learn how to improve their online teaching. And finally, participants mentioned implementation challenges that get in the way of quality teaching, such as textbook and technical glitches, bureaucratic requirements, and late scheduling of teaching assignments, all of which are dissatisfiers.

**Turnover Intentions**

Three themes were identified to answer the third research question regarding how institutional support impacts the turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site: 1) mutuality and congruency create comfort; 2) having a variety of work assignments; and 3) treating people well creates positive contrasts with other institutions. The following three thematic sections describe how institutional support at the site institution impacts the turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts and include excerpts from the interview transcripts to demonstrate key points in the themes.

**Mutuality and Congruency Create Comfort**

The first theme related to how institutional support impacts the turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts is Mutuality and Congruency Create Comfort, which is defined as online adjuncts sensing that there is a good fit between themselves and the institution based on the institutional support they receive. A good fit occurs when the institution and online adjuncts have similar values, perspectives, and expectations, leading to contentedness with the relationship. Participants in this study are able to determine good fit by receiving support from institutional staff, who through their actions and words, convey values, perspectives, and expectations that are congruent with the participants’ own thinking.

Mutual appreciation is an indicator of good fit and a good relationship. When asked what impacts their decision to stay with or leave an institution where they are teaching as an online
adjunct, participants indicated that they stay with an institution where they feel mutual appreciation exists between them and the institution. Online adjuncts want to feel appreciated and needed. John stated:

I want a school that wants me. I don’t want to beg a school to have me teach there unless I really, really want to be there. I want a school that there’s a mutual appreciation and affection and all that. I feel a loyalty to the schools I’ve been working with and I think they feel a loyalty to me, as well. That impacts my decision [to stay or leave].

Participants indicated that through support-related interactions with staff members, they feel a mutual appreciation between themselves and the site institution. Mary commented, “I feel like you’re here for me. I know I’m here for you, but I feel like you’re here for me as well. It’s a reciprocal relationship.” Bill mentioned that he is motivated to stay with the site institution because he feels that the institution “has my back.”

Congruent values and philosophies about education among online adjuncts and institutions also lead to good fit and make online adjuncts want to stay in their jobs. Throughout the interviews with participants, it became evident that congruent values and philosophies about students are particularly important to online adjuncts. When responding to this theme during member checking, Jim commented, “The mission of the school and instructors is the same, which is important. It is all about the students.” Participants mentioned working for institutions that view students as numbers, which are institutions they are not interested in working for. Bob explained his philosophy of how the way an institution treats students factors into his employment decisions:

I believe that the students come first. When I work for a university that really believes that, [the site institution] is definitely one, then I believe that’s a place that I need to stay.
I’ve worked for places where the students were numbers and that really bothers me. Several participants mentioned working at institutions that emphasize grades over learning, sometimes making faculty give students grades they have not earned just so the students can progress through their programs. Bob told a story about a time when an institution changed a student’s grade without his knowledge. He had given the student an F and he later discovered that the grade had been changed to a B-.. He resigned from the institution, saying, “I cannot work for an institution that believes that changing grades behind the professor’s back is acceptable.” None of the participants felt that the site institution puts too much emphasis on grades, but they indicated that if that ever changes, they would leave.

Several participants also mentioned that they don’t stay at institutions that micromanage them and limit their academic freedom. This ties into the theme for the second research question on empowering online adjuncts by trusting them with academic freedom. None of the adjuncts indicated micromanagement or limited academic freedom by the site institution, but Arthur and Frank indicated that if they feel increased oversight of their teaching, they will consider teaching elsewhere.

When online adjuncts sense mutual appreciation and congruent philosophies, they feel comfortable staying with an institution. Participants in the study seem to sense these two things with the site institution, leading to a high level of comfort. Helen says, “I feel like I’m at home,” when talking about the site institution. Also when speaking of the site institution, Alan said:

It’s just that feeling of extreme comfort at all times… just knowing that there are people there who actually care if I’m retained. That they care enough where it’s not just, “Oh, go out and get somebody else.” There is this relationship that goes both ways. That there are people who will support you, you want to stick around.
Alan’s comments indicate that the support he receives indicates a desire to retain him because it serves to develop his skills as an online instructor. The support also shows caring for him and his students.

David noted that teaching at the site institution is such a comfortable experience that he is gravitating towards more teaching at the institution:

Since I’ve been teaching at [the site institution], I have just gravitated closer to the university. I don’t know why. It’s a comfort level. I think it’s just an ease in which things happen… Those are the things that make me comfortable, to want to teach for the university.

David expanded on his comment about the ease with which things happen, indicating that the support provided makes it easy for him to be prepared and to teach. As indicated in the last theme for the previous research question, the number of implementation challenges online adjuncts encounter impacts their job satisfaction. Not having significant implementation challenges provides comfort for online adjuncts.

**Having a Variety of Work Assignments**

The second theme related to how institutional support impacts the turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts is Having a Variety of Work Assignments, which is defined as online adjuncts continuing to work for an institution when they have opportunities that keep their interest, limit boredom, and broaden their skills and knowledge. One type of opportunity that online adjuncts look for is being given a variety of courses to teach, which they consider a form of support. Helen, Carl, and Jerry all mentioned enjoying the challenge of teaching different subject matter. Carl explained how having a variety of courses to teach motivates him to stay with an institution:
What keeps me motivated to stay at these schools [that I teach at] are opportunities to take on additional courses that while I’ve had experiences in my career in those particular subject areas, I have not necessarily been afforded the opportunity to teach those subject areas. Being able to teach those subject areas allows me to expand my knowledge and experience base… As far as what impacts my decision to stay at these schools, it’s opportunities to teach other courses.

The participants commenting on a desire for course variety indicated that they have had such variety at the site institution, but they welcome more of it.

Having the opportunity to engage with an institution in a non-teaching capacity was also mentioned as a reason that online adjuncts stay with an institution. The site institution provides opportunities for online adjuncts to engage in curriculum development by creating master courses when full-time faculty are unavailable and to participate in marketing online programs to prospective students by blogging about careers and going to college online. Participants indicated that they enjoy both types of opportunities. Bill described his positive feelings about developing a master course:

I’ve had the good fortune of engaging in both curriculum development, as well as teaching… It’s been very rewarding to have had the opportunity to both teach and develop some of the curriculum, to have an impact on the way the students are being taught. Then, to see that end result of our hard work in creating that course, and the students enjoying it, benefiting from it… That’s been very rewarding and a very worthwhile experience that I’ve had and I consider myself fortunate to have been a part of.

Bill’s reason for enjoying the curriculum development process is that it allows him to impact
students through a different level of engagement with the institution. While most online adjuncts teach from master courses that are already developed, developing a master course allows online adjuncts to determine up front how a course should be taught, giving them greater influence on the learning outcomes of students. Some faculty also mentioned enjoying curriculum development because they have not done it before and it provides them with a new professional challenge.

Jerry described his enjoyment of writing blogs for the site institution:

The other thing that I’ve had the opportunity to do which I never thought I would ever do, what I was really grateful for, is writing blogs for [the site institution]. I’ve written six or eight blog posts. I’m really enjoying that. The opportunity to do something like that really enhances my desire to stay there. Frankly, I never thought I would enjoy it, but gosh, I really enjoy it. It’s kind of fun.

Similar to Bill’s enjoyment in impacting students through curriculum development, Jerry enjoys impacting students through blog writing. Whereas Bill’s additional engagement impacts learning outcomes, Jerry’s blogs are intended for recruiting students and giving them career insights. As noted in the findings for the first research question, online adjuncts are motivated by seeing students learn and impacting their lives beyond class. Both types of additional work assignments mentioned provide additional opportunities for online adjuncts to impact students’ learning and lives.

**Treating People Well Creates Positive Contrasts with Other Institutions**

The third theme related to how institutional support impacts the turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts is Treating People Well Creates Positive Contrasts with Other Institutions, which is defined as online adjuncts positively contrasting their situation at the site
institution with their situation at other institutions, making them want to continue or increase
their involvement with the institution. The online adjuncts participating in the study indicated the
support and treatment they receive from the site institution makes them want to stay with the
institution. Some of them even said that the support and treatment at the site institution is so
good that they now see it as the standard that they look for other institutions to meet. When
talking about the site institution, Alan noted, “I guess I’m just spoiled. I’m so used to this good
kind of environment.” Alan followed by stating that due to his experience at the site institution,
he has cut back his teaching at other institutions where the support is not as good and he even
lacks interest in teaching for new institutions. Jim has a similar sentiment, stating, “I think that
what I’m already used to at [the site institution] is something that I would now expect in any
adjunct position… I think I’ve been spoiled.” Bill contrasts the support at the site institution with
support at other institutions and explains how support makes him want to stay with the site
institute and increase his involvement:

[Support] certainly makes me want to stay within the university and participate more in
the institution, due to the support that is offered. In other institutions, it’s not been my
experience that that is the case. The level of support received here, I think is superior to
that of experiences I’ve had in the past, which is certainly a motivating factor to want to
stay around and want to engage more and be available to assist on whatever projects are
needed, whether in teaching, or curriculum development, or whatever may come my way.

Comments from Bill, Alan, and Jim all indicate that being treated well makes them appreciate
what they have at the site institution, driving interest in continuing their engagement and
engaging more.

Since online adjuncts are part-time employees, they are limited in how much they can
work for an institution. At the site institution, online adjuncts are limited to two work assignments per each 11-week academic term to avoid having to provide them with benefits, as required by federal law. When asked about what would increase their commitment to working at the site institution, several participants expressed an interest in being able to work more for the institution, which is not likely due to the limits on how much they can work. They are interested in teaching more courses per term or taking on new types of work for the institution. Jim stated, “I guess an additional role [would increase my commitment to the institution]. Additional responsibilities, additional coursework, head courses… Any additional roles that I would be able to assume.” Arthur indicated that he is interested in reaching more students, so for him that means he wants to teach more classes. David would be willing to stop teaching for other institutions if he could teach more courses at the site institution. Mary expressed frustration with the limits on teaching for part-time faculty:

I would like to do more and can’t because of federal regulations on the number of hours I can put in as a part-time employee. I’m a part-time employee who wishes they could do more. It’s not like I’m going to be looking for some place else to teach. I’m not looking for a better deal some place, because I think this is an institution worth investing in. My only hope is the school finds a way to include me in more ways, and that they find a way to get around the benefits… I even offered to pay for my own benefits because I would like to stick with this program.

Mary’s frustration is shared by others, as well as institutional administrators. It is to an institution’s benefit to use an instructor to teach multiple courses because doing so limits the need to support multiple people and provides greater consistency across courses.

A few of the participants are so impressed with the site institution that they expressed an
interest in full-time work at the institution, either online or on-campus. Mary is willing to relocate if it means she can teach more for the institution as a full-time employee and Bob has applied for a full-time on-campus teaching position. Jim lives near one of the regional campuses of the university and would consider teaching there full-time. Helen, Alan, and Arthur are all interested in full-time online teaching at the site institution. For these adjuncts, full-time employment may be a future possibility. On its website, the site institution has advertised a new lecturer position, which is a full-time teaching position. Online adjuncts would be eligible for the position, allowing them to teach up to four courses per term if they are hired. One limitation of the lecturer position is that it only involves teaching and lecturers are not permitted to participate in curriculum development or any other non-teaching activity. As the findings show, curriculum development and blogging has been an interest for the online adjuncts, so the lecturer position may not be an attractive option for some of them.

**Section Summary**

This section discussed three themes that answer the third research question regarding how institutional support impacts the turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site: 1) mutuality and congruency create comfort; 2) having a variety of work assignments; and 3) treating people well creates positive contrasts with other institutions. Findings showed that when online adjuncts sense mutual appreciation and similar philosophies between themselves and an institution, they feel comfortable staying in their online adjunct teaching positions. They also are motivated to stay with an institution when they have a variety of opportunities that keep them engaged and challenged. In general, the support that the participants have received at the site institution is better than the support that they have received elsewhere, making them interested in continuing or increasing their involvement with the institution.
Additional Finding

The study revealed an additional finding regarding compensation and benefits that does not directly answer any research question. Participants noted that the site institution pays well, stating that the pay is “very generous,” and “in the top 25%” when compared to other institutions. Despite being pleased with the pay, participants generally do not see pay or benefits as support or as a motivator, so they also do not see them as satisfiers. When asked if they view pay and benefits as forms of support, Arthur and Jim said that they are not concerned with benefits and they view pay as an obligation by the institution, not as a form of support. Frank described compensation for teaching as a transaction, not support.

Findings show that the participants are teaching online for reasons other than compensation. Jerry stated:

Since I’m just a part-time adjunct, the benefits piece is not really a consideration. The pay piece of it… I certainly wouldn’t do this on a volunteer basis, but it’s not one of the top two or three reasons I’m doing this… I’m not too terribly concerned about the compensation.

Likewise, John noted:

I guess the pay is a nice thing. If you paid me half of what you’re paying me, I’d still do it. I’m at the point in my life where money is not an incentive for me and that’s nice.

Benefits I don’t need.

For both Jerry and John, as well as other participants, seeing evidence that students learn and apply their learning to the real world is more motivating than compensation or benefits. None of the participants voluntarily mentioned compensation when asked what they consider to be support and they only commented on it when asked specifically about compensation. Thus,
compensation is not a significant factor leading to job satisfaction or reducing turnover intentions of online adjuncts included in the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings for the three research questions used to guide this basic qualitative study. The first question focused on participants’ motivations for teaching as an online adjunct faculty member. Participants are motivated to teach online instead of in traditional classrooms because the flexibility inherent in online education allows them to balance their personal and professional lives. When teaching online, faculty can teach at any time of the day from any location. Faculty teaching online are also exposed to a greater variety of students, ideas, and experiences, providing balance with what they are exposed to in other facets of their lives. Additionally, participants are motivated by evidence that their students are learning and applying what they have learned. Finally, participants are motivated by investing in students’ lives beyond class, which they do by nurturing students, helping students through difficult life circumstances, and helping them grow personally and professionally. Compensation was not a motivator for participants to teach online.

The second research question focused on what types of institutional support lead experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their online adjunct teaching positions. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated a desire to get the help they need when they need it by a range of staff members. Getting good help in a timely fashion is a significant satisfier of online adjuncts. Feeling empowered by being treated as a professional also leads to satisfaction for online adjuncts. Participants want to be trusted to do their jobs, which includes giving them academic freedom, and they want to feel appreciated and valued for their professional abilities. Offering a variety of faculty development options satisfies online adjuncts because such
opportunities allow them to grow as online instructors. And finally, online adjuncts are satisfied when they encounter few implementation challenges, such as technical and textbook issues, being provided poor quality course materials to teach from, late scheduling, and unnecessary bureaucratic requirements. Compensation for teaching online was not a satisfier for the experienced online adjuncts in the study.

The final research question focused on how institutional support impacts the turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts. Participants indicated that they want to work for institutions when they sense mutual and congruent perspectives between themselves and the institution on how faculty and students should be treated. Mutual and congruent perspectives create a comfortable working environment for experienced online adjuncts. Participants also indicated that having a variety of work experiences at an institution makes them want to continue their employment. They see being given a variety of work experiences as a form of support for their own development. And finally, just being treated well makes experienced online adjuncts want to say with an institution. Many participants conveyed stories of receiving poor support and being treated poorly at other institutions to draw contrasts with the good support and treatment they receive at the site institution. Being treated well makes experienced online adjuncts want to continue or increase their involvement with an institution. The findings for the three research questions are related, as show in Figure 2.
As depicted in Figure 2, the relationship between institutional support, motivation, job satisfaction and limited turnover intentions among online adjuncts at the site institution begins with the foundational values of the institution. Online adjuncts look for an institution to value student learning, academic freedom and the contributions of faculty, giving good support, and faculty development. The foundational values lead to supportive practices at the site institution, including timely and competent support, staff that works with faculty on exercising academic freedom, recognition of faculty work, the inclusion of adjunct faculty in institutional events, a variety of faculty development resources and opportunities, efforts to minimize implementation challenges, and a variety of work assignments. At the site institution, the supportive practices have led the online adjuncts to be satisfied with their positions and motivated to continue their association with the university. Continuing their employment with the university allows them to fulfill their motivations for teaching online. Connecting the foundational values, supportive practices, and satisfaction and motivation to stay is a feeling among the online adjuncts of
mutuality and congruency between themselves and the site institution. The values and supportive practices of the site institution make the online adjuncts feel as though they have congruent philosophies or values about education and that the site institution cares about retaining them. This leads to a general sense of comfort among the online adjuncts, making them highly satisfied with their online adjunct positions and motivated to continue or increase their association with the site institution so they can continue rewarding work with students in an environment that allows for balance in their lives.

Overall, from the perspective of the experienced online adjuncts in the study, the site institution has values and supportive practices that they look for when taking an online adjunct teaching position. Other institutions may wish to learn from these findings as they grow online programs and hire more online adjuncts. The following chapter explores conclusions of the study, some of which may be important points for other institutions to consider, as well as the site institution as it continues to grow its online programs.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions among experienced online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines at a private university in the Northeast of the United States. A basic qualitative study explored the following research questions:

1. What motivates experienced adjunct faculty to teach online?
2. What institutional support leads experienced online adjuncts to be satisfied with their jobs?
3. How does institutional support impact turnover intentions of experienced online adjuncts at the study site?

This study explored the motivations of experienced online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines to teach online, as well as the effect that institutional support has on their job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The study was practice-based, so purposeful sampling was used to reach participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study and to ensure range and variation of the sample. Twelve experienced online adjuncts teaching in business-related disciplines at the site institution participated in the study. Data was collected primarily through in-depth interviews with each participant, with secondary data collected through observations of staff providing support to online adjuncts and reviews of support documents. Using the constant comparison method of qualitative data analysis, data were analyzed and ten themes were identified to answer the three research questions.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research conclusions, implications for practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. Conclusions that can
be drawn from the findings will be presented, along with discussion of how the conclusions relate to prior research and the conceptual framework for the study. The chapter includes three sections: Conclusions and Discussion; Implications for Practice; and Recommendations for Future Research.

**Conclusions and Discussion**

This section offers conclusions and discussion for this basic qualitative study. Five conclusions were drawn from the findings: 1) foundational values of the institution play a key role in the job satisfaction and retention of online adjuncts; 2) motivated online adjuncts invest in students and the institution beyond teaching assignments; 3) congruency of values allows academic freedom and higher order management practices; 4) personalized support and professional development is integral to the satisfaction and retention of online adjuncts; and 5) experienced online adjuncts in business-related disciplines have similar, but not identical, support needs and desires as other online adjuncts. The following five sections describe the conclusions and discuss how they relate to the literature that was reviewed to frame this study.

**Conclusion One: Foundational Values of the Institution Play a Key Role in the Satisfaction and Retention of Online Adjuncts**

The first conclusion drawn from this study is that the satisfaction and retention of online adjuncts is tied to the foundational values of the institution. As indicated in the findings for this study, the foundational values of the site institution lead to the supportive practices it has put in place, which then leads to the satisfaction and motivation to stay among online adjuncts in the study. In a study related to organizational support theory, Dawley et al. (2010) found that an employee’s comfort or perceived fit with the culture and values of an organization is positively related to their perceived organizational support (POS), which in turn lowers their turnover
intentions. Relating the Dawley et al. (2010) study to this study, when online adjuncts sense that congruency and mutuality exists between themselves and the institution, they perceive the institutional support more positively, which in turn makes them more likely to stay with the institution.

In this study, the online adjuncts appreciated that the institution values their academic freedom and the contributions they make while exercising that academic freedom. Recognizing the good work of online adjuncts to make them feel appreciated is how an institution shows that it values the contributions of online adjuncts. The need for recognition as an indicator of institutional values is a theme throughout the adjunct, turnover, and organizational support theory literature. Gappa and Leslie (1993) found that a lack of institutional recognition and appreciation of adjuncts led to dissatisfaction of adjuncts. Other studies of online adjuncts indicate that the lack of recognition for good work can lead to their job dissatisfaction (Dolan, 2011; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Larcara, 2010; Maier, 2012). The recognition, praise, and approval of employees also factors into their turnover intentions (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973) and their positive perceptions of support (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997). Thus, recognizing online adjuncts for the contributions they make is a key way for institutions to express foundational values that satisfy and retain online adjuncts.

Giving good support in general, such as the timely and competent support from staff and professional development opportunities, is also viewed by online adjuncts as evidence that the institution values quality online instruction and believes in supporting faculty so they can deliver quality instruction. Organizational support theory, which provides the theoretical framework for this study, indicates that when employees have a positive perception of organizational support,
they reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors, such as increased job satisfaction, increased organizational commitment, and reduced turnover intentions (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1990). Relating organizational support theory to the site institution, the online adjuncts have positive perceptions of the support that is provided to them, and they see the support as embodying the institution’s values, which makes them highly satisfied and motivated to continue working at the site institution.

**Conclusion Two: Motivated Online Adjuncts Invest in Students and the Institution beyond Teaching Assignments**

The second conclusion drawn from this study is that motivated online adjuncts invest in students and the institution in ways that go above and beyond what is required by their teaching assignments. The findings show that online adjuncts are intrinsically motivated to invest in students for their long-term success in life outside of class by nurturing them and helping them grow personally and professionally. This type of investment is not a requirement of their teaching assignments, but is something the online adjuncts do because they are motivated by the reward of helping and developing students.

The intrinsic motivation of adjuncts is documented in the literature on both traditional and online adjuncts (Antony & Valadez, 2002; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Gullickson, 2011; Hopkins, 2013; Hoyt, 2012; Runyon, 2008; Schroeder, 2008). Online adjuncts in particular were found to be motivated and satisfied by feeling that they made a difference in students’ lives and that they were accomplishing something positive, as well as making personal connections with students (Gullickson, 2011; Hopkins, 2013; Reeves & Brown, 2002). The fact that intrinsically motivated online adjuncts in this study are willing to invest in students outside of class can be considered a benefit of hiring and retaining online adjuncts.
The findings for this study also indicate that online adjuncts are motivated to invest in the institution in ways that go beyond teaching. The participants in the study discussed wanting a variety of work assignments, some of which are not related to teaching, such as curriculum development and blog writing. Their interest in investing in the institution in ways other than teaching is due to the fact that they are motivated to stay in their positions and engage more with the institution as a result of the good support and treatment they receive. Most of the literature on traditional and online adjuncts does not address the motivations of adjuncts to invest in institutions beyond teaching, with the exception of Antony and Valadez’s (2002) indication that traditional adjuncts in their study were interested in institutional involvement through administrative duties and the finding of Green et al. (2008) that online adjuncts are interested in course development.

The motivation of online adjuncts to invest in the institution is related to the conceptual framework for the study, organizational support theory. As described in the previous conclusion, the literature on organizational support theory indicates that employees that perceive high levels of organizational support reciprocate with behaviors that benefit the employer, such as greater organizational commitment and going beyond normal job duties (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Wayne et al., 2002). Online adjuncts in the study appear to have positive perceptions of the institutional support provided to them, making them want to give back to the institution through greater involvement that goes beyond teaching.

**Conclusion Three: Congruency of Values Allows for Academic Freedom and Higher Order Management Practices**

The third conclusion related to this study is that the congruency of values between online adjuncts and the site institution allow for academic freedom and higher order management
practices. Throughout the data for this study, online adjuncts frequently mentioned that they value their academic freedom and they are dissatisfied when academic freedom is limited by micromanagement and strict monitoring. The study participants provided several examples from other institutions of being required to teach a certain way and having their teaching monitored by institutional staff. For example, Helen and Bob discussed being told how to teach and not being able to make any changes to courses they were teaching. The online adjuncts in the study report that they have an appropriate level of academic freedom at the site institution and they do not feel micromanaged or monitored, which they see as indicators that administrators at the site institution also value academic freedom and trust online adjuncts to teach without close supervision. This congruency among values allows for institutional support practices that provide mutual benefit for the institution and the online adjuncts. The institution benefits from motivated and satisfied adjuncts that want to stay and do their jobs well and the adjuncts benefit by being allowed to teach as they see fit and bring their own personal experiences to their teaching.

Although the desire for being trusted with academic freedom is a significant finding in this study, academic freedom is not frequently mentioned in the literature as a satisfier of adjuncts. Only Shannon (2011) and Lefebvre (2008) indicated that the inability to exercise academic freedom and rigid policies about how courses are run lead to the dissatisfaction of online adjuncts. The fact that academic freedom and micromanagement is not frequently mentioned in the literature may be indicative of recent changes in online education. As institutions expand their online programs, the need to manage the quality of online instruction may be leading to more limits on academic freedom and more monitoring of faculty. Research has likely not yet looked at how high levels of online enrollment impact the support of online adjuncts.
The desire for academic freedom and the lack of micromanagement is representative of the need for employee autonomy, which is mentioned in the employee turnover literature. The degree of employee autonomy, or the ability of the employee to determine how to do their job, is tied to employee turnover intentions. Liu et al., (2011) found that supporting the autonomy of employees gives them a sense of empowerment and reduces their turnover intentions. Rhodes and Eisenberger (2002) noted that autonomy, among other things, leads to high levels of perceived organization support, which in turn leads to positive organizational outcomes, such as employee job satisfaction and reduced turnover. Thus, the finding about academic freedom and micromanagement is particularly important to the field of online education as it illuminates a potential dissatisfier of online faculty which may negatively affect online programs if it leads to high turnover rates.

**Conclusion Four: Personalized Support and Professional Development is Integral to the Satisfaction and Retention of Online Adjuncts**

The fourth conclusion related to this study is that the satisfaction and retention of online adjuncts is related to providing them with personalized support and professional development. Findings in the study imply that the support at the site institution is aimed at working in step with online adjuncts rather than requiring them to conform to one-size-fits-all support and development practices. Participants discussed receiving personalized support in a timely manner and receiving instructional design coaching that is tailored to an individual adjunct’s strengths and weaknesses. Observations of support situations at the site institution also demonstrated personalized support. Professional development at the site institution is provided through multiple methods to meet the individual needs of online adjuncts. For example, a variety of documentation is available for use as needed and webinars are offered for those who are
interested and available, with attendance not required. These aspects of support and professional
development at the site institution contribute to a positive environment that leads to the online
adjuncts’ satisfaction and desire to continue their employment with the institution.

Although studies have not looked at the effect of personalized support and
professional development on adjuncts, some literature on online adjuncts recommends
personalized support in order to motivate and satisfy them. Puzziferro and Shelton (2009) point
out that standardized feedback and support practices at some institutions fail to recognize the
unique needs and strengths of online instructors. Bedford (2011) found that online adjuncts have
varying levels of instructional expertise and experience, which calls for support that is tailored to
each adjunct. Gallagher and LaBrie (2012) and Vaill and Testori (2012) suggest providing online
faculty with personalized instructional design support to meet their needs and desires.

The case for providing personalized support and development is tied more closely to the
literature on organizational support theory. According to the theory, employees perceive higher
levels of organizational support when they feel that the support is specific to them (Eisenberger
et al., 1986). When the same support is given to all employees, the employees do not sense that
the organization cares about their individual contributions and well-being (Eisenberger et al.,
1986). By receiving personalized support and development options, online adjuncts at the site
institution sense that the institution cares about them and the contributions they make. Since high
levels of perceived organizational support lead to increased job satisfaction, increased
organizational commitment, and reduced turnover intentions (Eisenberger et al., 1986;
Eisenberger et al., 1990) and the perception of organizational support is enhanced by
personalized support, this conclusion is an important one for institutions to consider as they
design their support and professional development practices.
Conclusion Five: Experienced Online Adjuncts in Business-Related Disciplines Have Similar, but not Identical Support Needs and Desires as Other Adjuncts

The fifth and final conclusion related to this study is that the support needs and desires of the experienced online adjuncts in this study are similar, but not identical, to the support needs and desires of adjuncts that are mentioned in the literature. Table 7 provides a summary of the satisfiers and dissatisfiers of adjuncts and online adjuncts that are commonly mentioned in the literature, the associated institutional support types that are recommended in the literature, and support types that are needed and desired by the participants in this study.

Related to the satisfiers of adjuncts, the participants in this study want evaluations of teaching performance, opportunities for new responsibilities, recognition and appreciation of their teaching abilities and contributions, and academic freedom, all of which are mentioned in the literature as desired and recommended support types of adjuncts and online adjuncts (Antony & Valadez, 2002; Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al., 2009). The literature also indicates that adjuncts look for career advancement opportunities (Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Green et al., 2009). In this study, the participants were not necessarily looking for career advancement opportunities, as they all had other sources of employment, but some were interested in full-time employment with the site institution as a means of being more involved with an institution with which they have mutual and congruent values and experience a comfortable relationship.

Related to the dissatisfiers of adjuncts, the participants in this study want training and professional development on technical tools and online teaching practices, face-to-face meetings, and early notification of teaching assignments, all of which are mentioned in the literature as desired institutional support types of other adjuncts (Cutts & Gammon, 2011;
Dolan, 2011; Green et al., 2009; Maier, 2012; Puzziferro-Shelton, 2009; Rogers et al., 2009). The participants in this study were particularly positive about the face-to-face online faculty symposium held each year by the site institution. Participants in the study mentioned the need for timely and competent support from a variety of staff members at the site institution. The literature does not specifically mention timely and competent support from a variety of staff members, but it does mention the need for instructional support from staff (Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012; Maier, 2012; Vaill & Testori 2012), which is one of the types of support that is provided in a timely and competent manner at the site institution. Participants also mentioned their desire and appreciation for minimal technical, textbook, and master course issues, and streamlined policies and processes, none of which are mentioned in the literature on adjuncts. Recommended institutional support mentioned in the literature, but not by participants in this study, include equitable pay and benefits, communities of practice, mentoring, and inclusion in departmental discussions (Balch, 1999; Biro, 2005; Eney & Davidson, 2012; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Green, 2007; Green et al., 2009; Hardy, 2007; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt et al., 2008; Kezar & Maxey, 2013; Maier, 2012; Nutting, 2003; Puzziferro-Schnitzer, 2005; Velez, 2009).

As indicated, there are many similarities between the institutional support types that are mentioned in the literature and the types of support needed and desired by the participants in this study. The types of support that are similar are appropriate for all faculty. The differences seem mostly related to career situations. The participants in this study generally have full-time employment elsewhere and teach online on a part-time basis to fulfill their interests in helping students learn, contributing to students’ long-term success in life, and balancing other aspects of their lives, which explains why they may not have
Table 7

**Summary of Satisfiers, Dissatisfiers, Recommended Institutional Support Types for Adjuncts and Online Adjuncts, and Desired Institutional Support Types of Experienced Online Adjuncts in Business-Related Disciplines in this Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfiers vs. dissatisfiers</th>
<th>Recommended institutional support</th>
<th>Institutional Support Desired by Experienced Online Adjuncts in Business-Related Disciplines in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfiers</strong> – the recommended support types enhance the following satisfiers noted in the literature:</td>
<td>Evaluations of teaching performance</td>
<td>Evaluations of teaching performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of performance</td>
<td>Opportunities for new responsibilities, such as curriculum development</td>
<td>Opportunities for new responsibilities, such as curriculum development and blogging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career advancement</td>
<td>Career advancement opportunities</td>
<td>Recognition and appreciation for contributions and teaching abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased responsibility</td>
<td>Recognition of adjuncts’ contributions by supervisors/administrators</td>
<td>Academic freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Academic freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissatisfiers</strong> – the recommended support types address the following dissatisfiers noted in the literature:</td>
<td>Pay rates equitable to those for full-time faculty</td>
<td>Training and professional development on technical tools and online teaching practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low pay</td>
<td>Benefits, including health, tuition, and retirement benefits</td>
<td>Timely and competent help from a variety of staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of benefits</td>
<td>New faculty orientations covering institutional mission, policies and practices</td>
<td>Face-to-face meetings where online adjuncts can meet administrators, support personnel, and other faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security; inability to plan on future teaching opportunities</td>
<td>Clear and frequent communications between administrators and adjuncts</td>
<td>Minimal technical, textbook, and course issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late assignment of courses</td>
<td>Comprehensive training and professional development on technical tools and online teaching practices</td>
<td>Early notification of teaching assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interpersonal relationships with other faculty and with administrators</td>
<td>Communities of practice in which adjuncts can share ideas about teaching with their peers</td>
<td>Streamlined policies and processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient training and professional development</td>
<td>Mentoring by experienced online adjuncts or full-time faculty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of involvement in departmental discussions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructional support from instructional designers and instructional technologists

Face-to-face meetings where online adjuncts can meet administrators, support personnel, and other faculty

Inclusion in departmental discussions, such as curriculum discussions

Guaranteed scheduling

Early notification of teaching assignments

Sources: Adams & Dority, 2005; Antony & Valadez, 2002; Biro, 2005; Cutts & Gammon, 2011; Dolan, 2011; Eney & Davidson, 2012; Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Gaillard-Kenney, 2006; Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Green, 2007; Green et al., 2009; Gullickson, 2011; Hardy, 2007; Hogan & McKnight, 2007; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt et al., 2008; Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Maxey, 2013; Larcara, 2010; Maier, 2012; Nutting, 2003; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009; Rogers et al., 2009; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003; Schroeder, 2008; Tipple, 2010; Vaill & Testori, 2012; Velez, 2009; Weschke & Canipe, 2010
mentioned equitable pay, benefits, career advancement, mentoring, communities of practice, and involvement in departmental discussions as types of institutional support that they look for from an institution. Such types of support are likely to be of more interest to adjuncts who are looking for academic careers and who desire full-time employment as a faculty member. The fact that the adjuncts in this study do not need and desire all of the support recommended in the literature is consistent with prior findings that online adjuncts are a heterogeneous group with a variety of support needs (Bedford, 2011; Bedford & Miller, 2013; Shiffman, 2009) and that experienced online adjuncts need and desire less support than inexperienced online adjuncts (Velez, 2009).

**Implications for Practice**

The findings and conclusions for this study lead to implications for practice for me, the student researcher, the site institution, and other institutions delivering online education.

**Implications for My Own Practice and the Site Institution’s Practice**

Since this is a practice-based study related to my professional position at the site institution, this study has several implications for my own practice as I lead the instructional support for online faculty. Through the process of conducting this study, I learned that many of the support practices I have put in place are having a positive impact on online adjuncts and the students they teach. I have also realized that there are things that could be done better to support online adjuncts and I have learned of several practices that should be avoided as the online school grows. The findings and conclusions of this study validate my own thinking about how to treat and support online adjuncts and they opened my eyes to practices at other institutions that negatively impact online adjuncts and online programs. Having the participants share their experiences, both good and bad, gave me good insight into how to effectively perform my job.

As this study concludes, the online school at the site institution is being asked by the
university’s administration to plan for more significant growth than originally anticipated, both in terms of the number of students it serves and the number of adjuncts it employs. As the online programs grow more numerous, more course sections are offered, and more online adjuncts are employed, managing the quality of the online programs while staying true to current values could become challenging. In September 2016 I attended a professional development workshop for online education administrators across the Northeast where the challenges associated with allowing academic freedom in a large online program were described by an attendee from a large online institution. The attendee shared that his institution has thousands of online master courses and delivers more than 25,000 online course sections each year, most of which are taught by online adjuncts. Due to the volume, the institution has no choice but to limit academic freedom and monitor faculty performance in order to control quality. In my professional position, I am aware that pressures to ensure online course quality while growing the online programs are leading to discussions about limiting academic freedom and monitoring faculty, although this has not yet come to fruition. The site institution may need to reexamine its values about academic freedom and how it treats online faculty in relation to the plans for growth as it moves forward. For my own practice, I feel it is important for me to keep the results of this study in front of decision makers, pointing out the impact of academic freedom and micromanagement on online adjuncts.

Another implication for practice is that the site institution must continue to invest in appropriate resources as the online programs expand. This means hiring adequate staff, providing professional development for online faculty, and ensuring that the technology infrastructure is up-to-date and easy for faculty and students to use. Although the site institution has invested in staff for the online school, growing the staff from eight in 2013 to 38 at the conclusion of this
study in the Fall 2016 term, the number of staff members has not kept up with the growth in online students and course sections due to institution-wide budget concerns that have delayed hiring. For example, instructional designers now support on average more than 50 course sections per academic term, which is far above their comfort level of supporting 30 course sections per term. As the online school has the potential to be a significant source of revenue for the institution, it needs to continue investing in adequate staff even during difficult financial times across the rest of the institution. Adequate staffing allows for the high quality, personalized support that leads to the satisfaction and retention of online adjuncts, minimizes the risks associated with hiring online adjuncts, and enhances online program reputations. If adequate staffing levels cannot be maintained, the site institution may want to consider hiring online adjuncts who have obtained certification in online teaching from external organizations, as such online adjuncts may be more competent and require less support.

A final implication drawn from the findings of this study is that experienced online adjuncts are valuable employees for an institution due to their intrinsic motivation to teach and their willingness to invest in students and the institution, so the site institution should strive to satisfy and retain them. Furthermore, I don’t think I or anyone at the site institution does enough to capitalize on the motivation of the online adjuncts. Since online adjuncts are intrinsically motivated to help students, the institution could do more to channel that motivation into formal programs for helping students, such as faculty advising or mentoring. The institution also needs to take advantage of the fact that online adjuncts want to give back to the institution outside of teaching. Online adjuncts often tell me and other staff members that they want to do more for the institution, but the institution has not made much effort to find ways for them to contribute within the limits of part-time employment. Online adjuncts are valuable resources for the site
institution and the institution should do all it can to satisfy and retain them and use their motivations to enhance the online programs.

**Implications for Other Institutions**

The implications for other institutions that are either embarking upon online education or expanding online programs are similar to the implications for the site institution. All institutions should carefully examine their foundational values and supportive practices to be in alignment with each other and to attract the types of individuals they hope to employ as online instructors. For example, if an institution wants to attract and retain highly qualified online adjuncts who bring a lot of real world experience to their teaching, they will need values and practices that encourage and support academic freedom and minimize micromanagement. Plans for growth may need to be considered at the same time, as growth in volume may affect course quality and the ability to support online adjuncts exercising academic freedom.

Institutions that are starting or expanding online programs must be willing to make adequate resource investments, even though the reward of increased revenue may be far in the future. The site institution would not be able to offer personalized support and professional development if it did not have adequate staff to support the online faculty. Stalled hiring at the site institution is threatening to limit the personalized attention that staff are able to give. The online adjuncts in this study told stories of getting slow support, not having anyone to go to for support, and feeling abandoned when they have taught at other institutions, which were dissatisfiers for them. It’s possible that those institutions were not adequately staffed, which resulted in the negative stories of support. Institutions must offer online adjuncts timely, high quality, and personalized support by hiring enough employees that share the institution’s values.

Like the site institution, other institutions should find ways to take advantage of online
adjuncts’ motivation to contribute beyond their teaching assignments. Online adjuncts could contribute to student mentoring programs, efforts to market online programs, and curriculum development. Institutions may need to be creative about how they allow for non-teaching work assignments while complying with federal rules about part-time employees. Perhaps non-teaching stipends could be used to occasionally give online adjuncts work assignments in place of teaching.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study’s findings allow for an understanding of how institutional support leads to job satisfaction and limits turnover intentions of experienced online adjunct faculty in business-related disciplines at the site institution. While these findings and the study’s conclusions may be helpful to both the site institution and other institutions offering online education, there are several recommendations for additional research on the job satisfaction and turnover intentions of online adjuncts.

1. Due to ethical implications, this study was conducted with only experienced online adjuncts in business-related disciplines. Future research should include experienced online adjuncts teaching in non-business-related disciplines, such as the sciences and liberal arts. The population for this study was largely homogeneous, so a population that includes online adjuncts teaching in different disciplines may provide more heterogeneity, and thus different perspectives on job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

2. The study was conducted at a career-focused, private, non-profit institution. Future studies conducted at research or teaching-focused institutions, public institutions, and for-profit institutions may yield different findings. A study that is not practice-based
and that includes participants from multiple institutions may be particularly powerful for contributing to the literature. Such studies may indicate that different types of institutions attract online adjuncts with different motivations and support needs and they may bring to light other types of support which either are satisfiers or dissatisfiers.

3. Due to the hiring practices at the site institution, this study was conducted with online adjuncts that all have prior experience teaching online at other institutions. Future studies should explore the motivation, satisfaction, and turnover intentions of online adjuncts who do not have prior experience at other institutions. The lack of prior experience may limit the ability of online adjuncts to draw comparisons with the institutional support they are receiving, possibly making it easier for an institution to satisfy them and keep them employed.

4. This study was conducted at an institution that still has a fairly small online enrollment and which values academic freedom and does not micromanage online adjuncts. A future study should be conducted at an institution with larger online enrollment and which limits academic freedom and micromanages online adjuncts.

5. As this study was conducted by a researcher that works at the site institution and that is known to the online adjuncts as a support provider, the findings may be clouded by the researcher’s own perspective and limitations inherent in the relationship the researcher has with the participants. Future studies should be conducted with researchers not affiliated with the site institution in order to determine if the findings are similar or different.
Concluding Thoughts

This practice-based study has attempted to shed light on the motivations, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions of the experienced online adjunct faculty employed at the site institution. Overall the study demonstrates that valuing online adjuncts and treating and supporting them well leads to their job satisfaction and motivation to stay employed with the institution. By better understanding the role of institutional support in relation to job satisfaction and employee retention, as well as the specific types of support that are most important for satisfaction and retention, the site institution and other institutions offering online programs can better retain these valuable employees and enhance the quality of their online programs.

As online education continues to grow at the site institution and at institutions across the United States, I do believe that academic values and support models for faculty will need to change, which may lead to different ideas about online teaching and quality in the future. As more adjuncts teach online, as more federal and accreditation requirements are imposed on institutions, and as students demand higher quality for their tuition dollars, issues related to academic freedom, control, and quality will need to be examined. Online teaching is transparent. It is easy for others to see what transpires in the online classroom and it is easy to evaluate online teaching against standards, more so than in traditional classroom teaching. These aspects of online education and changes that are taking place in higher education will likely lead to reduced academic freedom for online faculty and greater control of quality by institutions. It will be interesting to see how institutions such as the site institution adapt to these pressures and growth in online programs. In a few years, a study such as this one may have very different findings, conclusions, and implications.
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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Emails (Sent with attached recruitment letter in Appendix B)

*Text of Initial Recruitment Email*

Dear [First Name],

As a doctoral student at Northeastern University, I am writing to invite you to participate in my doctoral thesis study. The purpose of my study is to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions of online adjunct faculty members at Johnson & Wales University. I would value your insight and I hope you will consider participating. Your participation would be confidential and the results of the study may lead to improved support for online adjuncts at Johnson & Wales. Please see the attached recruitment letter for more details. I thank you for considering participating in my study and I look forward to your response.

Thank you,
Amy Ricci

*Text of Reminder Recruitment Email*

Dear [First Name],

I am writing to remind you of the email I sent a few weeks ago inviting you to participate in my doctoral thesis study. As a reminder, the purpose of my study is to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions of online adjunct faculty members at Johnson & Wales University. I would value your insight and hope you will consider participating. Your participation would be confidential and the results of the study may lead to improved support for online adjuncts at Johnson & Wales. Please see the attached recruitment letter for more details. I thank you for considering participating in my study and I look forward to your response.

Thank you,
Amy Ricci
Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letter (Sent via E-mail)

Amy Ricci, Doctoral Student
Dr. Elisabeth Bennett, Principal Investigator
(Doctoral Advisor)
Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies
360 Huntington Ave.
Boston, MA 02116

DATE

Dear (potential participant name),

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project. The purpose of this research is to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions of the experienced online adjunct faculty members at [site institution]. The study is being conducted for my student doctoral thesis project in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program, under the direction of my doctoral research chair, Dr. Elisabeth Bennett. The results of the study will be useful to the administrators and staff at the university who provide support to online adjunct faculty. Online adjuncts will also benefit by having their needs related to institutional support better understood.

Participation is completely voluntary. It involves an interview with me that will be conducted via a recorded web conference. The interview which will last for no more than 60 to 90 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked questions about institutional support related to your role as an online adjunct faculty member at [site institution] and your intentions regarding continuing your employment at the university in this role. Your responses will be handled in a confidential manner. The final study report will not identify you. If direct reference is made to your responses, a pseudonym will be used. More importantly, there are no foreseeable risks or negative consequences for taking part in this study. I understand that due to my professional position at [site institution] in relation to your role as an online adjunct faculty member that you may experience mild discomfort if you share negative perceptions of the support provided by the university. You will be encouraged to be honest in all responses despite any discomfort and ensured that the information you share will not impact your employment at the university in any way.

No compensation is offered to you for participating in this study. The findings of the study will be shared with you and may result in enhancements to the support provided to you and other online adjunct faculty members by [site institution].

Thank you for considering participating in this study. If you are willing to participate, please respond to the student researcher, Amy Ricci, by DATE via email at ricci.am@husky.neu.edu or via phone at 781-974-3944.

Thank you,
Amy L. Ricci
Appendix C: Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Elisabeth Bennett (PI), Amy Ricci (Ed.D. Student)

Title of Project: The Role of Institutional Support in Leading to Job Satisfaction and Limiting Turnover Intentions of Experienced Online Adjunct Faculty

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
You are invited to take part in a research study. This form tells you about the study, but the researcher is also available to explain it to you. You may ask this person any questions that you have. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, you must indicate your consent to participate by entering an electronic signature at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NZLMTTZ. To contact the researcher for additional explanation, contact Amy Ricci at 781-974-3944 or ricci.am@husky.neu.edu.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are an online adjunct faculty member at [site institution].

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research study is to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions of the experienced online adjunct faculty members at [site institution]. The study is being conducted as a student doctoral thesis project in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take place via video conferencing at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take 60-90 minutes and it will be recorded. You may be contacted via e-mail with follow-up questions or clarification. During the interview you will be asked questions about institutional support in relation to your role as an online adjunct faculty member at [site institution] and your intent to continue your employment at the university in this role. The interview guide is provided to you consent document so you may see the types of questions you will be asked.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks to you for taking part in this study. You may feel mild discomfort providing answers that reflect negatively on the support provided by [site institution].

Will I benefit by being in this research?
Your answers during the interview may result in enhancements to the support provided to you and other online adjunct faculty members by the university.
Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the student researcher will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee at [site institution].

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have questions about this study, please feel free to call Amy Ricci, the person mainly responsible for the research, at 781-974-3944 or ricci.am@husky.neu.edu. You can also contact Dr. Elisabeth Bennet, the Principal Investigator, at PHONE or el.bennett@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan. C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
No compensation is provided for your participation in this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?
you must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research project.

Your electronic signature at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NZLMTTZ is required for you to take part in this research.
Appendix D: SurveyMonkey Survey for Electronic Signature of Signed Informed Consent Document

Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Elisabeth Bennett (PI), Amy Ricci (Ed.D. Student)

Title of Project: The Role of Institutional Support in Leading to Job Satisfaction and Limiting Turnover Intentions of Experienced Online Adjunct Faculty

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
You are invited to take part in a research study. This form tells you about the study, but the researcher is also available to explain it to you. You may ask this person any questions that you have. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, you must indicate your consent to participate by entering an electronic signature on the next page of this survey. To contact the researcher for additional explanation, contact Amy Ricci at 781-974-3944 or ricci.am@husky.neu.edu.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are an online adjunct faculty member at [site institution].

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research study is to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and limiting turnover intentions of the experienced online adjunct faculty members at [site institution]. The study is being conducted as a student doctoral thesis project in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take place via video conferencing at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take 60-90 minutes and it will be recorded. You may be contacted via e-mail with follow-up questions or clarification. During the interview you will be asked questions about institutional support in relation to your role as an online adjunct faculty member at [site institution] and your intent to continue your employment at the university in this role. The interview guide has been provided to you with a PDF copy of this consent document so you may see the types of questions you will be asked.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks to you for taking part in this study. You may feel mild discomfort providing answers that reflect negatively on the support provided by [site institution].
Will I benefit by being in this research?
Your answers during the interview may result in enhancements to the support provided to you and other online adjunct faculty members by the university.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the student researcher will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee at [site institution].

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan. C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
No compensation is provided for your participation in this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research project.

Your electronic signature is required below for you to take part in this research. If you consent to participate in this research, please enter your name and institutional email address below:

1. Name

2. Institutional Email Address

Done
Hi, thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of this study is to understand the role of institutional support in leading to job satisfaction and reducing turnover of the experienced online adjunct faculty members at [site institution]. As such, this interview will cover a variety of topics covering your motivation related to online adjunct teaching, the support the university provides, and your intentions regarding continuing your employment with the university.

I will be recording this interview. Before we move on, do you agree to be recorded?

Thank you, I am starting the recording now [wait for recording to start].

I may also take written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts or my notes. I am the only person with access to the recordings which will eventually be destroyed after they are transcribed. My co-researchers may review the transcriptions, but will not have access to the actual recordings and only your pseudonym will be on the transcript. To meet our human subjects requirements, I have emailed you an informed consent document regarding the research which indicates that all information will be confidential, your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time or choose to skip questions if you feel uncomfortable, and I do not intend to inflict any harm. You have electronically signed the document via the SurveyMonkey link that was sent to you. Do you have any questions at this time about the interview process or the informed consent document? [wait for response]. And for the recording, may I confirm that you give your consent to participate in this study? [wait for response]. Thank you.

I have planned this interview to last about 60 to 90 minutes. During this time I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time runs short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Demographic Characteristics:

1. How long have you been employed at Johnson & Wales?

2. How many years have you been teaching fully online courses, including your experience at other institutions?
   a. Prompt: Less than 5 years, or more than 5 years?

3. Please tell me about the courses you teach online at Johnson & Wales. What disciplines do you teach in and are they graduate or undergraduate courses?

4. What are your other professional activities?
   a. Prompts: Do you have a full-time non-academic job, do you teach elsewhere, are you retired, etc.? What are your professional aspirations?
5. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?

6. If you don’t mind, I’d like to ask your age range. Are you in your 30s, 40s, 50s, or over 60?

**Research Question #1**

7. Tell me how you first came to be an online adjunct?
   b. Prompt: Was it something you pursued, or did you fall into it?

8. What motivates you to teach online?
   c. Prompt: What are your reasons for teaching online? Personal, financial, other?

9. Is there anything about teaching online that you find demotivating or challenging?

**Research Question #2**

Now I’d like to ask some questions about the institutional support that has been provided to you by [site institution].

10. First, please tell me what it means to you to be supported by the institution?
    d. Prompts: Do you consider pay an institutional support? Benefits? IT support? HR support? Other?

11. Suppose you were talking to a colleague who was considering teaching at [site institution] as an online adjunct. How would you describe the support provided to you?

12. Tell me about a support experience at [site institution] that you found to be particularly valuable.
    e. Prompts: Tell me more about that. What was it about that experience that made it valuable to you? How did it make you feel?

13. Tell me about a support experience at [site institution] that you did not find to be valuable?
    f. Prompt: What was it about that experience that limited its value to you?

14. Can you give me an example of a type of support that you would like to see implemented?
    g. Prompt: Why do you want to see this type of support offered? How would it
Research Question #3
Now I’d like to ask some questions about your decision to continue your employment with [site institution].

15. Tell me a little about what impacts your decision to stay at or leave an adjunct teaching position.

16. How has support influenced your decision-making regarding continuing employment with [site institution]?
   h. Prompts: Are there specific aspects of support that impact your decisions? If so, what are they? Why do they have such an impact?

17. Is there anything that would increase your commitment to continuing employment with the university?

18. Can you think of anything that would discourage you from continuing your employment with the university?
   i. Prompts: Can you give a specific example? Why would this discourage you?

Wrap-up
We are almost at the end of the interview. Before we finish, I have one last question

19. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience as an online adjunct at [site institution]?
Appendix F: Observational Protocol

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