

# RESEARCH BRIEF

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## Pilot Survey of Adjunct Faculty at the Alexandria Campus: Spring 2014

The role of adjunct faculty in higher education has steadily increased over the past decade. Ten years ago, slightly fewer than half of faculty in higher education were adjuncts. Today about 70 percent of the instructional faculty at colleges are adjunct, and community colleges rely even more heavily on adjunct faculty “with 85 percent of their instructors in 2010 not eligible for tenure” (i.e., adjuncts).<sup>1</sup> The largest single factor influencing the growth of adjunct faculty is economic necessity. With federal and state-wide budget shortages and varying enrollment, community colleges are leaning more heavily on adjunct faculty in order to achieve their teaching mission while maintaining access and affordability.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to better understand the role, satisfaction, and commitment of adjuncts at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success Initiatives conducted a pilot survey of adjunct faculty at the Alexandria Campus during the period from April 21, 2014 through May 7, 2014. The survey addressed the 2013-14 academic year. A total of 439 adjunct faculty were invited to take the survey, of which 168 provided responses to some or all survey items, resulting in an overall response rate of 38 percent. Adjunct faculty members were asked a total of 45 questions on an online survey covering six areas: employment, instruction, professional development, work environment, income and benefits, and job satisfaction. This Research Brief provides a summary of key findings from the survey.

### Employment Characteristics of Alexandria Campus Adjuncts

- 74% of adjuncts taught only at NOVA.
- 42% were employed full-time elsewhere in addition to working as an adjunct.
- 61% earned more than 75 percent of their income elsewhere.
- 57% had nine or more years of teaching experience.
- 63% had nine or more years of professional experience related to their adjunct teaching specialization.
- 44% worked as full-time professionals in their area of adjunct teaching specialization.

<sup>1</sup> June, A.W. (2012, November 5). Adjuncts Build Strength in Numbers. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Adjuncts-Build-Strength-in/135520/>

<sup>2</sup> Wallin, D.L. (Ed.) (2005). *Adjunct Faculty in Community Colleges: An Academic Administrator's Guide to Recruiting, Supporting, and Retaining Great Teachers*. Boston: MA: Anker Publishing.

### Course Loads

- During Summer 2013 the majority of adjuncts taught 4 to 6 credits (58 percent).
- During Fall 2013, adjunct faculty credit hours were closely divided between teaching 4 to 6 credits (32 percent), teaching 3 or fewer credits (30 percent), and teaching 7 to 9 credits (30 percent).
- In Spring 2014, the largest proportion of adjunct faculty taught 7 to 9 credits (35 percent), followed by those who taught 3 or fewer credits, and 4 to 6 credits (28 percent each).
- 37% of respondents reported that they were affected by the Commonwealth of Virginia's policy cap limiting adjunct teaching loads to a maximum of 10 credits for Fall 2013 and Spring 2014.

### Adjunct Satisfaction

- 66% of adjunct faculty at the Alexandria Campus indicated that they were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with teaching and learning conditions at NOVA.
- 57% of respondents were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the professional development opportunities at NOVA.
- 75% of adjunct faculty from the Alexandria Campus either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that NOVA offered a positive and supportive work environment.
- 68% either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that their work contributions at NOVA were valued.
- 54% of adjunct faculty were either *unsatisfied* or *very unsatisfied* with their level of pay at NOVA.
- Considering all aspects of adjunct work at NOVA, 74% of adjunct faculty at the Alexandria Campus responded that they were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied*.