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## Staffing: 'The Part-Time Crisis in the Classroom'

Judith Bailey Slagle  
East Tennessee State University, [slagle@etsu.edu](mailto:slagle@etsu.edu)

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### Keywords

adjunct, adjunct faculty, budgets, part-time, part-time faculty, post-doctoral, post-doctoral fellows, staffing, state of the profession

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In 2008, my Department of English reached such a crisis in the ratio of part-time faculty to full time that as department chair I decided it was time to involve the university President. With only 25 tenured/tenure-track English faculty, and several of them on administrative assignments, along with a rising number of majors, we were covering 62% of our 1000-2000-level English courses with part-time faculty—often barely qualified to be in the classroom. In comparison, according to the most recent Delaware Cost Study, our peers were using 32%. I found myself in the untenable position every fall of having to hire part-time faculty I said that I'd never hire again. My immediate supervisors understood the problem; they just didn't have the money needed to correct it.

So, with a blessing from the Dean and Provost, I put together a statistical presentation for the President, hoping that he would support a five-year staffing plan for the department. In addition to tenure-track replacements for any tenured faculty members retiring, etc., I asked for positions we'd never had before—post-doctoral fellows. My proposal was to staff

- 3000-4000-level courses and 5000-level graduate courses with tenured/tenure-track faculty
- 1000-2000-level courses with a mix of tenured/tenure-track faculty, post-doctoral fellows, lecturers, graduate TAs and experienced part-time adjuncts

The purpose of this inclusion of post-doctoral fellows was to support the university's Quality Enhancement Initiative by, particularly, improving the quality of freshman instruction.

Once the President saw our ratio statistics, he was appalled—he even turned to others in the room and asked, “how did this happen?” So what this did was set a 5-year plan in motion to change our quality of instruction in English. Now, unfortunately, we didn't get *new* tenure-track positions, only replacements; but we *did* get a reservoir of post-docs fresh out of PhD programs with significant teaching and research experience—and lots of enthusiasm. And because it was a 5-year plan, the President only had to invest the money in increments (about \$200,000 per Academic Year).

Clearly, this is still not an ideal situation. The ideal solution would be to support the market by opening a new tenure-track position with every university's growing enrollment. Although we now have 4 full-time lecturers in English and 7 post-docs, we still rely too heavily on part-time adjuncts. But it's better—we're down from 62% of our lower-division English taught by adjuncts to 37%—a huge improvement. And most of that improvement is a result of highly qualified post-doctoral fellows who benefit from additional experience as we benefit from their expertise. Until we gain tenure-track positions, this is probably the model we will follow. Even better is that the President and Provost have now required that every department provide a 5-year Staffing Plan to improve the quality of undergraduate instruction at our university.