

## An Examination of the Levels and Differences in Organizational Commitment of Full and Part Time Community College Faculty

Duane Akroyd<sup>1</sup>, Deborah Engle<sup>2</sup>

(1. College of Education, North Carolina State University, USA; 2. School of Medicine, Duke University, USA)

**Abstract:** Despite the wide spread employment of part-time faculty in community colleges, there is little known about the commitment levels of these faculty, or how it compares to their full-time counterparts. The purpose of this study was to determine if the levels of affective, continuance, and normative commitment for full-time faculty differed significantly from part-time faculty in North Carolina community colleges. Analysis of variance (ANOVA), found that mean scores of affective, and normative commitment were significantly higher for full-time faculty than part-time faculty.

**Key words:** faculty, community college, organizational commitment, part time faculty

### 1. Introduction

The nascent dependence on part-time employees in organizations represents a relatively recent trend across the modern landscape of the American workforce. As a result, the relationship between organizations and employees is shifting. Over the past 50 years, there have been a multitude of definitions of organizational commitment arise from the literature. This variety is derived from the various scholarly conceptualizations of organizational commitment (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). According to Meyer and Allen (1997), “common to all conceptualizations of commitment is the notion that commitment binds an individual to an organization” (p. 13).

Community college faculty organizational dependence on part-time employees is especially apparent in higher education. Across the United States, the number of part-time faculty members has increased by 79% between 1981 and 1999 (Walsh, 2002). In North Carolina community colleges, the total number of part-time faculty swelled from 9,093 in the year 2000 to 14,375 in 2006, representing greater than a 50% increase in just six years (North Carolina Community College System, 2006). Wallin (2004) suggests these dramatic increases in the employment of part-time faculty are significantly due to the economic recession during this period and concurrent large enrollment of students in college. Wallin (2004) cites Rifkin’s (2000) work when she states: “because [part-timers] are usually employed elsewhere, they may not have the commitment to the college that is more typical of full-time faculty” (p. 380).

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Duane Akroyd, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Leadership, Policy, Adult and Higher Education, College of Education, North Carolina State University; research areas/interests: community colleges, health professions. E-mail: [hdakroyd@ncsu.edu](mailto:hdakroyd@ncsu.edu).

Deborah Engle, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Director of Assessment and Evaluation, School of Medicine, Duke University; research areas/interests: medical education, assessment. E-mail: [Deborah.engle@duke.edu](mailto:Deborah.engle@duke.edu).

## 2. Problem

Provasnik and Planty (2008) report for the National Center for Education Statistics that over two-thirds of community college faculty across the United States were employed part-time (over 240,000 faculty), while one-third of community college faculty were employed full-time. These national statistics mirror the faculty employment data for North Carolina. In North Carolina, 70% of the state's community college faculty are part-time, while 30% are full-time employees (North Carolina Community College System, 2006).

Cohen and Brawer (2003) contend that the explanation for this substantial reliance on part-time faculty is that they cost less; they may have special capabilities not available among the full-time instructors; and they can be employed, dismissed, and reemployed as necessary (p. 85). Frequently, part-time faculty are teaching the same courses and content as their full-time counterparts, while enduring financial inequities in salary, benefits, and professional development (Wallin, 2005). As community colleges' dependence on part-time faculty continues, it becomes apparent that these employees are critical to the success of these institutions (Wallin, 2005). Despite this criticality, part-time faculty are "treated as disposable commodities, an expendable contingent work force" (Wallin, 2005, p. 13), are viewed as "indentured servitude" (Yoshioka, 2007, p. 41), and metaphorically linked to "migrant workers to the farms" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 86). In light of these circumstances, the debate continues whether community colleges and faculty are, or should be, mutually committed. Analyzing levels of organizational commitment and understanding how it is developed for individual employees is therefore a timely and important endeavor for this group.

Over the past 25 years, researchers have observed limitations of this early model of organizational commitment and have argued that it did not fully explain how an individual becomes committed to an organization (Mayer & Schoorman, 1998). Most notably, Meyer and Allen (1990) re-conceptualized organizational commitment as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of three components: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Affective commitment is an employee's emotional attachment to his/her organization — the employee remains working at the organization because he/she wants to. Continuance commitment is exhibited when an employee stays at an organization, not because he/she wants to remain there, but because she/he is aware of the costs associated with leaving. Normative commitment is when an employee remains at an organization out of a sense of obligation to stay there. Meyer and Allen's (1991) newer conceptualization of organizational commitment as a three-component model has become a widely-accepted theoretical framework in commitment research (Meyer, Becker, Vandenberghe, 2004).

There seem to be two divergent perspectives about commitment among part-time faculty that exist in the literature. One perspective is that part-time faculty is not as committed to their organizations as their full-time counterparts; the other is that they are just as committed as the full-timers. Clearly, more research is needed to clarify the levels of organizational commitment for both part-time and full-time faculty employees at community colleges.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The theory framing this study derives from Meyer and Allen's (1997) research on commitment. They propose that individuals become committed to an organization for any of three psychological reasons labeled as affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment is viewed as an individual's "emotional attachment to,

identification with, and involvement with the organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 11). For continuance commitment, an employee chooses to stay with an organization due to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving it. In normative commitment, an individual continues employment due to a sense of obligation. Each of these three components of organizational commitment may be experienced simultaneously and at different levels by all individuals in an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Over the past 25 years, researchers have observed limitations of early models and measures of organizational commitment and have argued they it did not fully explain an individual’s commitment to an organization (Mayer & Schoorman, 1998). Most notably, Meyer and Allen (1990) re-conceptualized organizational commitment as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of three components: affective, continuance, and normative commitment and it has become a widely-accepted theoretical framework in commitment research (Meyer, Becker, Vandenberghe, 2004).

#### **4. Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the levels of organizational commitment of full-time North Carolina community college faculty compared their part-time counter-parts. More specifically we wanted to determine if the levels of affective, continuance, and normative commitment for full-time faculty differed significantly from full part-time faculty in North Carolina community colleges?

#### **5. Research Design**

This study was across-sectional examination of faculty in their work setting and employed an explanatory non-experimental research design (Johnson, 2001). It utilized quantitative survey methods with appropriate sampling procedures in order to make inferences about all full-time and part-time community college faculty in North Carolina by using a smaller, representative sample of the population.

#### **6. Sample**

The sample was drawn from the 58 community colleges across North Carolina that employ approximately 6,244 full-time faculty (North Carolina Community College System, 2007) and 14,375 part-time faculty (North Carolina Community College System, 2006). During the 13-month data collection period, 26 colleges accepted the invitation to participate. Upon conclusion of the data collection period (web based survey gathered from colleges list of faculty email addresses), full-time faculty submitted 645 surveys and part- time faculty submitted 168 surveys.

#### **7. Instrumentation**

##### **7.1 Organizational Commitment**

To measure affective, continuance and normative commitment the scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1993) was used to measure this multi-dimensional construct. It consisted of a 6 Likert-type questions for each of the three types of commitment mentioned above (scale: 1 = Strongly disagree through 7 = Strongly agree). The mean of all six questions for each type of commitment (affective, continuance and normative) was used as the measure of employee commitment in the organization.

## 7.2 Validity and Reliability

Confirmatory factor analyses (Dunham, Grube & Castenada, 1994; Hackett, Bycio & Hausdorf, 1994) established that each of the commitment scales (ACS, CCS, and NCS) measures distinct components of commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). Gormley (2005) conducted a principal components analysis of Meyer and Allen's Multidimensional Organizational Commitment Questionnaire based on the responses of 316 nursing faculty. The results of her analysis indicated a three factor solution, accounting for 100% of the total variance among the commitment items. Gormley's (2005) study provides additional evidence of validity for each of the commitment factors.

## 8. Results

Affective commitment was the highest for both groups and full-time faculty show higher levels of commitment for each of the three types than part-time faculty.

The trend is especially apparent for normative commitment, where the mean difference was 0.93 and the effect statistic is the greatest (see Table 1). While there is a significant difference in affective commitment between groups, the magnitude of the difference is medium to small when effect size considered ( $d = 0.19$ ) (Cohen, 1988).

For continuance commitment, the difference between full-time and part-time employment status approaches significance ( $p < .05$ ), however, the magnitude of the difference is small when effect size ( $d = .08$ ) considered (Cohen, 1988). For normative commitment, there is a significant difference between full-time and part-time employment status ( $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1 Mean Differences and Effect Sizes of Employment Status for North Carolina Community College Faculty by Type of Commitment**

	Full-Time Faculty (a)	Part-Time Faculty (b)	Difference (a - b)	p	d
Affective Commitment	5.24	4.64	0.60	0.000*	0.19
Continuance Commitment	4.52	4.28	0.24	0.091	0.08
Normative Commitment	4.00	3.07	0.93	0.000*	0.29

Note:  $p$  = significance;  $d$  = effect-size (Cohen's  $d$ ). \*  $p < 0.05$

Moreover, the magnitude of the difference is medium when effect size ( $d = 0.29$ ) considered (Cohen, 1988). This data supports the conclusion that full-time community college faculty in North Carolina has significantly higher levels of affective and normative commitment when compared to their part-time counterparts, but there are no differences in continuance commitment.

## 9. Conclusions

**Affective Commitment.** The research literature is non-existent for Meyer and Allen's conceptualization of organizational commitment modeled for full-time and part-time community college faculty. Therefore, a direct comparison of findings from the current study with findings from the literature is not possible. Meyer and Allen (1991) define affective commitment as "the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (p. 67). This is generally seen as a favorable form of commitment, meaning that the individual stays with the organization because they want to stay. The results of this study produced a mean of

for all the faculty (both full and part time) of 5.12 (SD = 1.53), just within the response anchor range for “slightly agree” (5.00–5.99) on the seven point scale. This level of affective commitment is generally in accordance with other studies that have utilized the Affective Commitment Scale in the higher education setting. Messer (2006) reported a mean score of affective commitment for Tulsa Community College faculty at 5.23 (SD = 1.33). Carver (2008) reported that a national sample of nursing faculty produced a mean score of 4.41 (SD = 1.22) for affective commitment. His study’s reported level of commitment, however, is slightly higher than the reported mean score of affective commitment for Christian higher education faculty at 3.11 (SD = 1.12) on a 5-point scale (Thomas, 2008). Examination of affective commitment by faculty status shows that full-time faculty reported a mean level of affective commitment of 5.24 (SD = 1.47). Yet, the part-time faculty reported a mean level of affective commitment of 4.64 (SD = 1.61). Statistical analysis demonstrated mean levels of affective commitment between full-time and part-time faculty were significantly different ( $p < .05$ ), though the effect size was small ( $d = 0.19$ ).

There is no comparative research using Meyer and Allen’s conceptualization of organizational commitment modeled for full-time and part-time community college faculty. Therefore, a direct comparison of findings from the current study with findings from the literature is not possible. Yet, when comparisons are made with the few extant studies of organizational commitment among higher education faculty, the results of the current study do not match them. Speier-Bowman (1995), incorporating Mottaz’s conceptualization of organizational commitment, showed that overall commitment levels were not different between full-time and part-time faculty at Denver area community colleges. Borchers & Teahen (2001), using Mowday’s (1979) instrument for organizational commitment, reported no difference in commitment levels between full-time and part-time faculty at two Mid-Western universities. Murphy (2009), using years of institutional service as a single-item proxy for institutional commitment, reported full-time tenured/tenure track faculty have more years of service than part-time (contingent) faculty. This difference was explained as a by-product of the tenure structure and process itself. However, Murphy (2009) further indicated that part-time faculty were generally as committed as their tenured/tenure-track counterparts since both groups had an average of seven years of service.

The current study indicates that full-time faculty maybe more affectively committed than their part-time counterparts. One possible reason for this could be due to the fact that part-time faculty may have not been in the organization long enough to develop affective attachment. Lower levels of attachment maybe a result of poor socialization to the college as opposed to actual time in employment.

It is common for part-time faculty to teach sections of classes that are scheduled in the evening, after most full-time faculty have finished their work day. As a result, part-time faculty may not feel integrated and included in the cultural fabric of the college. Effective socialization is also related to organizational support. It teaches the part-time faculty member the skills of his/her job as well as the norms and values or culture that guide faculty behavior at the particular institution in order to enhance employee performance (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999). When the socialization process is institutionalized and made effective, some researchers believe it increases organizational commitment (Wanous, 1992).

**Normative Commitment.** The level of normative commitment is in accordance with Carver’s (2008) study of nursing faculty that produced a mean score of 3.78 (SD = 1.17) for normative commitment; but it is lower than Thomas’ (2008) reported a mean score of normative commitment for Christian higher education faculty at 2.96 (SD = 1.05) on a 5-point scale. When normative commitment was examined by faculty status, full-time faculty reported a mean level of normative commitment of 4.00 (SD = 1.53). In contrast, the part-time faculty reported a mean level of normative commitment of 3.07 (SD = 1.51). Results indicated that the mean levels of normative

commitment between full-time and part-time faculty were significantly different ( $p < .05$ ), though the effect size was medium ( $d = 0.29$ ).

A direct comparison of findings from the current study with findings from the literature is not possible. On the other hand, when comparisons are made with the few extant studies of organizational commitment among higher education faculty, the results of the current study do not match them. Several studies have reported no difference in commitment levels between full-time and part-time faculty (Borchers & Teahen, 2001; Murphy, 2009; Speier-Bowman, 1995).

Normative commitment is a measure of moral obligation, or loyalty, to the organization. The mean score for normative commitment was significantly higher for full-time faculty than for part-time faculty.

This finding could indicate that full-time faculty is more loyal to the organization and that part-time employees have less guilty feelings about leaving an organization than their full-time counterparts. Carver (2008) demonstrated that normative commitment may vary with generations of nursing faculty. Hartmann and Bambacas (2000) reported low levels of normative commitment in their Australian study of part-time, academic staff workers. They concluded that changing jobs is more acceptable than it has been in past years.

**Continuance Commitment.** Continuance commitment is defined as the employee's "awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1996, p. 67). A person who stays with an organization because they "need" to or feel they have no job alternatives demonstrates continuance commitment. The results of this study presented an overall mean score of 4.47 ( $SD = 1.57$ ), which lies squarely within the response anchor range for "Neither agree nor disagree" (4.00–4.99) on the seven point scale. Thus, North Carolina community college faculty would neither agree nor disagree with the statement "I stay in my organization because I need to".

This level of commitment is higher in comparison to Carver's (2008) study of nursing faculty that produced a mean score of 2.70 ( $SD = 1.12$ ) for continuance commitment; it is in accordance with Thomas' (2008) reported mean score of continuance commitment for Christian higher education faculty at 3.10 ( $SD = 0.72$ ) on a 5-point scale.

Examination of continuance commitment by faculty status shows that full-time faculty reported a mean level of continuance commitment of 4.52 ( $SD = 1.53$ ), which was higher than the overall mean level of continuance commitment for all faculty in this study. Yet, the part-time faculty reported a mean level of continuance commitment of 4.28 ( $SD = 1.52$ ). Statistical analysis showed the mean levels of continuance commitment between full-time and part-time faculty were significantly different ( $p < .05$ ), though the effect size very small (effect-size  $r = 0.08$ ). As noted earlier, the research literature is non-existent for Meyer and Allen's conceptualization of organizational commitment modeled for full-time and part-time community college faculty. Therefore, a direct comparison of findings from the current study with findings from the literature is not possible. Yet, when comparisons are made with the few extant studies of organizational commitment among higher education faculty, the results of the current study do not match them. Several studies have reported no difference in commitment levels between full-time and part-time faculty (Borchers & Teahen, 2001; Murphy, 2009; Speier-Bowman, 1995). The current study has shown that full-time faculty may have more continuance commitment than their part-time counterparts. This means that full-time faculty is more aware of the costs associated with leaving the organization. Costs involve the loss of an employee's investment of time, money or effort in the organization. It is posited in this study that continuance commitment develops as a result of decreased employment job alternatives. Written another way, employees who believe they have options for moving to a different job will have weaker continuance commitment than those who believe they have few job alternatives (Meyer & Allen, 1997). So part-time faculty,

who often work elsewhere to amass a base salary, may feel they have viable job alternatives for working at another organization.

The development of organizational commitment is a process. The literature points to the importance of early work experiences and institutionalized socialization tactics in the development of affective commitment. Faculty is socialized into the profession in many ways, including the theory and history behind the discipline, the theory-to-practice training, and the infusion of the “faculty culture”. However, this culture may in fact contribute to reduced affective attachment, through the expectations of a, low wages, and greater work related demands. Ultimately, commitment is made up of a compendium of influences. For the individual, the reality of commitment is grounded in a combination of expectations, perceptions, and experiences. It is possible that the low levels of attachment to the organization for faculty is not just a factor of the individual not feeling committed to the organization, but also the individual not feeling valued by the organization. For the community college, it is important to provide an environment that faculty both full and part time can find support and to develop a “committed calling”, however that is defined.

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**An Examination of the Levels and Differences in Organizational Commitment of Full and  
Part Time Community College Faculty**

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