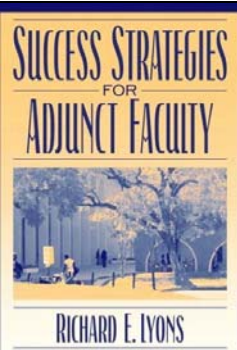


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| <p><i>Success Strategies for Adjunct Faculty</i> Richard E. Lyons Boston Allyn & Bacon ISBN: 0-205-36017-3 Cost: \$35.99 (paperback) <i>Reviewed by Joseph W. Guenther</i></p> |  |
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Richard Lyons has to be congratulated for his *Success Strategies for Adjunct Faculty* (2004). It offers both a compendium of classroom (and extra-curricular) strategies useful to any faculty person as well as a close look at what is driving universities to hire more and more adjuncts. It might as well be entitled *Success Strategies for College-Level Professors*. One might call this a Machiavellian manual on how to succeed in today's climate of corporate universities and increasing competition from the University of Phoenix, Online, and other such institutions which have a nationwide, if not world-wide, reach.

The book is very tightly organized. Each chapter begins with focus questions and ends with a summary of key points which are essentially detailed answers to the pre-questions. Each chapter also ends with an insightful, often touching vignette/anecdote from an in-service professional, frequently an adjunct, about a classroom experience or a teacher who particularly touched his/her life. The text is considerate, user-friendly throughout. The book is written at the approximate reading level of today's undergraduate, and it is fun, easy reading. There are no tables or mountains of statistics to pore through. Except for Chapter One, where Ellis reviews the literature on adjunct professors and describes the current academic environment, there is virtually no reference to statistics or tables at all, though there are appendices at the end of most chapters with exercises relevant to the chapter. This book could serve as the primary text for a course unto itself.

Ellis makes the point that we have to recognize that universities are now run on a profit basis regardless of their non-profit status. They compete with corporate universities, many of which rely solely on people currently working in the field. In highly profitable corporate universities such as these, faculty are almost exclusively part-time. Traditional universities must market their product with the understanding that they are also competing with local beauty schools, community colleges, truck-driving programs and the like.

Consumerism has crept into academia. Students are customers and must be viewed as such. Students pay their tuition dollars and expect to get their money's worth. Faculty

are increasingly being held accountable not only for academic growth but also for “customer satisfaction.” A faculty person not protected by tenure status is not likely to be invited back if his/her student evaluations are not satisfactory.

To stay under budget and for other reasons, universities increasingly rely on adjunct faculty. For one thing, they serve as a reserve force, ready to teach a course with short lead-time while at the same time having up-to-date expertise, real-world experience, and linkages to the real world with speakers, field trips, or internships. This reserve force gives the university the ability to mitigate spikes in enrollment. Additionally, the university can offer courses that are geographically unfavorable or that are offered at undesirable time slots.

Adjunct faculty are not protected by tenure, so whatever is true for tenured faculty is doubly true for adjuncts. They must be positive, professional, and ready to go the extra mile for students and for the university. Employers do not want professors who ad-lib, joke, extemporize, or digress with anecdotes that might not seem relevant to the students, read from the text or their prepared notes, assign projects that students consider inconsistent with course objectives or are not accompanied by clearly delineated criteria and rubrics, write ambiguous test and quiz questions, and do not assign grades according to a consistent, defensible policy.

Lyons offers numerous suggestions to would-be adjunct to increase their desirability to the university, and to improve their chances of being asked to return in succeeding semesters. He recommends that individuals write their own mission statements, perform a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis (appendix 2.1, p.29) on themselves and develop a personal philosophy of teaching and learning (pp. 30-31).

Without specifically using the term VAKT (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile) learning styles and teaching strategies for each, Ellis discusses learning dimensions, factors that affect learning, and the role of mental processing styles. He also gives suggestions on how to address the different learning modalities of all students in the class, and discusses Gardner’s multiple intelligences with the interplay they have in how students learn and how professors should teach. For an effective design, he recommends that an instructor base the course on Bloom’s Taxonomy, beginning with assessment, and then setting learning objectives and moving upward toward achieving them, assessing at the level that instruction ends.

Ellis makes the point that a syllabus is as a contract and must be clearly explained at the beginning of the course. One strength of this book is that the author seems to anticipate classroom situations and offer strategies for organizing a class accordingly. For example, he makes the interesting point that instructors should interview guest speakers beforehand, giving that person objectives and guidelines, and perhaps reviewing his/her resume. Guest speakers, video presentations, field trips – all should clearly reflect the content of the course as well as the demographics of the student population. Organization, from beginning to end, is key to an effective course.

Ellis suggests that in the beginning of the course the instructor should spell out what is meant by constructive participation in the class. He recommends that all presentations, field trips and guest speakers should include a pre-activity discussion or guideline and a post-activity debriefing of some sort, with information then explicitly tied to course content.

Needless to say, a course will include teaching/learning techniques that are instructor-driven and those that are student-driven. He gives strategies for small-group activities and ways for the instructor to keep students challenged and on-task. He recommends “problem-based learning” to stimulate higher-order thinking, and also ways to evaluate student collaboration and their final product. Ellis discusses how to effectively integrate student presentations and experiential learning into the course, as well as how to give them effective instruction in how to study.

Ellis makes excellent suggestions regarding the use of technology, such as the use of an instructor’s webpage, available to students before the class begins, e-newsletters, personalized e-mails, having drop-boxes for submitting assignments, and requiring students to e-mail comments or responses to the instructor at least once a week. He also recommends that professors recommend relevant web-sites, as well as how they should school their students in how to judge the reliability of websites. Ellis recommends a short course in what is frequently referred to as “information literacy.”

Ellis also suggests that professors evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching, such as self-assessment questionnaires, informal assessments by colleagues, video-tapes of one’s classes, and formal assessment by students. He concludes with a discussion on how to manage one’s career as an adjunct.

Ellis touches on every possible point one could consider about how to teach a course effectively. In my opinion, every professor should either know or learn these concepts and integrate them into his/her course. Given the budgetary constraints of academia today, the competition from non-traditional institutions, and the growing population of potential adjuncts not only from academia but from the workplace, professors should keep in mind that they must protect the academic integrity of their courses and the effectiveness of their teaching. Any one of us could join the ranks of wandering “free-way flyer” academics.

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