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Why Entrepreneurship Schools Should Make Better Use of Adjunct Professors

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Adjunct professors often bring deep startup and investing experience. Integrating them more closely can improve teaching, research and connections to practice.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Steve Blank, who has founded or co-founded eight startups, is best known as the Father of Modern Entrepreneurship and is credited with launching the Lean Startup movement, which for the first time gave startups a methodology for success.

Steve helped create the National Science Foundation Innovation Corps -- now the standard for science commercialization in the U.S. In 2019 he received the Lifetime Award for Entrepreneurial Excellence from the U.S. Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship for the impact his work has had on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education. This commentary is adapted from his blog (https://steveblank.com/2019/12/03/getting-schooled-lessons-from-an-adjuncts/) *.*

Colleges and universities often use adjunct professors to take the teaching load off tenured faculty members and free them up for research -- the bread and butter of a school's reputation. For entrepreneurship schools, this limited role for adjuncts is a missed opportunity.

The non-tenure-track, part-time adjunct professors who teach entrepreneurship classes are often accomplished entrepreneurs themselves, with first-hand knowledge of the strategic and day-to-day challenges of real business owners. They are founders, venture capitalists and business executives. Who better to help the college or university decide what should be researched? In a recent blog post (https://steveblank.com/2019/12/03/getting-schooled-lessons-from-an-adjuncts/) I made the case for a stronger onboarding process to integrate adjuncts more closely with faculty members who direct the research, and shared my attempt to capture some of best practices in an "Onboarding Adjuncts Handbook (https://docs.google.com/document/d/15uQQU4kiEHtX47sJ2J2UTglyNJdFTNvy9dCyzaZiZ18/edit) (https://docs.google.com/document/d/15uQQU4kiEHtX47sJ2J2UTglyNJdFTNvy9dCyzaZiZ18/edit) " for directors of entrepreneurship centers and adjuncts.

I've been an adjunct for almost 18 years, and got my start teaching at the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley. Despite my experience starting eight companies, I was essentially walk-on entertainment at first. But over the years that relationship grew more fruitful. The material from my first class gave birth to my book, The Four Steps to the Epiphany, which launched the Lean Startup Movement. Teaching exposed me to an entire universe of papers and people who had researched and thought long and hard about innovation and entrepreneurship, and I learned much in the process.

U.C. Berkeley created an onboarding process for its adjuncts that eventually led to designating adjuncts "professional faculty," creating a shared office space suite, and letting them collaborate more closely with established faculty. A stronger faculty-adjunct relationship has given the school an opportunity to co-create "translational research" that's more deeply linked to the work of real-life entrepreneurs.

Other colleges and universities should be doing this too. Instead of keeping adjuncts in separate silos dedicated to teaching, they should link them more closely with the entrepreneurship school's strategic goals. A formal onboarding process can accomplish this. Here are six

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benefits of a successful onboarding process:

- It integrates adjuncts as partners with their entrepreneurship centers;
- It creates repeatable and scalable processes for onboarding adjuncts;
- It exposes adjuncts to the breadth and depth of academic research in the field;
- It exposes faculty to current industry practices;
- It creates a stream of translational entrepreneurship literature for practitioners (founders and VC's); and
- It creates fruitful and mutually beneficial relationships between traditional research faculty and adjunct faculty.

A successful adjunct program starts with the mindset of the faculty research director and the team building skills of the center director. If they recognize that the role of adjuncts is to both teach students practical lessons and to keep faculty abreast of real-world best practices, the relationship will flourish. And ultimately, the entrepreneurship center can build a stronger program that enhances the reputation of the faculty, program and school.

References

Blank, Steve: "Getting Schooled: Lessons From an Adjunct."(https://steveblank.com/2019/12/03/getting-schooled-lessons-from-an-adjuncts/)

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