Western Kentucky University

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Teaching Branch Campus Students: Challenges and Opportunities for Educators in Higher Education

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Teaching branch campus students: Challenges and opportunities for educators in higher education

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What is a Branch Campus?

- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2006) defines a branch (or regional) campus or institution as “A campus or site of an educational institution that is not temporary, is located in a community beyond a reasonable commuting distance from its parent institution, and offers full programs of study, not just courses” (p. G-1).

- Number of branch campuses may be expanding even as the use of online and other interactive courses have increased.

- Higher percentage of nontraditional students who are place-bound, commute, may be older, and strive to balance multiple responsibilities including work and care for families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Working closely with students</td>
<td>1. Negative perceptions from parent campus</td>
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<td>2. Friendly environment</td>
<td>2. Professional isolation</td>
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<td>3. Autonomy</td>
<td>3. Demands on time and energy</td>
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<td>5. Cooperation re: student concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Greater involvement in change efforts at campus and in community</td>
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Sources: Bird, 2007; Fonseca & Bird, 2007; McGrath, 2012; Merzer, 2008; Mindrup, 2012; Poling, LoSchiavo, & Shatz, 2009; Wolfe & Strange, 2003
Purpose of Study

• An exploration of the unique experiences and perceptions of social work educators teaching branch campus students
  • Resident (at the branch campus) and non-resident faculty
• Investigated the perceived advantages and disadvantages of teaching branch campus students
• Aim to inform social work (and other higher education) programs re: challenges and opportunities related to supporting faculty members who teach branch campus students
Methodology: Sampling

- 542 total universities with social work education programs in U.S.
  - No database of social work education programs at branch campuses
  - Investigation identified 89 branch campus programs
- Online survey distributed to faculty who teach branch campus students
- 81 respondents from 26 states
  - 60 provided written responses
    - 37 resident (branch campus) faculty
    - 23 non-resident faculty
Methodology: Thematic Analysis

- Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across the data set of the advantages and disadvantages from both the resident and non-resident faculty of teaching on a branch campus.
- The process of coding took place in six phases. The researchers:
  1) familiarized themselves with the data;
  2) created a grid and generated initial codes;
  3) searched for themes among the codes;
  4) reviewed and defined the themes:
  5) named the themes; and
  6) reported out the final themes to each other.
- This approach best emphasizes the perceptions of the survey participants and captures their experiences as faculty members at branch campus social work programs.
### Themes: Advantages

#### Resident Faculty
- Autonomy & Ownership of Program
- Supportive Environment
- Connection to Students
- Location/Close to Home
- Removed from University Politics
- Smaller Setting
- Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- Meeting Needs of Underserved Students
- Students with Diversity of Life Experience
- Motivated Students

#### Non-resident Faculty
- Connection to Students
- Students with Diversity of Life Experience
- Motivated Students
- Location/Close to Home
- Smaller Setting
Themes: Disadvantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resident Faculty</th>
<th>Non-resident Faculty</th>
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<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Lack of Resources &amp; Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Understanding by Parent Campus</td>
<td>Students Unmotivated &amp; Unprepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Resources &amp; Support of Travel</td>
<td>Lack of Connection with Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Collaborative Opportunities</td>
<td>Travel</td>
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<td>Heavier Workload</td>
<td>Heavier Workload</td>
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</table>
Major Themes

- *Connection to Students*
- *Recognition by the Parent Campus*

Themes present for both comparison groups (Resident and non-resident) and expressed in both categories (Advantages and disadvantages)
Major Themes: Connection to Students

Resident Faculty
- “Because of smaller cohorts, I get to know each student well.”
- “Closer relationships with students.”
- “I meet the needs of underserved students.”
- “Students are more diverse and have life experience.”
- “Very motivated students.”
- “Students feel isolated, left out of main campus activities.”

Non-Resident Faculty
- “Students are older and have more life experience.”
- “Students are too busy to find time for school work.”
- “Students are hostile at regional campuses.”
- “Students are underprepared for level of work, less professional.”
- “Students act entitled, don’t feel need to be to class on time, don’t read, not hardworking when transferring from an CC.”

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Major Themes: Recognition by the Parent Campus

Resident Faculty
• “Have more autonomy and ownership of program.”
• “Lack of understanding by department in teaching load.”
• “Department meetings don’t address regional campus discussions/items.”
• “Feel disconnected from communication given at main, and from colleagues.”
• “Lack of collaboration opportunities but same research expectations.”

Non-Resident Faculty
• “University meets needs of underserved students.”
• “Lack of resources and support for faculty (advising, technology, supplies).”
• “Lack of interaction with other department faculty.”
• “Additional work load for those who have other university responsibilities.”
• “Additional work load for those who have other university responsibilities.”

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Discussion

• *The broader systemic problems* identified by faculty teaching at a branch campus can inform institutions on tailoring policies, procedures and resources that may better foster a supportive culture that values branch campus faculty.

• *Cultivating more opportunities for collaboration* between parent and branch campus faculty to foster a better understanding of the workload and ameliorate feelings of isolation may enhance branch campus faculty job satisfaction.

• Institutions that *develop a comprehensive menu* of faculty developmental offerings can help to build a faculty who can weather challenges and offer creative solutions (Wolfe & Strange, 2003).
References


References


Thank You

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