

“An adjunct faculty union is needed at McDaniel College to provide part-time instructors with a voice in the decisions that affect them. Many adjuncts feel that they work very hard for low pay; do not receive needed support for instruction; and are not informed appropriately about what is happening. Adjunct instructors teach about half of the curriculum, and personify McDaniel to their students. Yet McDaniel, like many colleges, treats them as if they were unwelcome guests, not really part of the college, and not really included when the different parts of the college are celebrated. How has such a situation come to be? Let me draw a contrast between two ways of thinking about the college curriculum. One is a Basic Accounting approach, in which students enroll, courses are staffed, and then several weeks later grades are submitted. So long as the spreadsheets are all filled in, the curriculum is said to be “delivered.” What actually goes on in courses is ignored for the most part, unless there is a crisis. The Basic Accounting approach assumes that adjunct and regular faculty instructors will both work throughout the semester to deliver McDaniel’s promises to students and their families. The impact of adjuncts on students is likely as great as that of the regular faculty, and even Basic Accounting makes no distinction between courses delivered by one kind of instructor or the other. Yet the working conditions of adjuncts are not commensurate with their importance to the college, and their pay is a small fraction of that received by the regular faculty, who themselves are underpaid. This should embarrass a college concerned with its “brand.” In contrast to the Basic Accounting approach, a true Learning Community approach to the curriculum would address some of these problems by recognizing adjuncts as a significant part of McDaniel, and worthy of better support. I teach Research Methods in McDaniel’s Graduate and Professional Studies division. I have had a 40-year career as a university professor, which included 5 years as Chair of a large department. As the person who once hired adjuncts, I know how easy it is for Chairs and other administrators to settle for the Basic Accounting model, which does not “count” the essential contributions of adjuncts very well. But frankly, it would not be difficult to move toward the Learning Community alternative – a model that we in academia do pay lip service to, and therefore at least have in mind at speech-making time. Let’s make McDaniel a better real Learning Community by acknowledging and supporting its adjunct faculty with greater fairness, and with pride.”

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