"Heavy Lifters of the University": Non-Tenure Track Faculty Teaching Required Diversity Courses

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Abstract

Higher education institutions have adopted diversity course requirements while hiring more faculty members off the tenure track. Non-tenure track faculty members' experiences teaching required diversity courses while navigating their precarious employment status has not been sufficiently explored. Addressing this need, the present study examined the experiences of non-tenure track instructors teaching diversity courses as part of general education programs at five colleges and how they understood their relationships to the diversity course requirement and the institution. Instructors perceived themselves as institutional "heavy lifters," yet emphasized that their precarious status left them disconnected from the diversity requirement and the larger campus.

Keywords Non-tenure track faculty · Contingent faculty · Diversity course · General education · Faculty · Academic labor

As colleges and universities respond to increasing demands to address curricular and cocurricular issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, institutions have incorporated diversity courses as part of their general education curricula. Such courses aim to "critically examine US society and minority group relations, investigate the causes of oppression and inequality, and foregrounds cultural pluralism" (Schueths, Gladney, Crawford, Bass, & Moore, 2013, p. 1259). In a 2015 Association of American Colleges & Universities member survey, approximately 60% of institutions included diversity courses as part of general education requirements (Humphreys, 2016).

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The increase in demand for diversity courses coincides with a trend of contingent faculty making up a greater proportion of the instructional workforce in higher education than tenured and tenure-track faculty. Almost 75% of all faculty positions in the United States are off of the tenure track (American Association of University Professors, 2018). By definition, instructors in those positions lack job protection, generally are excluded from academic governance (Kezar & Sam, 2014), and are "vulnerable to dismissal if readings assigned or ideas expressed in the classroom offend a student" (AAUP, 2018, p. 1). Non-tenure-track (NTT) instructors who teach diversity courses, particularly those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, are especially vulnerable, as they must navigate their own emotion management strategies and uphold their intellectual authority, all while considering students' social, cultural, and emotional responses to the course content (Harlow, 2003).

While there is a substantial body of research that addresses student learning and outcomes related to diversity courses (Case, 2007; Chang, 2002; Bowman, 2010, 2011), there is a gap in the literature that explores diversity course instructors' experiences. In their 2013 qualitative study on students' responses to learning diversity from diverse instructors, Schueths and colleagues found contradictory evidence that required diversity courses reified instructional bias against instructors of color, while simultaneously promoting values of diversity in the curriculum. Although the Schueths et al. (2013) study included 11 instructors who held NTT positions (lecturer, graduate teaching assistant, adjunct), findings were not disaggregated by instructor role.

Given this background on diversity course requirements and an increase in contingent faculty teaching in higher education, the purpose of this study is to examine how NTT instructors who teach required diversity courses negotiate issues of NTT status and manage their relationships to the institution and the diversity requirement. We seek to answer this primary research question: How do non-tenure-track instructors teaching required diversity courses describe navigating their status as NTT instructors? Specifically, we consider how NTT instructors understood their relationship to the diversity course requirement and the wider institution. Because diversity courses often include provocative content that may lead to controversy in the classroom, these courses are an ideal venue to examine the experiences of instructors who have the least job security and protections in academia.

Relevant Literature

This study draws upon literature in two key areas: NTT faculty and required diversity courses/ instructors.

Non-Tenure Track Faculty

The composition of faculty at U.S. higher education institutions has dramatically shifted over the past few decades (Kezar, DePaola, & Scott, 2019). In 1969, NTT faculty comprised approximately 20% of the faculty. Forty years later, about 66% of faculty are considered non-tenure-track, or tenure ineligible (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). In fact, NTT faculty appointments are outpacing tenure-track growth (Ehrenberg, 2012). There are many reasons for this shift in faculty hiring, most of which center on increasingly constrained budget and financial resources at U.S. colleges and universities (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001). Fixed-term appointments, like NTT faculty appointments, afford colleges and universities with the ability to hire instructors with varying levels of experience or credentials (Baldwin & Wawryznski, 2011) and compensate them lower than their tenure-track peers (Monks, 2009) and provide institutions the flexibility to quickly adapt (Kezar & Sam, 2014; Levin & Shaker,

2011). Universities increasingly rely on full-time NTT faculty for undergraduate instruction, as tenure-track faculty assume more research and doctoral-level responsibilities (Ehrenberg, 2012).

Although the focus of NTTF roles on campus are generally on instruction, research has also shown they do more than just teach; they are involved in a variety of service and mentoring duties, which often go undervalued and/or unrecognized by the institution and by their tenured/tenure-track (T/TT) peers (Drake, Struve, Meghani, & Bukoski, 2019; Haviland, Alleman, & Allen, 2017; Maxey & Kezar, 2015). Scholars have also documented NTTF experiences, which include limited socialization with their T/TT and NTTF peers, lack of professional development opportunities, lower levels of satisfaction with collegiality, and exclusion from curricular decisions (Bolitzer, 2019; Drake et al., 2019; Haviland et al., 2017; Ott & Cisneros, 2015; Kezar & Sam, 2014). Although their status and experiences may differ, research has shown in practice their work is similar to TTF (Hollenshead et al., 2007; Kezar & Sam, 2011). Studies have found NTTF teaching practices mirror those of TT peers, such as employing learner-centered approaches in their teaching, incorporating active and collaborative learning, and spending more time on teaching preparation (Baldwin & Wawryznski, 2011; Umbach, 2007).

Diversity Course Requirements and Instructors

Many institutions, including 60% of the membership of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Hart Research Associates, 2016), have created diversity course requirements as part of general education programs that compel undergraduate students to take at least one diversity course. These requirements are variously referred to as cultural diversity, global perspectives, multicultural education, and social justice requirements, with varied definitions and boundaries. Scholars have demonstrated the various benefits to students who enroll in diversity-focused courses in higher education. Diversity courses have been said to "challenge students to think in more complex ways about identity and history and avoid cultural stereotyping" (Humphreys, 1998, para. 11). Benefits to students include decreased prejudice (Denson, 2009), increased civic engagement (Bowman, 2011), and development of cognitive abilities (Bowman, 2010) and moral reasoning (Hurtado, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012).

Benefits to students are central to making the continued case for the inclusion of diversity courses in the curriculum. However, scholars have less often considered the experiences of diversity course instructors and how they design, teach, and assess their courses. When diversity courses are taught by people of color and women, students may resist and push back against the instructors, requiring them to perform substantial emotional labor (Kadowaki & Subramaniam, 2014; Moore, Acosta, Perry, & Edwards, 2010; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). Studies that have focused on those who teach diversity courses have explored how instructors create equitable learning environments (Bolitzer, Castillo-Montoya, & Williams, 2016), how they teach the subject matter (Bolitzer et al., 2016; Haslerig et al., 2013), and how they teach the subject matter to racially and ethnically diverse and first-generation students (Castillo-Montoya, 2019). Still, little is known about the experiences of those who teach diversity courses, or about NTTF who teach these courses in particular—despite the prevalence of NTTF in the academy.

Conceptual Framework

This study draws from Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model (JCM) to guide our analysis. JCM focuses on the psychological aspects that influence individuals' job

performance. The core of their model concentrates on three psychological states that affect internally motivated work (meaningfulness of the work, personal accountability and responsibility, knowledge of results/effectiveness). They assert five job characteristics contribute to the experienced meaningfulness of the work and impact motivation and satisfaction: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback from the job. In a comprehensive review of literature surrounding NTT faculty and theories to explain their experiences and behaviors, Kezar and Sam (2011) found that often, studies that consider NTT roles and contributions apply deficit-based theories to explain engagement, satisfaction, and performance (Kezar & Sam, 2011). In contrast, one theory that explains why NTT faculty have better performance in their roles, despite the lack of protections and working conditions is JCM. One of the few empirical studies to apply JCM to study faculty is Ott and Cisneros (2015). In their study, Ott and Cisneros studied full-time NTTF and compared their experiences to their T/TT peers. Their results indicated NTTF were more satisfied than their T/TT peers with skill variety of their work. However, NTTF were less satisfied with their autonomy over the content and focus of their research, teaching, and service than tenure peers. A deeper understanding of how NTT faculty experience the meaningfulness of their work while using an asset-based approach was warranted. Thus, this study draws from JCM to advance an asset-based approach about NTT experience in their roles.

Because JCM does not account for social identities or an examination of diversity issues, a lens on diversity work in higher education was needed to supplement the framework. In this study, we adopt Ahmed's (2012) view of diversity workers in higher education and consider diversity course instructors to be *diversity workers* who contribute to the marketization of diversity (e.g., institutions point to their diversity to help promote a positive public image and to recruit students and employees). In this way, Ahmed demonstrates that diversity may contribute to public relations and the institution's financial health rather than informing a deep, shared commitment to equity on campus. Ahmed asserted that "diversity practitioners do not simply work *at* institutions, they also work *on* them" (p. 22). Her critical view of diversity in higher education questions the substance of institutional commitments to diversity and whom they benefit. Ahmed explained:

> Diversity as a 'feel good' politics is clearly evident in the cultural enrichment discourse of diversity, which one practitioner described as 'the Thai food stall' model. Diversity can be celebrated, consumed, and eaten—as that which can be taken into the body of the university, as well as the bodies of individuals (p. 69).

Likewise, a diversity course requirement—particularly the type among which students choose from a large menu of courses—can be considered mere celebration of difference or tokenism rather than representing substantive change. Considering the instructors in this study contribute to undergraduate students' understandings of diversity, and by proxy, are working to "redress existing institutional goals or priorities" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 22) regarding diversity, this study seeks to understand how these instructors work to advance institutional goals within their own contexts.

Methods

This paper is based on findings from a qualitative multiple case study (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2014) rooted in critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2008). From a critical constructivist point of view, knowledge is socially constructed and processes of teaching, learning, and producing

knowledge are intimately connected to issues of power and equity (Kincheloe, 2008). The study examined five predominantly white higher education institutions with diversity course requirements in the Southeastern United States. This paper focuses on a subset of data from a larger study and examines how NTT faculty at the five institutions described their experiences as instructors teaching courses that met a general education requirement for diversity.

The larger study also included tenured/tenure-track faculty, but in analyzing data for the larger study, we noticed that NTT faculty often commented on their institutional role and/or employment status in relation to their teaching. In this paper, we examine themes common across NTT instructors at all five institutions rather than providing a multiple-case analysis. Diversity courses are the context (i.e., instructors teaching a diversity course required as part of general education programs), while the focus of our analysis is the non-tenure track status of instructors and how they understood their status in relation to teaching required diversity courses. Given the purpose of this manuscript, we sought to identify themes in NTT instructors' experiences across institutions and appointment types, rather than constructing and presenting an in-depth analysis of each institutions' particular contexts for NTT instructors, or differences in responses based on institution.

Data Collection and Analysis

The five institutions included in this study are detailed in Table 1. We selected institutions meeting the following criteria: located in the common regional context of two neighboring states in the Southern U.S.; bachelor's degree-granting institutions with at least one stand-alone diversity course requirement; a publicly available course schedule with faculty contact information to enable participant recruitment.

This study primarily draws upon semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with faculty members teaching required undergraduate diversity courses. We purposely recruited information-rich cases embedded within each research site by contacting all faculty members who taught courses satisfying diversity requirements. In total, 68 faculty members at five institutions were interviewed; for this paper, we analyzed interview transcripts of the 30 NTT instructors (Table 2). These faculty members included 16 NTT full-time faculty, 10 NTT part-time faculty, and 4 graduate student instructors. As with all other participants in this study, all graduate students were instructors of record for required diversity courses. While graduate student instructors generally may face different circumstances than their part- and full-time NTT faculty counterparts, they fit the criteria for this analysis focused on NTT instructors as a whole across appointment types, and we note in findings where their experiences converged and diverged with those of their counterparts. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours; the average interview lasted 75 minutes.

The interview protocol focused on four primary topics: teaching methods, course content, and faculty and student identities. For this manuscript, we focused on excerpts that dealt with instructors' understanding of the diversity requirement, perceptions of institution and their role(s) within it, and how issues of power, rank, and status (i.e., status as NTT faculty) influenced their approaches to teaching diversity courses.

We began analysis by reading each interview transcript independently, writing memos about key topics from interviews, and meeting together to discuss our initial insights. Interview transcripts were then systematically analyzed using inductive coding, building codes directly from the data. Each interview transcript excerpt was coded by one team member and coded

Table 1 Institution overview

Pseudonym	Carnegie classification	Control	Setting	Student: faculty ratio	% NTT faculty	Enrollment	Admission rate	% white students	% white faculty
Elite College	Baccalaureate college	Private	Suburban	9:1	15%	2500	20%	70%	75%
Regional College	Master's university	Public	Urban	14:1	50%	5000	70%	60%	85%
Selective College	Doctoral: High research	Private	Urban	11:1	30%	7000	30%	70%	75%
State Flagship University	Doctoral: Very high research	Public	Urban	17:1	50%	35,000	70%	75%	80%
State University	Doctoral: High research	Public	Urban	19:1	50%	30,000	65%	55%	70%

Table 2 Participant overview

Pseudonym	Institution	Primary position	Discipline	Race/ethnicity, gender
Alice	State	Non-tenure track, part time	Humanities	White woman
Amy	Regional	Non-tenure track, full time	Humanities	White woman
Bill	Elite	Non-tenure track, part time	Social science	White man
Cesar	State	Non-tenure track, part time	Social science	Latinx man
Charles	Regional	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	White man
Cheryl	State	Non-tenure track, part time	Humanities	White woman
Damien	Flagship	Non-tenure track, part time	Social science	White man
Dean	State	Non-tenure track, full time	Humanities	African American man
Eleanor	State	Non-tenure track, part time	Social science	White woman
Glen	Flagship	Graduate student instructor	Social science	White man
Hugh	State	Non-tenure track, part time	Social science	White man
Jason	Flagship	Graduate student instructor	Social science	White man
Jeanne	Regional	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	White woman
Joy	Elite	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	Asian American woman
Kim	Flagship	Graduate student instructor	Social science	White woman
Leo	Regional	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	Latinx/white man
Liz	Regional	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	African American woman
Mary	Selective	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	African American woman
Nancy	Regional	Non-tenure track, part time	Humanities	White woman
Neal	State	Non-tenure track, part time	Humanities	White man
Norah	State	Non-tenure track, full time	Humanities	White woman
Penny	Flagship	Graduate student instructor	Social science	White woman
Priscilla	Elite	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	White woman
Randolph	State	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	White man
Roxanne	Selective	Non-tenure track, full time	Humanities	Latinx woman
Sheila	State	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	Black woman
Stephanie	State	Non-tenure track, part time	Humanities	Asian American woman
Toni	Flagship	Non-tenure track, full time	Social science	White woman
Trudy	State	Non-tenure track, full time	Humanities	White woman
Vicky	State	Non-tenure track, full time	Humanities	White woman

again by the other team member to identify discrepancies or missing codes. After initial coding, we also examined codes in light of the conceptual framework and literature review for the study to check whether major concepts were represented within the data. Codes applied from the JCM conceptual framework included "autonomy" and "feedback," and from Ahmed consisted of "institutional diversity goals" and "diversity worker." Codes that emerged from the participants included "disconnections," "identity," and "evaluations." These codes were organized and recoded into three themes and sub-themes that reflect the findings presented in this paper. We reached consensus on code applications and, subsequently, themes and results.

During data analysis, we found that we reached data saturation related to perspectives on NTT status and that original themes ceased to emerge after coding approximately half of the 30 interviews; however, we continued to code all interviews to confirm that these themes applied across the data and we made modification to themes/sub-themes as necessary to ensure findings were reflective of the data as a whole. We selected examples to report in the findings across the entire dataset. We sought to identify common patterns, experiences, and themes across the entire dataset and across the faculty appointment types included in the study. Thus, we did not analyze transcripts in groups according to faculty appointment type, but we do note instances in the findings section when we identified patterns that seem clustered by an appointment type (for instance, graduate student instructors' lack of clarity about the diversity requirement).

Trustworthiness and Researcher Reflexivity

We engaged in several strategies to promote trustworthiness of the study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). We member checked by sharing interview transcripts with participants and sought their corrections, additions, and feedback. We collected data at five college campuses over the course of one academic year and completed 30 interviews with NTT instructors, in an attempt to collect adequate data. As mentioned above, all data were analyzed by both researchers to surface divergent perspectives. We built an audit trail for the study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016), documenting all study recruitment materials, interview and field notes, transcripts, codes, and manuscript drafts. We also engaged in peer debriefing sessions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in which we shared our understandings and meaning-making of the emergent themes, findings, and implications with colleagues not involved in the research study.

We also considered our own subjectivities and positionalities as researchers as we collected and analyzed data by engaging in reflexive journaling and conversations during data analysis. I (first author) am a tenure-track higher education faculty member; I previously taught diversity courses as an adjunct instructor while I was a student affairs administrator. I was struck by how some instructors pointed out that diversity was ostensibly a core value of the institution, yet they did not feel adequately supported in their teaching required diversity courses. Tenure and employment status came up in several ways as I recruited participants and conducted interviews—when I suggested we meet in a faculty member's office, though most part-time faculty members did not have offices, or when we discussed and compared teaching loads and departmental support (or lack thereof).

I (second author) hold a position in a center for teaching and learning and support graduate students' teaching and pedagogical needs. At our center's teaching and learning workshops, NTTF are often in attendance, but participate at the expense of the many other teaching and service-related tasks for which they are responsible and do not necessarily receive recognition or support. I also serve as an adjunct instructor; while analyzing these interviews, I was aware of the needs of the instructors in this study who were negotiating a liminal role in their department and felt a keen sense of responsibility for their students' learning.

Delimitations of this study include, primarily, the contexts and participants: instructors of courses meeting general education diversity requirements at five predominantly White colleges and universities in the Southeastern United States. We must also note that this study takes place in non-unionized contexts; the constraints and opportunities for NTT faculty in unionized contexts will differ from those in this study. While this study was initially motivated by faculty experiences teaching required diversity courses and not primarily focused on faculty employment status in particular, we found as interviews continued that NTT instructors frequently brought up NTT status and how it influenced their perspectives. Thus, we sought to center NTT instructors' perceptions and experiences in this manuscript. As this study is context-specific, we do not seek to generalize our findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We do provide thick description to allow for connections from our findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Below, we present two overarching themes: (1) non-tenure track instructors as "heavy lifters" and (2) the double-edged sword of autonomy.

(1) NTT Instructors as "Heavy Lifters"

Diversity courses are core components of undergraduate curricula and participants in this study described how they experienced the responsibility of teaching these courses professionally and personally. NTT instructors' high course enrollments resulted in increased workloads and pressure to deliver quality courses to sometimes hundreds of students. Participants acutely perceived how their own intersecting social identities benefitted their institutions' goals around diversity, from their presence alone to being available to teach diversity courses. Although NTT instructors were interested in pursuing professional development opportunities, many did not have access to or the bandwidth participate in pedagogical or community-building offerings.

Strain of High Teaching Load and Enrollment

NTT instructors of diversity courses — both full- and part-time — functioned as "heavy lifters of the university," in the words of Trudy, with some teaching more courses, sections, and students than tenured/tenure-track faculty members. Trudy, a full-time instructor, was hired specifically to teach large sections of the course her department offered to meet the requirement and reported "feeling that I'm in a box" because of the repetition. She remarked

> I'm not the lesser [colleague] here. I'm their peer. I just teach a different course. … I teach more courses and more students than anybody in my department. I think of myself as one of the heavy lifters of the university, because it's all those students in the seats that bring the money into the university. … Every time I walk around campus, I think, 'I'll bet I've had a lot of these in class and I don't even know it.'

Trudy connected her role as an instructor with large courses with the overall functioning and finances of the university. While she expressed pride in teaching so many students, she also lamented the lack of personal connections she was able to make with students in high-enrollment courses.

Similarly, Eleanor, a part-time instructor, taught multiple sections of required diversity courses each semester, but lamented her lack of job security and juggling multiple sections with high student enrollment.

> I do actually really enjoy teaching [diversity courses] because … the students get to think about their lives, and the political atmosphere today, and connect it to the history and changes in culture over time. … The frustrating things about teaching is the load of teaching as adjunct without the support of the full-time benefits that you would get as a permanent faculty member. And then the quantity of students that you have without the help of [teaching assistants]. So, that's actually what's more frustrating … it's not necessarily what's happening in the classroom, it's just the technicalities of making the living of being an adjunct, and the time you put in versus the kind of stability you get out of it as a job.

Eleanor taught courses ranging from 50 to more than 100 students. While she wanted to inject active learning techniques into her courses—particularly given the focus on diversity issues—she concluded that due to the size of the classes she was "forced to lecture mostly."

NTT Instructors as Evidence of Institutional Diversity

NTT instructors as "heavy lifters" extended beyond the number of course sections and students to bolstering overall faculty demographics for the institution and how the

institution might point to the "diverse" instructors' presence as evidence of diversity. Joy, a full-time instructor, said,

> I must fit this institution somehow because I'm working here. It seems like there's a lot of diversity in the fringes, the non-tenure track, the visitings, the adjuncts. … I'm not going to put my resources into a place that's not investing in me. It's not surprising that they use certain people as transitional labor and then bypass them when something shiny and new comes along.

In Joy's view, faculty of color and women faculty were often used in "transitional labor" roles that were off of the tenure track, which enhanced the institution's faculty diversity numbers without a more permanent commitment to faculty with minoritized identities. She also described being sought out as a mentor by students of color, which added additional time and work to her schedule: "I tried to minimize my service. However, being a person of color on this campus mean that somehow I have a list of 10 students who want recommendation letters—they all happen to be students of color." Because faculty with minoritized identities may be considered "diversity" experts even when it is not their primary area of expertise, they may be asked to teach required diversity courses. Instructors looking to pick up courses may agree to teach in areas they have not taught before. Stephanie, a part-time instructor who had taught language but not culture courses, was offered courses fulfilling the diversity requirement. She said, "My only concern was that I didn't have any experience teaching culture related topics." That faculty might be asked to teach in areas outside of their expertise—and that such requests are made to "diverse" (i.e., minoritized) faculty members—is cause for concern.

Obstacles to Professional Development

Because NTT faculty were committed to teaching effectiveness as "heavy lifters," they expressed interest in professional development and an awareness of university resources, but part-time faculty in particular were either unsure if they could participate or did not have the time to participate. For instance, Eleanor, a part-time instructor, shared:

> I see emails here and there about diversity training being offered to faculty, but I have not participated, and whether or not they may be just as open to adjunct staff, but it's something that I just haven't been immersed in, or taken advantage of on my part, or been explicitly sort of encouraged or directed that way.

Thus, with the lack of specific invitations and encouragement, some faculty doubted whether they could participate in the university's professional development offerings. Cheryl, a part-time faculty member, advised new faculty to, "Hook up with somebody who already does [teach these courses] and chat with that person. That's a lot of what you get out of those [teaching and learning center] things is the visiting beforehand and afterward. And they're not just for adjuncts." Cheryl's comment "they're not just for adjuncts," indicated a perceived disinterest on the part of T/TT faculty toward teaching workshops. Trudy also noted, "I don't get things that other faculty get. I don't get sabbaticals. I don't get funding for travel, and it's because I'm not tenure track." These comments indicate that NTT instructors were highly aware of status differentials among faculty members.

(2) Double-Edged Sword of Autonomy

Instructors discussed the autonomy they were granted to design and teach their courses, which they appreciated, yet also noted the "vague objectives" of the diversity

requirement, in the words of one participant, from which many were disconnected. Autonomy to design courses and teach in the classroom was broadly seen as a benefit, yet instructors also described a lack of support from academic leaders, resulting in disconnections they experienced from the diversity requirement, their departments, and the overall institution. Those who took risks in terms of their course content or teaching methods questioned whether they would have support from academic leaders should complaints arise or if students negatively evaluated courses, especially since student course evaluations could figure heavily into hiring and contract decisions.

Autonomy in Course Design and Instruction

Although instructors felt disconnected from broader, institutional diversity course requirements, many found an opportunity to make the course their own. Hugh's department chair offered for him to teach a course meeting the diversity requirement. He explained the autonomy he experienced designing and teaching the course:

> I did feel I got a lot of freedom in terms of putting it together. … I've talked about this with another professor here, too, who is an adjunct and he and I both thought that sometimes the objectives seem a little vague, but actually I told him I kind of liked that. You can kind of shape the course to meet objectives in a wide variety of ways.

Though Hugh, a part-time instructor, cast this freedom of course design in generally positive terms, the "vague objectives" related to the diversity requirement and those asked to teach it may present cause for concern: Is the requirement actually fulfilling its mission?

Faculty spoke of a "hands off" approach to supervision from department chairs and other academic leaders. Glen, a graduate student instructor, said,

> There's been kind of a hands off, academic freedom type way of approaching, you know, letting [graduate] students teach the courses. They'll only usually send one person in during half of the class at some point during the semester to audit, but other than that, it's pretty much free reign. Nobody comes in and checks in. The nature of what you can teach can have as much breadth or depth as you want.

Glen equated a "hands off" approach with instructors having academic freedom to teach as they see fit. Alice, who had been affiliated with her university for many years, expressed similar sentiments. She stated, "I have never once, in all that time, ever had anybody else from the institution ... see what the hell I was doing. Never once. So [they] don't really know what I'm doing." The lack of supervision of these courses gave instructors the latitude to design and teach their courses in ways they may not otherwise.

Disconnections from Diversity Requirement and the Institution

The lack of a permanent, or in some cases full-time, position, and the need for a contract to be renewed periodically resulted in non-tenure track instructors occupying a precarious position in the academy. This precarity created disconnections from the larger campus and from the diversity requirement itself. Bill, a part-time faculty member, created a course fulfilling the diversity requirement for his department but was unsure of the criteria by which it was evaluated:

> I don't actually know how it was made a diversity course but it does meet the diversity requirement, but since I'm not on the tenured faculty I really haven't been told and I haven't really pushed for an understanding of exactly what criteria it had to meet to be included but it is included.

Bill expressed that his status as a part-time adjunct faculty member meant he was less connected to departmental and college procedures. Despite this challenge, he described his attempts to maintain a rigorous course that would push students out of their comfort zones:

> White students are much more afraid of talking about race than students of color and trying to break through that barrier to open up dialogue is really a tough thing and I'm not sure that I've figured out how to do it.

Bill lamented an "imbalance" in his classroom when students of color might be willing to talk about race and white students shut down as they were "afraid of saying something racist." As an instructor, Bill tried to work through this obstacle and provide a high-quality course, despite disconnection from curricular decision-making and specific criteria associated with the diversity requirement.

Instructors discussed possessing little, if any, knowledge of the diversity requirement itself and even, in some cases, which courses met the requirement. Priscilla, formerly a part-time instructor now on a rolling full-time contract, still felt disconnected from the diversity requirement: "I realized I don't know that much about [general education] requirements and things like that—maybe a passing familiarity based on the things you pick up by osmosis." She went on to say, "I think it may be informative and revealing to you that I'm teaching courses not knowing which requirements that they fulfill." Once on a full-time contract, she described that she felt more agency in her position by being able to submit a course proposal. She also described "doing a lot of hand holding" of students and performing emotional labor, which she attributed to the nature of a diversity course: "I think it's just because of the kinds of courses that I'm teaching."

In particular, the four graduate student instructors felt completely unaware of the diversity requirement and its specific objectives, despite being hired to teach the courses. Jason was unsure as to the specifics of the diversity requirement. He said,

> I mean, I'm sure it's on the school website somewhere, that if I dig I could find it, but as far as letting instructors or new instructors know like, 'hey, this class is part of this core requirement and this is what it means and this is what you should do.' ... I have no idea.

He described a simple process of the graduate director emailing before each semester to ask he would be willing to teach a given course, without additional explanation about the requirements the courses might meet.

Similarly, Penny described her lack of knowledge about the specifics of the diversity requirement:

> I have no idea actually [what the requirement is]. …If it's probably important for the university, then instructors should probably know as well as what it entails and what is their role in that particular course to fulfill that requirement. Basically, at the same time, I don't know, maybe the actual professors, faculty, will have more information and more knowledge about those requirements and those courses. … Cause we're not 'real professors' obviously.

As a graduate student instructor, Penny did not see herself as an "actual professor" and thus was not privy to knowledge about the intent of the diversity requirement—even though she was teaching courses that fulfilled the requirement. Likewise, Kim said,

> My first response is I have no idea [what the requirement is]. I don't really know exactly. I think it's kind of a distribution of learning about different cultures, cultural understanding, or cultural context. … I think this is important, but it's "check the box."

While Kim did not have a clear sense of the diversity requirement initially, she came to perceive the effort as "checking the box": a task done with little care or substance. The graduate students in this study served as instructors of record and were expected to fulfil the same instructional obligations and responsibilities as tenured instructors. However, both graduate students and NTT instructors expressed a disconnect from the university regarding the diversity requirements.

Student Evaluations Influencing Hiring and Contract Renewal

Autonomy, however, also had its downsides as NTT instructors reported hiring decisions may be based in part of student evaluations. In teaching diversity courses, instructors must consider whether and how to push boundaries on topics perceived as controversial, therefore risking negative evaluations and adding to their precarity. Liz, a full-time instructor, described assigning readings with critical perspectives and also using experiential activities around privilege and oppression, which she said were mostly received well by students but occasionally met with resistance. She felt the need to cite research in her evaluation documents on the evaluations of faculty of color and those who teach about diversity to justify occasional negative student evaluations:

> I was in the first group going up [for promotion] and I pulled in all the research that talks about when you teach classes that are like this you can expect, you are not always going to have glowing [evaluations], although I had many more glowing ones but you know it tends to [be lower]. … I had really good evaluations but there were a few things. I spent most of my annual report justifying those because that's what I felt like I had to do with my former chair.

In an appointment off of the tenure track, Liz discussed the need to contextualize teaching evaluations she received, both because of her status as a faculty member with minoritized identities and as one who teaches on diversity.

Alice, a part-time instructor, said that she uses a variety of methods including readings, documentaries, and activities in her classes to engage with topics such as race and social change. She expressed an awareness that course evaluations were considered in contract decisions:

> I know that [the department chair] reads through them [course evaluations]. And I assume that that might, in some way, affect whether or not, as an adjunct, they're going to hire me to teach another class. So I guess in that way, you know, it's kind of a control for them, to know if they've got a problem. But … It doesn't affect the way I teach.

Alice ultimately concluded that she was not overly concerned about her own evaluations influencing her continued employment and teaching practices.

Discussion

This study was designed to examine how NTT instructors who teach required diversity courses negotiate issues of NTT status and manage their relationships to the institution and the diversity requirement. We interviewed 30 NTT instructors at five institutions in the Southern United States as part of a larger study examining faculty experiences teaching required diversity courses. This study adds to the growing body of literature that focuses on the experiences of contingent faculty and how they relate to student outcomes (Kezar, 2013a, b; Kezar et al., 2019).

Disconnections between NTT faculty and the diversity requirement make the value of diversity itself precarious and contingent (D. Louis, personal communication, Nov. 16, 2018) as both their presence and the diversity requirement function as forms of "tick box" diversity (Ahmed, 2012, p. 113)—students "check the box" for a diversity requirement and move on to their other required coursework; faculty also "check the box" by teaching courses they are assigned, whether they are aware of the intentions of the diversity course requirement or not. Ahmed (2012) positioned diversity workers as "institutional plumbers … the ones who point what is getting blocked. To point out what is blocked to be experienced as the blockage point, as the ones who are getting in the way of a flow" (p. 187). This certainly may be the case for instructors of required diversity courses who may be vulnerable in multiple ways, including their employment status and, for some, minoritized social identities. They may also teach about controversial subject matter, which leaves them open to negative student evaluations. While the experiences NTT faculty shared in this study are important in their own right, they also matter because these faculty experiences eventually influence student experiences and outcomes (e.g., Kezar et al., 2019; Umbach, 2007). Using Ahmed's (2012) critique of the institutionalization of diversity, we might consider whether the diversity requirement itself becomes a form of public relations, particularly if many instructors are only marginally aware of the requirement. Thus, a diversity requirement "provides a positive, shiny image of the organization that allows inequalities to be concealed and thus reproduced" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 72).

Meaningfulness of the Work for "Heavy Lifters"

Findings indicated that NTT instructors viewed themselves as "heavy lifters" on their campuses, often teaching multiple high-enrollment course sections. Using Hackman and Oldham's (1976) JCM, we find instructors to be satisfied overall with the meaningfulness of their work —however, the volume of their work and lack of comprehensive institutional support may leave them dissatisfied. Instructors with minoritized identities (e.g., people of color, women) also saw themselves as bolstering the institution's faculty diversity without the job security that tenured positions provided (Schueths et al., 2013), and they were sometimes asked to teach courses outside of their areas of expertise.

Highly committed to students and their teaching (Baldwin & Wawryznski, 2011; Bolitzer, 2019; Umbach, 2007), NTT faculty expressed interest in professional development and teaching workshops, yet were unsure if they were eligible to participate as NTT instructors and/or lacked the time to actually participate. This is a common experience among NTT faculty (Kezar & Maxey, 2013) who often lack institutional support and basic resources such as office space or access to professional development, in the case of adjunct faculty (Bolitzer,

2019). This is a missed opportunity, as research indicates the benefits of faculty participation in diversity training relative to curriculum (Booker, Merriweather, & Campbell-Whatley, 2016) and faculty benefit from differentiated learning opportunities depending on their needs (Ceo-DiFrancesco, Kochlefl, & Walker, 2019).

Precarity as Threat to Accountability and Responsibility

The overall precarity of their positions generated disconnections from the wider institution and its diversity requirement. This relates to the personal accountability and responsibility component of the job characteristics model and, specifically, to task identity. NTT faculty were unevenly aware of the diversity requirement and whether their own courses fulfilled the requirement, at least in part due to their exclusion from departmental activities and governance, a common experience among NTT faculty (e.g., Drake et al., 2019; Kezar & Sam, 2014) that ultimately results in a diminished sense of belonging or community (Kezar & Sam, 2013; Kezar et al., 2019; Leung, Siu, & Spector, 2000; Ott & Cisneros, 2015). In the JCM, Hackman and Oldham (1976) posited individuals derive greater meaning from the work when they perceive their own tasks contribute to the completion of a "whole" piece of work (e.g., a diversity course requirement as part of an undergraduate curriculum). Since NTT faculty were not acutely aware how their own courses complemented the institution's broader diversity requirements, a disconnect formed (e.g., graduate student instructors, in particular, were unaware of the requirement and its intentions). NTT faculty are often left without an orientation to the job, professional development, or formal evaluation procedures (Kezar & Maxey, 2013).

The JCM describes how core perceived job attributes, such as autonomy, feedback, and skill variety, interact with a person's individual responses to work, which in turn, leads to different personal and work outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Since this model places emphasis on an individual's internal meaning-making about job dimensions, it does not account for external factors that shape motivation, satisfaction and job outcomes (Ott & Cisneros, 2015). However, in our study, external factors such as job security, vis-à-vis employment contracts, significantly reinforced participants' feelings of precarity at the institution. Research has shown how influential short-term and/or ambiguous contract terms are to NTT instructors' feelings of social inclusion, satisfaction, and agency (Crick et al., 2019; Drake et al., 2019; Haviland et al., 2017). In this study, participants like Priscilla reported how their energies towards proposing new diversity courses could be realized once she had a more stable employment contract. Even if her individual feelings of autonomy, skill variety, and task significance were high, external forces shaped how she was motivated to contribute.

Left on their Own: Lack of Knowledge of Results and Effectiveness

While NTT instructors appreciated the freedom to design and teach their courses with minimal supervision, this "hands off" approach accompanied by "vague objectives" of the diversity requirement and an awareness that their course evaluations would help determine their continued employment further exacerbated their feelings of precarity and isolation from the institution. "Hands off" might simply mean a lack of time to provide support or even disinterest, and may be an indicator of T/TT faculty disinterest in teaching undergraduate general education courses, as some faculty in this study speculated. This corresponds to a need for knowledge of results and effectiveness from the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), as well as the need for autonomy and feedback on performance. Prior research

indicates NTT faculty may be less satisfied with autonomy over their work (Ott & Cisneros, 2015); in this case, faculty may be left alone to teach their courses, but may teach the same course repeatedly without input or support.

Scholars have established the racialized and gendered components of course evaluations and the unduly negative evaluations that women and people of color often receive (e.g., Anderson & Smith, 2005; Basow & Silberg, 1987; Reid, 2010). Further, an overemphasis on student evaluations might prompt instructors to shy away from addressing controversial issues in class (Schueths et al., 2013). Student evaluations can be balanced by some combination of peer evaluations, self-evaluations, and participation in meaningful professional development, but all of these components would require academic leaders to devote additional time and resources toward the development of NTT faculty—an investment that seems unlikely at a large scale given fiscal pressures on higher education institutions. Lack of institutional policies to support NTT faculty can negatively influence their performance (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). Indeed, "failure to institutionalize the support, inclusion, and fulfilment of [non-tenure track faculty] as part of campus life only serves to weaken universities that increasingly rely on their professional and teaching expertise" (Drake et al., p. 1660).

Limitations

While this study offers a contribution to understanding the experiences of NTT faculty who teach required diversity courses, several limitations must be noted. This study focused primarily on faculty members' understanding of their NTT status relative to the diversity requirement and the institution. Thus, we focused less on these instructors' teaching practices and effectiveness, which warrant further study. Interviews were conducted with faculty members who volunteered to participate; non-volunteers may have had different experiences not captured in this study and NTT faculty in general may have been less likely to participate due to limited time and involvement on campus. Last, we explore common themes and experiences across the five institutions in this study, but differences in these institutional contexts and their diversity requirements would present additional nuance that can be explored in future studies. We also included the perspectives of part- and full-time NTT faculty, including graduate student instructors, though these experiences could be disaggregated to better understand specific experiences.

Implications

Based upon findings of this study, we propose several key implications, primarily directed to academic administrators and tenured/tenure-track faculty members who generally have more power in the academy than NTT instructors to enact structural change. There is first a need to understand the unique circumstances and challenges facing NTT faculty who teach required diversity courses, particularly those who teach high-enrollment sections and/or carry heavy teaching loads. There is a particular need to advance understandings and support for under-represented faculty, especially around mentoring, as mentoring can play a crucial role for underrepresented faculty, especially faculty of color and women (Turner, Myers Jr, & Creswell, 1999; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). When faculty are teaching courses in a diversity requirement, or any other general education requirement, communication about the requirement and its goals and learning objectives, is crucial. Academic leaders can also create,

promote, and encourage NTT faculty participation in professional development opportunities, including by offering accessible sessions (including online and hybrid options) and compensation or a reward structure to NTT faculty, particularly targeted toward those who are not on full-time contracts. Academic leaders can also seek ways to better involve NTT faculty in college and department life and governance—as faculty in this study expressed, without a specific invitation or encouragement, NTT faculty may be unlikely to participate or know whether their presence is wanted. While beyond the scope of the study, the creation of career ladders for NTT faculty would also help reduce precarity and dissatisfaction. These implications regarding reward structures, career ladders, and compensation will depend upon contractual and/or union contexts within a given institution.

While all faculty should be afforded sufficient freedom to design and teach their courses, it is essential that academic freedom be accompanied by appropriate supports. This support can also contribute to NTT faculty sense of belonging and community on campus (Haviland et al., 2017; Kezar et al., 2019; Leung et al., 2000; Ott & Cisneros, 2015). Faculty teaching diversity courses may be expected to lead contentious discussions on controversial topics in the classroom; doing so may lead to instructors expending emotional labor (Harlow, 2003; Miller et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2010) and fearing reprisals in the form of student complaints and negative course evaluations—with evaluations raising the potential for NTT faculty contracts not to be renewed. Academic leaders must have an understanding that course evaluations can be affected by introducing diversity content into courses, and negative evaluations may be more likely targeted toward faculty minoritized in identities such as race/ethnicity and gender.

Coupled with these implications, additional research and assessment efforts are needed to understand the experiences of NTT faculty teaching required diversity courses. Prior research has generally established NTT faculty satisfaction with teaching, despite low pay and status and exclusion from many institutional processes including governance (Bolitzer, 2019). However, more research is needed to understand how NTT design their courses within specific institutional contexts and in specific subject matter/topical areas. As diversity course requirements have proliferated within higher education in the last three decades, less attention has focused on the instructors of these courses and how they design and experience the courses; in particular, little is known about NTT faculty teaching required diversity courses. This is a significant gap given some institutional contexts where NTT instructors many teach a significant portion of the courses. Additionally, while this study focused on how NTT faculty experienced their roles in relation to teaching required diversity courses, future studies can draw upon other theories to better understand NTT faculty experiences in their full context, including attention to external forces (e.g., policies, economics) that shape the academic labor market.

Data Availability Per IRB approval, raw data will not be shared.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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