

Chapter-11

INFLUENCES OF THE NEOLIBERAL TURN ON CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

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ABSTRACT

The neoliberal transformation of higher education has significantly increased universities' reliance on contract instructors. As institutions have shifted toward market-driven priorities such as efficiency, cost reduction, and student satisfaction, they have sought more flexible and less expensive forms of academic labor. Tenure-track faculty, who traditionally provided stability, academic leadership, and long-term pedagogical investment, are increasingly being replaced by contract instructors who can be hired and released on short-term bases. This has created a two-tier faculty system in which contract instructors now carry a disproportionate share of the teaching load while lacking the job security, benefits, and institutional protection afforded to their tenure-track colleagues. Within this context, student evaluations of teaching have become a primary mechanism for assessing and renewing contract instructors, making them particularly vulnerable to the well-documented biases embedded in these evaluations. As a result, the same neoliberal forces that expanded the use of contract faculty have also intensified the inequities and precarity associated with their employment.

Further, the influence of neoliberalism on higher education has affected the way instructors are perceived and rated by students. Further, by way of these evaluations, post-secondary students as consumers of educational products offered by higher education, have impacted the way instructors design and deliver instruction and assessment. One potentially positive effect of the neoliberal influence on higher education relates to the benefits students may receive from course instructors endeavoring to acquire favorable ratings by implementing student-centered pedagogies, as constructivist inspired approaches to active learning have the potential to enhance students' learning experiences. Separate sections of this chapter address components of the broad areas of curriculum and instruction in higher education including, curriculum content, planning, delivery, and assessment, drawing from research in higher education and from my lived experiences as a post-secondary instructor. Each section includes a phenomenological description of I have experienced the individual components of curriculum and instruction in higher education, along with addressing how the elements of instruction have been implemented over time in relation to typical rating criteria designed for students' use. The chapter concludes with prospects for future research.

Keywords: Contract Instructors, Student Evaluations of Teaching, Neoliberal Higher Education, Academic Precarity, Student-Centered Pedagogy

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