

Job Security and Satisfaction Strategies for Non-Tenure and Part-time Photography Instructors

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Working as a part-time or non-tenure track instructor can eventually lead to career frustration and financial anxieties. Additionally, being out of the loop regarding academic affairs can make one feel out of touch with what is going on at campus. Nor does it do one's self esteem any good when they perceive they aren't getting the same type or degree of professional recognition as full time and faculty members for the same accomplishments.

The following strategies are ones which can be used to help maximize employment security for part-time and non-tenure track college photography instructors. They can have the added benefit of increasing one's level of personal satisfaction from teaching, irrespective of whether or not they get one closer to a goal of permanent employment.

- **Create specialty classes and claim intellectual property rights on their content.**

Are you, for example, a specialist in forensic photography, or an accomplished nature photographer? A sure-fire job security strategy is to personally develop a course and use policies protecting intellectual property rights to retain your right to teach it at your institution. Research your institutional policies and procedures for this, least you lose out on a benefit to this strategy because of an oversight. It is best to read those policies firsthand, rather than rely on word of mouth. Among the policies you may discover are avenues to securing permanent course numbering after teaching it for a required number of semesters.

- **Teach a course that is in the catalog but no instructor is teaching.**

Does your department have a course listed in the college catalog that isn't being taught? Find out why and, if qualified, offer to teach it. Better yet, if you are in a state system of higher education institutions, is there a course you would be qualified to teach which hasn't been picked up by the school where you teach? The best place to find out might be system-wide course number catalog or index. Think of it as a super catalog of courses in your state, but one compiled for administrative use. Don't give up if you don't find a potential course you could teach which is listed in *your* academic department. Check for photography courses offered in fine arts (or conversely, commercial photography or graphic arts), criminal justice, science, and information technologies. Dare to think out of the box. Maybe all it needs to adapt it to photography students is to add the word "Photographic" to the title. For example, many art departments teach a course in gallery practices, in which case propose a "*Photographic Gallery Management & Practices*" course if you are in a commercial photography program.

If you are proposing a course taught elsewhere in your state system, make some inquiries to determine why the permanent numbered course isn't being offered at your school, as well as who teaches it elsewhere and how. In the process you can assure other instructors and departments you aren't stepping on their toes since, logically, if no one else will do it, it is up for

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grabs. But, be diplomatic in that you might want to explore team teaching it if there is someone equally or more qualified than you to be an instructor.

- **Publicize to get the students you need.**

Ever notice the easel mounted course promotion posters facing students in line for registration? Or the new course information flyers posted on bulletin boards or even in local businesses where potential students would frequent? The instructors for those courses have learned the truth of getting listed in the course schedule or catalog: a listing alone can't insure the number of students you need for a course to fly. Publicize to get your numbers!

- **Initiate new course time and place combinations for required courses.**

Reality is that part time instructors get bumped from teaching certain sections due to full-time instructors needing to pick up hours to fulfill their contracts. You may also get bumped because the department is trying to attain equality in offering all the part timers the same number of classes. The worst is getting bumped because of what you might perceive as favoritism.

To minimize getting bumped, be the one who *volunteers* for the class sections held when full timers don't want to teach and new part timers think are dead times. A great example for a beginning photography class is a Friday night. Some non-traditional students will find it very convenient, especially couples wanting to take a course together, stay at home parents who schedule it as a get-away, and empty nester adults who are into career or knowledge enhancement but aren't available during the work week. There is bound to be exceptionally motivated students in those groups.

- **Teach a similar course in a different department.**

Some schools offering photography have similar course offerings in both a commercial-orientated department and in a fine arts department. Find out if you qualify to teach in both departments. If not, it could be a matter of getting some extra courses under your belt to qualify, although the expense of taking non-reimbursed graduate courses might not pencil out.

- **Seek and exploit press and media coverage for your specialty classes.**

The cheapest advertising for a business is free positive media coverage. Consider yourself a business and seek out opportunities to get free press for yourself and your student's activities.

- **Initiate a Photography Club and become its faculty advisor.**

For a relatively small investment of time, an instructor can get to know quite a few students by becoming the advisor to a campus photography club. If there isn't one already in place, see if your students will initiate one. If it seems to everyone in administration that only full time instructors can be advisors, check for a written policy on that. You may end up being a trend-setting part-timer.

- **Maintain an intern program for students at your commercial studio.**

Working professionals are among the best sources for part-time instructors. They have on-the-job experiences that enrich their classroom instruction. And they may operate or be associated with a photography studio or art gallery. Whether or not your department has a formal

intern program, offer to mentor advanced students in an intern program. You get some inexpensive assistance along with the rewards of helping students in their careers.

- **Secure or provide regular opportunities for students to display their work in off campus galleries and public locations.**

The gentrification of our cities seems to cut down on the number of venues in which students can display their photography. Corporate ownership of coffee and bookshops makes it less likely that wall space will be devoted to showing local art. You'll gain a large measure of appreciation from students if you seek and secure public spaces to exhibit their work and actively work with the owner/manager of that space to make sure it is a win-win-win for them, yourself and students alike. Don't forget to add signage identifying your school and *you* as the curator. As an instructor, you can probably reserve a time slot to do a solo show, too. If you are lucky, you might even attract a media review for an exhibit.

- **Keep tabs on course scheduling every step of the way.**

Do you assume that once you express your class assignment preferences, they will happen? Chances are things will change, but because you don't work on campus, you'll get forgotten in the chaos of course scheduling. In worst case scenarios, there will be communication lapses and you won't know until you walk into your class with all your class handouts, only to find someone else is teaching it. Back up your phone conversations with emails.

Besides periodic follow-ups with the faculty representative who is doing the scheduling, it pays to stay in touch with the department's administrative assistant who is charged with getting it through the last hoops. There is nothing worse than being bumped for reasons which could have been reversed, like "We never got your email request..."

- **Take free college courses outside of photography to strengthen your skills or knowledge.**

Colleges generally offer tuition waivers to instructors, including part time and non-tenure track instructors. Take them for credit and increase your marketability and develop new avenues of academic interest. Turn course assignments into professional development exercises. For example, you might take an art history class to enhance your art critique abilities in the commercial photography classes you teach. If that instructor gives you the assignment to create a mock exhibit catalog, turn it into an opportunity to do a real exhibit and catalog of a photographer who appeals to you.

- **Seek out opportunities for equipment vendor support in your courses from companies the full-time faculty has not tapped.**

Vocational programs are fertile ground for equipment vendors who benefit from interacting with your school's students and faculty. Your photography program probably has its favorite companies who provide workshops and vendor shows open to all the students. What about those companies not being or no longer tapped by the administration or faculty, but have equipment that you personally use or is specific to your specialty classes? Contact them and ask to talk with whom ever is responsible for liaisons with schools. You might be able to secure an equipment rental or even a demonstration in your class by a representative of the company.

- **Develop relationships with other colleges and universities and their faculty.**

This is a fertile ground for innovations. But chances are that part-time and non-tenure faculty won't get the same opportunities for reimbursed travel that tenure track and tenured faculty do. Don't let that stop you! Find whatever ways to connect that you can.

Developing a unique relationship with a neighboring institution may seem way beyond the means of a part time instructor. Yet, consider the following example: In your travels, you note a facility where you would die to teach. This could be something like a research camp in the mountains just over your state line. Looking into it more, you find out it is available to visiting faculty for field courses. In fact, they are dying to have it utilized. The next step can be a no-brainer - find a way to teach there through your *present* institution. Ultimately, you may discover the institution offering the facility is promoting you to attract additional faculty.

- **Seek out opportunities to judge photography competitions, while hyping your college faculty connection.**

Unless it is an art museum, part-time status isn't going to matter when it comes to being a jurist. Wear your title proudly, attend the awards event, and talk up your school. It will reap unexpected rewards down the line.

- **Make periodic presentations on your course offerings at community photography club meetings.**

Photography clubs attract newbies eager to learn the craft. They are ripe pickings as beginning digital photography students. And the established club members will like your field-orientated classes, where they can both shoot and socialize.

- **Routinely prove to your school how you are a value-added employee.**

Increase your department's public reputation by identifying yourself professionally in whatever title the department confers on you. For example, list your self as an "Instructor" in art exhibitions, exhibition catalogs, symposium and trade show participation, etc. Don't assume you can't participate in symposiums or publish professional papers because you are a part-timer.

- **Develop name recognition in your community and with photography professionals.**

You can minimize the "forgotten adjunct instructor syndrome" by marketing yourself in ways that increase your name recognition as a photographer and instructor. Students and faculty will be less likely to forget you when your name regularly appears as photographer credits in the media, or you are highlighted as a contributor to a magazine, you win a community award, or you received positive coverage in the news. And don't overlook letting others in the profession know you are teaching. The local photography store that might have recommended you for a teaching position also has the power to refer students to your classes.

- **Keep the faculty and administration abreast of your accomplishments.**

Let the entire faculty in your department know when you accomplish something that made the program shine or become more visible to the public. Then don't let it bother you if the faculty or administration seems to ignore what you have accomplished. Keep believing that "What goes around comes around." What comes around may very well be something positive which is unrelated to the school where you teach.

- **Develop your Internet presence.**

Generation X and Y students are curious to know who is teaching them and Googleing your name is a no-brainer strategy to accomplish that. Get your photography, publications and accomplishments on the web so that other's can judge you on what you do, rather than what you say. You will be more likely to get professional respect from your students, without resorting to verbal bragging. That might translate to positive word of mouth recruitment.

- **Put on seminars for students.**

This strategy fits in well with advising a Photography Club. Get the students to host a seminar in which you invite faculty to give a preview of upcoming course offerings. Or invite a camera repairman to do equipment checks on campus. Or foster cross-department cooperation by having faculty outside the department give a presentation. For example, does your commercial photography program teach students how to frame and hang their work? If not, an art instructor would be a perfect invite. Do *you* know a skill students could benefit from, but you can't incorporate it into a class you teach? Then offer it as a seminar.

- **Remind your college administrators in job applications of the strategies and good ideas you have initiated.**

It is you who has to toot your own horn, although you need to take care in how you do it and the frequency at which you toot. Actions speak louder than words, but they soon get forgotten. Use your periodic job applications to the department as a way to remind them what you have accomplished. This is especially fruitful if your previous ideas have been adopted by the department or other faculty members. Corporate memory is short and this will remind people who the innovator was.

- **Maximize your chances for teaching the maximum number of classes allowed by instructing in unrelated departments for which you have the qualifications.**

A graduate minor might have provided you with the hours you need to teach in a department unrelated to your major, or area of primary interest. Departments forced to bump part-time instructors don't want to have to totally bump you off the payroll. Use inter-department teaching to maximize your chances of having a full, or nearly full, teaching load.

- **Teach classes at remote campuses that have difficulty getting full-time instructors.**

Even if a course isn't presently offered, the digital revolution has rural residents hungry for a class in using their cameras and printing their images. Your rural campus coordinators are your best contacts for knowing the pulse of their community.

As a bonus, the students you'll meet in rural areas can become important contacts when you need to shoot rural subjects. Need a farm or ranch setting for a shoot? Need to supply a stock image of something too far away to justify the travel? Network with your former rural students for assistance.

- **Recruit potential students for your higher paying credit courses by teaching "teaser" continuing education and education workshops.**

While a lower pay level can be a detriment to teaching continuing education, it can serve as a conduit for getting students into your credit classes. Likewise, teaching workshops can

attract students to credit classes, especially if you hold back information by saying: “You get that material in my credit course.”

- **Simultaneously recruit students for your degree program and your specialty classes by enthusiastically teaching the introductory classes.**

Tenured instructors and professors tend towards teaching higher-level courses, leaving the bulk of the entry level courses for part-timers and non-tenure track faculty. Use those introductory course teaching assignments to capitalize on the opportunity for developing a loyal base of students. There will be students in your classes who are testing the waters to see where they want to go in their education and careers. Get them enthused in you and the way you teach. They will be the ones who come back for your “beyond the basics” courses. This is an especially good way to help your enrollment numbers if you also teach intermediate level photography courses.

You may feel that because the syllabus is standardized by the department for introductory courses, it limits your innovation in presenting subject matter of particular interest to them? No problem. Distribute questioners in the first class and *read the responses out loud*. Your students will immediately identify with other students who are potentially interesting to them. Then foster ways to get students to interact *throughout* the course. Social classes keep boredom at bay. Sometime it is who is signing up for the course that is more important to students than who the instructor is. You want those leadership orientated, gregarious students, because they will draw others who relish socially interactive classes.

- **Recruit non-traditional students.**

Does your school have reduced tuition for seniors? If so, get them to enroll! But also get them engaged in the homework and class projects, least you end up with too few students actually doing the work. How do you do that? Have them initial a student questionnaire contract on their first day which states that participating in activities x, y, and z are a requirement for auditing. Your school may even have a policy backing you up in this requirement.

Does your school give college credit to students still enrolled in high school? If so, find ways to recruit on high school campuses. Judging high school level photo competitions is another way to attract the best and brightest high school students. Show up for the awards presentations and seek out those students whose work you liked, as well as their instructors. If you take the time as a judge to discuss their work, they won't forget you! Nor will their instructors, who potentially influence their college decision-making. Holding a workshop for local high school teachers who in turn recommend their students for your classes, is another fruitful way of recruiting

Are you multi-lingual? Figure out a way to draw the students who prefer instructors who can speak their primary language.

- **Teach an honors class.**

Does your school have a program where students can do extra projects in any course to get honor credits? If so, recruit students for it from day one of your classes. Does your school offer honors sections of certain courses? Volunteer to teach one, or to get your specialty course listed. Does your school offer unique courses as Honors College seminars? Don't assume part-time instructors are excluded. Your idea for a course might be well received.

- **Team teach a course.**

Two can accomplish more than one, especially if you have a tenured professor as your mentor. Is there a course idea for which you both are proficient? Propose a team-taught course. This can be especially fruitful for cross-disciplinary courses, as well as when there is an instructor or professor who has the expertise and might feel territorial if you proposed a course within their perceived turf.

- **Initiate a student petition.**

Did you fill a class, only to find you have enough students to fill yet another? Rather than sign overflow slips, get them to initiate a petition requesting another section be opened. Then you've doubled your income. Likewise, did they enjoy your specialty course enough to want a follow-up? Then get them to initiate a petition for a second level course offering.

So, what if you have successfully executed most of the above strategies, but don't have a permanent job? What if you have accumulated service credits enough to pass tenure review twice over, but there is still no permanent employment on your horizon? It is easy to lay blame on the school, individuals, yourself, or any other sacrificial lamb. Unless your mentors and confidants confirm it has something to do with you personally, assume that you never would have accomplished as much as you have if you didn't have the right stuff.

The right stuff might, for reasons totally unrelated to you, not be enough to land the position you covet. But in the course of making yourself competitive, take stock of what you have become in the process. You may have gained insight into reasons why the grass isn't always greener in academia. Chances are you are now positioned for something you never considered, or thought you would never attain. Go for it! You might even encounter a tenured faculty member who says to you: "I sure wish I was in your shoes, rather than in this job."