

Results of the Annuitant Survey of November, 2014

By Keith Johnson, Oakton Community College

Background

During the second week of November, 2014, rumors began to circulate that all adjunct faculty receiving pensions from the State University Retirement System (SURS) were being fired. An e-mail to faculty from Human Resources confirmed the policy, although there was no information about whether it had been approved by the Board. Neither the Adjunct Faculty Association nor the Faculty Senate had been consulted before this decision.

At this moment, after a brief discussion with AFA leaders, I wrote and circulated a survey on Monday, November 17 at the Division 4 meeting. I also circulated the survey at the open faculty office spaces in Skokie and DesPlaines, and on Tuesday, November 18, at the OCC Board Meeting. My objective was to discover the general opinions about the policy, find out how many had formed an opinion about it, and see how many were affected by the policy, if not immediately, then in the future.

While more than 100 surveys were distributed, I have received 62 as of this writing. This does not count surveys which were returned too incomplete to be used, or blank.

The survey questions were drawn from conversations I had with various faculty, both full- and part-time. This Report is to supply the results to all interested parties at OCC.

The Survey and Response to It

Respondents were asked to define themselves as affected or not by the new policy on annuitants, indicate their number of years at OCC, and state whether they knew enough about the policy to answer the questions; 77 percent said they did. In addition, 30 percent made written comments.

Aside from the opinions, the survey produced results about the general interest in the subject of the dismissal of a substantial number of our adjunct faculty colleagues. Of

the 28 percent who stated that they were not nor will be affected by the policy, 53 percent indicated that they knew enough to state opinions about it. Their perspective is somewhat different from that of those affected. However, those who were affected were much more likely to feel they knew enough to give their opinions: 86 percent. This difference is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

A second group of colleagues affected are any full-time faculty member who is considering working at a reduced level upon taking retirement. Thanks to the new policy, such teaching as an emeritus will not be possible. Full-time faculty will have to consider teaching as all or none, possibly leading many to work full-time past the age when they would like to keep busy and active, but have more personal time. Of those choosing to answer the survey, the largest number were those thinking of their future retirement, 61 percent. The annuitants were few, only 12 percent of the respondents. However, those who either would be affected immediately or in the future compose most of the respondents (72 percent) and a large majority of those who felt they knew enough about the policy to give an opinion on it.

The Adjunct Faculty Background

Fortunately, there are results from the studies of the adjunct faculty done through the Adjunct Faculty Association that bear on the current situation. The November annuitant survey found that only one-fourth of the non-retirees were disinterested in continuing to work part-time after retirement. The large proportion who are so interested may surprise the reader. Is this a valid answer, or is the survey biased towards those who have a vested interest in working past retirement? The adjunct faculty may give a clue. To the item, "Will adjunct as long as health permits," a surprising 72 percent indicated that was their plan. A percentage almost as large indicated they were "Willing to sacrifice to serve OCC and students." For those who think of our part-time faculty as merely spending a few hours at their part-time hobby, think again. Our students are demanding of attention, advising, and individual help. A majority of our adjuncts, 57 percent, answered this question affirmatively: "Find you are working full-time at a part-time job."

For those in the administration who believe that only a few annuitants will be affected by this new policy, they need to understand that a majority of current faculty are thinking of continuing to teach after their official retirement. The policy could potentially affect every full-time faculty member. This is not a decision that can be taken lightly, or will be soon forgotten. Let's see what the current opinions are towards this unusual situation.

The Opinions

The survey consistent of 13 opinion questions with a Likert type five point response options ranging from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree. None of these questions simply asks for an acceptance or rejection of the policy, but almost 20 of the respondents made their opinion known by circling or writing in a number for the entire list of opinions. Almost all of these were "5," or Strongly disagree.

The opinions are summarized for each survey item in Appendix 1. The body of the survey is reproduced, with the percentage of the respondents for their classification, or the average (mean) score for each question. It is clear that the response to the announced policy was very negative from the survey results. The greatest disagreement was with the item, "OCC should break its contract with its part-time faculty, if it costs too much money." On the one to five scale, the score was 4.58, halfway between "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree." Similarly, the question with greatest agreement was, "The administration should consider the hardship their decision is causing, not just its legal and financial interests" at 1.57. There is a discussion of the generally negative attitude towards the administrative policy in the following section on a factor analysis of the survey items.

Comments written by 30 percent of the respondents fill in some of the details about these opinion questions. They too are negative. All comment received are listed in Appendix 3.

Data Reduction

In order to simplify the analysis, a data reduction technique called factor analysis was used, thanks to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results are displayed in Appendix 2. They explain 69 percent of the variance among the respondents. Here follows a description of the factors, which show different respondent types to the survey. These types are tendencies shown in the data, and do not describe individuals, I duly note.

Factor 1: The Majority, Affected Opponents

This factor is based on responses of seniority among the respondents at OCC, along with being affected by the new policy. Certain opinions were also associated: Disagreement that annuitants “double dipping” should retire, that not enough people are affected to make an issue of the policy, and to a lesser degree, with the statement that the decision was inevitable. There was also strong association with agreement with the item “We will be losing a lot of good people...” In short, this factor describes the majority response to the survey, and ordinarily that would be the end of the reporting. However, the factor analysis shows that while this factor is almost double the weight of any other, it doesn’t tell the whole story. The variance explained is 18 percent of the total (that is, 18 out of the 69).

Factor 2: Administration Opponents

While the first factor found associations among those opposed to the policy, the second factor shows items that show opposition to the administration which appears to be the source of the policy. The opinions show strong disagreement that the administration should be given credit for delaying the decision for a year or that the decision was inevitable. Somewhat less strong were disagreements that what they did was legal, or that it would help to delay the policy until its legality was clarified. They also agreed that the administration should consider the hardship its decision will cause. In short, these opinions take the administration to task for an apparent illegal stance, not to speak of its inhumanity. This factor explains 11 percent of the variance.

Factor 3: Administration Supporters

Four opinions were factored together in this third respondent type; they speak for themselves. They are strong disagreement that the decision was “just about the money,” disagreement that the administration should consider the hardship caused by its policy, and agreement that the administration should break its contract if it costs too much, and get credit for delaying the policy. Because of the strong feelings against the policy, these opinions are not necessarily strong in the opposite direction, they can be rather weak and tenuous. Even so, they also represent 11 percent of the variance.

Factor 4: My Way or the Highway

This is the factor defined by the smallest number of items. They seem to be opposed to the adjunct faculty and others who don't like how the College is treating them. The factor is composed by strong disagreement that the College should wait for legal clarification before getting rid of the annuitants and strong disagreement that the climate for inclusion at OCC is terrible. There is somewhat lesser disagreement that “we will be losing a lot of good people...” In effect, these items together tell a story of some who are satisfied with Oakton's climate of exclusion, getting rid of annuitants sooner rather than later, and no concerns about the quality of the people being lost. This factor also explains about 11 percent of the variance.

Factor 5: Silent Newcomers

This factor includes two non-opinion items. It is strongly associated with not giving any written opinion on the survey, and to a lesser degree, having fewer years of seniority at OCC. These respondents are still distinctive, expressing a strong disagreement with the legality of the policy and a less distinctive disagreement that the policy doesn't affect enough people to cause an issue. This factor also explains about 11 percent of the variance.

Factor 6: The Official Reason is Enough

This is a smaller factor, only explaining about 8 percent of the variance. It also is composed mainly of a single question, “I know the official reason, but not the real reason for this.” The factor consists of strong disagreement with this item. Lesser associations come from disagreement that OCC should break its contract, or that

discharging annuitants will benefit the new president by getting rid of union activists. There was agreement that annuitants should just retire. In short, these are “realists” who see that there is a clear problem and the college should do its part by following the law, and the annuitants should do their part by going away.

Conclusions

The abrupt policy change of November, 2014 and its announcement brought about many reactions among the faculty. A survey that was created on the spot helps to show several aspects of the response. First, it was mainly and highly negative. This was the case whether the respondent was an annuitant about to be discharged, a faculty or staff member anticipating both retirement and continuing to be active teaching part-time afterwards, or others with no plans to work as an annuitant. The proportion of people uninterested in working part-time after retirement was only one-third the proportion anticipating it. Second, the respondents who were not affected by the policy were less likely to answer the survey, and when they did, they more often stated they were too uninformed to give opinions. Third, while the overall responses were opposed to the policy, a factor analysis shows that there are some tendencies to either blame or support the administration, blame the annuitants, support the status quo and otherwise form distinctive responses to a complex situation when it suddenly appeared on campus. Doing an opinion poll is unlikely to discover the many, varied responses individuals will have.

This small study was designed to be an opinion poll, and the results show clear, even overwhelming opposition to the policy of discharging all annuitant faculty. Similar expressions of opinion at the Board meeting of November 18, 2014 may have an impact on the policy, as well as the revisions in the law that are currently in process. But there also are hints in the data that faculty are highly varied and have personal, even unique perspectives that polls do not tap. I tried to tease out some of these tendencies through a factor analysis. Other expressions of opinion in comments are included in an Appendix. I hope the reader finds the results interesting and useful.

To form an opinion of the general situation of Oakton's full-time and part-time faculty and staff, a much more detailed database must be established and followed longitudinally over time. This small report merely presents a snapshot of OCC at a critical juncture on November 17 and 18, 2014.

Please note that the study and the opinions I express about the results are my own, and do not necessarily represent those of the College or the Adjunct Faculty Association.

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Appendix 1: Survey and Averages (Means) for Opinion Questions

Survey on the Annuitant Situation at OCC

1. As an Oakton employee covered by a SURS retirement contract, how are you impacted by the recent decision not to allow any SURS annuitant to work at OCC?

I am not impacted, because I won't want to continue part-time after retiring (19.7%)

I am not impacted, because I am retired and won't work after leaving OCC (8.2%)

I will be impacted after retirement, for I want to continue part-time to keep active(60.7%)

I am impacted, because I am currently receiving a SURS pension (11.5%)

2. What do you think of these opinions about the decision to disallow annuitants from working at OCC in the future?

1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = ? 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

I don't know enough about any of this to answer questions about it_23%_ (Skip to end)

The **decision** was inevitable because other schools have done the same thing_3.58_

OCC should wait until the **legal** situation is clarified_2.03_

OCC should **break** its contract with its part-time faculty if it costs too much money_4.58_

The administration should consider the **hardship** their decision is causing, not just its legal and financial interests_1.57_ This is just about the **money**_2.14_

The administration should get **credit** for not doing this last year_3.71_

I know the **official** reason, but not the real reason for this_2.67_

We will be **losing** a lot of good people when this goes into effect_1.67_

Whether we **like it or not**, what Oakton is doing is perfectly legal_3.26_

This doesn't concern enough people to make an **issue** of it_4.51_

The **climate** for inclusion for part-time faculty and staff at OCC is terrible_2.11_

Annuitants should stop "**double dipping**" and retire already_4.42_

This will clean out the **union** activists for the incoming college president_2.99_

(Highlighted words are used to identify the questions in the factor analysis that follows)

Appendix 2: Factor Analysis

Factor Analysis: Six Factors from Annuitant Survey

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Years	.524				-.477	
Situation	.721					
Opinion					-.816	
Union						.264
DoubleDip	.656					-.396
Climate				.695		
Issue	.823				.259	
LikeOrNot		.387			.722	
Losing	-.772			.273		
Official						.888
Credit		.800	-.281			
Money			.702			
Hardship		-.476	.609			
Break			-.773			.343
Legal		.340		.700		
Decision	.340	.729				

Note: "Years" are the number of years at OCC. "Situation" is whether respondent is affected or not by the new policy, higher number is being affected. "Opinion" is whether the respondent wrote in an opinion, with the higher number for stating one. The opinion questions are in reverse order from the survey (Appendix 1). Description of the factors is in the text. In all opinion questions, lower numbers indicate agreement, higher, disagreement. So "Union" on the factors was only weakly associated with the last factor, with a correlation of .264. Because it is positive, the correlation shows disagreement with the union question (the last on the survey).

Note that the table shows the Varimax rotation of the factor analysis. The Varimax is useful for presenting factors with the greatest differences among them. The factor analysis is based on 40 completed surveys.

Appendix 3: Comments

Commented [K1]:

"Unbelievable how OCC treats its adjunct faculty."

"Harmful for us and for the quality of the faculty at OCC. Qualified, loyal faculty will be replaced by inexperienced 'wannabe' instructors. We are NOT replaceable."

"A heavy-handed decision."

"So OCC had to pay a fine for adjuncts going over the limit. Don't worry, the administration will get back every penny by firing senior adjuncts and replacing with newcomers at the bottom of the salary scale."

"This is another cruel decision made by the administration."

"It's also about protecting those in the administration who failed to catch these errors in 3 adjuncts"

"A very confusing issue."

"I don't know if this will apply to me. I haven't made any plans for retirement."

"This possible choice by Oakton's administration may have additional consequences that need consideration:

- (1) Cutting the number of skilled, knowledgeable tutors...;
- (2) Cutting the number of people available to read and evaluate placement exams;
and
- (3) Limiting the number of experienced faculty available as substitutes, especially substitutes with content knowledge and teaching experience."

"We should work to change the law."

"I'm still a bit unclear on this, sorry"

"This is sad. SURS is at fault."

"I'm too far from retirement to respond to this question."

"We should file a grievance and lawsuit."

“Last year it was cutting adjunct hours. This year it’s cutting adjunct jobs. What will it be next year?”

“Why punish 80 people for three going over the limit?”

“Isn’t this age discrimination?”

“OCC can’t act unilaterally on an issue affecting all staff and faculty”

“This is legal, and also unethical”