CHAPTER 8

Faculty in Academic Disciplines

Introduction

Of all of the administrator and faculty “types” I attempted to recruit for my research inquiry, disciplinary content-teaching faculty were the most difficult to identify and recruit. The stories of two disciplinary content teaching faculty members are presented in this chapter: one a full-time Speech Communications faculty member who teaches credit-bearing “Speech Com” courses for pathway program students as well as course sections for matriculated university students, and the second, an adjunct Business faculty member who is contracted to teach segregated introductory Business courses to pathway program students. Neither of these faculty members has a terminal degree within his respective discipline.

Christopher Walker

Christopher’s Background

Christopher Walker is a full-time faculty member in South Portage University’s (SPU) College of Arts and Letters in Portage, Maine. While working on a Master’s degree in Communications Studies and Rhetoric, he was first initiated into the field of teaching through public speaking and gender communication courses as a graduate teaching assistant. Christopher spent nearly 10 years of his early career in academia, running writing centers on various university campuses, hiring and training tutors, and working individually with a number of international students, many of whom were English language learners. For a brief period of time, he and his partner worked in Asia for a pre-university preparation program that shared similarities with the JVP Pathway program at SPU. “But, it was strictly a non-credit preparation program: very small, but JVP-like with a Business-school focus. These were students who were hoping to study in England, Canada, or the United States, and they simply needed to qualify: to get in. The school needed help shepherding them through the process.” Christopher found out about SPU’s Speech Communications Department from a former colleague who was teaching there. He submitted his curriculum vita, hoping to be welcomed into the adjunct instructor pool, but his experience with international students caught
the eye of the department chair, who suggested that he seemed to have the set of skills they were interested in for covering the first-year Speech Communications classes for JVP students. Despite Christopher's not having secured a Ph.D. in the discipline, the job would be a full-time faculty position with benefits within the university's College of Arts and Letters but teaching almost entirely JVP Pathway program students.

Christopher's Reflections on the Corporate Sector Partnership
I met with Christopher on the SPU campus, not far from the JVP Center. Through his stories, I learned about his early days being mentored by a colleague in his department and how his experience being mentored led him to "play forward" this role for other content teaching faculty. He shared with me his concerns about the lack of equivalence between the segregated mainstream course sections and those being taught to the JVP students and also his challenges in dealing with a high volume of plagiarism by the JVP students due, he feels, to the high-stakes nature of the program. In his narratives, Christopher also emphasized his having embraced both his disciplinary identity and his newfound identity as one who supports the needs of English language learners, and shared his great admiration for his English language teaching colleagues. Christopher also discussed the varied perceptions others on campus have of the JVP partnership, its pathway program, and its faculty. While he feels himself to be a competent and conscientious teacher, Christopher is unsure whether the JVP students are in fact making appropriate gains in disciplinary content knowledge.

Being Mentored and Mentoring Others
When Christopher first arrived at SPU, hired to teach undergraduate JVP course section, he was fortunate to be mentored by an experienced Communication Department faculty member who had been teaching the Speech Communications course for JVP for about a year. His mentor, Bonnie, had previously taught the course for domestic or direct-entry international students at the 100 (first-year) and 200 (second-year) levels, but she had been asked to adapt those materials significantly for the JVP students enrolled in the Pathway programs. Christopher recounted that Bonnie was quite helpful, and they ended up exchanging a lot of materials and practices: "She kind of gave me all of her materials, and I gave her my ideas based on my experience with the class and with international students." They met almost weekly Christopher's first semester, and as he told me, "It helped to have someone show me the ropes." Christopher does not have a lot of contact with other disciplinary content faculty teaching in the Pathway programs, though a newer