THE INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR PROBLEM: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

Session Chairs
John A. Schibrowsky, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Las Vegas, NV, 89154-6010; (702) 895-0993
James Cross, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Las Vegas, NV, 89154-6010; (702) 895-3176

Presenters
Paul Hugstad, California State University, Fullerton CA 92834-6848; (714) 278-3544
Gary McKinnon, Brigham Young University; Provo UT, 84602-3131; (801)378-7641
Richard Lapidus, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Las Vegas, NV, 89154-6010; (702) 895-3023
Douglas Lincoln, Boise State University; Boise Idaho, 83725; (208) 385-3246
James W. Peltier, University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, Whitewater WI 53190 (262) 472-5474
Shirley Stretch, California State University, Los Angeles; Los Angles CA 90032-8127; (323) 343-2962

Abstract

This special session discusses the issue of the independent contractor problem. This is the term we used to describe the situation where the individual faculty member views his or her association with the university as one of independent contractor rather than that of member of university's faculty. While this problem has existed for years and affects all ranks of faculty, it appears to be more prevalent today than at any other point in time. Virtually every administrator has been confronted by a faculty member that refuses to perform a service activity unless it "counts" at merit, annual evaluation, or promotion. These faculty members often ask, "Why should I?" and "What's in it for me?" They do not see these activities as part of their job nor do they see any value in performing them.

The expert panel we have assembled have a wealth of both faculty and administrative experience in dealing with the issue. They tried to provide some insights into the causes and solutions pertaining to this issue. A few of the issues discussed included:

1. Are more faculty adopting this model today than is the past? If so, why?
2. Is this really a problem or simply a reflection of the times?
3. Has the ability to work from home increased this problem?
4. What are the factors that increase the likelihood that this model of behavior will be adopted?
5. How are different schools dealing with the issue?

Gary McKinnon provided insight into the issue from an associate dean's point of view. He also shared some insights into what is done at BYU to alleviate this problem. In addition, he discussed some of his recent experiences in Eastern Europe where faculty members have a different relationship with the university and each other than we have here in the U.S. Paul Hugstad discussed the history of the problem and some of the theoretical reasons for its increase. He also discussed the role that changing university missions and goals have played in exacerbating the problem. Doug Lincoln discussed the role that technology has played in allowing faculty members to be more self-sufficient and collaborate with researchers and teachers from outside the university. Shirley Stretch and James Peltier discussed the role of department chair in reducing (or increasing) the adoption of this work behavior. They also discussed the problem from the perspective of faculty members at schools where almost no faculty members live in the same location as the school. Richard Lapidus talked about some of the psychological theories relating to this behavior and explored possible solutions. He also provided some insights from his recent work in sales management where a number of independent contractors operate. Rich discussed the role rewards and superordinate goals play in alleviating this problem. James Cross looked at the issue from the social welfare perspective where there is a large literature on why people prefer to remain on welfare and let others do the work. Finally, Jack Schibrowsky discussed the topic from an adaptive consumer point of view building on his research in the area of how consumers adapt to the environment in which they exist. He argued that the increase in the adoption of this behavior is direct result of changes in the academic environment in which faculty members are asked to work.

While the panel provided some ideas and insights, this was a working session where attendees were encouraged to participate in the discussions.