Moonlighting Among University Lecturers and its Multifaceted Impacts on Job Performance

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a critical analysis of the phenomenon of moonlighting, the practice of holding secondary employment outside one's primary academic appointment among university lecturers. Moving beyond simplistic narratives that frame moonlighting solely as either a necessary economic strategy or a detrimental distraction, this paper argues that its impact on core job performance is complex, contingent, and multidimensional. The analysis is structured around a tripartite framework, examining the economic, temporal, and psychological pathways through which external work influences academic roles. Drawing on contemporary scholarship in higher education studies, labour economics, and organizational psychology, the article explores how systemic pressures such as precarious employment conditions, stagnant wages, and the commodification of academic labor drive the prevalence of moonlighting. The study calls for a reconceptualization of the issue by university administrators, advocating for policies that move from punitive measures to supportive, transparent frameworks that acknowledge the realities of the modern academic workforce and seek to harness potential synergies while mitigating harms.

Keywords: Moonlighting, Higher Education, Job Performance, Gig Economy, Academic Capitalism.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The contemporary university exists within a paradigm of intense financial constraint and market-driven logic, a transformation extensively documented under the rubric of "academic capitalism" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). Within this pressurized environment, the figure of the university lecturer, the foundational teaching and research academic, navigates an increasingly precarious professional landscape characterized by stagnant real wages, the proliferation of fixed-term contracts, and escalating demands for productivity (Finkelstein et al., 2016; Müller, 2014). A pervasive, yet often institutionally unacknowledged, response to these conditions is the practice of moonlighting which is the pursuit and maintenance of secondary employment external to one's primary academic appointment. This paper posits that moonlighting among lecturers is not a marginal anomaly but a structural feature of the modern higher education ecosystem, and its impact on core job performance is far more complex and contingent than traditionally assumed. The central thesis is that the effects of moonlighting are not unidirectional but are mediated by a constellation of factors including the nature of the external work, its congruence with academic duties, the individual's coping strategies, and the level of institutional support, resulting in outcomes that can range from severe performance degradation to unexpected enhancement.

The scholarly discourse on moonlighting has historically been situated within general labor economics and management studies, often focusing on blue-collar or corporate sectors (Jamal et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2019). Within this literature, a fundamental tension persists between the "scarcity hypothesis," which posits that finite personal resources (time, energy) are depleted by multiple roles, leading to negative outcomes like fatigue and conflict (Goode, 1960; Kahn et al., 1964), and the "expansion hypothesis," which suggests that well-managed multiple roles can generate energy, stimulation, and resource gains (Marks, 1977; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). However, the application of these theories to the unique profession of academia remains underdeveloped. The academic

role is distinct in its blending of intellectual autonomy with institutional accountability, its often blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and its tripartite performance metrics of teaching, research, and service (Bexley et al., 2013). Therefore, a direct transposition of findings from other sectors is inadequate; a specific, nuanced investigation into academic moonlighting is imperative.

This article seeks to address this gap by synthesizing emerging research and constructing a comprehensive analytical framework. The argument proceeds in several interconnected sections. First, it delineates the scope and drivers of moonlighting in academia, moving beyond mere financial explanation to consider systemic, professional, and personal motivations. Second, it establishes a robust definition of academic job performance, disaggregating it into its constituent parts to allow for a granular analysis of moonlighting's impacts. The core of the article then explores the multifaceted pathways of influence economic, temporal, and psychological, through which external work affects primary academic duties. This tripartite model illuminates how financial relief, time poverty, and psychological states like burnout or enrichment interact to shape final performance outcomes. The analysis consistently integrates findings from current international scholarship to highlight both universal challenges and context-specific variations. Finally, the article concludes by discussing the implications for higher education policy and leadership, arguing for a move away from clandestine toleration towards proactive, evidence-based strategies that can mitigate the harms and leverage the potential benefits of this widespread practice for both individual lecturers and their institutions.

Objectives

1. To analyze the multifaceted drivers of moonlighting among university lecturers.
2. To establish a tripartite conceptual framework to explain the mechanisms through which moonlighting influences primary job performance.
3. To synthesize existing scholarship to evaluate the contingent impacts of moonlighting on each domain of academic performance (teaching quality, research output, and institutional service).
4. To derive evidence-based recommendations for university administrators and policymakers to move from punitive or passive approaches towards supportive, transparent frameworks that mitigate harms and leverage potential benefits.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory posits that individuals are motivated to obtain, retain, protect, and foster valued resources (energy, time, financial stability, emotional well-being). Stress and negative outcomes occur when these resources are threatened, lost, or when investments of resources fail to yield anticipated gains. In the context of this study, moonlighting is conceptualized as a dual-edged strategy lecturers employ to acquire or conserve resources, primarily financial capital. However, this pursuit occurs within a finite personal resource pool, most notably time and cognitive energy. The core proposition of this framework is that the multifaceted impacts, both positive and negative on job performance are determined by the net balance of resources gained from moonlighting versus the resources depleted in the process. When the resource gains (reduced financial stress, new skills) outweigh the losses (exhaustion, time poverty), job performance may be enhanced or sustained. Conversely, when resource depletion exceeds gains, job performance is likely to suffer.

The application of COR theory allows for a nuanced prediction of impacts across different dimensions of a lecturer's job performance. For instance, the financial resources gained from secondary employment may reduce anxiety and increase job satisfaction, potentially positively influencing organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) like helping colleagues (Okurame, 2012). This represents a successful resource gain spiral. However, the intense investment of time and psychological resources in moonlighting can lead to exhaustion, thereby depleting the energy necessary for core teaching duties, potentially diminishing teaching effectiveness and increasing neglect of in-role responsibilities. Furthermore, the theory explains the potential for resource loss spirals, where chronic fatigue from overwork impairs a lecturer's ability to engage in research, leading to a decline in research productivity and scholarly output (Tlaiss, 2013). Thus, the conceptual framework visualizes moonlighting not as

a monolithic activity, but as a dynamic resource transaction, where the net outcome, shaped by factors like the type of moonlighting, workload, and individual coping strategies determines its ultimate multifaceted impact on the core domains of a university lecturer's job performance.

The Scope and Drivers of Academic Moonlighting

Moonlightin refers to the act of an individual engaged in remunerative work beyond their primary employment contract (Kimmel & Conway, 2001). In the academic context, this definition requires immediate refinement to distinguish between activities that are institutionally sanctioned and integrated, such as paid external consultancy that enhances institutional reputation, and those that are purely personal ventures undertaken for private gain, often without formal institutional knowledge (Bozeman & Corley, 2004). It is this latter, more shadowy form of moonlighting that is the primary focus of this analysis, as it presents the most significant challenges for management and performance assessment. The scope of the practice is substantial, though exact figures are elusive due to its frequently undisclosed nature. International studies suggest that between 30% and 60% of academics engage in some form of significant external paid work, with prevalence highest among early-career researchers and those on insecure contracts (Müller, 2014; Bentley & Kyvik, 2013).

The most frequently cited driver of academic moonlighting is unequivocally economic pressure. The financial precarity of an academic career, particularly in its early stages, is a well-documented global crisis (Laudel & Gläser, 2008; Aarnikoivu et al., 2020). The proliferation of fixed-term, project-based postdoctoral and lectureship positions, coupled with a decline in the real value of academic salaries in many countries, has created a generation of "academic nomads" for whom multiple income streams are not a luxury but a necessity for survival (Ylijoki, 2010; Ivancheva et al., 2019). For contingent faculty, adjuncts and part-time lecturers who form the backbone of teaching in many universities, moonlighting is often not a secondary activity but a patchwork of several part-time roles across different institutions, a phenomenon starkly described as the "gig academy" (Kezar et al., 2019; Woodcock, 2020). In this context, moonlighting is a direct rational response to systemic economic failure, a means of achieving a livable wage in the face of institutional underinvestment in human capital.

Beyond sheer financial necessity, however, lie a complex set of professional and personal motivations that complicate the narrative. From a professional development perspective, external work can be a strategic career move. For lecturers in applied fields such as business, law, engineering, or the creative arts, maintaining a professional practice is essential for credibility, curriculum relevance, and network building (Brew et al., 2018; Veles & Carter, 2016). This form of "integrated moonlighting," where the secondary job aligns closely with academic expertise, can be a source of practical case studies, research opportunities, and enhanced student employability outcomes. Furthermore, in an environment where tenured positions are scarce, external work can serve as a crucial hedge against career uncertainty, providing a potential exit route or an alternative professional identity (Clarke & Knights, 2015; Baruch & Hall, 2004). This strategic diversification of professional capital is a rational adaptation to the high-risk nature of academic career pathways.

Personal and psychological drivers also play a significant role. For some academics, moonlighting offers an escape from the perceived frustrations of university life, which can include bureaucratic inertia, political infighting, or the relentless pressure to publish in high-impact journals (Anderson, 2008; Sparkes, 2007). External work can provide a sense of autonomy, tangible impact, and intellectual stimulation that may be lacking in their primary role, thereby acting as a buffer against burnout and disillusionment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Conversely, for others, the drive may be less about escape and more about identity reinforcement; being a consultant, a writer, or a practitioner outside the academy can bolster self-esteem and provide validation that is not forthcoming within the institutional hierarchy (Archer, 2008; Billot, 2010). Thus, moonlighting can be understood not just as an economic strategy but as a multifaceted psychological response to the affordances and constraints of academic work, serving needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as described by selfdetermination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Deconstructing Academic Job Performance: A Multidimensional Metric

To assess the impact of moonlighting meaningfully, one must first deconstruct the complex construct of

"academic job performance." It is not a monolithic entity but a multidimensional metric encompassing distinct, and at times competing, domains. The classic triad of academic duties; teaching, research, and service (often termed "administration" or "citizenship")—provides the foundational framework, though the relative weighting of these components varies significantly by institution type, national context, and individual career stage (Boyer, 1990; O'Meara, 2002). A comprehensive evaluation must therefore consider the effects of moonlighting on each of these domains separately, while also acknowledging their interconnectedness and the inherent tensions between them, a challenge often referred to as the "academic role conflict" (Fox, 1992; Link et al., 2008).

Teaching performance is typically measured through student evaluations of teaching (SETs), peer review, course development, and graduate outcomes. Effective teaching requires not only subject-matter expertise but also significant investments of time and emotional labour for preparation, delivery, feedback, and student mentorship (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). It is a highly energy-intensive activity that demands presence, patience, and creativity. Any external demand that encroaches upon the cognitive and temporal resources necessary for highquality teaching therefore poses a direct threat to performance in this domain. The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) emphasizes the importance of reflective practice and pedagogical innovation, both of which are compromised when an academic is perpetually time-poor and cognitively overloaded (Kreber, 2002; Trigwell & Shale, 2004). Consequently, the impact of moonlighting on teaching quality is a primary concern for educational leaders and a key variable in this analysis.

Research performance, the cornerstone of academic prestige in research-intensive universities, is quantified through metrics such as publication output in high-ranking journals, success in securing competitive research grants, citations, and doctoral supervision (Hicks et al., 2015). This domain demands sustained, deep focus, often referred to as "slow time," for reading, writing, data analysis, and intellectual contemplation (Mountz et al., 2015; Vostal, 2016). The "publish or perish" culture creates intense pressure that is itself a source of stress, but when combined with the time drains of moonlighting, the capacity for productive research can be severely curtailed. However, as previously noted, if the external work is synergistic, providing data, access, or novel perspectives, it can potentially enhance research relevance and output. The net effect is thus highly contingent on the nature of the alignment between the external work and the academic's research agenda (Banal-Estañol et al., 2018; Perkmann et al., 2013).

The third domain, service and administration, includes committee work, curriculum design, departmental leadership, and external peer review activities. While often less valorized than research, this "invisible lab or" is essential for the smooth functioning of the academic community (Macfarlane, 2007; O'Meara, 2015). Performance here is gauged by reliability, contribution, and collegiality. Moonlighting can directly impact this domain by reducing the availability and mental bandwidth an academic has for institutional service, potentially leading to a decline in citizenship and a free-rider problem where the burden falls increasingly on colleagues not engaged in external work (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). This can erode departmental cohesion and morale, creating a negative externality that affects overall organizational performance. A holistic assessment of moonlighting's impact must therefore account for its ripple effects beyond the individual to the collective functioning of the academic unit.

The Pathways of Influence: Economic, Temporal, and Psychological Mechanisms

The impact of moonlighting on the aforementioned performance domains is not direct but is mediated through three primary interconnected pathways: the economic, the temporal, and the psychological. These mechanisms act as the conduits through which the external employment situation transmits its effects to the core academic role, and their interplay determines the ultimate outcome.

The Economic Pathway

The most straightforward pathway is economic. The primary intent of much moonlighting is to alleviate financial strain. When successful, this can have a positive indirect effect on job performance. Financial security reduces anxiety, improves overall well-being, and can free up cognitive resources previously devoted to monetary worries, allowing for greater focus on academic tasks (Dijkstra-Kersten et al., 2021; Gubler et al., 2018). For an academic

struggling to pay rent or support a family on a single salary, the additional income from moonlighting can be the difference between staying in the profession and leaving it altogether, thus retaining valuable human capital for the institution (Matthews et al., 2014). In this sense, moonlighting can function as a de facto coping mechanism for systemic underpayment, indirectly supporting performance by enabling the academic to remain employed and functionally engaged.

However, this pathway is fraught with complexity. The economic benefit is often offset by the costs incurred. If the secondary job is poorly paid or requires significant expenditure, the net financial gain may be minimal, rendering the entire endeavour counterproductive (Kimmel & Smith Conway, 2001). More importantly, the economic relief may simply create a "golden handcuff" scenario, where the academic becomes dependent on the additional income, locking them into a cycle of overwork that is unsustainable in the long term (Houle, 2014). This can negate the initial psychological benefits of reduced financial stress, replacing it with a different form of stress related to time pressure and exhaustion. Therefore, the economic pathway does not guarantee improved performance; it merely alters the landscape of constraint within which performance is enacted, with the net effect being highly dependent on the magnitude and stability of the additional income relative to the costs and sacrifices involved.

The Temporal Pathway

The temporal pathway is perhaps the most intuitively obvious and widely studied mechanism. The scarcity hypothesis, rooted in role theory, posits that an individual's time and energy are finite resources (Goode, 1960). Engaging in a second job inevitably consumes hours that could otherwise be devoted to academic duties, leading to a direct time-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For academics, whose work is notoriously unbounded and who already struggle with work-life balance (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Watts & Robertson, 2011), the addition of external employment can push time commitments into unsustainable territory. This manifests as rushed lecture preparation, declining availability for student consultations, delays in providing feedback, and the curtailment of the deep-thinking time required for high-quality research (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003).

Beyond mere clock hours, the temporal pathway involves cognitive load. Juggling multiple professional roles requires constant task-switching and mental context-shifting, which is cognitively demanding and can lead to attention residue, where thoughts about one task intrude upon performance in another (Leroy, 2009; Syrek et al., 2017). An academic returning to their research after a day of external consultancy may find it difficult to achieve the state of flow necessary for writing or complex data analysis. This cognitive fragmentation is a silent killer of academic productivity, particularly affecting the research domain, which is most vulnerable to interruptions (O'Carroll et al., 2019). The temporal pathway, therefore, impacts performance not only by reducing the quantity of time available but also by degrading the quality of the time that remains, leading to a superficial engagement with academic tasks that undermines both teaching and research excellence.

The Psychological Pathway

The psychological pathway is the most complex and nuanced, encompassing the emotional and identity-related consequences of multiple role engagement. On the negative side, the constant pressure of meeting demands across multiple fronts is a primary driver of chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and ultimately burnout—a syndrome characterized by cynicism, detachment, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Academics are already a high-risk group for burnout due to inherent job demands (Shin & Jung, 2014); moonlighting can exacerbate this risk significantly, leading to a depletion of the very emotional resources required for effective teaching and empathetic student interaction (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). This state of depletion directly corrodes job performance, manifesting as irritability, diminished creativity, and a withdrawal from voluntary service activities.

Conversely, the expansion hypothesis suggests a positive psychological pathway through the mechanism of work-family enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) or, in this case, work-work enrichment. When the secondary role is experienced as stimulating, rewarding, and psychologically complementary to the academic role, it can generate positive affect, new skills, and perspectives that spill over to enhance performance in the primary job

(Cunningham, 2008; Trefalt, 2013). For instance, a lecturer in journalism who works as a freelance editor may bring fresh, real-world insights into the classroom, enriching their teaching. This positive spillover can boost self-efficacy and professional identity, counteracting feelings of stagnation or isolation that can sometimes afflict academic life (Barnett, 2011). The key psychological moderators in this pathway are autonomy (the degree of choice in taking on the external work) and congruence (the perceived fit between the two roles). When an academic freely chooses congruent external work, the experience is more likely to be enriching rather than depleting (Deci & Ryan, 2000), thereby potentially creating a virtuous circle that enhances overall job performance and satisfaction.

Impacts on Core Academic Domains

Having established the mediating pathways, we can now analyze the contingent impacts on the specific domains of academic performance. The evidence suggests that outcomes are not predetermined but are the product of the interaction between the type of moonlighting and the individual's context.

Impacts on Teaching Quality and Student Engagement

The impact on teaching is often the most immediately visible. When moonlighting leads to temporal scarcity and psychological burnout, the consequences for teaching are stark. Lecturers may resort to "teaching to the slide," recycling old materials, and reducing interactive or innovative pedagogical methods that require more preparation time (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008). Their availability for students outside of class—a critical component of effective teaching—diminishes, impacting student support and potentially leading to poorer learning outcomes and lower student satisfaction scores (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). The emotional labour required for patient mentorship is often the first casualty of exhaustion, leading to a more transactional, less engaging classroom environment (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

However, the enrichment pathway can produce the opposite effect. When the external work is relevant to the curriculum, it can invigorate teaching. A business lecturer consulting for startups can bring cutting-edge case studies into the classroom; an engineering lecturer working on industry projects can demonstrate practical applications of theoretical principles. This enhances the authenticity and relevance of teaching, boosting student engagement and perceived learning (Brew et al., 2018). The key differentiator is often the *type* of moonlighting. High-skill, congruent external work is more likely to enrich teaching, while low-skill, incongruent work is almost exclusively depleting, offering no professional synergy and merely draining time and energy (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Therefore, a blanket condemnation of moonlighting's effect on teaching is unwarranted; a differentiated analysis based on the nature of the external activity is essential.

Yet, the potential for positive impact exists, particularly in fields where research is collaborative and applied. External projects can provide direct access to data, funding, and real-world problems that fuel publishable research (Perkmann et al., 2013). This is the logic behind university-industry partnerships. When an academic's moonlighting effectively functions as such a partnership on an individual level, it can boost research productivity. The critical factor is integration. If the external work is siloed from research, it becomes pure distraction. If it is strategically aligned, it can be a catalyst. Furthermore, for academics on teaching-intensive contracts with limited research support, external work that keeps them at the forefront of their practice can be the only way to maintain a research profile at all, however modest (Veles & Carter, 2016). Thus, the effect on research is profoundly shaped by institutional expectations and the individual's capacity to integrate multiple professional identities.

Impacts on Service, Citizenship, and Institutional Cohesion

The domain of service is typically the greatest casualty of moonlighting. As time and energy become scarce resources, discretionary activities like committee service, mentoring junior colleagues, and participating in community outreach are the first to be jettisoned (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). This creates a collective action problem. If a significant proportion of a department's staff are heavily engaged in external work, the burden of "keeping the lights on" falls disproportionately on a shrinking core of individuals, leading to resentment, inequity, and the erosion of collegiality (O'Meara, 2015). This decline in institutional citizenship weakens the social fabric

of the university, impairing its capacity for collaborative governance and innovation.

This negative impact is less amenable to the enrichment pathway. While external work might provide networking opportunities that benefit the institution indirectly, it rarely directly enhances an academic's willingness or ability to serve on internal committees or contribute to curriculum reform. The service domain is therefore the clearest example of where moonlighting, particularly when driven by economic necessity, poses an almost unambiguously negative threat to institutional health. It represents a privatization of academic labour at the expense of the public good of shared governance, highlighting a fundamental tension between individual survival strategies and collective well-being within the modern university.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis presented in this article unequivocally demonstrates that moonlighting among university lecturers is a significant and multifaceted phenomenon with profound implications for academic job performance. The evidence refutes simplistic characterizations of it as either an unalloyed evil or a benign personal choice. Instead, its impacts are contingent, shaped by a dynamic interplay of economic drivers, the nature of the external work, individual coping strategies, and the institutional context. The tripartite framework of economic, temporal, and psychological pathways reveals that outcomes can range from severe performance degradation due to burnout and time poverty to unexpected performance enhancement through skill acquisition, network expansion, and psychological enrichment. The most consistent finding is that the *congruence* of the external work with academic roles is the critical moderating variable determining the balance between conflict and synergy.

For university leaders and policymakers, these findings carry urgent implications. The traditional response has often been one of tacit toleration or outright prohibition, both of which are inadequate. A policy of ignoring the issue fails to address the systemic drivers and allows the potential negative externalities such as eroded service and diminished teaching quality to fester unchecked. A punitive, prohibitionist approach is equally flawed; it is likely unenforceable, ignores the economic realities forcing many academics to seek additional income, and may drive the practice further underground, preventing any possibility of constructive management or harnessing potential benefits.

A more sophisticated and responsible approach is required. First and foremost, institutions must confront the root causes. Addressing the precarity of academic labour through better pay, more secure contracts, and clearer career pathways is the most effective long-term strategy for reducing necessity-driven, incongruent moonlighting (Kezar et al., 2019). Second, universities should develop transparent, supportive policies that acknowledge the reality of external work. This could include:

1. Creating a Disclosure and Support System**:** Implementing a non-punitive system for voluntary disclosure of significant external work, allowing departments to understand the scale of the practice and offer support for time management and boundary-setting.

2. Promoting Synergistic Moonlighting: Actively facilitating and incentivizing external engagements that align with institutional goals, such as industry partnerships, public engagement, and professional consultancy that feeds back into teaching and research. This could involve streamlining approval processes and providing institutional backing.

3. Developing Institutional Capacity for Work-Life Balance: Investing in resources that help all academics, but particularly those juggling multiple roles, to manage their time and well-being effectively. This includes training
4. on workload management, providing access to counselling, and fostering a culture that respects boundaries and discourages perpetual availability.

In conclusion, moonlighting is a symptom of deeper structural issues within contemporary higher education. To view it merely as an individual failing is to misunderstand its nature. A proactive, evidence-based institutional approach that combines addressing economic precarity with smart policies to manage external work is essential.

The goal should not be the eradication of moonlighting, but its effective management minimizing the harms of exploitative, depleting multiple job holding while creating conditions where synergistic external engagements can flourish, ultimately benefiting individual lecturers, their students, and the health of the academic institution as a whole. The shadow academy need not be a place of depletion; with thoughtful leadership, it can be integrated into a more sustainable and realistic model of academic professional life.

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