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# Creating a Culture of Care for Contingent Faculty Through Professional Development at Santa Monica College

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## Example Best Practices to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

- ✓ Adjunct-Specific Orientation
- ✓ Departmental Mentorship
- ✓ Professional and Leadership Development

Santa Monica College employs three times as many contingent faculty as they do full-time faculty and part-time instructors taught 53.6 percent of classes in Fall 2018. The responsibility of welcoming and integrating contingent faculty members normally falls to departments, however Santa Monica College has worked to formalize and institutionalize several approaches to recognize part-time faculty members to best support student learning and success. The program includes an institutional orientation event, department-specific mentoring, and professional and leadership development, as well as compensating contingent faculty for non-teaching work. The program is framed using four guiding principles: 1) contingent working conditions are student learning conditions, 2) contingent faculty should be treated as professional equals to their full-time colleagues, 3) contingent faculty deserve to be compensated fairly for all work performed, and 4) contingent faculty are integral to institutional success and should be treated as such.

### **Adjunct 411: An Orientation for Contingent Faculty**

Santa Monica College implemented an orientation event called Adjunct 411. The benefit of the orientation is tripartite: it serves as a chance for newer contingent faculty to ask questions; communicate key messages about rights, responsibilities, and resources for contingent faculty; and is an opportunity for contingent faculty to meet and connect with each other to build community. Adjunct 411 started off in 2016 as a two-hour question and answer session held at the end of the institution-wide Fall professional development day with speakers from across campus coming together to share information on topics including scheduling, benefits, and campus resources. As years progressed and the Adjunct Committee received feedback from attendees, Adjunct 411 began to alter in content and design. One notable change was switching from a typical presentation style to a career fair layout where contingent faculty members could ask intimate questions without having to disclose sensitive information in front of a number of their colleagues. Santa Monica College has updated Adjunct 411 each year to align with changing institutional priorities and student learning needs.

Faculty at Santa Monica College reported that Adjunct 411 opened their eyes to opportunities to get involved and become more familiar with institutional resources. Faculty also provided the following feedback:

- The presentation from the Human Resources department on topics around retirement, insurance, and maternity leave were viewed as imperative
- Enrollment policies and practices, how to read pay stubs and general information on adjunct faculty rights was useful
- Faculty found that interacting and networking with other contingent faculty was meaningful
- Just-hired faculty desired to learn more about campus life (student activities, resources)

Orientation exclusively for contingent faculty influences a collective socialization process as opposed to an individual socialization process, creating a sense of community and introducing faculty to their peers. The contingent faculty-specific orientation promotes their inclusion as they navigate their role and place within the college; the contingent faculty orientation is thus a space adjunct faculty could benefit from.

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### **Adjunct Mentoring & Support**

The Adjunct Committee worked together to conceptualize best practices and guidance tailored to specific department needs and contexts through the creation of an Adjunct Mentoring & Support report. Alongside an analysis of academic literature around contingent faculty mentoring, the Adjunct Committee administered a survey to all contingent faculty members in an effort to collect data around what kind of support contingent faculty desired. The survey also served as a space for contingent faculty to air out their grievances and frustrations and provide recommendations. The literature and the survey told very similar stories about the need for mentorship to improve the quality of contingent faculty life at Santa Monica College.

Data from the mentoring survey, unique to Santa Monica College, yielded interesting findings. An overwhelming number of contingent faculty who responded to the survey (>80 percent) expressed varying levels of interest in receiving mentoring, training or resources around:

- Syllabus creation
- Course management software
- Pedagogical practices
- Information about campus resources
- Adjunct rights and responsibilities
- Instruction and assessment strategies



The quantitative data retrieved from the survey was congruent with the concerns echoed in the short answer section of the survey where contingent faculty were given a chance to anonymously share any ideas, concerns, priorities or comments about adjunct life at Santa Monica College. There was overwhelming overlap in the following areas:

- Time conflicts stopped many contingent faculty from regularly attending department meetings
- Contingent faculty lacked opportunities to acquire and develop institutional knowledge
- Teaching schedules prevented many contingent faculty from attending course management software training

Adjunct mentorship programs are a way to address these concerns by way of connecting a veteran contingent faculty with a newer contingent faculty member. Veteran contingent faculty have spent a considerable amount of years at the institution, giving them a wealth of knowledge about the school and the many inner-workings of the department. Mentorship is a reciprocal relationship where both parties have the opportunity to feel a sense of connectedness to the institution.

Mentorship also helps to establish a culture of care both in the department and the institution at large. By committing to the creation, implementation and evaluation of mentorship programs, the department commits to inclusiveness, collaboration, and respect.

### **Professional and Leadership Development**

The Adjunct Committee, which established initiatives like Adjunct 411 and advocated for departmental mentorship, was an important mechanism in the careful push towards facilitating professional and leadership development opportunities for contingent faculty. Such a committee affords contingent faculty the chance to partake in leadership roles and effect change for the quality of contingent faculty life at the institution.

The Adjunct Committee was able to send committee members to the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) plenary conference to become familiar with state-wide governance and how decisions are made. In one particular instance, Santa Monica College attendees went back to campus with the knowledge and skills acquired at the conference and advocated for compensation for shared governance work. The Faculty Association, along with the Adjunct Committee Chairs, worked to determine the usual rate of compensation for non-teaching work in California. Then, the co-chairs carefully calculated the time spent on Senate-related activities. After months of hard work, the Senate Executive agreed to

compensate part-time committee chairs for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years. The Senate Executive has suggested that the Faculty Association make a push for the community college district to financially support non-teaching work in subsequent years.

The Adjunct Committee also produces events for the annual Spring Flex Day at Santa Monica College. Flex Day is an all-day professional development event for Santa Monica College faculty and staff with concurrent sessions in various topics including how to write an effective resume and cover letter when applying to full-time lecturing positions, stress management and alternative pedagogical practices. Classes are cancelled for students on Flex Day which signals Santa Monica College's commitment to professional development for their instructors.

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**Learn more** about SMC's efforts to support adjunct faculty on the university's Academic Senate webpage at <http://www.smc.edu/ACG/AcademicSenate/Committees/Pages/Adjunct.aspx>.

Visit The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success for more example practices and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support faculty off the tenure track at [pullias.usc.edu/delphi](http://pullias.usc.edu/delphi).

