Expanding Opportunities and Community for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty at Washtenaw Community College

2019 Applicant for the Delphi Award

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Example Best Practices to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

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Washtenaw Community College (WCC) is located in southeast Michigan and enrolls around 18,000 students per year. The Part-Time & Adjunct Faculty Institute (PTFI) serves roughly 750 non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF) at WCC. Although WCC has a history of supporting NTTF, part-time faculty still lacked opportunities in areas of community building and professional development (PD). The creation of the PTFI originated from an institution-wide strategic plan that placed Professional Development and Organizational Health as WCC's top priority and more specifically, to provide rewards and incentives to increase faculty participation in PD. With the combined support of senior-level administrators and the Faculty Professional Development Committee, the PTFI has experienced notable success and institutionalization. In only 4 years since the program was first piloted, the PTFI increased engagement of part-time faculty by 30%. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, participation of NTTF in the program has increased to 43%.

Professional Development and Stipend Incentives

Past models for PD participation relied on either the personal initiatives of NTTF or on initiatives from individual department chairs; however, neither offered recognition or compensation for attendance. While some department-specific PD did exist, opportunities were inconsistent across departments, and most lacked PD for NTTF. A year after WCC's plan to prioritize organizational health with a focus on building a learning community, the push for a more deliberate PD-centered NTTF community was created by way of the PTFI program; the program utilized WCC's current PD but offered additional incentives to encourage engagement. Whereas stipends for participation were nonexistent before, during the pilot year of the PTFI, the goal was simply to provide targeted PD for NTTF and to compensate participants. In the first year, PD opportunities included:

- PTFI Kick-Off Events offered twice a year before Fall and Winter semester for a $100 stipend
- Monthly Lunch & Learns and attendance to two additional PD sessions for a $50 stipend per month

NTTF engagement increased to 43% amidst the COVID-19 pandemic; NTTF participated in over 3,380 hours of PD with $60,000 awarded in stipends. The PTFI now uses an expanded system for stipends:

- PTFI Kick-Off Events offered twice a year with a $50 stipend per month
- Monthly catered Lunch and Learns or other PD sessions offers $25/session up to four times per month
- Yearly Part-Time Faculty Conference offers stipends of $50 to participants and $100 to presenters

The establishment of a robust PD program has contributed greatly to the overall success of the PTFI program; features of the program have included targeted NTTF-exclusive courses, faculty-led training, and on-demand virtual training.

Multilevel Institutional Support

The Faculty Professional Development Committee (FPDC), which runs PD for the college, worked in collaboration with the administration to empower NTTF and facilitate the development of the PTFI. The administration provided financial backing and a dedicated support team to manage the registration and tracking system for PD offerings and stipends; meanwhile, the PFDC developed the actual programming and content for the pilot program. The Part-Time Faculty Commons staff also contributed by providing instructional support and managing operations. Initially, funding came from a grant — applied for by the Dean of Liberal Arts & Sciences — that was awarded to increase engagement in the community and aligned with WCC's Priority One Strategic Plan. Once the grant funding ran out, the Vice President of Instruction (VPI) covered stipend costs using different accounts and a line item in the budget. The VPI continued to find other funding alternatives to cover PTFI costs until the program was eventually institutionalized. Institutional support has successfully fostered a strong culture of fellowship and community building, both of which were intended goals of the PTFI. WCC has emphasized that the most essential factor in the success of the PTFI program has been the genuine support of the administration, PD providers and staff. NTTF are empowered because they feel respected and valued.

Surveys and Feedback

Surveys are sent out after each PTFI session in order to collect feedback and improve sessions. College administrators have been responsive to NTTF requests for changes in the format and content of PD and are appreciative of feedback. Survey responses indicate that almost 100% of NTTF agree that sessions have provided:

1. Valuable learning opportunities;
2. Information that can be utilized as info as part of the job;
3. Information that is useful for increasing student success on campus.

Qualitative data has also been collected that highlight comradery between new and seasoned employees, instructor connectedness, and community support. Overarching themes include: feeling valued and included in the community, learning best practices in teaching, being informed about the college (policy, services, processes) and connecting students to important campus services.

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.**

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