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Improving the Quality of Term Faculty Careers at George Mason University
2021 Applicant for the Delphi Award

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Example Best Practices to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

- ✔ Participation in Shared Governance
- ✔ Multi-year Contracts and Promotion
- ✔ Institutional Investment in Term Faculty Satisfaction

George Mason sought to create an institutional culture in which non-tenure-track faculty (known as "term faculty" at George Mason) are viewed as valuable and the term faculty career path as both productive and rewarding. Through a partnership between the University's Faculty Senate and the Office of the Provost, a Term Faculty Task Force was convened in alignment with George Mason's Strategic Plan Goal 9, Support Teaching and Faculty Excellence. The task force was responsible for identifying challenges and difficulties facing term faculty, as well as thinking through career development and advancement opportunities. They were also expected to generate and present recommendations for new policies, practices and initiatives. After the Term Faculty Task Force presented their recommendations to the Provost, he then directed the formation of a Term Faculty Committee (TFC) to oversee and facilitate the implementation of task force recommendations.

Guiding Principles
The TFC used a set of guiding principles to help create new policies and practices meant to improve the quality of term faculty careers. These principles, framed as core values that guide their work, include:

1. Our work is driven by a sense of urgency in order to make meaningful progress;
2. We believe that all faculty have the right to participate in governance decisions that affect them;
3. We will operate with openness and transparency;
4. Our actions are designed to support term faculty well-being; and
5. We embrace the "spirit of possibility."

These principles emphasize a commitment to communication and systemic change toward a more equitable culture for term faculty. These principles also gave the committee a shared vision and mission.

Campus-Based Inquiry
The TFC consulted numerous books, articles, and supplementary materials around the realities of non-tenure-track faculty, but it was important for them to understand the issues facing term faculty within their specific campus context. To do so, the TFC interviewed nearly all chairs/local academic unit heads to obtain a broad understanding

of term faculty issues across the university. They found significant variations in practices, policies and experiences across the colleges/schools. They used data from the interviews and national research to develop a survey regarding term faculty experiences. The survey was sent to all full-time instructional (both term and tenure-track) and professional faculty. The results from the survey were shared during three community-wide forums. These forums were key places for faculty to give the committee feedback and for the committee to communicate progress.

Consistent Communication with Stakeholders

Collaboration with faculty, academic and administrative leadership was a critical component of the University's success. Both the Term Faculty Task Force and the Term Faculty Committee regularly communicated with chairs/ local academic unit heads and the dean's council about their work. Consistent communication with stakeholders was a way for the task force and committee to be open, transparent and accountable. Furthermore, they were able to identify issues for which there was a broad consensus and issues where they needed to further focus their efforts.

The change processes that the TFC utilized ultimately helped craft effective solutions to better support faculty off the tenure track.

After three single-year appointments, term faculty who meet satisfactory annual performance standards will be recommended for a multi-year appointment.

Participation in Shared Governance

COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) Faculty Satisfaction Survey data indicated that Mason's term faculty believed that their governance and departmental quality were areas of strength, especially compared to other NTTF at peer institutions. However, these strengths were not evident in the Faculty Handbook or in shared governance structures. Now, as a result of their consistent efforts and conversations, all full-time faculty, both term and tenure-track/tenured, possess governance responsibilities and voting rights in local academic units in which they hold primary affiliation and in the larger units of which their local academic units are a part. Being part of shared governance is a mechanism to understand the needs of term faculty and for them to have a voice in institutional policy and practices.

Multi-Year Contracts and Promotion

The TFC also created new guidelines related to term faculty appointments to multi-year contracts and promotion. The local unit administrator (i.e., department chair) now has the specific responsibility to advise term faculty individually regarding their progress toward achieving reappointment or promotion. In addition, after three single-year appointments, term faculty who meet satisfactory annual performance standards will be recommended for a multi-year appointment. Also, issuing one-year contracts for a faculty member after three single years is strongly discouraged. As necessary, contract responsibilities (i.e., teaching, research, service, clinical practice) should be

re-evaluated and negotiated in consultation with the term faculty member. Term faculty professional development leave has also been codified in the Faculty Handbook as a result of the TFC's efforts.

Institutional Investment in Term Faculty Satisfaction

Term faculty are included in the University's data collection efforts such as the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE), a national, research-based initiative designed to understand the job satisfaction of instructional and research faculty. This collection of comprehensive data helps to design policies, practices, and initiatives that impact job satisfaction and productivity. Some emerging trends include the need for formal mentoring, workload concerns, building faculty communities of support and addressing salary disparities between term and tenure-track faculty. This allows for them to continual change on an on-going basis and to be responsive to emerging issues.

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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