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Nurturing the ‘SOUL’ of Adjuncts at The American Womens’ College at Bay Path University

2020 Finalist for the Delphi Award

By Jordan Harper and Adrianna Kezar

From the Delphi Project database of

Example Best Practices to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

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In 2013, Bay Path University launched The American Women’s College (TAWC) to deploy the Social Online Universal Learning (SOUL) model for delivering accelerated online baccalaureate degree programs exclusively for women, the first of its kind in the nation. The SOUL model was designed to improve student learning by offering wrap-around supports and implementing evidence-based practices, as well as moving women toward degree completion faster and in a more affordable manner. The SOUL model is designed to nurture, develop and educate our students along with our adjunct faculty who teach them. TAWC deems adjunct faculty the backbone of the SOUL model. So much so that the faculty development committee created an adjunct faculty hierarchy of needs. The adjunct faculty hierarchy of needs outlines what adjunct faculty need to be effective educators and members of the TAWC community.

Onboarding/Orientation

The first responsibility of adjunct faculty at TAWC is to complete an adjunct contract. Upon completion of the contract, adjuncts are enrolled in an online, self-paced, introductory training course called SOUL Connect for Educators (SCE). In this course, adjunct faculty are provided an overview of TAWC, the SOUL model and the tools the institution uses. Adjuncts are then assessed on the material presented in the course and are required to achieve 80% or higher prior to teaching their first course. The self-paced nature of the course allows adjunct faculty to complete the required course on their own time instead of spending time out of their day attending an in-person workshop.

The onboarding process does not end after successful completion of the course. Instead, TAWC offers additional opportunities for adjunct faculty to become one with the community such as: pairing new faculty with mentors and more senior faculty, receiving access to an instructor resources module complete with best practices, policies, and other important institutional information, and an invitation to the TAWC Adjunct Faculty Facebook group page to build a virtual community.

Paid Curriculum Development Opportunities

Of paramount importance to TAWC is that the institution promotes a community of leaders and learners. Adjunct faculty are often selected as paid, contracted Subject Matter Experts (SME) responsible for curriculum development. Too often, adjunct faculty are not seen as subject matter experts and this push toward recognizing them as such and paying them for their additional labor fosters a better working environment for adjuncts, as well as a collaborative environment at TAWC. Additionally, adjuncts at TAWC are invited to share feedback through a course feedback form every time they teach a course. Using this feedback, adjuncts are given the power and agency to make their voices heard regarding the courses they are responsible for teaching and how to improve them to better align with the SOUL model and other student learning outcomes.

TAWC offers adjunct faculty the opportunity to develop professionally by offering a number of internal webinars, lunch and learns, and access to webinars/information from organizations in which they have an institutional membership.

Evaluation and Recognition

Adjunct faculty at TAWC are evaluated and recognized often, and receive support and guidance from Academic Program Directors (and/or Senior Lead Faculty). Their colleagues responsible for supporting adjunct faculty are responsible for giving feedback as needed, negotiating any conflicts that may arise between faculty and students, and observing classes. For new adjunct faculty members, their Program Director/Senior Lead evaluates them after their first course. Thereafter, most adjuncts have classroom observations and evaluations on an annual basis. These opportunities are especially necessary for new adjunct faculty and faculty interested in improving their teaching practices more broadly.

TAWC evaluates their adjunct faculty through a variety of mediums. On one end, Program Directors send informal postcards, meant to represent a token of thanks, to adjuncts. Branded in TAWC purple and resembling a thank you card, adjuncts who go above and beyond expectations are recognized for their hard work and dedication to TAWC and the students within. Adjunct faculty also have the chance to be featured in the “faculty spotlight” section of the student newsletter.

At the end of the year, the Faculty Development Committee, in collaboration with Program Directors, initiates the annual adjunct award process where students and staff are afforded the opportunity to vote for an adjunct faculty member deserving of the recognition. Later, the committee, along with the directors, meet to name the three winners. Each winner receives a monetary gift of \$250 and formal recognition at the awards ceremony.





Professional Development

TAWC offers adjunct faculty the chance to develop professionally by offering a number of internal webinars, lunch and learns, and access to webinars/information from organizations in which they have an institutional membership. In response to COVID-19, TAWC has made it a priority to offer free career development support for adjunct faculty as well.

Adjunct faculty are also given access to a series of four graduate courses that make up a certificate in online teaching and learning, free of charge. So, not only do they get access to the courses, but they also receive a certificate from their engagement in the courses which they can use for their own career advancement.

Leadership

As stated earlier, TAWC recognizes adjunct faculty as subject matter experts and scholars and practitioners in their respective fields. To further reflect this, adjunct faculty are given the opportunity to serve as part-time lead adjunct faculty or full-time senior lead adjunct faculty. With these appointments comes even more opportunities to design and develop training materials for new instructors, serve as a mentor for new instructors, participate in faculty panels, and share their expertise and best practices through the curation of resources or group presentations. The creation of these appointments signals a desire to honor the labor and knowledge adjunct faculty bring to the university, the chance to significantly improve the experiences of new instructors, and lastly, intentionally inscribe adjunct faculty more into the campus community.

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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