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Professional Development for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty at Boise State University

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Boise State University is a public, doctoral research institution in Boise, Idaho enrolling roughly 26,000 students. Boise State employs approximately 1,400 faculty, of whom roughly 43% are part-time. Among those employed full time, nearly 33% are non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF).

Boise State has engaged in sustained work to create better support for part-time NTTF (adjuncts). For instance, the institution offers a “stepped” compensation system for adjuncts based on their qualifications and longevity in the institution. Adjuncts who meet performance expectations are eligible for the step 2 level after they have taught at the institution for more than three semesters, which is associated with an increase in the per-credit pay rate. Additionally, the faculty senate includes an adjunct representative; originally designed as a non-voting position, the senate recently granted voting rights to the adjunct representative.

In 2007, an adjunct commission was formed to make recommendations about how the institution could better support adjunct faculty. Some policies and practices were changed as a result of the commissions’ recommendations, including the development of an adjunct faculty handbook and allowing adjuncts to have continued access to email in semesters when they were not teaching. The provost’s office recently convened another adjunct committee with representatives from all of the colleges in order to revise policies related to adjuncts to have greater alignment with the policies for full-time NTTF. As a result of the recent efforts of this committee, a third promotional step has just been created for adjuncts who have taught for more than six semesters; conversations with regards to including a pay increase for this step are ongoing, which reflects the ongoing efforts and advocacy required to achieve meaningful changes in policy and practice. Departments can also choose to recognize adjuncts who have taught at Boise State for more than 10 years by designating them as senior adjunct faculty, but this title is not associated with increased compensation.

Professional Development of Faculty at Boise State

As with many institutions, Boise State offers professional development initiatives at multiple levels. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is the central hub for professional development. There are also various opportunities that have been created at the college and department level. For instance, as Mathematics and First-Year Writing both employ

a lot of adjuncts, these programs often organize their own faculty learning communities, so that faculty can engage in professional development at the local level. The Mathematics department also has an adjunct committee and a course coordinator who plans discipline-specific professional development opportunities. In the School of Social Work, the online degree program is also staffed predominantly by adjunct faculty. This school also offers their own professional development that is tailored to the nature of teaching and learning in online environments.

Given Boise State's work to support adjuncts, this case study begins with an overview of various initiatives in the CTL that are designed to be more accessible to and inclusive of adjuncts, including an adjunct-specific faculty learning community. We then describe professional development offered by the First-Year Writing program and the School of Social Work due to the high percentage of adjunct faculty who teach in these programs. In addition, we also describe how those leading these efforts in the CTL and in Social Work are assessing the needs of adjuncts in order to inform the opportunities they offer.

Center for Teaching and Learning

The CTL provides professional development for faculty across career tracks. In this section, we begin by describing the role of the Faculty Associate for Adjunct Faculty Support, a position that has been incredibly helpful for better supporting adjuncts across the institution. We then briefly describe some of the less intensive professional development initiatives that target adjuncts: adjunct orientation, workshops, and evaluations of teaching. In the following section, we describe in detail the CTL's adjunct-specific learning community.

Faculty Associate for Adjunct Faculty Support

The 2007 adjunct commission highlighted the need for more sustained attention to the needs of adjuncts. Influenced by these recommendations, and a commitment to supporting the professional development of these faculty, the CTL created a faculty associate position dedicated to the support of adjuncts in 2012. As the availability and success of professional development for adjuncts is intertwined with other institutional policies and practices, the adjunct in this role has worked with others across campus to improve support for adjuncts.

For instance, University policy requires that department chairs conduct regular evaluations of all adjuncts in order to fulfill accreditation requirements, which can be a heavy lift for departments who employ a large percentage of adjuncts. Therefore, the faculty associate worked with the Assistant Provost to collect resources (both internal and from other institutions) and facilitate a workshop for academic leaders to support their success in conducting adjunct evaluations.

Additionally, the faculty associate was a member of a committee recently formed by the provost's office, helping to revise the adjunct policy. This revision, which aligned the policy with other non-tenure track faculty types, includes language about adjuncts' rights related to evaluation. The revised policy explicitly states that adjuncts are entitled to regular formative and summative evaluations that are based on multiple forms of evidence that demonstrate teaching effectiveness, and that adjuncts have the opportunity to respond to performance evaluations in writing.

The faculty associate also collaborates with staff in offices such as human resources and information technology to create more consistency and transparency in adjunct faculty hiring and onboarding processes. One process they have been working on is to increase adjuncts' ability to access the learning management system a few weeks before the semester

begins, so that these instructors can maximize their use of technology-enhanced learning. Another area of ongoing dialogue is about the potential to unbundle benefits offered to full-time faculty in order to create more flexibility and provide options for adjuncts related to benefits. As part of these efforts, staff in human resources created a list of “adjunct advantages” that is posted on Boise State’s website to help adjuncts understand all of the options available to them, including the opportunity to contribute to a supplemental retirement plan and college savings plan, a free bus pass, and discounts on parking passes, cell phone plans, and more.

New Faculty Orientation

The CTL has offered an adjunct-specific orientation for several years, with information that is specifically tailored to this population. This orientation is offered in both fall and spring, acknowledging the reality that many new adjuncts are hired each semester. The orientation includes information about institutional resources and provides an opportunity for new faculty to connect with one another. They have experimented with several different approaches to orientation to increase adjunct’s engagement, including offering it twice at different times of day. Recently, they have been experimenting with combining orientation for full-time faculty and adjuncts in order to integrate adjuncts more fully. They’ve also scheduled a series of drop-in sessions with human resources, learning technologies, and the libraries so that adjuncts have scheduled opportunities to engage with these offices that might be difficult to access otherwise.

Workshops

The CTL offers a number of workshops on specific topics related to teaching effectiveness. To increase engagement among adjuncts, the faculty associate started offering some workshops online and in an asynchronous format. In addition, synchronous options were scheduled early in the mornings, in the evenings, and at least one on a Saturday each semester. These options also increased access for other faculty and graduate teaching assistants, benefitting instructors widely across campus.

In 2020, the provost’s office funded a pilot project to pay adjuncts \$25 for attending these workshops, with a maximum of \$50 per semester. In addition, the CTL often works with Parking and Transportation to make parking passes available to adjuncts who attend CTL events. These practices not only make it possible for adjuncts to participate but also convey that adjuncts’ efforts to increase their instructional effectiveness are valued by the institution.

E-Newsletter

The CTL sends a monthly newsletter that is tailored specifically for adjuncts via email. The newsletter includes CTL workshops that may be of particular interest, information about a campus resource that adjuncts may not be aware of, and reminders and tips related to specific points in the semester; the newsletter also spotlights an adjunct faculty member. More than one-third of adjuncts who receive this email open it regularly, which shows that adjuncts value the information, especially because this group often feels disconnected to campus, in part because of mass institutional emails with information that is irrelevant to them. The newsletter is also posted online, offering adjuncts another way to access this information. One additional benefit to the e-newsletter is that it positions the faculty associate as a point person that adjuncts can contact if they have questions or concerns.

Treasure Valley Adjunct Conference

Boise State partners with a local community college, the College of Western Idaho, to offer this adjunct-specific

one-day conference, which creates an opportunity for adjuncts to engage in learning and networking with peers. The conference is scheduled in May, just after the conclusion of the spring semester. The conference offers the opportunity for about 10-12 adjuncts to present based on their teaching and research, and averages about 50 adjunct attendees

Adjunct-Specific Learning Community

The CTL at Boise State offers a number of learning communities (LCs) that give faculty the opportunity to engage in sustained learning and connection with peers. Faculty are compensated for participation, which limits the number of participants that can be supported each year.

While adjuncts are eligible to participate in all of the learning communities offered by the CTL, most use a yearlong format that is challenging for adjuncts who may only be employed for one semester. In 2015, the faculty associate developed an adjunct-specific faculty learning community (AFLC) that is more effective in meeting the needs of this group, including using a semester-long format.

The AFLC includes about 10 adjuncts each semester. At the beginning of each semester, the AFLC facilitator sends out a survey about availability and topics of interest. Meeting scheduling and content are thus specific to each cohort of participants. The AFLC coordinator also plays a larger role in facilitating meetings compared to the other LCs on campus, which are more faculty-led. The additional support reflects adjuncts' limited time to engage in research and preparation to lead meetings.

Because of the shorter time-frame, adjuncts are not expected to develop a project where they design a substantive change to their course materials or activities, implement the change in their course, and then report on the results. Instead, adjuncts submit a brief reflection on a new teaching technique they tried during the semester. Additionally, adjuncts are expected to engage in a mid-semester assessment that provides them with formative feedback on their teaching. Participants who meet these expectations receive a \$200 stipend and a letter of completion, signed by the Provost, that is shared with their department chair.

The AFLC was originally designed with an opening and closing meeting as a cohort supplemented by adjuncts' participation in several CTL workshops of their choice. However, as participants reported that the meetings were the most beneficial part of the program, the CTL shifted the format. The AFLC now includes four cohort meetings (one per month) that are each about an hour and fifteen minutes in length. Participants are also expected to choose two workshops to attend individually.

First-Year Writing Program

The First-Year Writing (FYW) program employs a number of adjuncts, including several who have taught at Boise State for more than 15 years; the program also employs full-time NTTF and a few tenure-track faculty. Because the field of rhetoric and composition is historically rooted in pedagogy, FYW faculty are generally deeply invested in teaching effectively. Thus, the program has made intentional choices to facilitate access and participation for adjuncts in professional development opportunities, and works collaboratively with the CTL in innovative ways to maximize the professional development of their faculty.

For instance, FYW engaged in a long-term project to revise course curriculum several years ago. As part of that process, program administrators consulted regularly with CTL administrators. Internally, they held several workshops to provide faculty with multiple opportunities to participate in the discussions. They also used online spaces where faculty could contribute thoughts and suggestions asynchronously, providing another means of participation for faculty who couldn't attend workshops.

Many FYW faculty participate in the professional development initiatives offered by the CTL. The program director works collaboratively with CTL staff to think through issues related to professional development. For instance, they conceptualize CTL offerings as primarily addressing pedagogy and supporting the student population at Boise State, including workshops on topics such as talking about race in the classroom and strategies for working with veterans. Program-level professional development is then designed to be complementary to those offered by the CTL, focusing more on content-specific issues related to the teaching of writing.

The FYWP has implemented various forms of professional development within their own program over the years. These initiatives have included professional book clubs, workshop series, and teaching circles. Teaching circles are usually small groups of faculty (about 4-6) that meet regularly to engage in peer-led, informal discussions about teaching that support faculty's current efforts through sharing ideas and offering opportunities for feedback and troubleshooting. For instance, FYW organized teaching circles for the fall 2020 semester that focused on effectively teaching writing using online and remote modalities during the pandemic. These continued throughout the spring 2021 semester.

The program director is working with CTL staff to use strategies to amplify and scale professional development with limited resources. For instance, FYW faculty sometimes take a third of the available seats for CTL workshops. This limits the availability of spaces for faculty in other programs and becomes an equity issue when adjuncts' participation in workshops is compensated. Therefore, the program has started experimenting with identifying faculty liaisons for the more time-intensive CTL offerings, including the faculty learning communities. Liaisons receive a small stipend from FYW in addition to the compensation offered by the CTL. After participating in the FLC, liaisons are expected to create presentations or workshops for FYW writing and to share resources from the FLC that are relevant to the program.

School of Social Work Online Program

The School of Social Work offers an online degree program with intensive, seven-week courses. Across the two seven-week sessions, there are about 80 faculty who are licensed professionals and/or practicing in the field teaching in the program, and most of whom are adjuncts. To support their success, the school hired an online technology specialist to provide professional development and support for online teaching and learning.

The specialist collaborates with the CTL to advertise workshops and other opportunities that might be of interest to the social work faculty. However, the specialist also supplements CTL opportunities with additional programming in order to meet the specific needs of their faculty. Specifically, many of the adjuncts in the school also have full-time careers, constraining their availability to participate in professional development during business hours. Additionally, many of the school's faculty are professionals who have expertise in social work but not in teaching for learning or in educational technology. Thus, in addition to offering individualized consultations, the specialist has also developed a new faculty orientation, drop-in sessions, and a resource site for faculty in this school.

New Faculty Orientation

The school has developed a new faculty orientation program that is entirely asynchronous, with different modules covering a number of topics. These topics include role expectations, information about their student population, and resources to help faculty prepare courses for launch. Participation is not compensated, as completion of the orientation is an expectation for all new faculty. By using an entirely online and asynchronous format, the school also makes orientation widely accessible to adjuncts who may live in different time zones, who may teach in different seven-week sessions, and who may have varying career and family responsibilities.

Workshops

The specialist also offers drop-in synchronous meetings that include mini-workshops on topics related to teaching and technology. These meetings are scheduled at different times of day and on different days of the week across a seven-week session to increase the school's ability to engage many of their faculty. The specialist surveys faculty a few times each year to learn about their needs and interests and then chooses workshop topics accordingly. These drop-ins are often framed as lunch and learns or as happy hours to emphasize their informal, relational nature.

Teaching Groups

Each semester, the specialist uses email to connect faculty who are teaching the same course in teaching groups. Teaching groups offer a space where faculty can connect with colleagues when they have questions about the course or when problems arise. By facilitating communicating, teaching groups also help to create better alignment across course sections. Faculty in some teaching groups choose to engage in greater coordination by setting up their courses collaboratively and by scheduling synchronous sessions across course sections rather than holding separate synchronous sessions for each section.

Resource Site

The specialist has developed an extensive resource site for faculty in their learning management system (LMS). This site includes information about campus resources, tips for using the LMS effectively in courses, and best practices for online learning. The specialist also develops a monthly newsletter that includes selected CTL workshops and other professional development initiatives, opportunities to participate in faculty committees, invitations to faculty meetings, and minutes from previous faculty meetings. The newsletter is structured as an announcement so it can be pushed as an email to all faculty in the school through the LMS. In addition, the LMS calendar is used to note important dates related to class sessions, grade submissions, workshops, and more.

Needs Assessment

The CTL and School of Social Work utilize different approaches to assessing the needs of adjuncts, with each achieving slightly different goals. Given that understanding the needs of the diverse types of adjuncts can be difficult, we include a brief description of each approach to needs assessment.

The CTL has conducted an institution-wide assessment of adjuncts' needs in 2012 and 2019 through survey data collection (the most recent survey was created in collaboration with colleagues at Portland State University and Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis). The needs assessment addresses topics including adjuncts' professional development needs, their experiences with onboarding and evaluation at the department and institution levels, and their perceptions

of culture within their department and in the larger institution. By examining the same topics over time, Boise State hopes to better understand changes in adjuncts' needs as well as in the practices and culture related to adjuncts at the department and institutional level. By targeting adjuncts specifically, this needs assessment allows Boise State to ask questions related to integration, resource knowledge, and inclusion that are particularly important for this population. The data allows for an understanding of adjuncts' needs across campus as well as informing a better understanding of how policies, practices, and culture vary across different departments and schools.

The School of Social Work uses formal and informal methods for assessing the professional development needs of faculty in the school. Formal needs assessment includes a survey sent out once a semester or academic year that asks faculty to identify teaching topics of interest. As a more personalized and informal means of assessing needs, the specialist also uses individual consultations and drop-ins to identify patterns of professional development needs. These two methods of just-in-time needs assessment are useful for informing the development of topics for workshops and resources that can be added to the resource site.

Best Practices for Supporting NTTF

In this section, we highlight a number of best practices for engaging adjuncts in professional development by creating initiatives that are accessible, inclusive, and relevant.

Best Practices reflected by CTL

- ✓ Having a dedicated staff position that is focused on engaging adjuncts gives attention to a population that is often overlooked.
- ✓ The collaborations between the faculty associate in the CTL and other offices on campus offer the opportunity to center teaching effectiveness in policies and practices related to adjuncts.
- ✓ Offering professional development to academic leaders for conducting evaluations supports adjuncts' development indirectly; this practice especially benefits adjuncts who want to move into full-time roles, as annual evaluations are frequently included as part of job applications.
- ✓ The CTL has offered versions of initiatives like orientation and workshops that are geared specifically for adjuncts and tailored to their needs.
- ✓ Compensating adjuncts for participating in professional development recognizes that these efforts exceed expectations for the adjunct role and demonstrate that this engagement is valued on campus.
- ✓ The adjunct-specific FLC creates a space where adjuncts can be comfortable sharing and connecting with peers.
- ✓ The deliverables for the adjunct-specific FLC are adjusted to provide adjuncts with practical feedback on their teaching and help them reflect on a specific change to practice, creating realistic expectations for the semester-long time frame

Best Practices reflected by the First-Year Writing program

- ✓ The use of liaisons for CTL initiatives promotes the scalability of effective teaching practices and conversations about teaching in the program and demonstrates a commitment to facilitating equitable opportunities for engaging adjuncts across campus.

- ✓ The program demonstrates the value of the additional work liaisons do by compensating them above and beyond the FLC stipend they receive from the CTL.
- ✓ FYW designs program-specific professional development initiatives to focus on content-specific issues of teaching writing so as not to duplicate the efforts of the CTL

Best Practices reflected by the School of Social Work

- ✓ New faculty orientation is entirely asynchronous and online, allowing adjuncts to complete the program on their own time.
- ✓ The drop-in format of workshops creates flexibility so that faculty can participate on their own terms.
- ✓ The resource site also includes invitations to participate in department meetings and minutes from meetings so that adjuncts feel informed and included in the issues that are most likely to impact their work

Learning Community: Design Summary

In this section we provide a quick summary of the design of the adjunct faculty learning community offered by Boise State's CTL, as the changes made over time provide effective support for adjuncts.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES: To facilitate adjuncts' development of instructional effectiveness and to help them develop a community of peer educators.

PARTICIPANTS: About 10 participants each semester, all of whom are adjuncts.

DELIVERY MODE: Participants choose whether to meet on campus or online.

STRUCTURE AND LENGTH: One semester long including four meetings (roughly one per month) that are each one hour and fifteen minutes long. Participants are also expected to attend two CTL workshops during the semester.

CONTENT: Each cohort decides on the topics to be covered based on their interests and needs.

FACILITATION: The faculty associate facilitates meetings.

DELIVERABLES: Participants engage in a midterm teaching assessment and write a reflection about a new teaching practice they tried during the semester.

ASSESSMENT: Participants complete an evaluation of the FLC at the end of the semester; the faculty associate also reviews the submitted reflections for evidence that adjuncts are applying what they have learned to their teaching.

COMPENSATION AND RECOGNITION: Participants who meet all expectations receive a \$200 stipend.

Additional Resources

Adjunct Advantages. Download available at [https://www.boisestate.edu/ctl/files/2020/09/ADJUNCT-ADVANTAGES-Revised.docx](https://www.boisestate.edu/ctl/files/2020/09/ADJUNCT-ADVANTAGES-<u>Revised.docx</u>) [describes benefits offered to adjuncts]

Adjunct Faculty E-Newsletter. <https://www.boisestate.edu/ctl/resources/adjunct-newsletter/> [offers an archive of the

monthly newsletter specifically created for adjuncts]

Focarile, T. (2018, December 7). Checklist: Preparing Adjunct Faculty to Teach Online. Academic Impressions. <https://www.academicimpressions.com/blog/checklist-preparing-adjunct-faculty-teach-online/> [article about supporting online teaching effectiveness for adjuncts]

Focarile, T. (2018, August 6). Adjunct Faculty: A Department Chair's Guide to Orienting New Instructors. Academic Impressions. <https://www.academicimpressions.com/guide-orienting-adjunct-faculty/> [article about how chairs can help integrate new NTTF into the department and institution]

Treasure Valley Adjunct Conference. <https://www.boisestate.edu/ctl/events/adjunct-conference/> [adjunct-specific conference offered through collaboration with other local institutions]

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