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

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- ✓ Faculty Learning Community
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Texas State University (TXST) is a public research institution with 38,000 enrolled students. The comprehensive university offers roughly 200 degree programs and is comprised of two campuses; the main campus in San Marcos and the health professions campus in Round Rock. Designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) for a decade, the school has worked to make changes that better serve its student population; currently, 57% of TXST students are minorities, 51% are from underrepresented backgrounds, and more than 70% of students receive financial aid. The school employs roughly 2,000 faculty, about 54% of whom are non-tenure-track-faculty (NTTF). Among NTTF 56% are full-time and the remaining 44% are part-time (adjuncts).

Since being reclassified as an Emerging Research University by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, TXST has earned a “R2: Doctoral Universities- High research activities” Carnegie Classification and continues to follow a committed path towards becoming a premiere research institution. As a result of the school’s shifting focus, the Office of the Provost and VP for Academic Affairs created a full-time position in the Faculty Development office to support the professional development of faculty, with an emphasis on the career development of tenure-track faculty. In recognition of the needs of NTTF, the director is now expanding the professional development programs available to faculty in order to to inspire leadership, collegiality, teaching, research, and creativity using an equity-minded approach.

The Faculty Senate at TXST includes an NTTF subcommittee that includes one appointed member from each department and school. The subcommittee meets once a month to address the needs and interests of NTTF and makes recommendations to the Academic Senate about policies and issues that impact NTTF. The faculty senate also funds two awards for NTTF, both of which are reviewed by the NTTF committee. First, the Part-Time Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award is given to one adjunct in each academic college annually, providing recognition during fall convocation and a \$1,000 reward; all NTTF who taught less than full-time during the academic year are eligible to apply. Second, the Nontenure Line Faculty Workload Release allows full-time NTTF who have taught at TXST for more than four years the opportunity for a course release to pursue creative and scholarly projects or develop curriculum for improved teaching and learning. In general, around 10-15 participants each year receive a release of 3-6 workload credits.

Professional Development Initiatives for NTTF

The Faculty Development Office (FDO), housed within the Office of the Provost, provides faculty across career tracks with professional development opportunities. An advisory committee, comprised primarily of associate deans of research for each academic college, provides recommendations on needed faculty development programs, participates in the development of those programs, and promotes initiatives within their colleges. FDO offers a number of programs that are open to NTTF, including faculty orientation, workshops, and faculty learning communities (FLC). One FLC designed specifically for NTTF is a discussion group that was created in collaboration with the NTTF subcommittee of the Faculty Senate.

New Faculty Orientation

For new faculty, a 4-hour professional development workshop (2 hours in the morning offered by FDO and 2 hours in the evening offered by the faculty senate NTTF sub-committee) offers practical advice and suggestions towards completion of a successful first semester is encouraged. The workshop allows NTTF to familiarize themselves with university policy (including rules and procedures), resources for teaching, and offers support for website navigation and instructor tools (grade book, how to upload documents, etc.) The morning workshop includes an overview of TXST's commitment to diversity and inclusive teaching practices and a panel discussion with the Vice President of Student Affairs and her staff. During the evening orientation, faculty from different departments are available to answer questions ranging from simple/ logistical (e.g., how to find an employee badge #) problems to more complicated ones (e.g., how to manage large 200+ student lectures). The orientation is held in-person with an online option via Zoom to encourage participation. The orientation is also recorded for those who cannot attend the live session.

Workshops

The faculty development office offers a number of workshops on instructional and career development throughout the year. The director collaborates with other offices on campus, including student affairs and the office of research, to provide workshops on a broad range of topics, from designing an inclusive syllabus to documenting invisible labor in a performance review. Workshops are recorded and made available asynchronously on the faculty development website. The director also provides support for programs across campus, including grant-funded efforts in STEM to foster student success through institutional change teams and course redesign.

Drop-In Lunches

The Let's Do Lunch series is open to faculty across all career tracks. Every Friday, at noon, faculty are invited to a 1-hour synchronous online event. Faculty and staff across departments share expertise and facilitate discussions on just-in-time topics. Some sessions are devoted to providing opportunities for faculty to socialize and engage with their colleagues through games and other activities. The Let's Do Lunch sessions are supplemented by informal off-campus social events.

Faculty Learning Communities

In this section, we review two types of learning communities offered by the FDO: summer learning communities and an NTTF-specific discussion group.

Summer Learning Communities

Summer faculty learning communities (FLCs) are open to all faculty across career tracks, meeting weekly for seven weeks. Previous FLCs have focused on topics like teaching large classes and promoting academic integrity through assessment. Each FLC has two faculty facilitators so that they can attend to content and an inclusive environment. For these FLCs, the director intentionally chose NTTF to be facilitators, offering them leadership opportunities and \$1,000 compensation. The director has regular meetings with facilitators to support their leadership and also provides logistical support (such as Zoom setup, room reservations, and promotions) so that facilitators can focus on working with participants.

Discussion Group

Through a partnership with the NTTF faculty senate subcommittee, the director created a discussion group specifically for NTTF as a way to provide an informal space for NTTF to read and discuss a common book. Participants meet weekly across a semester and are allowed to attend virtually under a drop-in format. About 25 NTTF participate in each discussion group, with about half attending every session. As with summer FLCs, the discussion group is led by two NTTF facilitators, while the director handles logistics and supports the facilitators through regular debriefing meetings to discuss inclusive participation, as well as any challenges that arise. Books are chosen to meet the needs of NTTF; previous groups have discussed Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* and Sarah Rose Cavanagh's *The Spark of Learning*, both of which offer hopeful, energizing opportunities for improving teaching. The FDO and the faculty senate split the cost of books for participants.

The director chose a low-stakes participation model in order to meet the needs of NTTF who often have a heavy teaching workload and busy schedule. The only expectation for participation is reading the book. And while the book offers a jumping-off point for participants to discuss teaching and faculty careers, the groups are also designed to help faculty be successful by sharing their concerns and experiences related to being NTTF. A discussion group also offers easy entry into professional development, raising awareness of the FDO and creating momentum for more intensive programs. The director noted that it is important for NTTF to have their own space, free of staff and tenure-track/tenured faculty. The NTTF-specific discussion thus creates a space that values self-governance and agency of voice.

Best Practices for FLCs

This section highlights several best practices demonstrated by the FDO programs, including the NTTF-specific FLC.

The FDO has demonstrated best practices in inclusivity and support of both adjunct and full-time NTTF, with areas that can benefit from additional focus:

- ✓ The director collaborates across campus to engage with community and other departments whenever possible. This collaboration allows faculty to have greater access to a wide variety of professional development opportunities, including applying learned strategies from different disciplines (for example, from more STEM-focused courses) to personally relevant courses.
- ✓ The advisory group and campus collaborations are also important opportunities for building relationships and raising awareness of FDO offerings that can help the FDO be successful in the long term.

- ✓ The FDO uses equity-minded practices to create inclusive environments. For example, one strategy is to always have two facilitators for programs, so that one person can engage with the audience while the other monitors participation to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

For the NTTF-specific discussion group, best practices are reviewed below:

- ✓ To better integrate professional development into the culture of Texas State, low-stakes programs like a discussion group promotes the participation of busy NTTF and subsequently can improve the overall effectiveness of the FDO.
- ✓ By providing a NTTF-specific FLC with NTTF facilitators, members are given a safe environment to discuss issues that they may otherwise not be comfortable sharing in a mixed space with tenure-track-faculty. The space allows for NTTF to voice concerns and act with self-governance.

Discussion Groups: Design Summary

This design summary highlights the NTTF-specific discussion group FLC as it demonstrates several qualities that make it accessible and inclusive for NTTF.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES: The discussion group provides an informal community space for NTTF to connect and offers an opportunity for connection around instructional effectiveness.

PARTICIPANTS: Roughly 25 members, limited to NTTF including adjuncts; although tenure-track faculty showed interest in participating, they were turned down in order to preserve the only space available for just NTTF.

DELIVERY MODE: Meetings were held in-person with an online option for attending synchronously via Zooms.

STRUCTURE AND LENGTH: The discussion group is held weekly during one semester using a drop-in format.

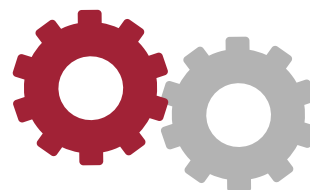
CONTENT: The discussion uses the book to kick-off reflection and conversation around teaching.

FACILITATION: Two NTTF were chosen to lead the FLC; the choice to pick NTTF as designated leaders was deliberate as to demonstrate a protected space for NTTF. Staff from the FDO office provide logistic and technical support.

DELIVERABLES: There were no deliverables other than reading the book, in order to accommodate busy NTTF.

ASSESSMENT: After each session, the director debriefed with facilitators about how the FLC session went; the director provided leadership development and troubleshooting throughout the semester. Additionally, participants completed evaluations about their experience in the discussion group.

COMPENSATION AND RECOGNITION: Participation is entirely voluntary, and the book is provided for free. Facilitators are compensated \$1,000 each for their leadership.



Additional Resources

Bookcats Book Club. <https://www.facdv.txstate.edu/Teaching-Learning/Bookcats.html> [describes the NTT-specific discussion group]

Inclusive Excellence Showcase 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWPX4epogAQ> [video provides an overview of many of the workshops and programs hosted by the FDO]

Texas State Faculty Development <https://www.facdv.txstate.edu/> [an overview of all FDO programs at Texas State]

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Visit [The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success](https://pullias.usc.edu/delphi) for more case studies of professional development that is accessible and welcoming of adjuncts and non-tenure-track faculty and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support faculty off the tenure track at: pullias.usc.edu/delphi.

