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Steady Lines of Communication, Representation and Support for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty at Washington University in St. Louis

2020 Applicant for the Delphi Award

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Example Best Practices to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

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The Association for Teaching Research and Practice (ATRaP) at Washington University in St. Louis was created to support full-time non-tenure-track faculty (FTNTTF) and encourage the institution's administration to establish a steady line of communication with NTTF. Faculty and administrators realized that NTTF faced many challenges regarding institutional policies, cultural norms and communication. After an unsuccessful attempt to unionize FTNTTF, ATRaP was formed as a result of the grassroots efforts that advocated for changes specifically in the interest of FTNTTF. The achievements and institutionalization of ATRaP as an official university association have further increased the empowerment of FTNTTF. Moreover, the university administration has been supportive of the Association and likewise desire to provide a positive working environment for the valued personnel that make up non-tenure track faculty; this mutually-beneficial relationship has heavily contributed to the effectiveness in change and overall success of the ATRaP.

Grassroots Organizing

Following an unsuccessful attempt to unionize FTNTTF in 2017, a grassroots group evolved to advocate for improvements in work-life conditions for FTNTTF at Washington University. The group focused on community building, assessing needs, enhancing communication and forging a collaborative relationship with the university administration. Since then, the university has experienced a marked and notable improvement in workplace culture, representation and working conditions for full-time non-tenure track faculty. As a result of the grassroot efforts, the Association for Teaching Research and Practice (ATRaP) was officially voted in as a university association in 2018.

Representation: Collective Voice, Membership and Leadership

ATRaP has recognized the importance of diversity since its inception and aims for representation from all of the schools that fall under the umbrella of the University. The organization is led by co-presidents, who are intentionally

chosen from two different schools to stay true to the diverse array of disciplines within the institution and foster a collective voice. The co-presidents serve staggered 2-year terms and lead monthly meetings along with a 10-member board, a corresponding secretary and a recording secretary; these positions allow FTNTTF opportunities to exercise leadership and autonomy as an official university organization. ATRaP considers all full-time non-tenure-track faculty personnel as members of the Association. Members are encouraged to participate at a level that suits their comfortability. ATRaP limits representation to full-time non-tenure-track faculty because part-time non-tenure-track faculty are represented by a union.

Identify and Prioritize Issues

In order to help identify the top issues affecting FTNTTF at the time of inception, ATRaP surveyed all FTNTTF. The top priorities identified as the Association was developing were: status clarification for research, cultural change, community building, structure and governance of the organization, university policies regarding equitable pay, leave (family leave, developmental leave) and job promotion. Volunteer work groups were formed and assigned to each

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topic to further investigate the needs of FTNTTF, better understand the issues, and reach possible recommendations on how these areas could be improved upon. Conducting a needs assessment and identifying priorities is an important process for ATRaP because it permits all FTNTTF to voice concerns and to share their needs, wants and desires rather than depending on administrators to speak for the group.

Professional Development and Equitable Policies

ATRaP categorizes successes (in policies and other changes) into two levels: university and school. At the University level, issues that have seen meaningful progress include equitable parental leave policies, funding of professional development (PD) for FTNTTF, and increased representation in governance both at the school and university level. At the school level, issues that have been successfully advanced include more equitable salary, promotion/rank policies, representation (faculty meetings and governance committees) and research opportunities. Additionally, overall workplace culture and FTNTTF sense of value have improved.

Paid parental leave for FTNTTF has been updated to match the same policy as tenure-track faculty. The current policy allows one semester of paid leave following childbirth or adoption, whereas the parental leave policy for FTNTTF used to depend on prior years served and was limited to 4 - 12 weeks. When FTNTTF were first surveyed, equitable parental leave emerged as one of the top priorities; following the policy revisions, between 2018 and 2020, there have been at least 22 FTNTTF who have chosen to take the semester off.



Professional development programming efforts have also improved as a result of increased funding:

- a. The Provost's Professional Development Fund allots \$1,000 per year toward each FTNTTF's PD. Between the fiscal years 2018 - 2020, up to 30 FTNTTF have been supported and funds have ranged from roughly \$16,800 (FY18) to \$26,700 (FY19).
- b. ATRaP members are provided with specific PD programming such as a 'lunch and learn' with the campus Ombuds and workshops such as "How to Deal with Difficult Students" facilitated by the Teaching Center.
- c. The ATRaP website was built and funded by a \$5,000 grant from the Office of the Provost. The website provides information such as leadership opportunities, events and by-laws, and also includes a faculty handbook with FTNTTF-specific information.
- d. A mentoring program was created that allows ATRaP to match newly-hired FTNTTF with seasoned mentors to help them acclimate to the University more smoothly.

Across the institution, representation in governance of FTNTTF has increased. Nearly all University-level committees (including ones newly created as a response to COVID-19) include FTNTTF representatives. Additionally, FTNTTF have gained voting rights in governance bodies, on the University Faculty Senate, and on hiring committees at both the university and school level.

Acknowledgment of FTNTTF's significance has been demonstrated through acts such as a nationwide search for FTNTTF and by listing all faculty on the same webpage without distinguishing tenure categorization.

Three schools that have made headway in negotiating for better FTNTTF conditions are the College of Arts & Science, James McKelvey School of Engineering, and Brown School of Social Work.

- a. At the College of Arts & Sciences (A&S), the minimum salary of \$10,000 for each FTNTTF rank was increased. The school was also able to establish set policies and procedures to define ranks, responsibilities and the promotion process for faculty. Finally, FTNTTF were able to strengthen representation on the A&S Faculty Senate council when two members were elected to serve as representatives.
- b. At the Brown School of Social Work, a yearly performance review process was created. FTNTTF also established policies and procedures to define ranks, responsibilities and the promotion process for advancement. Lastly, the Brown School Faculty Assembly has granted voting rights to FTNTTF to solidify representation in governance.
- c. At the James McKelvey School of Engineering, FTNTTF were invited to attend faculty meetings and have since gained voting rights on the School Faculty Assembly. Policies and procedures have also been created to define ranks, responsibilities, and the promotion process as well as the implementation of a yearly performance review. Additionally, the school has permitted FTNTTF to conduct domain research under certain conditions. Lastly, acknowledgment of FTNTTF's significance has been demonstrated through acts such as a nationwide search for FTNTTF and by listing all faculty on the same webpage without distinguishing tenure categorization.

Strong Working Relationship with Administration

The University administration has been helpful in enacting positive changes overall, and the relationship between the Association and administration is viewed as one that is symbiotic and respectful. Each semester, the co-presidents, representing the whole of FTNTTF, meet with the Provost office to highlight the most imminent concerns regarding each work group's findings on the different prioritized topics. Over the last few years, ATRaP has achieved tremendous progress in providing FTNTTF with a more equitable and positive work environment. The Association plans to continue making advancements and future improvements on policies/changes regarding phased retirement policy and additional professional development goals.

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