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Supporting Adjuncts from a Distance: Adjuncts as Subject Matter Experts & Valued Members of the Northcentral University Community

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From the Delphi Project database of

Example Best Practices to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

- ✓ Integration into University Governance
- ✓ Substantive Evaluative and Feedback Process
- ✓ Professional Development
- ✓ Compensation, Benefits, and Recognition

Northcentral University (NCU), a 100% online, nonprofit institution, declared part-time adjunct faculty as vital actors in carrying out their mission for student success. This realization and subsequent declaration prompted NCU to initiate a task force to explore the working conditions and challenges adjunct faculty face. The task force was comprised of part-time adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, human resources, and leaders from the Office of the Provost. Together, the task force developed three guiding principles to frame their ongoing work: 1) integration into the university community; 2) preparation for their responsibilities as adjunct faculty; and, 3) compensation for their work and university activities.

Integration into University Governance

As part of the guiding principle of integrating adjunct faculty into the university community, the task force saw it necessary to integrate adjunct faculty into the overall governance structure. Each school in NCU established an Adjunct Council as a way to ensure open communication and provide ways for part-time adjunct faculty to feel a sense of belonging in the school and the larger university community. The adjunct council also affords part-time faculty the chance to converse and learn from school leadership, the faculty senate, and university administration. In addition, adjunct faculty are able to participate in the faculty senate, and, previously, in fact, the Senate Chair position was held by an adjunct faculty member. Integration into the formal governance structure gives adjunct faculty a voice and a chance to be more fully immersed in the university they take pride in being apart of. And they are compensated for their service on the council.

Along with involvement with formal governance structures, adjunct faculty are invited to sit on committees across the virtual campus. Those committees range from event planning and commencement to academic affairs and strategic planning committees. Adjunct faculty's involvement in these committees is resilient and necessary as they provide a unique perspective and insight regarding student success and the needs of the university. By welcoming and encouraging adjunct faculty to participate, they can more fully feel a part of the NCU community.

Adjunct faculty's involvement in the formal governance structure and school and university committees affords them the opportunity to play a strong role in the curriculum process as well. Their visibility in these meetings and committees positions them as subject matter experts and thus, they can help improve curriculum and participate in program evaluation and assessment. Involvement in this process gives them additional experience in curriculum design and assessment that is traditionally given to tenure-track/tenured or full-time faculty members.

Substantive Evaluative and Feedback Process

Evaluation and feedback are crucial to the support and development of adjunct faculty and the overall mission for student success at NCU. Each school within the university has an associate director for faculty support and development. People in these positions serve as academic coaches responsible for supporting faculty and engaging in the Teaching Through Engagement (TTE) model. The TTE model is a faculty-student engagement model that encourages faculty to be involved in student work earlier on and proactively rather than simply giving students feedback in a reactive manner. Because teaching through feedback is the dominant way of teaching, academic coaches help faculty alter their teaching to better align with this campus-wide model. Academic coaches are available to provide feedback to enhance adjunct faculty performance in accordance to the model. Adjunct faculty particularly benefit from such feedback since they are not traditionally given opportunities to be trained or evaluated on their pedagogical practices.

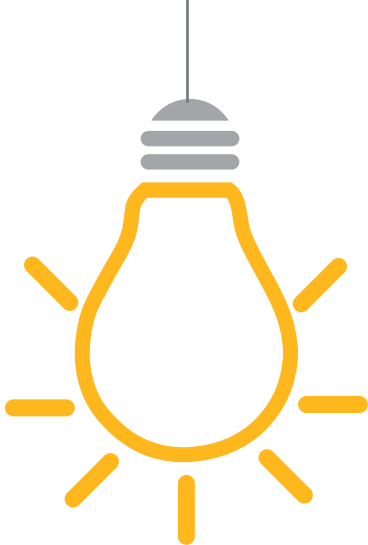
Academic coaches and leadership in the schools engage with adjunct faculty on an annual basis at a minimum. Adjunct faculty are responsible for completing a self-assessment activity first which is centered around reflection and planning. Then, school leadership and the associate directors review adjuncts' self-assessments and encourage personal growth. It is in this process where adjuncts are shown support and given affirmation regarding their roles as instructors responsible for student success.

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Professional Development

Part-time faculty at NCU are given the same access to professional development as full-time faculty. NCU ensured this by developing the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to provide resources and programs to support excellence in teaching. CTL serves as a space for faculty to strengthen knowledge around institutional practices, resources, pedagogy, and technology, and learn best practices from each other. The center offers unlimited access to asynchronous training opportunities and even archives sessions for faculty to return to on their own time.

Outside of the CTL, faculty are also given the opportunity to have their professional development activities funded by NCU. For adjuncts who teach a minimum threshold of courses, NCU offers professional development funds in the range of \$500-\$1000 to support adjuncts participation and attendance at conferences, workshops, or training. Adjuncts are also able to tap into another fund, the Professional Development Extraordinary Cost Program, for funds that exceed the



\$1000 maximum. In addition, adjunct faculty can access internal research awards that provide financial support for research projects and can also aid in their professional development.

Compensation, Benefits, and Recognition

NCU believes they have a moral imperative to provide compensation and benefits for part-time adjunct faculty. From 401K packages to service compensation, part-time adjunct faculty are recognized for the work and services provided to the university.

Adjunct faculty are compensated for teaching, course development, training provided to others, sitting on committees, and engaging in research. While compensation for service and research is rare for adjunct faculty at other institutions, NCU once again finds it necessary to do so because of the vital role adjuncts play in the institution.

Also unique to NCU is that part-time adjunct faculty are given access to a wide array of benefits that are normally exclusive to full-time faculty. Adjunct faculty can enroll in the university's 401K program, where the financial match made for adjuncts is equivalent to that of full-time faculty and staff, and even receive tuition discounts (25%) for their families. Adjuncts can also take advantage of resources such as Grammarly, Qualtrics (survey software), NVivo (data analysis software), and many more for little to no cost. By allowing adjuncts to access to these benefits only enhances their working conditions and their sense of belonging at the institution. Accessing these benefits also affords adjuncts the opportunity to grow personally and professionally, which is especially important if they desire to apply for jobs on the tenure-track.

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Adjunct faculty recognition is also important to NCU. Annually, a faculty symposium is held in-person to recognize and award faculty at the individual school level. Each school is responsible for identifying an outstanding adjunct faculty member deserving of adjunct-specific award for their efforts and contributions to the school. These awards only further elucidate the importance of honoring the work of adjunct faculty that too often goes unnoticed.

Learn more about Northcentral University at: www.ncu.edu

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