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## Adjuncts as Effective Community College Team Members

Many community colleges have a large adjunct faculty to full-time faculty ratio, with adjunct faculty members teaching critical-to-retention (high-demand and/or high-failure) courses. A simple, inexpensive plan to include, prepare, develop, and recognize adjunct faculty members can remedy some of the challenges associated with adjunct use and can assure their retention from semester to semester. The plan may be gradually phased in to empower adjunct faculty members to take their rightful places as confident, well-prepared, and valued team members in academic divisions. Components include adjunct faculty orientation, common course documents, full-time faculty mentoring, professional development (along a continuum), leadership roles, and recognition.

The first element of a plan to help adjunct faculty members feel oriented to campus and the department is a “mandatory” adjunct faculty orientation. This event should occur prior to the start of each semester, with invitations to “save the date” mailed out two months in advance and followed by reminder letters two to three weeks before the event. The letters should provide contact information in case an adjunct cannot attend and will need a make-up session; however, with clear expectations spelled out well in advance, most adjuncts will be there. An evening event on a weeknight usually draws the best attendance.

This approximately three-hour orientation should begin with a welcome, followed by dinner and announcements. Having adjuncts and full-time faculty members from the same departments sit together can serve as a useful time to build connections to the college community and begin mentoring relationships. During this opening segment, adjuncts should receive some type of college-themed giveaway (preferably with a logo that can be spotted in the community—more about this later). This can also serve as a great opportunity for adjunct faculty members to turn in completed contracts and pick up new instructional materials.

During this orientation, all first-time adjuncts should attend a mandatory new faculty orientation session presented by a chief academic officer or dean. An adjunct handbook should be handed out (or pointed out in its online location) at this session. Other breakout sessions may include teaching with technology, adult learning instructional techniques, community college student characteristics, rubric scoring, departmental planning, or classroom management.

A second way to help prepare adjuncts is to provide them with common course documents. Many adjunct faculty members have experienced a harrowing moment when they received a desperate call on a Friday afternoon to replace a faculty member in a course that would begin the next Monday. A common syllabus that includes course learning outcomes, metacognitive/student success learning outcomes, and college resources can provide guidance to both adjuncts and their students. A generic course outline with textbook sections to be covered or read, homework assignments, computer-assisted tutorials, and assessments spelled out week by week will help adjuncts learn to pace a course so that every learning outcome is successfully addressed. Adjuncts may also be happy to have access to assessment templates such as departmental writing samples, chapter tests, final exams, and study guides; if these are provided, scoring rubrics should also be discussed.

Even with adjunct orientation and common course documents, formal mentoring is still an important part of the process that will lead to adjunct faculty empowerment as part of an academic team. All new adjunct faculty members should be mentored by a full-time faculty member, preferably for two full semesters. Mentors should meet individually with their adjuncts (in person or via technology) for at least a 15-20 minute conversation once a week. A department may develop a short outline of suggested topics for these conversations (FERPA, college resources, classroom activities, etc.); nevertheless, the main point of the mentoring relationship is for adjuncts to have a forum for their questions and concerns related to classroom teaching. Some departments may prefer that mentors make very brief notes of discussions at these meetings.

Mentoring should not be limited to a single relationship, however. After the initial hiring conference, the department chair should maintain regular contact with adjuncts that includes regular informational emails and 24/7 phone access in case of emergencies. Adjuncts should be encouraged to attend regular departmental meetings as their schedules permit and should have regular access to the department’s administrative support staff, important forms, a workspace, a mail location, and an institutional email address.

Further, both adjunct and full-time faculty members will profit from shared observations; that is, adjunct faculty members may learn much from observing full-time faculty members teach, but full-time faculty may learn just as much from observing adjuncts. Observations of adjuncts should include an observation form that is part of the adjunct faculty orientation and handbook. During a class observation, it should be completed by the faculty member or department chair and shared with the adjunct afterwards in both written form and as part of a conversation in order to provide useful feedback.

Professional development along a continuum is another crucial aspect to helping adjuncts grow as teachers over the course of several semesters. As an example, for developmental education, the continuum should move from the very basic topics to more complex issues:

- Who are our students?
- What is developmental education?
- What are the recommended instructional practices for developmental education?
- How do I teach using hands-on materials, technology, collaborative learning?
- How can I help students with metacognition?
- What can I teach other faculty members?

These professional development topics begin with the breakout sessions at adjunct orientations but also include invitations to share the institution's regular professional development schedule of sessions, webinars, technology training, and/or reading groups. It can also include funding to attend regional professional association meetings or mini-conferences within driving distance. Frequently, fees are quite minimal, perhaps a few dollars for a meal or a state membership. Adjuncts may even be covered already under an institutional membership. If such opportunities are not available, institutions can hold their own professional meetings by inviting faculty members from nearby institutions and setting up a few roundtable discussions, presentations, or demonstrations, possibly on a Saturday afternoon for the benefit of working adjuncts.

Of course, experienced adjuncts are some of the best potential presenters at these regional meetings, and experienced adjuncts can serve a department in a number of valuable leadership roles. Those who are retired or not working full-time elsewhere may be able to participate regularly in department meetings. Adjunct faculty members should be included in the development and revision of missions and goals and in the selection of textbooks for their courses. They can contribute valuable input to the development of an assessment plan, assessment instruments, or departmental rubrics. Many adjuncts are long-term community members who proudly serve as excellent recruiters when they wear or carry their college logo gear into the community. (If someone comments on the college coffee cup, hat, or t-shirt, it is a simple matter to encourage a cashier, server, bagger, stocker, or gas station attendant to consider improving his or her earning power with a technical certificate degree program at the local community college.) Adjuncts are often willing to serve on college advisory committees as well as donate two to three hours a week tutoring students.

Any plan to include, prepare, and develop adjunct faculty members should also feature recognition for these professionals. Unfortunately, pay and benefits provided are often not what a department would desire. Some institutions do recognize adjuncts who have participated in professional development or leadership roles or who have served an institution for a number of years by conferring senior adjunct status that includes perhaps 25% more pay per course. If that is not an option, senior adjuncts can be rewarded with their preferred class times or classrooms, with a higher tier of departmental gear giveaways (a hooded sweatshirt, polo shirt, or jacket rather than a t-shirt, for example), or with preferred teaching technology (such as a loaner iPad or android). A simple thank-you note written by a department chair, dean, or chief academic officer can help an adjunct faculty member feel valued. A profile on the college website, an Adjunct of the Month award (or even Faculty Member of the month, for that matter), or a write-up in a local newspaper might be a meaningful recognition. Finally, adjunct faculty members should be honored at an end-of-year recognition event that provides awards for outstanding service.

A departmental or institutional commitment to this inexpensive plan will provide huge dividends for students, full-time faculty members, and administrators by empowering adjuncts to take leadership roles in teaching, professional development, recruitment, retention, and institutional service.

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