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# Addressing the Unique Needs and Challenges for Contingent Faculty at UNC Charlotte

## *2019 Finalist for the Delphi Award*

By Jordan Harper and Daniel Scott

From the Delphi Project database of

## Example Best Practices to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

- ✓ Needs Assessment
- ✓ Targeted Orientation and Online Resources
- ✓ Community-Based Learning and Development

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) Center for Teaching and Learning spearheaded a longitudinal, data-driven project to better understand and respond to the needs of non-tenure-track faculty. When the project began in 2014, non-tenure-track faculty comprised approximately one-third of all faculty. The study consisted of five phases:

1. Contingent faculty needs assessment;
2. Implementation of institutional responses to identified contingent needs;
3. Follow-up assessment and contingent faculty initiatives;
4. Institutionalization and dissemination of successful contingent faculty initiatives;
5. Planning for expansion and continuous improvement of contingent faculty needs.

UNC Charlotte has completed the first three phases, are fully engaged in phase four, and are moving towards phase five. With institutional stakeholders including Academic Affairs, College Deans and Department Chairs, Offices of Institutional Research and University Assessment, and Faculty Governance, the project has birthed new and exciting practices to support non-tenure-track faculty.

### **Assessing the Climate of Current Non-Tenure-Track Life through a Needs Assessment**

In order to best support and provide resources for non-tenure-track faculty, the Center for Teaching and Learning made it a mission to hear from current non-tenure-track faculty about their experiences and what they would like to see moving forward. The electronic needs assessment was sent to all 398 contingent faculty members with a response rate of 25%. The survey contained five open-ended questions asking about major challenges facing contingent faculty; types of professional support provided to them in their roles; awareness of professional development support available from the Center for Teaching and Learning; suggestions for the type of support/resources/programs they would find beneficial; and any factors that would encourage them to participate in professional development opportunities.

Two major takeaways emerged from the results of the study:

1. Respondents felt that there was a lack of onboarding training, resources and information provided to them;
2. Respondents felt isolated and disconnected from their colleagues and departments due to their contingent status

One of the questions specifically asked contingent faculty for suggestions for additional supports. Suggestions included the following:

- Some form of orientation course/experience;
- Face-to-face interaction/discussion with other faculty;
- A manual;
- Classroom behavioral management training

Though contingent faculty have access to participation in all instructional and professional development opportunities provided by the Center for Teaching and Learning, this survey gave a glance into the unique needs of contingent faculty. A qualitative analysis of responses identified a gap between current levels of support received and desired levels of support, and directly informed the new programs and practices implemented at UNC Charlotte.

### **Targeted Orientation and Online Resources**

Data from Phase 1 guided the development of two new initiatives in Phase 2: a general orientation and the implementation of a new website for non-tenure-track faculty.

The general orientation, referred to as Adjunct Faculty Orientation, is delivered through an online platform, Canvas.

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## ***Faculty learning communities have a two-fold mission: to build a sense of community and enhance teaching and learning.***

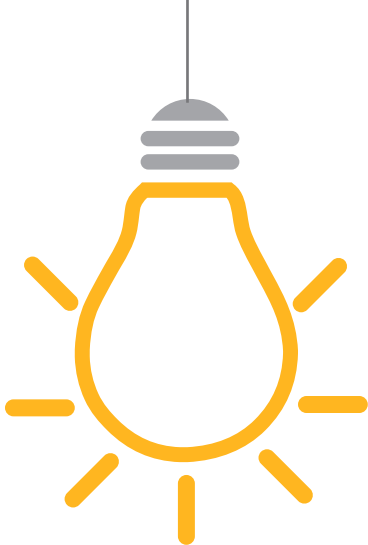
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The online format allows for new contingent faculty to complete orientation on their own time instead of having to adjust their schedules to attend an in-person orientation. The orientation introduces new faculty to university policies, guidelines and additional information and resources needed in order to be successful instructors and satisfied employees. During the first semester in use, the online orientation was accessed by over 205 faculty, had greater than 5,000 page views, and over 130 quiz submissions.

The second resource that emerged from the needs assessment was a “one-stop-shop” website for contingent faculty, [adjunct.uncc.edu](http://adjunct.uncc.edu). The website contains virtually the same content as the orientation, but is designed with quick reference in mind and prevents contingent faculty from having to go back to the orientation just to get certain information. Since the site’s inception to 2019, data shows that 2,846 unique IP addresses have visited the site.

### **Community-Based Learning and Development**

To address the theme of isolation and disconnectedness ingrained in the results of the needs assessment, and in an effort to supplement the online resources with face-to-face programming, the Center for Teaching and Learning created a Faculty Learning Communities program, which has since moved online.



Faculty learning communities have a two-fold mission: to build a sense of community and enhance teaching and learning. The Center for Teaching and Learning achieved this by bringing a diverse group of contingent faculty members, irrespective of discipline, for a semester-long, cohort-based experience. Each faculty learning community session consists of two parts: community building and discussions of relevance to contingent faculty, and pedagogical/instructional support. Since its inception in Fall 2016 to 2019, over 200 contingent faculty members have participated and logistical changes have altered due to the success of the program including the switch to concurrent cohorts each semester.

With contingent faculty flocking to the faculty learning communities program, the Center for Teaching and Learning has been unable to meet the demand. In fact, many contingent faculty ended up sitting on the waitlist for the program. Thus, the Center for Teaching and Learning created a second face-to-face program, a book club for contingent faculty members.

The book club was an alternative to the faculty learning community program. Instead of the monthly commitment required for the faculty learning community, contingent faculty were able to drop-in to book club meetings facilitated by a former Center for Teaching and Learning faculty fellow and university teaching award winner. In Phase 3, the center discovered that it was the most underutilized program for contingent faculty, however anecdotal evidence suggested that contingent faculty participated in the full-faculty book clubs at higher rates than tenure-track faculty. Though the exclusive book club did not necessarily work for UNC Charlotte, it may work in a different institutional context.

UNC Charlotte has made great progress with their data-driven evaluation of contingent faculty experiences and implementation of new programs and policies to support contingent faculty. UNC Charlotte expresses an ongoing commitment to improving contingent faculty experiences and working conditions with multiple iterations of evaluation, implementation, and reevaluation, and shows they are willing to test novel approaches, and also willing to change tactics when novel approaches are not as impactful as intended.

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Learn more about University of North Carolina at Charlotte's efforts to support all faculty through the Center for Teaching and Learning at: <https://teaching.charlotte.edu/services-programs>

Visit The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success for more example practices and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support faculty off the tenure track at: [pullias.usc.edu/delphi](http://pullias.usc.edu/delphi).

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