



A resource created by **The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success**

[pullias.usc.edu/delphi](http://pullias.usc.edu/delphi)

# Professional Development for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty at The Ohio State University

by Maeve Lee, KC Culver, and Adrianna Kezar

✓ Learning Community

✓ Microlearning

✓ Evaluation

✓ Recognition Event

The Ohio State University (OSU) is one of the largest public research universities in the U.S., enrolling nearly 70,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students; the main campus is located in Columbus, Ohio, with a number of small regional campuses operating across the state. The institution employs nearly 6,000 faculty, about 50% of whom are non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF).

Over the past several years, there have been significant changes to the institutional structure and programs related to professional development for faculty. Until 2017, the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT) provided resources and programming for faculty, most of which were available to faculty regardless of career status. However, staff in UCAT recognized a need to provide better support that specifically targeted NTTF and a new position was created that was dedicated to NTTF. This case study focuses on NTTF-specific initiatives developed by the coordinator of associated faculty in UCAT.

As a result of changing institutional leadership, additional professional development offerings were created through a faculty-led group; the two parallel initiatives were then merged into the newly formed Michael V. Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning. While most professional development opportunities continue to be available to full-time faculty regardless of tenure eligibility, none of the current initiatives are specifically for NTTF. We also discuss some lessons learned about supporting NTTF in initiatives where participants have different career roles.

---

## Professional Development Initiatives for NTTF

Professional development initiatives specifically for NTTF included microlearning through lecturer lunches and a faculty learning community (FLC). In describing the FLC, we pay specific attention to how it was tailored for NTTF, how it supported the needs of NTTF faculty in STEM disciplines, and how evaluation was conducted.

### Microlearning

Lecturer Lunches were created to help NTTF engage in professional development workshops across several weeks. The goal of these lunches was to provide professional development in a format that was easily accessible and designed to

create a sense of community. These opportunities were more informal compared to FLCs and allowed for greater scale.

The coordinator for associated faculty hosted these meetings every Friday at noon for 6 weeks per workshop topic. In each meeting, the coordinator presented about 15 minutes of content from a workshop (topics included supporting students and effective teaching practices), asking faculty to engage in reflection and planning for their own courses; faculty then shared and discussed their thoughts about the topic for the remainder of the hour.

Since lunches were designed to be more informal, no commitment was required, providing needed flexibility for NTTF. At the same time, about 25 NTTF engaged consistently across each six-week topic, demonstrating the benefits of learning and community that lunches offered. While less intensive than FLCs, this approach to professional development reached a greater number of NTTF.

### **Recognition Event**

At the end of the spring semester, UCAT hosted a breakfast banquet at the faculty club for participants in all of their FLCs. A slideshow of photos featuring each FLC with quotes from participants about what they had learned was played throughout the banquet, celebrating the accomplishments of participants. This recognition and opportunity to connect with other faculty who were also interested in teaching effectiveness helped NTTF create a network of colleagues.

### **Websites**

UCAT dedicated a section of their website to NTTF that outlined the resources available to them, including some of the center's grant programs and a link to recordings of previous microlearning sessions.

### **Grants**

UCAT also offered individual and departmental teaching development grants specifically for NTTF. Designating some funding specifically for NTTF helped to ensure that the award process was more equitable and allowed NTTF to be departmental change leader.

---

## **Learning Community**

While lecturers were able to participate in existing faculty learning communities at OSU, staff at UCAT designed an NTTF-specific FLC that included 8-10 participants from across disciplines. The purpose of these FLCs was to help NTTF improve instructional practice through providing knowledge and support specific to their teaching-focused role in a positive and uplifting atmosphere. In their application, participants were asked to propose a project or deliverable that would impact teaching effectiveness. Projects ranged from the implementation of a new teaching strategy in the classroom to creating departmental change and were created through participation in the FLC so that new programs and practices could be implemented after completion of the FLC. Examples included creating a departmental workshop series based on best practices for teaching and learning, replicating the learning community model with teaching assistants, and designing something from scratch to utilize in the classroom that would enhance students' learning experiences.

Participants for the following year's FLC were announced at the end of the spring semester to give them visibility and also give them plenty of notice for scheduling and preparation. The FLC was then



held in the following fall and spring semesters. In the first meeting, participants shared their goals and identified topics and resources that would be helpful. Meetings occurred once per month in person for two hours. In the first hour of each meeting, the facilitator presented content and led discussions about the topic; the second hour was devoted to working on the project/deliverable while collaborating and discussing between group members, as well as getting help or resources as needed from the coordinator. Faculty received \$750 for participation, which was meant to be used in part for resources needed toward completing their project.

### **Tailoring for NTTF**

Some adjustments were made to the model used for other FLCs at OSU in order to better support NTTF. For instance, as NTTF are often less connected to campus, the FLC facilitator emailed participants monthly during the summer before the FLC began to share short articles and resources; the facilitator also worked at a local coffee shop on several Fridays over the summer and invited participants to drop in for conversation. These pre-FLC activities focused on building relationships to help NTTF feel supported. During meetings, the facilitator also provided space for participants to discuss how they managed their teaching responsibilities, focusing on ways they had negotiated their roles and built skills to be successful; these conversations helped participants learn about different strategies to advocate for their needs and practice self-care.

Because many NTTF have a heavy teaching load, the facilitator did not hold FLC meetings in the first few weeks of each semester and was more flexible in terms of missing a few meetings during the year. In addition, the facilitator sometimes provided condensed versions of UCAT workshops and invited representatives from offices, such as academic technology, to talk with participants. These modifications demonstrated recognition that NTTF would likely not be able to dedicate additional time to professional development during the FLC and that those who taught in the evenings may not have access to offices that operate solely during business hours.

Finally, staff in UCAT coordinated with administrators in finance so that NTTF would receive the \$750 in their first paycheck after being selected to participate. This truly supported their ability to purchase teaching-related resources, and also provided a mechanism for ensuring compensation for part-time faculty who may not have been teaching during both semesters of FLC participation.

### **Supporting STEM Faculty**

NTTF in STEM disciplines often teach multiple large lecture courses at OSU, creating specific challenges for implementing effective teaching practices. The challenges that STEM faculty tended to face in the classroom were related to engaging students actively, as well as effectiveness and efficiency in giving feedback. As such, STEM faculty who participated in FLCs were particularly interested in using technology more effectively in their courses, including facilitating online discussions as a means of creating community.

One particular challenge noted was that while OSU provides iPads and Apple Pencils to all undergraduates, the institution does not provide these tools to faculty. This practice adds to the material constraints that NTTF already faced as a result of lack of access to offices, printers, etc. Additionally, STEM faculty noted the time and financial costs involved in exploring the plethora of options available for implementing virtual labs. These constraints undermined what NTTF could do to support their large student populations, and so many of the FLC participants in STEM focused their projects on the use of digital tools.

## Evaluation

Participants engaged in a mid-year check-in with the FLC facilitator to discuss how their individual projects were developing. In addition, faculty completed a written reflection on the effectiveness of their project about three months after the FLC concluded, which gave them time to implement the changes that were of focus in their FLC project.

Immediately following the FLC, participants also completed a survey that was aligned with the FLC goals established by UCAT. Based on the goals of NTTF-specific programming, the survey included several open-ended questions related to how the FLC may have contributed to participants' sense of belonging and institutional knowledge.

---

## Lessons Learned

While professional development initiatives that are open to faculty across career tracks may be accessible to NTTF in terms of policy, there are a number of considerations that are important for making them accessible in practice as well as for creating an inclusive environment. Most importantly, institutional culture plays an important role, and so if a culture of inclusion and respect doesn't exist, mixing faculty across tracks can be problematic. Here we offer some lessons learned about supporting NTTF in mixed-track professional development experiences.

- NTTF often have multiple identities that are marginalized in higher education, and so framing questions of access and inclusion in program design through intersectionality can be very useful.
- LNTTF are less likely to participate and engage in mixed-track professional development where they feel like their experiences and work may be judged by other faculty, including topics such as teaching portfolio development.
- Facilitators should be knowledgeable about differences in compensation and evaluation, work responsibilities, and the institutional resources available to faculty in different career tracks and should build the consciousness of tenure-track/tenured participants to also be respectful of these differences.




---

## Best Practices for Inclusivity of NTTF

The suite of professional development and resources offered by the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching demonstrates several best practices related to the inclusivity of NTTF, especially in terms of being welcoming of lecturers. Ultimately, the combination of NTTF-specific FLCs and other professional development initiatives helped NTTF cultivate a sense of community.

- ✓ Microlearning through lecturer lunches gave faculty an opportunity for learning as well as for conversation and social connection on campus.
- ✓ The six-week length and lack of commitment required for lunches allowed UCAT to reach a larger number of NTTF than in FLCs.
- ✓ The annual banquet offered public recognition for NTTF, giving them a sense of pride and belonging on campus.

There are several best practices specific to the NTTF-Specific Faculty Learning Community:

- ✓ The associate faculty coordinator worked with a finance administrator to make compensation for participation fully

available as soon as possible, rather than waiting until after completion of the FLC, which allowed NTTF to purchase resources for the FLC.

- ✓ The coordinator provided flexibility through scheduling, especially by not meeting during the first week or two of the semesters, giving NTTF time to focus on the work that occurs at the beginning of a semester.
- ✓ The coordinator used a small budget for refreshments during meetings and scheduled meetings in nice conference rooms, emphasizing the idea of valuing NTTF with food and space.
- ✓ The use of check-ins, which began in the summer before the FLC officially started and continued through the end of the following summer helped the coordinator to build relationships so that they really understood the needs of NTTF and could help them feel supported.

---

## Professional Development Initiative Design Summary

In this section, we highlight the design of the NTTF-Specific Faculty Learning Community, as it effectively supports the professional development of part-time, non-tenure-track faculty through sustained opportunities for learning and community related to teaching effectiveness.

**PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES:** To help NTTF improve instructional effectiveness in a positive and safe environment. FLC objectives met the needs of NTTF particularly by helping them develop efficiency, stability, and sustainability. Through the FLC, NTTF were also able to implement their project on what they have learned in real life through a project/deliverable on a topic of their choice.

**PARTICIPANTS:** 8-10 NTTF across disciplines selected through an application process.

**DELIVERY MODE:** In-person with the coordinator also using email check-ins and coffee shop drop-ins to help build a sense of community.

**STRUCTURE AND LENGTH:** Met once a month for two hours at a time across semesters, with breaks during the first week or two of the semester so that faculty could focus on teaching.

**CONTENT:** A mixture of participant-determined and facilitator-determined topics and resources (tech tools, microaggressions, providing feedback, etc.) during the first hour of meetings; during the second hour, faculty shared progress on projects, discussed options, and worked on projects/deliverables.

**FACILITATION:** Facilitated by the coordinator for associate faculty in UCAT.

**DELIVERABLES:** Implementation of new teaching strategy or creation of resources to support effective instruction; the project was expected to be implemented in the second semester of the FLC or during the following summer. Projects included developing a workshop series for colleagues in a specific discipline, creating a learning community for graduate assistants, and implementing virtual labs.

**ASSESSMENT:** Formative assessment: Mid-year check-in with facilitator including a write-up of the project. Summative assessment: Evaluation of FLC conducted through survey. There was also a post-FLC check-in about three months after the FLC had ended where faculty reflected on the success of their newly implemented practice or program.

**COMPENSATION AND RECOGNITION:** \$750 given in lump sum with the first paycheck after acceptance into the program, so that participants could use funds to purchase resources for their FLC project. Faculty were recognized at a “Celebration of Teaching” breakfast banquet held at the faculty club for participants in all of UCAT’s FLCs.

---

*This project is funded from the Improving Undergraduate STEM Education program within the Department of Undergraduate Education of the National Science Foundation, under Grant No. NSF DUE-1914784.*

---

*Visit The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success 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](https://pullias.usc.edu/delphi).*

