



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

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Professional Development for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty at University of North Carolina, Charlotte

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- ✓ Learning Community
- ✓ Certificate Programs

- ✓ Symposiums and Institutes
- ✓ Workshops

UNC Charlotte is North Carolina's urban research university. It leverages its location in the state's largest city to offer internationally competitive programs of research and creative activity, exemplary undergraduate, graduate and professional programs, and a focused set of community engagement initiatives. It has 24,175 undergraduate students and 1,100 full-time and part-time faculty, 69% are full-time instructors (both tenure track and non-tenure-track) and 31% are part-time faculty members. Founded in 1946, it is the largest institution of higher education in the Charlotte region and the second largest of 17 constituent members of the University of North Carolina.

Professional development is offered through the Center for Teaching and Learning. The Center has 23 staff members whose work is supported by an advisory committee with members from across campus. Since its inception in 1998, the Center for Teaching and Learning has offered a wealth of professional development opportunities for all instructors at UNC Charlotte. Those opportunities are wide-ranging in topic, scope, and impact. The work ranges from supporting individual faculty with just-in-time solutions to supporting complex programs at the institutional level. Up until 2014, the center's focus was primarily on full-time faculty, although all options are available to all faculty members.

The Center for Teaching and Learning enhances the University's mission of teaching and learning excellence, provides enterprise level instructional technologies, and champions the advancement of scholarly teaching. Major priorities include:

- ◇ Providing professional development opportunities to ensure constructive and active learning environments.
- ◇ Leveraging the experience and wisdom of faculty leaders to promote teaching excellence.
- ◇ Encouraging innovative research and scholarly publication on teaching and learning.
- ◇ Identifying, developing, and sustaining enterprise level instructional technology systems.
- ◇ Collaborating with campus constituents to assess programs, tools, and services that support their teaching and learning needs.
- ◇ Contributing to the development of policies, initiatives, and campus-wide culture that supports excellence in teaching.

Professional Development Initiatives

In this section we describe several initiatives the center offers to support the professional development of faculty, including workshops, symposiums and institutes, a certification, and website resources. We also detail their approaches to assessment. In the following section, we detail the adjunct-specific learning community that was created in 2014 based on the results of a needs assessment, including the modifications made over time based on lessons learned to better support the professional development of adjuncts.

Workshops

Like many campuses, they went from primarily offering in-person workshops each semester to focusing on providing online, asynchronous modules that can be accessed at any time. Creating asynchronous modules allows them to reach faculty of different types and increase access as much as possible. They still offer some synchronous workshops so that individuals can engage and ask questions. However, the self-paced virtual workshops have become much more prevalent (and all workshops moved online last year due to the pandemic).

Symposiums and Institutes

Each year they host an in-person event with a plenary speaker focused on a key issue of teaching and learning called the Spring Expo. In addition to the honoree speaker, they present awards, celebrations, and acknowledgments and provide opportunities for faculty members to network. They also have a special two-day boot camp on supporting online learning that they offer multiple times a year.

Large Course Redesign Services

The center offers extensive support for large course redesign, including partnering interested faculty with instructional designers who can help them think through all of the aspects of their course. Through these services, faculty usually spend 3-4 semesters, first designing changes, then implementing changes and gathering feedback, and then revising and scaling their redesign.

Certifications

The center offers a teaching certificate in the essentials of teaching and learning that faculty can earn by taking a series of five workshops and completing a peer observation of teaching. The program is designed to be self-paced.

Through a partnership with Quality Matters (QM), faculty members can also take courses and work with an instructional designer one-to-one to become certified in terms of their online teaching effectiveness. Quality Matters is an external organization that has developed a nationally recognized faculty-centered peer review process that is designed to certify the quality of online and blended courses. Faculty members who complete the certification process can apply to be a fellow in subsequent years to lead the QM initiatives. Each year faculty who earn a certification are recognized that an annual event.

Website and Other Resources

The Center for Teaching and Learning has created several guides on key topics including active learning, online learning, access and accessibility, and curriculum models, with some topics including videos. The website also includes an adjunct-specific page offering one-stop information and support for adjunct faculty.

They also have a specific initiative on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and provide grants to faculty members doing work in this area. The website provides a list of SoTL journals and offers advice for how faculty can design and conduct SoTL research.

Assessments

Assessment is extremely important to the work of the center and all of their professional development initiatives undergo extensive evaluation. They evaluate the impact of their offerings annually and publish an annual report. In terms of the adjunct learning community specifically, there is an evaluation of the experiences of participants as well as of outcomes assessment that is done with each cohort. Assessment is a primary task of the center to ensure offerings are customized and that professional development is responsive to current needs as well as high quality offerings.

The center also engages in needs assessment and conducted an extensive needs assessment in 2014 to examine the experiences and professional development needs of adjuncts. The results of this needs assessment led to a variety of changes focused on adjuncts including a new onboarding process and a detailed adjunct website that provides a number of resources. They also identified that adjuncts felt extremely isolated and lacked community which led to the creation of the adjunct-specific faculty learning community.

Learning Communities

Through the Active Learning Academy, the center offers several cohorts of yearlong faculty learning communities (FLCs) that are open to instructors across ranks, including adjuncts and a limited number of graduate students. As a result of participating in these learning communities, faculty have created grant-funded projects, published peer reviewed articles and an edited book, and presented at a wide range of conferences.

While adjuncts are invited to participate in the Active Learning Academy, in 2014 they began offering a separate faculty learning community specifically for adjuncts. Each semester, 10-15 adjuncts participate and receive a \$500 stipend. In addition, as adjuncts are the primary group seeking out the essentials of teaching and learning certification, participation in the adjunct learning community can contribute to earning the certification.

The purpose for the adjunct-specific learning community focuses both on instructional effectiveness and on fostering relationships and community building based on the importance among adjuncts of wanting a sense of community. Therefore, they spend the first hour on facilitated discussion. In the second hour, participants engage in a pedagogical workshop, with topics chosen by each cohort. In their evaluations, adjuncts report the first hour to be the most important part of the program, as the information learned in the second hour could be garnered from the existing workshops, but the open space to engage with other adjuncts is a particularly valuable opportunity.

Their research and assessment of the learning community with each cohort has resulted in several changes over time to improve access and learning among adjuncts. We detail these lessons learned and the revised adjunct learning community practices next.

Learning Community Design Summary

In this section we provide a quick summary of the design of the adjunct faculty learning community offered by the UNC, as the changes made over time provide effective support for adjuncts.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES: To support adjuncts by giving them the opportunity to develop relationships, support one another in their teaching, and learn best practices for student learning in a community of practice.

PARTICIPANTS: These are adjunct specific learning communities. There are typically two cohorts of 10-12 members each year that are able to participate in the learning communities. Faculty are drawn from across different disciplines purposefully to learn from each other.

DELIVERY MODE: In person primarily but on-line options were offered after feedback from part-time faculty suggested they would like more flexible options. They identified through their needs assessment that adjunct faculty desired a sense of community and belonging and therefore decided to have their learning communities be in person, for the most part. During the pandemic, they shifted to synchronous virtual meetings and assessment shows they have been successful building community virtually.

STRUCTURE AND LENGTH: The learning community is one semester long to be accessible to adjuncts. Each meeting is set up with the first hour being facilitate discussion and relationship building among the adjuncts about how things are doing in their teaching and that the second hour is more of a workshop about pedagogical improvement and more of a learning focus.

CONTENT: Content is often from their workshop series but also derived from the interests of the adjunct faculty themselves. Community-building topics are drawn from challenges facing adjuncts and best practices in teaching and learning.

FACILITATION: A professional from there Center for Teaching and Learning facilitates the session.

DELIVERABLES: Faculty complete a culminating project/presentation related to the topic of the FLC.

ASSESSMENT: The learning communities emerged from a needs assessment that was conducted and they regularly conduct needs assessments. They have conducted rigorous assessment of their learning communities and published articles about their outcomes.

COMPENSATION AND RECOGNITION: Faculty are compensated (\$500) for their involvement in the learning communities.

Lessons Learned

- ✓ They originally used a year-long option with the second semester happening in a virtual space but moved to a shorter one-semester option based on feedback.
- ✓ While adjuncts desired the community that comes from face-to-face meetings, they have started to offer online options based on feedback of wanting more flexible approaches to being engaged.
- ✓ The learning community can count toward a certification. This has made the learning community more valuable to adjuncts as they feel they have something tangible that they leave with.

- ✓ They received feedback from adjuncts that the recruiting timeline was too early, and they didn't know about their schedules. After they receive this feedback, they created a new recruitment process that has a consolidated time frame has helped to ensure that adjuncts can commit to the learning. For instance, center staff now advertise and recruit in August for September. This one-week recruitment period is particularly challenging but they have made it work.
- ✓ Another lesson learned relates to scaling efforts given existing resources. There is always greater demand among adjuncts than they have the capacity to support in the learning community, and each year they have a long wait list. Some adjuncts have also expressed wanting opportunities that may not require as much time. As a result, they started a book club as a second option where a group meets to discuss the same content that is covered in the learning community. The discussion group is more informal and there is no final project. One of the adjuncts agrees to facilitate it and the center buys them book for them, but participants are not paid. While this is not ideal, adjuncts have reported that they appreciate the flexibility to have another easily accessible option that requires less commitment.

Additional Resources

CTL History. <https://teaching.uncc.edu/about-ctl/ctl-history> [includes annual evaluation impact reports].

Adjunct website: <https://adjunct.uncc.edu/> [offers policies, classroom guidance, and campus resources]

Buch, K., & McCullough, H. (2016). Addressing the needs of adjunct faculty with a cohort-based faculty learning community. *Learning Communities Journal*, 8(1), 35-50. [describes the needs assessment and first year of the learning community including results of evaluation]

Buch, K., McCullough, H., & Tamberelli, L. (2017). Understanding and responding to the unique needs and challenges facing adjunct faculty: A longitudinal study. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 16(10), 27-40. [describes how needs assessment guided development of several adjunct-specific initiatives that led to increased perceptions of support]

McCullough, H., & Buch, K. (2020). Using Certificates to Engage Faculty in Professional Development. *Current Issues in Education*, 21(2). [about creating certificate programs]

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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.



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