



Six Strategies to Support Non-Tenure-Track Faculty in Professional Development

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In recent years, critics have pointed out the poor working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF), but less attention has been paid to the lack of investment in them as teachers and how that shapes the teaching and learning environment. Engaging NTTF in professional development is a critical dimension of helping them develop teaching effectiveness and campus connectedness. Thus, it is important to understand the expanding suite of professional development options that offer NTTF sustained engagement and how administrative policies and practices shape the successful engagement of the new faculty majority in such initiatives.

Given that there has been extremely limited research on this topic, we studied 14 campuses that have altered their professional development to specifically meet the needs of NTTF, conducting interviews and analyzing documents related to the policies and programs that supported the engagement of NTTF in programs. As we describe in our new report, *Designing Accessible and Inclusive Professional Development for NTTF* (Culver & Kezar, 2021), these campuses offered a wide variety of professional development opportunities for NTTF. Creating a suite of professional development options is often necessary to support NTTF in different career stages and who have varying needs, interests, and time constraints.

Most campuses offered several less-intensive options, including new faculty orientation, workshops, institutes and symposiums, and one-to-one consultations. Leaders also developed newsletters or resource websites specifically for NTTF and expanded the availability of teaching awards and other forms of recognition for professional success. We found four general models of more intensive professional development: modified faculty learning communities, curricular redesign and departmental action teams, certification programs, and discussion groups. The purpose, structure, and design of these initiatives varied across campuses according to the model and the institutional context. Yet, across campuses, we found that NTTF benefitted from these more intensive models in terms of instructional improvement, sense of belonging, institutional integration and knowledge of resources, professional networks, career development, advocacy opportunities, and leadership opportunities.

Best practices

One key finding from our study is that organizational considerations surrounding the professional development of NTTF create an important foundation for initiatives' success. Institutional policies, structures, and practices present opportunities and constraints related to the role of professional development, the value placed on it, and the opportunities for NTTF to participate in it. For instance, departments and colleges often employ different hiring practices, pay scales, and role expectations for NTTF. The uneven recognition and rewards that faculty receive for participating in professional development shapes their motivation to engage in it.

In addition, sustained professional development models are often designed implicitly for full-time faculty, including a yearlong timeframe that excludes NTTF with semester contracts. Thus, campuses also need to engage in intentional work to design and implement opportunities in ways that center the realities of NTTF careers.

To facilitate this work, we highlight several best practices that emerged from our campus case studies and cross-campus report. These practices enable NTTF to participate as well as setting the tone and environment for the right supports to be in place to make professional development efforts successful.

Align the professional development of NTTF with institutional mission and culture

To more broadly engage NTTF in professional learning, campuses should include the development of all faculty in their institutional mission, vision, and values. Leaders at Valencia College (VC) and Sinclair College (SC) described a culture and set of values that reflect a growth mindset for faculty,

including expectations that all people should be constantly developing their knowledge. Aligning the mission creates a sense of priority, motivation, and willingness to engage NTTF who otherwise tend to be overlooked. Another way that mission and culture can support involving NTTF is by adopting a student success initiative that identifies the significance of faculty for student success and articulates the need for support of all faculty members regardless of contract type. We found these student success initiatives at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB); CSU San Francisco; Texas Tech University; Kennesaw State University (KSU); and VC.

Integrate professional development with faculty evaluation and rewards

Institutional leadership should make it a priority to connect incentive systems with professional development. SC and VC both tied NTTF career advancement and higher pay to participation in professional development. At Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Worldwide campus, department chairs acknowledge faculty who participate in professional development and link it to their annual evaluation and merit increases. Another example is at KSU, where those leading efforts have tied professional development to annual evaluations, program review, and revised student evaluations, which are now geared toward the instructional practices that they are promoting in professional development.

Position initiatives within a framework of ongoing support for instructional effectiveness and career advancement

These considerations include thinking about how to extend support beyond the formal timing of an initiative, offer development for NTTF across a spectrum of instructional and career expertise, and integrate professional development with other institutional processes related to teaching. Such considerations shape how designers think about the initiative, how facilitators lead, and how participants view the work of effective teaching. For instance, at Ohio State University (OSU), the facilitator of the NTTF-specific faculty learning community (FLC) emailed participants a few times during the summer to start building relationships before the FLC began and give participants helpful resources for the first week of classes. In addition to meetings, the facilitator scheduled individual midsemester check-ins during the fall and again in the spring after the FLC had ended. These proactive check-ins that extended beyond the FLC helped faculty feel supported in their work.

Create planning groups to support the development of effective initiatives

Another facilitating mechanism that helps in designing professional development in systematic ways is having planning groups that assemble the right individuals and groups across campus who are tapped for their expertise. Among the most beneficial structures that we identified were advisory boards or councils that brought together individuals from academic affairs, unions, and the office of diversity, equity, and inclusion to design professional development. CSUSB and SC both had such advisory groups. These advisory groups help to not only create better initiatives but also connect professional development to other campus operations. For example, advisory groups can make sure that teaching awards are open to NTTF, that union contracts include professional development, that new faculty orientation describes professional development, and that technology professionals communicate the availability of technology support to adjuncts. Additionally, many campuses have created a position within their center for teaching and learning in which an NTTF helps design

professional development and services as part of a planning group. We saw this position at Boise State University, OSU, and KSU.

Collaborate with others on campus who focus on faculty work

Campuses that had more systemic designs worked with their governance systems, collective bargaining units, and leadership to both get feedback to inform the design and use these groups to advocate for NTTF to pursue and make normative professional development. In terms of governance, interviewees at KSU talked about the development of the adjunct council as a systemic way to obtain ongoing needs assessment from adjunct faculty, communicate needs, and create a feedback loop from the institution. Some members of the adjunct council also served on other campus committees, working to ensure that adjuncts' voices were being included in many types of decision-making across campus. At the University of Michigan, administrators worked with the union that bargained for NTTF so that the union would welcome rather than resist the professional development they created.

Address cultures that marginalize NTTF

Finally, institutional and disciplinary cultures that marginalize NTTF create enormous challenges. Some campuses reported that tenure-track faculty members and administrators did not value the work of NTTF; this made it challenging to engage NTTF in professional development. When NTTF are stressed because they feel a lack of respect, they are much less likely to engage and are unlikely to feel safe participating in professional development models where their peer group includes tenure-track faculty members. Leaders on several campuses noted that it's important to focus on improving the culture so that NTTF feel safe and have confidence that participating in professional development is worthwhile.

Final takeaways

In the end, we learned that a few key perspectives can help drive a strong process for establishing quality professional development for NTTF. First, perhaps the most important takeaway was that without a systems perspective that addresses the needs of NTTF, including the ways that the institution can minimize or enable their participation, planners will be limited in their success.

Second, having compassion and empathy for NTTF is essential for designing professional development to meet their needs. Without this empathy, planners will not be able to create equitable experiences, empower NTTF, understand their vulnerabilities, and advocate for their interests. We recommend that individuals to read our companion report, *Design for Equity in Higher Education* (Culver et al., 2021).

Third, working across campus to create a culture where growth and development are expected is critical to obtaining the resources, priority setting, and structures to support professional development that is inclusive of NTTF. When professional development is an expectation rather than a perk, it will also be valued and recognized much more so than it is otherwise.

References

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