**Enhancing Academic Department Growth through Adjunct Faculty Inclusion**

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### Not all universities across the nation provide well-conceived faculty-to-faculty mentoring programs. Many adjunct faculty are not provided with office space to work or meet with students. Some rely on their own cell phones rather than having in-office telephones while others are denied office support or even access to department meetings or other services that, in the end, put a drain on their ability to do their work. In contrast, other universities and colleges do provide adjunct faculty with good working environments that allow them to concentrate on teaching and avoid marginalizing them so they feel included in their departments.

### Inclusion is an important concept that acknowledges that there is value that every adjunct faculty member brings to a department. More specifically, departments must find ways to indicate that adjunct faculty are valued for the insights, energy, innovation and background they bring to departments. Effective inclusion signals that strong connection exists between full-time and part-time faculty and that well-developed faculty-to-faculty mentoring programs have the potential to affect morale and department growth for all. This article explores many concepts being developed in a successful faculty-to-faculty program that is entering its third year.

### Adjunct Faculty Inclusion

### Adjunct faculty are professionals in their own right but could “enjoy” further department inclusion that acknowledges the experience they bring to academic departments. With department recognition of faculty who are publishing, attending conferences, and serving on committees, part-time faculty can often feel neglected, even left alone to do their work, while others are taking on more attractive work to help build their profession. It’s essential that adjunct mentoring programs boost and encourage high morale by recognizing the positive contributions that adjunct faculty provide to increase department vitality and growth. It can’t be denied that adjunct faculty have an elevated sense of teamwork and are enthusiastic contributors when asked to help out, often modeling creative mentoring for their full-time colleagues. If asked how an adjunct might be compensated, this might occur through a funded program while working with a full-time faculty colleague in collaborative research.

### The bottom line is that mentoring programs allow departments to reinterpret the meaning of mentoring. And, every faculty member should be part of a mentoring program. More important is that mentoring falls into many environments that go beyond the teaching practice—government agencies, business and health practices to name a few. In fact, much of the open literature for mentoring resides in the health profession because of the unique mentoring models and concepts that are used for developing the careers of students, practitioners, and other health science professionals. The aim in asking all levels of faculty to experience working together in programs and even inviting adjunct faculty to take on some unlikely roles can set the stage for true “inclusion” by establishing a sense of belonging in the department. In short, developing a culture of collegiality often legitimizes the importance that justifies why an adjunct faculty member was hired to impact student learning and to give credence to the university setting.

### Thus, adjunct faculty ought to be encouraged to teach in a once-in-a-semester setting where first, the adjunct and another educator are able to share a classroom experience so both teaching and career background are seen as useful, valuable, instructive, even reciprocal. And second, that adjunct faculty have an opportunity to develop their careers by participating in a number of environments to encourage career development so every educator in a department can contribute to its health and growth. Research indicates that professional health programs serve as mentoring models that involve placing senior and faculty in a variety of combined learning/teaching situations.

**Developing opportunities for adjunct faculty professional growth**

It is time to give teaching adjuncts an opportunity to derive benefits from the influence they exert to help with department development because of their broad professional experience and specialized knowledge. Having listened and spoken with adjunct faculty, especially those employed for three or more years, departments might consider rewarding them with an opportunity to attend a conference at least once a year in recognition for the value they provide. In terms of inclusion, attending a conference easily provides attendees the opportunity to share new insights, to develop professional connections with faculty colleagues and to socialize—all positive aspects that can be easily dismissed or forgotten by faculty who enjoy attending conferences. Attending conferences also falls into several valuable categories: career- and self-development, collegial experiences, and networking opportunities. The experience can, in turn, promote employee loyalty and university exposure that easily motivates other future conference goals such as delivering a conference paper, writing a collaborative paper, contributing to a round table session, even chairing a session. In a down-to-earth sense, giving adjuncts an opportunity to attend conferences adds to department goodwill and the belief that the adjunct is doing a good job at work. In other words, it is a logical way to give a “pat on the back” and help energize careers.

**Expertise sharing in the classroom**

Inclusion can be promoted in a number of other ways like inviting an adjunct faculty member to deliver a short lecture in another colleague’s class and, in turn, asking the colleague to reciprocate at another time. This inter-professional collaboration would allow both instructor and adjunct to develop a dialog highlighting two perspectives in the classroom—a valuable educational tool for both teaching instructors and students receiving it. Informal mentoring (as opposed to formal mentoring) is thus characterized as an environment where both might profit from another’s insights, background credibility or even result in both educators coming to new realizations. Thus, adjuncts might share their expertise during faculty meetings where their knowledge might even advance department recognition through knowledge enhancing workshops for departments or other university programs. If implemented, the potential for establishing department loyalty cannot be underestimated and benefits can be far reaching.

**Technology and e-mentoring**

Adjunct faculty can utilize technology to informally mentor colleagues by showcasing their best teaching practices. Many utilize TED Talks to energize class sessions in ways that depart from traditional teaching methods and to enhance, even generate, classroom discussion. On the other hand, even seasoned educators report using TED Talk sessions to energize their own teaching by self-mentoring. A resourceful adjunct instructor can easily take advantage of technology to boost visibility in the department by creating resources they make available to their colleagues. An adjunct colleague might suggest that faculty meetings take a few minutes to discuss what part-time colleagues are doing...and then spearhead the idea. An activity like this has the potential to enhance an adjunct’s visibility who is easily distanced from full-time faculty members during faculty meetings. Why not ask adjunct faculty to emphasize their best teaching skills by capturing their class sessions and making videos available to faculty through a department website or department video library? At the very least, it would be easy to post a list of available videos on a department bulletin board. An adjunct might even enlist the help of a colleague to push an idea forward.

Many full-time faculty members forget that socialization and bringing adjunct faculty “into the fold” are part of their responsibility in facilitating inclusion and developing more reciprocal mentoring relationships. Using a 10–15 minute slot during a faculty meeting would provide credence to all adjunct members who need recognition in their departments. This is an ideal situation where an adjunct member could easily participate in an informal mentoring process with other department faculty. With technology reaching into realms that depart from the usual presentation resources, departments might have an adjunct faculty member in their midst who would gladly demonstrate that there’s more to presentations than using PowerPoint slides in the classroom.

**Final Thoughts**

The purpose of this article has been to realistically examine the many complexities of faculty-to-faculty mentoring relationships, specifically as they apply to adjunct faculty in higher education. In addition, in identifying issues that adjunct faculty face, there has been an attempt to provide suggestions as to how departments might address the issues that exist when all departmental faculty are not provided an environment for approaching inclusion for part-time, adjunct faculty. The issue of inclusion is complicated by the unpredictable ways that people relate to each other. No one remedy exists to circumvent the fact that “people are people.” In suggesting ways to combat adjunct faculty exclusion, universities have varying policies and funding concerns that may preclude accomplishing suggestions made in this paper. And finally, mentoring continues to be a growing concern in a field that is challenged by many theories and a lack of standardized vocabulary and definitions. And although suggestions for perfecting mentoring do exist, the fact is that a scientific system for analyzing the many concepts involved and results has yet to be established.