

Chapter 55

Holistic Evaluation Strategies to Empower Remote Adjunct Faculty

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ABSTRACT

To ensure a quality educational experience for students, it is important to establish effective evaluation strategies to support remote adjunct faculty. Adapting a comprehensive process of training, mentoring, evaluating, and providing ongoing support strategies and professional development opportunities builds a foundation for faculty success. Implementing scalable strategies for holistic evaluation offers opportunities to further support adjunct faculty teaching online. This chapter will share effective evaluation practices that provide purposeful strategies to empower adjunct faculty to strengthen skills and ultimately support student success as well as learning in the classroom.

CONTEXT

When reflecting on over 12 years of experience evaluating remote adjunct faculty, a common challenge for them is feeling isolated and disconnected from their institution. This can contribute to misunderstanding online facilitation expectations, especially when remote adjunct faculty are teaching at multiple institutions and balancing different guidelines and other obligations while teaching from a distance. For example, an adjunct faculty member may be teaching remotely for several different institutions while working full time in a career. As this an area that continues to grow, it is vital to instill the best techniques to support, develop, and effectively evaluate the adjunct faculty member in this example and others with similar stories.

The growth of online offerings in higher education has led to the rapid rise of and reliance on adjunct faculty teaching remotely (Benton & Li, 2015; Schieffer, 2016). With more adjunct faculty teaching online, administrators are faced with developing working strategies to ensure educational excellence is maintained in the classroom. The emerging evolution of adjunct faculty requires institutions to close

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the gap in understanding online teaching needs. Adjunct faculty need sufficient support, preparation, and resources when teaching online (Kemery & Serembus, 2019). To that end, researchers highlight how this is an area that has received little attention (Luna, 2018; Ridge & Ritt, 2017) despite continual changes in higher education.

Ensuring that adjunct faculty are equipped with the necessary skills to teach online is vital to the classroom experience. The challenge is providing proactive support, promoting holistic development, and establishing effective evaluation for adjuncts. This chapter discusses how holistic development promotes continual growth by sharing strategies, teaching techniques, and resources while also acknowledging the value of specific strengths that support a quality educational experience. The holistic development approach also inspires faculty to continue learning, innovating, and adapting to student needs. Prior to evaluating remote faculty teaching online, it is essential to provide a framework for success that encompasses training, mentoring, community, and opportunities to strengthen teaching skills.

TRAINING TO BRIDGE THE GAP

Considering that the teaching skills of adjunct faculty influence students, it is increasingly important to successfully support specific training needs and ongoing development for adjuncts (Lewis & Wang, 2015; Luna, 2018). A fundamental step to supporting adjunct faculty is creating comprehensive training for them. The critical components of this type of training program consist of orienting faculty to the institutional culture, mission, and vision along with navigating aspects of the learning management system, online teaching guidelines, and relevant resources (Ridge & Ritt, 2017). This training approach allows adjunct faculty to obtain a solid foundation for teaching online.

Researchers have revealed a variety of training programs to support remote adjunct faculty. A few examples consist of synchronous and on-demand trainings or a combined approach with an online, asynchronous facilitator-led class with self-directed activities. Considering the needs of communication, professional development, and online training, a dynamic program promotes proactive support in the form of structured training, mentoring, and ongoing activities (Luna, 2018). The elements embedded throughout the program provide a means of holistic support wherein faculty feedback, accountability, and community connections permeate the online teaching experience. One recommendation is a virtual self-directed environment available 24/7 to support remote adjunct faculty with information about orientation, training, courses, teaching tips, facilitation guidance, and opportunities for professional development (Luna, 2018).

With complex changes taking place in higher education, institutions are also exploring other options to meet training needs. For instance, to prepare adjunct faculty to teach online, a self-paced orientation course was developed. Although the training was self-paced, it was also facilitated and included participation requirements (Lewis & Wang, 2015). This critical component served the dual purpose of allowing the adjunct faculty to understand the student perspective and the relevant role of online discussions. The training comprehensively covered the essential elements an adjunct would need to know, and the modules focused on faculty responsibilities, institutional policies, student demographics, assessing student learning, facilitation best practices, and teaching processes to support success (Lewis & Wang, 2015).

Another common training theme is considering the distinct needs of remote adjunct faculty in terms of instructional information and engagement experiences. For instance, during development for a faculty onboarding and learning community training program, the training program provided preparation,

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