

Building Community and Teaching Excellence among Adjunct Faculty

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Session Description:

Last year the Mathematics Department at Ferris State University (MI) created an in-house professional development program to enable long-term adjunct faculty to obtain graduate credit in mathematics to satisfy recent HLC guidelines regarding faculty credentialing. Although nearly every adjunct who teaches for the Mathematics Department has a master's degree, seven of the 13 adjuncts have fewer than 18 hours of graduate credit in the discipline. This left the Department with a choice — either replace these faculty or require them to earn the necessary credentials. Given their effectiveness as instructors and their institutional commitment, the Department chose the latter. However, requiring graduate courses in mathematics did not seem to align well with course needs (the adjuncts teach lower division and developmental courses), faculty interests (principally student learning and pedagogy), and University goals (an institutional emphasis on retention and student success). As a result, the Department created six graduate courses with a focus on teaching and learning. The courses address teaching and pedagogical issues that relate closely to the courses the adjuncts teach, and they provide an opportunity for the adjuncts to improve their practice in a way that supports retention and student success.

In that context, the program has three principal objectives:

- Increase student engagement.
- Develop a variety of pedagogical approaches.
- Incorporate research-based perspectives into teaching practice.

Each of the six courses includes activities that align with the principal objectives:

- Written reflection on theoretical and practical readings related to course topics;
- Participation in electronic group discussion board;
- Development of activities for classroom implementation;
- Peer-to-peer and instructor-to-peer observation and review;
- Peer reports on personal research assignments.

Although the program is only required for the seven adjuncts who need additional credentialing, three additional members of the adjunct group have been participating. The program has yielded a number of benefits to the Department: dramatic increases in classroom student engagement, a deeper sense of community among the adjunct group, and a renewed commitment to teaching excellence.

In this session, we will outline the program framework, describe how we have dealt with logistical issues, share stories of community development and instructional growth, and explain how such a program is potentially scalable to other disciplines. We will also discuss how this program could be expanded to promote professional development for dual and concurrent instructors as part of a strategy to support relationships with local area schools that could lead to opportunities for student recruitment.