The Design Process

Designing Professional Development for Advocacy and Change Supporting VITAL Faculty at University of Georgia

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✔ **Design team reflected partnership between CTL staff, the Office of Faculty Affairs, and VITAL faculty, with VITAL faculty driving the leadership and coordination of the FLC.**

✔ **Design team's cross-functional nature offers financial, logistical, and strategic support, aiding FLC sustainability and impact.**

✔ **The FLC serves to raise awareness of VITAL faculty issues and advocate for change.**

✔ **The FLC also offers VITAL participants a broader understanding of the institution.**

Background

The University of Georgia (UGA) is the flagship public research university for the state of Georgia. Located in Athens, UGA enrolls about 40,000 students across 18 colleges. UGA awards baccalaureate, master's, doctoral, and professional degrees. About 43% of full-time faculty at UGA are in VITAL[1] faculty roles, with a majority of VITAL faculty in some academic units. There are nine different career roles for UGA non-tenure track faculty, which are referred in our case study as VITAL faculty, including instructors, lecturers, academic professionals, administrative, librarians, research scientists, clinical faculty, and public service faculty. In addition to institutional guidelines, there are a number of statewide policies and guidelines related to VITAL faculty that are managed by the Georgia Board of Regents, including related to appointment type categories, parameters for appointment periods, salary, promotion, and advancement.

The Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA), housed within the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, coordinates faculty hiring, promotion, and related procedures. The office also offers career development programs related to mentoring, leadership, and promotion and tenure.

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[1] We use the term VITAL faculty — an asset-based term— to refer to contingent or non-tenure track faculty (including visiting faculty, instructors, adjuncts, lecturers, research faculty, and clinical faculty) as a way to affirm their vital role within institutions.

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), housed within the Office of the Vice President for Instruction, provides educational development and classroom support to faculty of all ranks and career tracks (including VITAL faculty). Educational development efforts promote evidence-based teaching and learning practices, sustain a university culture that values and rewards teaching, encourage critical reflection on teaching practices, and create learning environments in which all students and instructors can excel. The CTL offers cohort-based professional development programs, including Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs), structured communities of practice that meet about every three weeks during the academic year.

FLCs at UGA are designed to provide opportunities for connection and community-building, foster evidence-based pedagogies, and promote the scholarship of teaching and learning. As such, FLC participants are expected to complete a project such as developing new instructional materials or a conference presentation that is shared outside of the FLC. The CTL provides $500-750 in funding to each FLC, depending on number of communities funded annually.

History of the Non-Tenure Track Faculty Learning Community

The goal of the Non-Tenure Track Faculty Learning Community (NTT-FLC) is to develop data-based awareness and advocacy related to VITAL faculty in service of improving institutional policy and practice. This case study reports on the NTT-FLC from its formation through 2023. The NTT-FLC started in 2012 out of a recognized need to provide space for community building and professional growth among VITAL faculty, with sponsorship from the CTL. In its first few years, the NTT-FLC focused on providing lecturers with opportunities for networking, an understanding of expectations for promotion, and the development of examples of the dossier materials required for promotion.

Over the next few years, the NTT-FLC expanded its focus to faculty in other VITAL faculty career roles while continuing its focus on understanding promotion criteria and experiences, helping faculty balance multiple roles within their departments, and engaging students in the classroom. Participants gathered institutional data on the number of VITAL faculty in each of the different roles, documented the eligibility of VITAL faculty for different awards and opportunities, and conducted an institution-wide survey of VITAL faculty experiences, perceptions, and backgrounds. They began advocating for VITAL faculty representation in their shared governance body, the University Council (UC), as well as in other shared governance work. In addition, the NTT-FLC started hosting an annual networking event for all VITAL faculty on campus.

During this time, the OFA became a co-sponsor of the NTT-FLC, reflecting recognition of its importance and contributing to its sustainability as a campus entity. Other changes included the addition of working groups, which allowed participants to focus on specific areas of interest as part of the FLC. Working groups evaluated policy, analyzed data, provided outreach to VITAL faculty, and established a mentoring program. New NTT-FLC participants are encouraged to choose a working group to join. Most working groups are led by VITAL faculty who have previously participated in the NTT-FLC.

The NTT-FLC has conducted four climate surveys to provide awareness of the experiences and needs of VITAL faculty at UGA (2015, 2017, 2020, 2023), with high response rates in each iteration. These surveys help the NTT-FLC identify the needs that VITAL faculty identify as most important to address. The survey data also allows the NTT-FLC to gain a better understanding of who the VITAL faculty are and to use this information to advocate with different groups on campus. For example, they shared the results of the 2023 survey with the UC to raise awareness, challenge assumptions and biases, and demonstrate the similarity of experiences and issues that VITAL faculty face across units and roles. This work is a form of scholarship that provides a deeper understanding of the engagement of full-time faculty by career track, perceptions of campus climate, participation in professional development, evaluation of systematic barriers, and recommendations for action. The design team noted that conducting such in-depth needs assessments may be an unusual charge for an FLC; however, they believe this work has been impactful, increasing awareness across campus on the experiences of VITAL faculty at UGA.

Design Team Process and Perspectives

Situating the NTT-FLC within the CTL reflects the reality that for a significant number of VITAL faculty at UGA their primary responsibility is to educate undergraduates. Thus, the CTL can offer instructional support and expertise in conducting professional development to elevate the reach and success of the NTT-FLC. With the addition of the OFA as a partner in the ongoing design process, the NTT-FLC now has more stable resources for meetings and their annual networking event, as well as more recognition as an institutional lever for change.

The NTT-FLC, predating the design team, invited the CTL and the OFA to partner on this project. For the purposes of this case study, we will refer to this group as the NTT-FLC design team, though the leadership and coordination of the FLC continues to be participant driven. The NTT-FLC design team included the director of the CTL, two VITAL faculty who co-facilitate the NTT-FLC, and the senior director of faculty and leadership development for Faculty Affairs. As a design team, these members bring expertise around VITAL faculty needs, educational development, and faculty policies. Having a small design team allows them to schedule meetings more easily, and the opportunity to develop relationships over time allows them to focus on specific, common goals rather than try to meet the broader objectives of the NTT-FLC that would result from a larger team.

Thus, the design team reflects a strategic partnership that highlights the importance of who is at the table, provides financial and logistical support to the NTT-FLC, and elevates identified priorities to a university-wide audience. Design team members also noted a willingness to continue to provide appropriate resources to

aid the sustainability and longevity of the FLC. The design team emphasized that having a cross-functional group also promotes sustainability, as the program is not the passion project of just one person. Design team members expressed that it is crucial when planning an NTT-FLC that members have buy-in and feel as though their involvement in the FLC is worth their time. If the FLC is not valuable to members and partners, it creates difficulty in establishing and maintaining partnerships. The NTT-FLC success arises, in part, from ensuring these values are met.

Program Structure/Design

The NTT-FLC is conducted via Zoom and in person due to growth in the number of participants, their schedules, and the multiple campuses in Athens and across the state of Georgia. Working groups within the FLC are also typically facilitated via Zoom. Meetings of the NTT-FLC occur throughout the academic year, usually once a month, and ends in late spring with a networking event.

The NTT-FLC also created and maintains an independent website, housed on a university platform, that provides resources and information about and for VITAL faculty.

The design team noted the following objectives for 2022-2023 that emerged from their design process: supporting new VITAL faculty, building community, supporting their mentoring program, reviewing relevant UGA and the University System of Georgia (USG) policies, providing information and data on best practices for VITAL faculty support, and creating more strategic methods of sharing data with department heads and other campus leaders. They also aimed to utilize technology more frequently, particular with Microsoft Office tools, to enhance collaboration among NTT-FLC participants.

The NTT-FLC is open to anyone who wants to participate. Design team members noted that having a smaller group of consistently engaged participants in the early years created momentum for enacting meaningful change, acknowledging that as the number of participants has grown, engagement has become more uneven, which can make it more challenging to get work done.

Good Practices in the Design Process

- ✔ The partnership between the NTT-FLC, CTL, and the Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA) is noted as particularly useful by members of the design team. The OFA views the NTT-FLC as a conduit for feedback, while their co-sponsorship provides the NTT-FLC with official recognition, support, and facilitation of outreach or requests to campus units. The ongoing support from the CTL as a co-sponsor provides evidence of central administrative approval and sustainability of the NTT-FLC.

- ✔ The focus on program sustainability allows the NTT-FLC to continue beyond any one individual, and to benefit a community of VITAL faculty with diverse roles.

✔ The NTT-FLC regularly uses data from the Office of Institutional Research and conducts their own climate surveys, which allows them to assess the current state of VITAL faculty needs, informing priorities for how the FLC can improve to support them, and adjusting each year to focus on the topics that are more important for VITAL faculty.

Program Successes

VITAL Faculty Inclusion and Recognition

✔ UGA has created two awards specifically for VITAL faculty, one for excellence in teaching and one for excellence in research.

✔ UGA has created updates and expansion of promotion guidelines for multiple VITAL tracks.

✔ The increased visibility of the NTT-FLC has facilitated greater engagement among VITAL faculty from across disciplines and roles at UGA.

✔ The President's annual Faculty Appreciation Luncheon has been increasingly inclusive of VITAL faculty.

✔ The NTT-FLC and the design team clarified and inventoried select campus-wide teaching programs and intensive professional development opportunities for which VITAL faculty are eligible.

✔ The University Council bylaws were revised to increase VITAL faculty representation on committees, including the Faculty Affairs Committee which now requires representation from six VITAL faculty tracks.

Information and Resources for and about VITAL Faculty

✔ The NTT-FLC has developed public-facing informational materials on VITAL faculty written primarily for UGA academic administrators, such as "at a Glance" comparisons by faculty track about VITAL faculty.

✔ They created a VITAL faculty website with resources for VITAL faculty and a schedule of events.

✔ They have developed a mentoring network so that VITAL faculty can get support from a colleague who is also in a VITAL role.

✔ The expertise developed within the NTT-FLC has made them a resource for other institutions in Georgia and in neighboring states.

Lessons Learned

- ✔ The NTT-FLC has grown in popularity over the years. The design team has found that the larger number of participants means that some participants are not as involved and engaged. This also increases the amount of work for facilitators to accommodate all interested participants.

- ✔ There are also some VITAL faculty who would like to participate but are unable to join due to meeting times, even with the use of a virtual modality. The NTT-FLC is considering how to accommodate these faculty and use meeting time effectively with larger group attendance.

- ✔ While the NTT-FLC has been successful in advocating for change, they have limited agency and authority, especially because many policies related to VITAL faculty are determined at the state or university system level.

- ✔ One of the design team members was a co-facilitator of the FLC for five years and now passed on that role to peers. The goal is to not have any one member facilitate long-term, however, the capacity to lead a FLC for a VITAL faculty may be challenging depending on the rank, career track, and appointment.

Professional Development Program Summary

- ✔ **Purpose and Objectives:** To gather information and advocate for improved climate and policy related to VITAL faculty, and to give VITAL faculty a shared space for learning and community.

- ✔ **Participants:** 8 -14 VITAL faculty.

- ✔ **Delivery Mode:** Both online and in-person. Participation at the start of the year.

- ✔ **Structure and Length:** Semi-formal, between September and April each year. Meetings are held among working groups about every three weeks. Faculty can join at the beginning of each semester. They also host a networking event for all VITAL faculty.

- ✔ **Content:** Ad-hoc working groups focus on specific topics, such as promotion and advancement, mentoring, advocacy, communications, and research and development; these working groups also meet together in the larger FLC to share learning, update progress, and allow for community.

- ✔ **Facilitation::** Two co-facilitators annually.

- ✔ **Deliverables:** Poster at the annual teaching celebration and luncheon event to share NTT-FLC accomplishments.

- ✔ **Assessment:** Reports to the OFA about the focus of working groups and the goals achieved.

- ✔ **Compensation and Recognition:** Participation is voluntary.

Additional Resources

Center for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.). Past faculty learning communities. University of Georgia.
https://ctl.uga.edu/programs/faculty/faculty-learning-communities/past-faculty-learning-communities/

Matthews, P. (2019, September). Non-tenure track faculty at UGA: An overview of career tracks and perspectives [Powerpoint Slides]. University of Georgia.
https://nontenuretrack.domain-account.com/ntt_faculty_overview/NTTF-OverviewPresentation-2019.pdf

Office of Faculty Affairs. (2019, July 25). Faculty ranks and appointment status categories. University of Georgia. **https://provost.uga.edu/faculty-affairs/uga-faculty-information/faculty-ranks-appointments/**

Office of Research. (n.d.). Internal grants and awards. University of Georgia. **https://research.uga.edu/iga/grants/**

Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost. (n.d.). Office of faculty affairs, University of Georgia. **https://provost.uga.edu/faculty-affairs/**

Visit the **Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success** website for more case studies of professional development that is accessible and welcoming of VITAL faculty and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support them.

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