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Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU): Centralizing Support for Part-time VITAL Faculty

2025 Winner of the Delphi Award

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From the Delphi Project database of

Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

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Institutional Overview

Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) is a public, regional comprehensive institution located in Southwest Florida, serving approximately 16,000 students across diverse undergraduate and graduate programs. As a relatively young university, FGCU has cultivated an academic culture that prioritizes innovation in teaching, community engagement, and environmentally-responsive learning. The institution's mission emphasizes student success, educational excellence, and inclusive support structures. Within this context, the university relies heavily on part-time VITAL (visiting, instructors, temporary, adjuncts and lecturers) faculty, who teach nearly one-fifth of all undergraduate courses and contribute substantially to the academic experience.

The Lucas Center for Faculty Development plays a central role in supporting the institution, including by contributing to efforts to meet two goals of the 2024-2029 FGCU strategic plan: innovating in academic excellence and strengthening organizational culture and commitment to employees. Their approach is grounded in consistent collaboration among HR professionals, instructional designers, department chairs, and senior administrators, as well as in evidence-based decision-making, drawing heavily on data collected directly from part-time VITAL faculty themselves through surveys, focus groups, and IRB-approved research.



This blend of evidence-based inquiry and human-centered design has allowed FGCU to craft supports for part-time faculty that are not only functional but also affirming. In essence, the institution reframes adjunct support not as remedial or peripheral, but as indispensable to academic mission and organizational culture.

Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

Streamlined, Holistic Onboarding for VITAL Faculty

The Lucas Center first developed an orientation for part-time faculty in 2016. The orientation is offered twice a year, which recognizes that many part-time faculty start working at FGCU in the spring. The Center has continuously refined and expanded orientation to better connect new part-time faculty. Today, new faculty leave orientation with essential tasks completed, such as onboarding with human resources, university ID acquisition, learning management system (LMS) access, and technology familiarization, thereby removing the maze of disconnected steps that usually span campus units. This practice alone reduces anxiety and enhances an instructor's ability to create effective learning environments. Additionally, orientations are purposefully located within the Lucas Center for Faculty Development, signaling from the start that teaching excellence, rather than administrative compliance, is the institution's main priority.

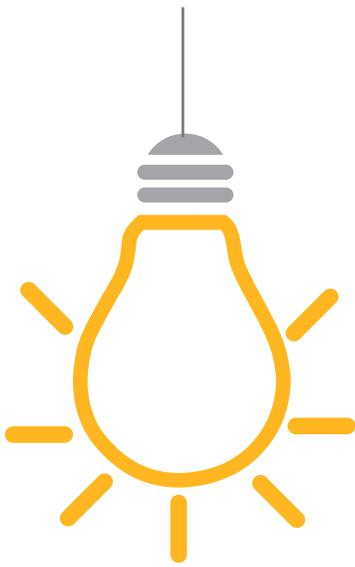
Ongoing Professional Development

Equally important is FGCU's focus on the professional growth of part-time faculty. Entirely online, asynchronous professional development modules offer rolling enrollment, allowing faculty who manage multiple jobs, commutes, and caregiving duties to participate without penalty. The focus on flexibility and autonomy recognizes the structural challenges part-time VITAL faculty face while also affirming their right to quality pedagogical development.

The Lucas Center also offers the Adjunct Academy, an intensive program that includes workshops, advanced Canvas training, peer observation, and elective professional development. Part-time faculty who complete the Academy receive a 22% increase in compensation, which is a powerful way of rewarding instructional expertise.

Dedicated Support Personnel

The Lucas Center started a faculty fellows program in 2018. Fellows are faculty members who provide support to their colleagues in specific areas of strategic interest to the university. In 2020, they recognized the need to add a fellowship position that specifically supported part-time faculty. The inaugural part-time faculty fellow started by assessing part-time faculty's needs and developing a part-time faculty handbook, as well as conducting scholarly research on the role of department chairs in supporting part-time faculty.



Because of the impact of the part-time faculty fellow, in 2024, FGCU created a full-time adjunct coordinator position. This role has increased awareness of part-time faculty needs across the institution and nationally, including through the creation of a podcast called “The Adjunct Files.” To facilitate a better understanding of part-time faculty issues, the coordinator engages an Adjunct Advisory Board, with part-time faculty representatives from across the university. The coordinator has also developed relationships with department chairs through individual meetings and participates in chairs’ council meetings, so that the voices of part-time faculty are better represented in leadership discussions. Additionally, the adjunct coordinator provides targeted communication to part-time faculty through a twice-monthly newsletter. These practices counter the widespread feeling of invisibility reported by many adjuncts nationwide, reinforce the professional identity of part-time faculty, and foster opportunities for part-time faculty engagement in support of student success.

Example Best Practices in the Change Process

Institutionalizing Adjunct Support Through Incremental Changes

The practices described above show that sustainable, fair adjunct support is not just a single project. It is an ongoing, evolving system of improvement rooted in strategic vision. The Lucas Center’s development of part-time faculty orientation in 2016 was a starting point for ongoing efforts to better support part-time VITAL faculty. The creation of the Adjunct Faculty Fellow role then facilitated the establishment of a full-time Adjunct Coordinator position. The alignment of new programs such as the Faculty Fellows with institutional priorities demonstrated the importance of part-time faculty support, such that FGCU’s 2024-2029 strategic plan now explicitly includes a goal to strengthen the organizational culture and commitment to employees.

These ongoing efforts have been successful in part because of a commitment to learning from part-time VITAL faculty through ongoing assessment. The Lucas Center has conducted systematic needs assessments, such as surveys, focus groups, and IRB-approved studies, to document part-time VITAL faculty’s experiences and guide program development.

By looking at changes retrospectively, it is clear that thoughtful, iterative design can shift part-time faculty support from a patchwork of disconnected efforts into a durable, mission-driven infrastructure. By integrating continuous assessment, strategic alignment, and cross-unit collaboration into the core of adjunct support, FGCU has developed improvements that are not temporary fixes but reflect ongoing progress. The sustained attention given to better supporting part-time faculty by leaders in the Lucas Center was crucial for the ways part-time faculty support have become more centralized and institutionalized within the structure of FGCU, ensuring long-term oversight and institutional dedication.

Feedback Loops as Drivers of Continuous Improvement

Another hallmark of the Lucas Center's process-oriented model is its reliance on feedback loops to improve part-time faculty professional development programs. Exit surveys from orientations, faculty requests during professional development sessions, and insights gathered from advisory boards are actively used to inform expansion and revision of programs. For example, each semester's orientation is revised to better address more adjunct concerns about technology access, LMS navigation, and pedagogical strategies, demonstrating genuine responsiveness to the experiences of VITAL faculty.

Integrating Adjunct Support Through Partnerships

The Lucas Center has developed numerous partnerships that have contributed to the success of efforts, including collaborating with human resources, instructional technology, digital learning, department chairs, and upper administration. These partnerships have allowed FGCU to streamline processes and reduce barriers to access for part-time faculty. In addition, these partnerships allow part-time faculty to have the needed resources to do their jobs and facilitate part-time faculty's engagement in student success through fostering their understanding of different systems and processes, including the Early Alert system and Adaptive Services. By doing so, they position part-time VITAL faculty centrally within the institutional ecosystem rather than on its margins.



Learn more about Florida Gulf Coast University's efforts to support all faculty through their **Lucas Center for Faculty Development** at <https://www.fgcu.edu/lucascenter/>

Visit The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success for more example practices and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support VITAL faculty at pullias.usc.edu/delphi

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