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Charting Pathways of Intellectual Leadership for VITAL Faculty at Michigan State University's College of Arts & Letters

2024 Winner of the Delphi Award

by Barielnen Vita and KC Culver

From the Delphi Project database of

Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

- ✓ Full-time Positions, Multi-Year Contracts, and Salary Equity
- ✓ Career Pathways with Promotion and Recognition Opportunities
- ✓ Inclusion and Leadership in Shared Governance
- ✓ Leadership Roles in Administration and Research
- ✓ Professional Development, Including Mentoring and Career Development

Example Best Practices in Process to Support VITAL Faculty

- ✓ Aligning Efforts with University and College Strategic Plans
- ✓ Utilizing Shared Governance
- ✓ Employing the Charting Pathways for Intellectual Leadership Framework for Evaluation

At Michigan State University (MSU), a public research institution and member of the Big Ten Academic Alliance and AAU, the College of Arts & Letters has been working since 2016 to improve the academic environment for VITAL¹ faculty and academic specialist staff (FAS). The college has created greater job security and stability through a focus on full-time positions, clear guidelines for VITAL FAS hiring processes, and longer contracts, in addition to increasing equity in salary and compensation, the College has developed intentional career pathways that include clear promotion policies, flexible work arrangements, and recognition through awards. It recognizes the value

¹ We use the term VITAL faculty to refer to contingent and non-tenure-track faculty (e.g., instructors and lecturers, adjuncts, research faculty, academic librarians) using an asset-minded approach.

of VITAL FAS through including them in various leadership opportunities, including in shared governance, administrative roles, and research and creative activities. The College has also expanded opportunities for VITAL FAS's growth across their careers, including through a college-level mentoring program and grant-writing support.



These changes have been made through the College's intentional alignment of their work with the College of Arts & Letters strategic plan, the implementation of a framework called Charting Pathways for Intellectual Leadership (CPIL), collaboration with the university's Union of Non-Tenure Track Faculty (UNTF), and shared governance processes that are inclusive of VITAL FAS voices, including the College Advisory Committee's Non-Tenure Track Task Force.

Example Best Practices

Job Security and Stability

Starting in 2017, the College asked department chairs to combine part-time (adjunct) positions to create full-time positions that offer greater job security. This change was a first step for increasing job security among VITAL FAS. The College also worked to create formal guidelines for VITAL FAS searches, in order to increase consistency, transparency, and equity in VITAL FAS hiring processes.

VITAL FAS are eligible for multi-year contracts after a probationary period. Fixed-term faculty and fixed-term academic specialists are eligible for a three-year appointment after one year. Academic specialists may be hired or shifted into the academic specialist "continuing system", which consists of a three-year fixed term appointment that can be renewed once; after their second term, they are eligible for "continuing" appointment status, a continuous rolling contract.

Additionally, through the UNTF contract, VITAL fixed-term faculty and academic specialists with teaching workload percentages can undergo a review process that grants "Designation B" status to recognize teaching excellence. Designation B status has conveyed a three-year contract for the teaching portion of VITAL faculty's workload since 2013; in 2022, the union contract extended this to a five-year rolling contract. Within the College, 61 faculty and 38 academic specialists have earned Designation B status.

The College has also improved financial security for VITAL FAS. Since 2017, they have worked to raise the salaries of the lowest-paid VITAL FAS and established guaranteed raises for fixed-term FAS who are promoted or achieve Designation B. The UNTF adopted this policy of guaranteed raises in their 2022 collective bargaining agreement. In spring 2024, the College also introduced a more equitable flat pay rate for all faculty teaching summer courses, correcting the previous practice where tenure-system faculty were paid more.

As a result of these efforts, VITAL faculty in the College of Arts & Letters have greater job security and stability: 91% are full-time, only 3% are under 50% time, and 61% have multi-year contracts.



Career Pathways

In 2017, the College Advisory Committee (CAC) approved a trial "fixed-term faculty" promotion process and established a task force. Over a six-year period, the task force developed formal promotion criteria and guidelines for VITAL FAS. Fixed-term faculty are eligible for promotion to associate and full professor fixed-term; academic specialists (both fixed-term and continuing) can be promoted to senior academic specialist, and instructors can be promoted to senior instructor.

This work also served as a foundation for Michigan State to more broadly clarify promotion policies in the university's handbooks for FAS, with several members of the College's task force contributing to these efforts.

VITAL FAS are required to live in the state of Michigan but can be approved for a remote work agreement that creates greater flexibility.

The College has also worked to increase recognition of VITAL FAS. VITAL FAS are eligible for several College faculty awards and for the MSU Distinguished Academic Staff Award. In 2017, they introduced the Fixed-term Faculty/Academic Specialist Leadership Excellence Award that is specifically for VITAL FAS.

Currently, promotions have been given to 38% of the College's VITAL FAS (61 faculty and 38 staff). These efforts have also led to a 50% reduction in faculty turnover between 2015 and 2020, creating a more stable teaching environment and consistent faculty presence that supports student success and institutional excellence.

Inclusion and Leadership in Shared Governance, Administration, and Research

VITAL FAS are valued as leaders in shared governance and administration. VITAL FAS with three years of service have university-level voting rights. College-level voting rights were granted to VITAL FAS in 2016, and the College faculty senators have led the charge to revise university-level voting rights to include all VITAL FAS. They also regularly serve on college-level committees, and several have chaired committees. They can also be elected to represent their department on the CAC; a dedicated seat for VITAL FAS from non-departmental units was added to the CAC in 2022.

VITAL FAS are also increasingly serving in administrative leadership roles that were historically reserved for tenure-line faculty. These roles include leading initiatives, directing centers, and serving as program directors, department associate chairs, and assistant deans.

Additionally, VITAL FAS can serve in a leadership role as a principal investigator on research through the support of the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education. Since 2017, 35 NTT FAS have been a PI or Co-PI on a grant proposal, including 13 externally funded and 12 currently pending projects, indicating continuous involvement in research funding opportunities.

Professional Development

Since 2019, when the College expanded access to its new mentoring program, 75 VITAL FAS have participated in the program as a mentor or mentee, which has enhanced their professional growth. Targeted mentoring groups were created for those interested in specific promotion categories. The mentoring program has led to multiple collaborations across the College, fostering community building. Mentors receive \$1,000 per year as compensation for their efforts. This model has led two College units to develop their own peer mentoring programs specifically for VITAL faculty.

The College includes VITAL FAS in their College Faculty Leadership Fellows Program, which provides leadership development that is designed for aspiring leaders to "build the bench"; VITAL FAS made up half of the 2019-2020 program cohort and half of the current 2024-2025 cohort. They also offer workshops and consultations for VITAL FAS related to research and grant-writing and holds annual promotion workshops that provide guidance for career advancement.

As part of the CPIL approach, faculty create personalized work plans that outline their horizon goals, milestones, and individual stepping stones needed to advance their professional goals.

Best Practices in Process to Support VITAL Faculty

Alignment with Strategic Plan and CPIL Framework

The College's Strategic Plan 2030 aims for "irresistible possibility" through creating a culture of care that contributes to institutional transformation. Efforts to increase support for VITAL FAS have been intentionally aligned with this strategic plan in order to enact the College's values of equity, openness, and community and reflect its commitment to practice inclusion as a matter of institutional habit.

The Charting Pathways for Intellectual Leadership (CPIL) framework offers a philosophical foundation and a process for faculty evaluation and promotion. The framework shifts the focus from traditional measures of teaching, research, and service to recognize and incentivize a wider set of activities through a relational lens, in order to value the diverse work of sharing knowledge and expanding opportunities in a variety of ways. This includes through scholarship or by creating equity learning conditions through teaching or advising, building community through mentoring, and being a steward in shared governance and leadership.

As part of the CPIL approach, faculty create personalized work plans that outline their horizon goals, milestones, and individual stepping stones needed to advance their professional goals. These plans are used as the basis for annual reviews, promotional discussions, and holistic career planning between faculty and their supervisors.

The CPIL framework has promoted recognition of VITAL FAS's important role in the academic mission of the college, including activities related to curriculum development, teaching, advising, outreach, research, and administration.

The CPIL model has been shared widely through publications, videos, conferences, and presentations, and a CPIL Toolbox will soon be available on the Knowledge Commons. The framework focuses on creating an environment where all faculty, students, and staff are empowered to do the work they care about most.

Shared Governance and Union Collaboration

MSU's College of Arts & Letters has relied on shared governance to design and incorporate these changes. The College Advisory Council has led much of this work, with improvements to promotion processes led by the CAC's Non-Tenure Track Task Force on Career Pathways. Changes to faculty contracts and salary have also been made through collaboration with the Union of Non-Tenure Track Faculty (UNTF); the majority of UNTF leadership roles have traditionally been filled by College faculty.

As VITAL FAS serve on, and often lead, shared governance bodies including the CAC, the task force, other task forces and committees, and the UNTF, the processes have centered the needs of VITAL FAS.



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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