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360° Support for Adjuncts Through Advocacy, Inclusion, and Practical Support at Montclair State University

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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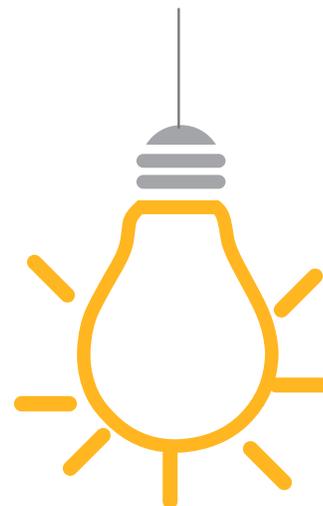
Introduction

Montclair State University, founded in 1908, has grown into a dynamic public institution offering more than 300 programs across 14 colleges and schools, while maintaining a student-to-faculty ratio of 17:1 that ensures personalized attention and mentorship. Recognized as an R2 Research Doctoral institution by the Carnegie Classification, Montclair is New Jersey's second-largest public university and its largest Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), with more than half of its students identifying as underrepresented minorities. 45% of students are Pell-eligible, and a majority identify as first-generation. Ranked ninth in the nation in social mobility, Montclair offers students the ability to discover, create, evaluate, apply, and share knowledge in a climate characterized by tolerance and openness in the exploration of ideas. The university consistently outperforms state and national benchmarks for student success, earning recognition for inclusivity, social mobility, and value.

The faculty serve as role models and mentors, and the majority are VITAL, or contingent, faculty. The VITAL faculty includes Montclair's full-time non-tenure-track Teaching Faculty positions that include opportunities for development and promotion, as well as a clear and progressive salary structure. This change is one demonstration of the University's support for VITAL faculty. Montclair also employs more than 1,200 part-time VITAL faculty, who teach nearly 50% of all courses. All faculty at Montclair are unionized, and part-time VITAL faculty are represented by an adjunct-specific chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

In acknowledging the critical role part-time VITAL faculty play, Montclair launched the 360° Support for Adjuncts initiative in 2022 to address both working conditions related to material inadequacies and social structural marginalization of adjunct faculty. This initiative is led by the Office for Faculty Excellence (OFE) to ensure long-term, systemic improvements in adjunct support.

The OFE, established in 2019, serves all faculty and is an advocate center for adjunct support and faculty development, recognizing adjunct faculty as valuable contributors to the university. In 2022, in recognition of the importance of faculty development and support, the OFE expanded, allowing for new staffing dedicated to adjunct needs. This strengthened Montclair's capacity to address the concerns of its instructional workforce through supporting inclusion and sense of belonging, as well as providing adjunct faculty with the information they need to support the University's mission, honor their own professional values, and cultivate their connection to the University.



Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

Dedicated Adjunct Liaison

Montclair appointed an adjunct liaison within the OFE to serve as the primary point of contact for adjunct faculty. The liaison is responsible for sending regular newsletters and organizing events such as the “Just for Adjuncts” weekly series program to offer timely support in building a community that showcases adjunct expertise. The OFE is also responsible for one-on-one confidential consultation sessions to ensure that adjuncts have an advocate who communicates and consistently channels their information to the university community. Additionally, in May 2025, Montclair received funding to make the adjunct liaison position full time, affirming that the administration values their supportive effort.

One-Stop Informational Repository/Adjunct Essentials

The OFE created Adjunct Essentials, a centralized online repository that serves as a resource hub where adjunct faculty can easily access critical resources and calendars; consolidated information on policies, parking, ID information, university services, email access, and health benefits; and professional development opportunities. This one-stop hub reduces confusion, promotes inclusion, and ensures part-time VITAL faculty have access to the information that is relevant for them across departments.

Orientation and Professional Development

Montclair offers multiple professional development opportunities designed specifically for adjuncts, including onboarding, asynchronous courses, and writing groups.

Montclair requires all new adjuncts to participate in a 75-minute synchronous online orientation that provides essential onboarding information and initiates relationship support for adjunct faculty, offered multiple times before each semester begins. The orientation introduces an overview of teaching policies, technology resources, available support, and university expectations while connecting adjuncts directly with OFE staff for support, and to their adjunct union representatives as well.

They have also developed other professional development that is explicitly inclusive of part-time VITAL faculty.

- Montclair Teaching: An asynchronous mini-course in teaching aimed at illuminating the Montclair context, enhancing pedagogical skills, and developing course plans.
- Faculty showcases that provide an opportunity for faculty across ranks to demonstrate their expertise, held twice a year, where adjunct faculty present and attend.
- Writing groups where adjunct faculty are regular participants in the weekly writing accountability groups and a specialized 12-week journal article writing group.

Departmental and Curricular Support

Academic departments are on the front lines of supporting adjunct faculty, and chairs in particular play a pivotal role. Montclair developed the Department Chair's Guide to Supporting Adjuncts to help chairs create inclusive environments for adjuncts. They have also created a template for a department-level guide for adjuncts that chairs can tailor to provide information to their part-time VITAL faculty, as well as a welcome email template that chairs can use to make new adjuncts feel like essential members of the community. Additionally, the adjunct liaison offers one-to-one support for chairs.

Also, OFE developed a customizable standard syllabus that is automatically imported into every instructor's Canvas course, so that part-time VITAL faculty don't have to create syllabi from scratch. This syllabus includes a comprehensive list of institutional resources for students. As some part-time VITAL faculty may not be aware of all of the resources available to students, this master syllabus helps adjuncts learn about the institution and also promotes consistent communication of institutional supports to students.

Salary, Compensation, and Benefits

Through union negotiations for the 2023-2027 adjunct contract, Montclair has secured significant improvements in policy changes, compensation, and benefits for part-time faculty, including these:

- A significant pay increase, with parity for overload and summer rates.
- Seniority increments for long-serving adjuncts.
- Increased course cancellation compensation.
- Limited office-hour requirements with flexibility.
- Early access to email accounts (at least two weeks before the semester starts).
- A new tuition waiver program.
- Representation on campus Safety Committees.
- Academic freedom protections aligned with those of full-time faculty.

Inclusion and Recognition

Beyond negotiated contract gains, Montclair has made deliberate efforts to integrate part-time faculty into the broader structures of shared governance and institutional recognition. Adjuncts now hold three at-large seats on the University Senate, ensuring they have a direct voice in shaping university policy



and decision-making. In addition, the creation of a new suite of Presidential Excellence Awards explicitly honors the contributions of part-time faculty, placing them alongside full-time colleagues in university-wide recognition. These changes ensure adjuncts are visible in shared governance and valued alongside full-time colleagues.

Part-time faculty receive the title of “adjunct professor” after 12 semesters of teaching at Montclair. Additionally, part-time VITAL faculty who have worked the equivalent of 20 years at Montclair are eligible to apply for emeritus status upon retirement, with several adjunct faculty receiving this distinction this last year.

Example Best Practices in the Change Process

Creating a Unified Framework for Supporting Part-Time Faculty

Montclair’s efforts to better support part-time faculty have been successful in part because OFE developed a unifying framework called “360° Support for Adjuncts through Advocacy, Inclusion, and Practical Support.” The framework is grounded in scholarship on VITAL faculty and in the voices of the part-time faculty on campus.

Developing Partnerships to Improve Adjunct Support

The OFE has developed partnerships with various groups to create more holistic support for adjuncts. They partner with human resources and the adjunct union for orientation and onboarding. This has improved department chairs’ understanding of the hiring process and accelerated the timeline for new faculty hiring, giving part-time faculty earlier access to email and the learning management system. OFE also partnered with the Business School and adjunct union to conduct an adjunct-specific survey when developing their 360° support initiative. These collaborations draw upon the varied expertise and perspectives of different groups to create more coordinated and holistic support for part-time VITAL faculty.

Engaging in Continuous Improvement Through Data Collection and Assessment

Montclair engages in continuous improvement through regular data collection and assessment efforts. Assessment strategies include an annual survey of faculty related to OFE engagement as well as tracking page views of their adjunct-focused website resources and conducting participant feedback surveys for programs like orientation. The OFE also partnered with the Business School and the adjunct union to conduct a needs assessment survey of adjuncts to help them better understand their challenges and interests.

Learn more about Montclair State University’s efforts to support all faculty through their **Office for Faculty Excellence** at <https://www.montclair.edu/faculty-excellence/>

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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