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# The University of Massachusetts Amherst Model: A Comprehensive Strategy for Enhancing VITAL Faculty Work Environments and Student Outcomes

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## Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

- ✓ Salary Parity between Part-Time and Full-Time Lecturers
- ✓ Professional Development Opportunities
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- ✓ Paid Professional Development Leaves
- ✓ Improved Benefits
- ✓ Supporting Leadership Development
- ✓ Promotion Steps with Salary Increases
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- ✓ Pandemic Workload Accommodations

## Example Best Practices in Process to Support VITAL Faculty

- ✓ Union Collaboration
- ✓ UMA Model

The University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMA), a public research university, has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to improving working conditions for VITAL<sup>1</sup> faculty with a 20-year track record of progressive policies to improve the support for them. This commitment is manifested through a series of improvements in policies, practices and programs, specifically designed to expand support systems for VITAL faculty. Many of the meaningful and impactful changes were made possible through the effective collaboration between the university leadership and the faculty union, which represents both this group as well as tenure-line faculty. Their collaborative efforts are guided by the UMA Model, which outlines the process an institution undertakes to transform the work environment for VITAL faculty and ultimately enhance student experiences. The UMA model has been disseminated across other higher education institutions and professional organizations, amplifying its positive impacts beyond the UMA campus.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Example Best Practices

### Salary Parity between Part-Time and Full-Time Lecturers

UMA ensures salary parity for part-time lecturers. Starting in 2004, part-time, temporary lecturers were paid per course at a rate equivalent to 25% of the base salary of a full-time lecturer for a semester. This equal pay model prevents the unfair practice of hiring part-time faculty as a cheaper substitute for full-time lecturers, while still offering flexibility to meet university's instructional demands.



### Enhanced Job Security Through Continuous Appointments

Since 2005, lecturers who complete three years of full-time work and show meritorious performance gain permanent employment status, free from the limitations of term-based contracts. Continuous appointments provide job security for lecturers, making this policy functionally equivalent to tenure. In addition, faculty members who join UMA with similar roles from other institutions, whether they were in tenure track or adjunct positions, may receive credit for their prior experience, which can count toward obtaining a continuous appointment or promotion. This eliminates the instability associated with frequent contract renewals, which makes full-time lecturers no longer considered "contingent."

### Improved Benefits

Part-time and full-time VITAL and tenure-line faculty who work at least 50% full-time equivalent (FTE) have the same access to benefits. These benefits include healthcare, sick leave, family and parental leave and retirement plans. The parental leave policy serves as an example of the development of improved benefits for VITAL faculty, and was initially offered only to tenure-line faculty. This policy, which offers one semester of fully paid leave, was extended in 2005 to include VITAL faculty with at least six years of full-time service. By 2017, the policy was made equitable, granting both tenure-line and VITAL faculty the same access to fully paid parental leave. Starting from their first semester at UMA, VITAL faculty are now eligible for paid parental leave.

### Promotion Steps

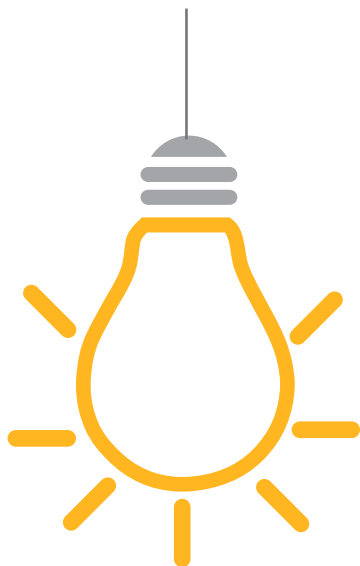
Besides offering job stability and equal access to benefits, a career as a non-tenure-track faculty member at UMA comes with substantial support for career advancement through the opportunity for promotional steps. Both lecturers and tenure-track faculty have the option of two promotional advancements, each of which comes with a new title and a salary increase. Instituted in 2005, these promotional steps serve to acknowledge and reward the contributions of VITAL faculty, reinforcing that those who consistently perform well at UMA are highly valued.

### Pandemic Workload Accommodations

UMA offers substantial workload accommodations for faculty who face unexpected challenges. When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the transition to online teaching, UMA offered a unique set of workload accommodations to compensate for their extra workload expended in transitioning into online classes. Both tenure-line and VITAL faculty had the option of choosing between:

1. Receiving a future paid course release, meaning that faculty are relieved from teaching one or more courses in a future semester while still receiving their regular salary, or
2. Receiving credit toward career advancement, such as expedited eligibility for a continuing appointment or promotion.

These benefits were offered for each separate course that faculty successfully transitioned and delivered online.



### Professional Development Opportunities

In 2018-2019, UMA restructured the former Institute for Teaching Excellence and Faculty Development into the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), with a focus on pedagogy and instruction, and the Office of Faculty Development (OFD) with a focus on faculty development and career success to support the recruitment, retention and advancement of diverse faculty. OFD has expanded existing opportunities and created new faculty development programs. From its inception, OFD's initiatives have been open to both tenure-line and VITAL faculty. All faculty members are welcomed to events like new faculty orientation and leadership panels that feature VITAL faculty. UMA's lecturers have workloads structured to allow for engagement in professional development programs, as well as governance and service — the factors considered essential for career advancement.

In 2020, OFD appointed a senior lecturer to investigate the specific needs of VITAL faculty across various career stages and to tailor professional development programs accordingly. Utilizing insights from the COACHE survey<sup>2</sup> and focus group data, the senior lecturer developed and introduced a highly effective program series called "Supporting Non-Tenure Track Faculty." This program offers a range of professional development opportunities, including workshops on preparing annual faculty reports and assembling promotion applications, as well as networking and community-building events. The non-tenure-track faculty who attended those workshops provided significantly positive feedback. For example, a participant said, "I ... have really benefited from them. They have helped me understand better the complex structure of the university and how lecturers fit into it. They've also helped connect me with other lecturers ... and understand how I can best leverage my role to accomplish my personal career goals."

### Professional Improvement Leaves

For tenure-line faculty, sabbaticals serve as an opportunity for focused work leading to career advancement. In 2018, UMA introduced a similar yet distinct benefit for senior lecturers: paid leaves for professional improvement. These leaves, much like sabbaticals, grant a semester off for activities aimed at professional growth. However, they are offered based on competitive selection, with currently 12 leaves awarded annually. Lecturers have shared feedback about how these paid leaves have positively influenced their professional and instructional development. Considering the long-term dedication of these faculty members, UMA gains substantially from fully leveraging this skilled workforce.

### Supporting Leadership Development

Over the past few years, UMA has created initiatives to foster the leadership aspirations of VITAL faculty. For instance, UMA supports female VITAL faculty who wish to attend the HERS Leadership Institute<sup>3</sup> and has chosen the first VITAL faculty members for the Chancellor's Leadership Fellowship<sup>4</sup> in 2020 and the Five College Leadership Development Program<sup>5</sup> in 2022, all aimed at nurturing future campus leaders. Some lecturers at UMA also hold high-level administrative roles such as associate provosts and associate deans, directly impacting policies and initiatives concerning undergraduate education and student development.

<sup>2</sup> The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education offers Faculty Job Satisfaction and Faculty Retention and Exit surveys. <https://coache.gse.harvard.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> The HERS Leadership Institute is a leadership development and research organization and offers various leadership development programs focusing on women leaders in higher education, but not limited to any gender identity. <https://www.hersnetwork.org/hers-institute/#>

<sup>4</sup> UMA's internal fellowships to foster future campus leaders. <https://www.umass.edu/faculty-development/programs-resources/leadership-development/chancellors-leadership-fellowship>

<sup>5</sup> The Five College Leadership Development Program is offered by the Five College Consortium. <https://www.fivecolleges.edu/faculty/mellon-faculty-development-programs>

They also occupy leadership positions in the institution's shared governance, often in areas of undergraduate education. For example, they have served as Chairs of the General Education and Undergraduate Education Councils and the Presiding Officer of the Faculty Senate. Moreover, a lecturer was voted in as co-president of the faculty union in 2021. Through these various leadership capacities, lecturers play a pivotal role in shaping the institution's key priorities, rules, procedures and programs.

### Awards and Fellowships

UMA acknowledges the achievements and contributions of all faculty in areas of teaching, research and community service to foster a positive work environment and encourage ongoing high performance. Over the last five years, UMA has extended its internal rewards system to VITAL faculty, beyond the previously mentioned leadership awards. For example, starting in 2019, lecturers have become eligible for awards that promote collaborative mentoring and educational innovation, such as the Mellon Mutual Mentoring Team Grants<sup>6</sup> and the Lilly Fellowship for Teaching Excellence.<sup>7</sup> These initiatives, along with others, demonstrate the university's leadership values and rewards the contributions of VITAL faculty.

### Examples of Best Practices in Process

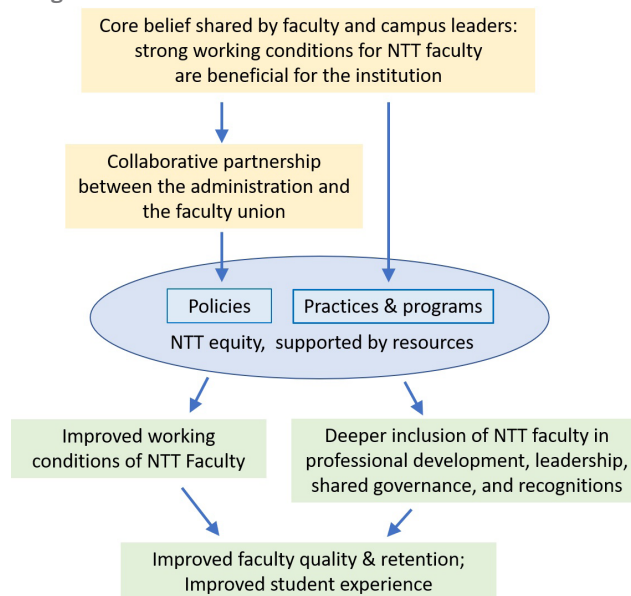
#### Union Collaboration

The UMA leadership and the faculty union, known as the Massachusetts Society of Professors (MSP), have collaborated based on shared principles of equity, inclusion and collaboration, and joint governance. Together, they've established a policy framework that offers better working conditions for VITAL faculty. These policies were jointly crafted with input from VITAL faculty who participate in the MSP, an organization that represents both tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty. The policies, which cover job security, benefits, promotion steps and professional development leaves, are formalized in the collective bargaining agreement, institutionalized, and maintained over time.

#### UMA Model

UMA has developed the UMA Model, which describes the steps an institution can take to improve working conditions for VITAL faculty, ultimately leading to enhanced student experiences (Figure 1). This model is grounded on a core belief held by faculty and campus leaders: the equity and inclusion of VITAL faculty benefits both the faculty members themselves and the institution as a whole. Guided by this belief, the faculty union and campus leaders work collaboratively to modify institutional policies, practices, and programs, making them more equitable and supportive for VITAL faculty as detailed in the Best Example Practices section on page 2. Through these enhanced policies, practices, and programs, the working conditions for VITAL faculty improve. They also become more deeply involved in university leadership and shared governance and receive adequate acknowledgement for their contributions. These improvements in work conditions lead to higher quality instruction and better retention rates, which in turn positively impact student experiences.

Figure 1



<sup>6</sup> The Mellon Mutual Mentoring Team Grants encourage faculty to develop professional networks that support their growth. <https://www.umass.edu/news/article/tefd-announces-mutual-mentoring-grants>

<sup>7</sup> The Lilly Fellowship for Teaching Excellence aims to cultivate teaching skills and leadership of early-career faculty. <https://www.umass.edu/ctl/communities/lilly-fellowship-teaching-excellence>

Indeed, the COACHE faculty job satisfaction survey in 2020 shows that 80% of VITAL faculty are satisfied with the university as a workplace and 76% said they would again choose UMA. Additionally, 86% of VITAL faculty reported satisfaction with teaching effectiveness of their non-tenure-track colleagues, and 75% being satisfied with their colleagues' intellectual engagement. This result demonstrates a promising positive impact of the UMA model.

UMA and faculty union leaders have disseminated the UMA model widely with other higher education institutions. For example, they made a series of presentations at the annual conference of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, including presentations titled “Negotiating Contracts for Adjunct Faculty” and “Striving Toward Family-Friendly Policies” and more. Faculty union leaders also regularly meet with leaders of other unions and professional organizations representing faculty in higher education, as well as leaders at other universities to share the model and their best practices.

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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/](https://pullias.usc.edu/delphi/)

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