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The University of Delaware CT Caucus: Grassroots Collective to Foster Institutional Change

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by KC Culver

From the Delphi Project database of

Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

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Example Best Practices in Process to Support VITAL Faculty

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The University of Delaware (UD) is a privately governed, state-assisted land-grant research university in Newark, Delaware. In addition to its status as a very high research doctoral university, it has a Community Engagement designation by the Carnegie Foundation. UD enrolls about 24,000 students, with satellite campuses across the state. The faculty population includes 1008 tenure-line faculty and 356 VITAL[1] faculty; UD uses the term continuing- track faculty (CTF) for this group.

Over the past nine years, CTF have accounted for steadily increasing share of total faculty, from 19% in 2015 to 26% in 2023. CTF serve in roles primarily focused on teaching or service. This case study begins with an overview of the University of Delaware's faculty model for CTF, which offers supportive working conditions for VITAL faculty, including contracts and benefits that offer job stability, promotion opportunities with clear standards for promotion, inclusion in shared governance, and flexible workloads.

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[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.

In 2016, CTF formed a volunteer organization called the CT Caucus. CTF are automatically voting members of the CT Caucus unless they opt out. The Caucus promotes a fair and equitable work environment, advocates on behalf of CTs and students, and collaborates with other groups and caucuses on issues of common concern. The Caucus raises awareness of the issues that CTF face to the UD community, disseminate reports with guidance for institutional change, and facilitates promotion applications among CTF. The Caucus' work has had an impact on the UD campus because it is designed to be an equitable organization led by VITAL faculty with recognition of their heavy workloads. The Caucus' effectiveness also stems from the evidence-based approach they take to understanding and addressing issues. As a grassroots organization, the Caucus leverages its collective voice in service of change, while also equipping its members to lead institutional change individually through their campus involvement in shared governance and in their daily roles.

University of Delaware's VITAL Faculty Model

Institutional policies and practices related to CTF at UD are generally quite supportive, due in part to the institution's collective bargaining agreement with the UD chapter of the American Association for University Professors (AAUP). UD's CTF model provides employment security and benefits, promotion opportunities with clear standards, inclusion in shared governance, and flexible workloads.

Employment Security and Full Benefits

CTF are initially hired into 2-year contracts, with a 6-year probationary period in total. Evaluations for reappointment include full peer review. After the sixth year, CTF are eligible for a 3-year contract, followed by a 4-year contract. Beyond their 13th year, CTF receive 5-year rolling contracts.
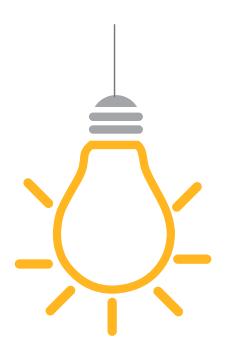
CTF have full benefits, including medical benefits, course fee waivers, and tuition remission benefits for immediate family members. CTF are also eligible for institutional contributions to the voluntary retirement plan and family leave.

CTF are also eligible for sabbaticals after 12 semesters of full-time employment. CTF can propose a sabbatical project related to conducting research or related to developing or improving instructional approaches. Proposals are evaluated by a peer review committee. The inclusion of both research- and teaching-focused projects creates flexibility for CTF and aligns with the teaching-focused role many CTF hold.

Promotion Opportunities with Clear Standards

CTF have opportunities for promotion in both the instructor line (Instructor, Associate Instructor, Senior Instructor) and professorial line (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor). The faculty handbook describes general criteria for promotion through professorial ranks and requires all departments with CTF to have clearly defined processes for promotion review as well as more specific criteria for promotion in the department.

Additionally, promotion criteria state that CTF should be evaluated for excellence based on the role that accounts for the majority of their workload, so while VITAL faculty may have responsibilities in several areas, they do not have to achieve excellence in all areas to be promoted.

Inclusion in Shared Governance and Flexible Workloads

Full-time CTF have guaranteed voting rights in the University Senate. CTF are eligible to be Faculty Senators and can serve on university committees.

While many CTF at UD are in instructionally-focused positions, there are also a number of CTF in clinical, service, and research roles. There is also flexibility in CTF workloads; they often run centers and support student success by mentoring undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants, peer mentors, tutors, and fellows. Research or scholarship can also be a negotiated part of the workload.

Example Best Practices

Raising Awareness of the Issues VITAL Faculty Face

The Caucus regularly canvases its members through surveys and meetings to learn about the issues CTFs face in different colleges. When needed, the CT Caucus takes action to seek solutions to the problem. For example, during the COVID-related transition to online teaching, CTF were concerned that virtual learning models were susceptible to the adoption of increased class sizes. As CTF often teach introductory and large-enrollment undergraduate courses, the Caucus presented evidence that led the University Senate to establish an ad hoc committee on faculty workload equity.

Developing Guidance and Recommendations for Institutional Change

The Caucus has developed a number of reports and briefs related to the issues they identify in order to chart a path forward for systemic change. For instance, the report developed based on the issue of course enrollment sizes and caps identified the inequitable workload that results from the disconnect between credit-hour based workloads and course sizes.

For instance, in 2016, a caucus subcommittee developed a report on promotion and tenure documents that provided suggestions for departments as they revised their promotion and tenure documents to accommodate and enable promotion of CTF through the professorial ranks. The report recommended that CTF be included in the revision process through representation on committees. The report also offers a menu of options that departments can consider in terms of the sources of evidence required (e.g., a narrative statement, learning outcomes data, peer evaluations), the types of evidence considered (e.g., engagement in mentoring, conference presentations, service to the local community and professional community), and recommendations for evaluating scholarship for CTF (e.g., scholarly teaching and scholarship of teaching and learning).

Supporting Promotion

The Caucus also supports faculty who are considering going up for promotion. For instance, in partnership with the Center for Teaching and the Assessment of Learning, the Caucus offers a winter dossier-development challenge that provides advice, discussion, examples, and the opportunity for dedicated quiet time to work. The Caucus also

maintains a list of recently-promoted faculty who are willing to serve as informal mentors and help CTF develop a strong dossier. By centralizing this process, interested faculty can identify a potential member in the same or a similar discipline who can provide tailored guidance.

Example Best Practices in Process

Caucus Structure Reflecting VITAL Faculty Workloads

The Caucus operates primarily through a governing board, with ad hoc committees forming as needed to address specific issues. The governing board holds annual open elections for the executive board officers. The Caucus also has clearly established bylaws to establish policies and processes for representation of CTF in varied roles on the executive board, create transparency in the selection of officers, and provide a process for Caucus decision-making. The Caucus meets once a semester.

> *The structure of the caucus promotes fairness, inclusion, and transparency and allows CTFs to be engaged and informed members of the university community without requiring a significant commitment of time.*

Between meetings, information is communicated electronically to caucus members using several options that provide easy updates and constant access to the information, including email, the institution's course management platform, and the CT Caucus website.

In addition, the Caucus occasionally organizes social events that are often supported by other entities, such as the Provost's Office, Academic Technology Services, and the Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning. The structure of the CT Caucus promotes fairness, inclusion, and transparency and allows CTFs to be engaged and informed members of the university community without requiring a significant commitment of time.

Evidence-Based Advocacy

To write the report on course sizes, the Caucus committee analyzed course enrollment data, conducted a university-wide faculty survey, interviewed and surveyed department chairs, reviewed University policies related to class sizes, and conducted a literature review of best practices in pedagogy. This multi-pronged approach allowed Caucus members to develop a broad understanding of the problem, to use the data to present a strong case for workload inequity, and to raise awareness of the problem in a way that persuaded institutional leaders to address the issue.

Amplifying Collective and Individual Voices

The Caucus serves as a collective, amplifying the challenges CTF face beyond the individual level. The Caucus benefits from having members that reflect a variety of different roles in different colleges who bring different experiences and perspectives to the table. By working collaboratively as a grassroots organization, CTF have a stronger voice that can facilitate institutional change more effectively.

Additionally, the support of the Caucus also allows individual members to be engaged as leaders in the institution. For instance, CTFs are engaged as participants and leaders in the Center for Teaching and the Assessment of Learning. In 2023, 31% of participants in the Summer Institute on Teaching were CTF. Members of the CT Caucus have also been instrumental in developing the Faculty Peer Observation Protocol (FPOP) program, which operated for two years before the COVID-19 pandemic. The program provided a formative assessment of teaching while training faculty in the art of the observation and evaluation of teaching. The majority of the committee members who developed FPOP were CTF.

And the wider perspective, increased institutional knowledge, and sense of belonging that the CT Caucus offers also allows CTF to be more effective in their roles as change leaders in their departments and in other groups that work to evaluate, strengthen, and improve the student learning experiences and environment.

Learn more about University of Delaware's efforts to support VITAL faculty through their **CT Caucus** at **https://sites.udel.edu/ctcaucus/**

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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