

**TITLE:** Mentoring New Adjunct Faculty to Improve Instruction and Increase Student Success

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**ABSTRACT 250 WORDS**

At Everett Community College (EvCC), we have implemented a successful mentoring program for new Adjunct Faculty. In our third year of a five-year federal grant, we have valuable lessons to share. Our program pairs experienced faculty mentors with new Adjuncts in their first quarter at EvCC. The duration of the formal program is one quarter; the relationships formed have proven to last for years.

We offer new ideas and best practices for successful developmental relationships. In building an online Canvas course to deliver relevant module content, we introduce new faculty to our campus culture within the platform that they will actually be using to convey instruction. We meet twice a quarter as a large group to introduce new faculty to their peers and mentors; in addition to this cohort setting, 1:1 time with individual mentors is encouraged.

As well, we are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of our existing mentoring program, as we are in our third year. We have seen a marked increase in faculty enrollment/participation as our reputation has grown. The goal of our Title III grant is to increase student success and retention by increasing faculty success, and we have evidence of this. EvCC plans to assume funding responsibility for our mentoring program once our federal funding expires in 2017, which illustrates the strength of our program and the support we have garnered.

We are eager to share our replicable model with conference participants, beyond the attention we have already gathered in our home state of Washington!

**CONTENT**

Our new Adjunct Faculty mentor program was originally begun in Fall Quarter 2012 with funding from a Title III grant. The four initial mentors spent the first year establishing the course content, setting up a basic Canvas class, and training in QM in order to better understand concepts like course alignment ourselves. In addition to our offering two group meetings a quarter and one-on-one availability, new hires complete a quarter-long academy course in our LMS, Canvas. Our first group of adjuncts in Spring 2012 were our fledgling cohort; we have come a long way in three years, in terms of our own expertise in mentoring, being able to anticipate new adjuncts' needs, and improving our "new adjunct faculty academy" course content and design in response to feedback.

Feedback about the quarter-long course has been overwhelmingly positive. The stated goal of the project is student retention via faculty success, which is harder to

quantify, due to a variety of complicating factors. Certainly, new adjuncts seem to indicate a desire to stay and teach at EvCC. One new faculty member and academy graduate writes, "I'm planning to stay at EvCC while I get my Masters, and it's because this quarter showed me how much I enjoy teaching." Considering the tenuous position of many adjunct faculty members (here, we call them "I-5 flyers," those who have teaching jobs in multiple locations along the I-5 corridor), this is a firm declaration of loyalty to this institution.

Excerpts from faculty mentee reflections posted inside our Canvas academy in June 2015 attest to the overall success of the mentoring program and offer specific examples.

Writes one first-quarter psychology instructor, "The Academy was extremely helpful to me this year in my first quarter of teaching at the community college level. The group lunch meetings were the most helpful as they got a large group of us, all new to teaching at the college together, and in addition to lunch, we were given opportunities to talk about our experiences thus far, challenges, successes. In these meetings I learned from other teachers and also came to realize that a lot of what I was experiencing, other new teachers were experiencing too - uncertainty and lack of confidence were especially pervasive among many of us. My mentor was available for questions when I needed her, and I especially appreciated the computer lab session prior to the beginning of the quarter where I was able to get some extra instruction around Canvas and my syllabus; all of these things were especially helpful."

One new IT instructor says, "My overall experience has been fantastic. It was really great to meet other teachers to talk about common challenges. That has been like a bit of therapy at times. One on one time was a great help to get feedback on how I am doing and what changes I can make to improve my effectiveness as a teacher and tips on managing my lessons. I am very excited to attend future classes on how to continue improving my Canvas content and effectiveness as a teacher, an adviser, and as a student."

Finally, an enthusiastic new hire in the Math Department states, "It was a pleasure, and I thank you so much for allowing me to take part in this particular program; often times teachers are placed in a classroom with little connection to the overall college, new developments, and new information and research. I felt going through this program bridged those gaps."

Beyond the formal meetings twice quarterly on campus and one-to-one sessions scheduled as needed, there are real relationships forming across our campus. Long after the quarter ends, faculty maintain relationships with their mentor or mentee. All mentors have anecdotal evidence of friendships sustained years after the "first quarter" experience. Not only does this enhance the experience for the parties involved, but it also benefits the institution as a whole. According to Wilson and Elman, (1990), the benefits of mentoring "flow, not strictly to the individuals involved, but to the organization that fosters mentoring relationships" (Wilson & Elman, 1990). This can be seen in the sheer number of new adjunct hires taking advantage of on-campus professional development opportunities. In the June 2015 Innovations Academy – a four-day teaching and learning symposium presented by EvCC faculty on our campus, for other EvCC faculty – no fewer than one-third

of participants were recent graduates of the Adjunct Faculty Academy and the mentoring project. This disproportionate representation in a campus-wide activity speaks to the validation faculty feel when invested in through a program such as this mentorship. Similar ratios can be found when looking at enrollment for our February Faculty Retreat, which new adjuncts enrolled in the faculty academy sign up for in large numbers.

Mentors are deliberately paired with new faculty from other departments/divisions, and this cross-pollination approach helps to combat the “silo effect” so commonly rued on college campuses and which is contrary to campus collaboration (Sidorko, 2011). In a practical sense, creating bonds between programs and departments enhances collegiality across campus and strengthens the institution as a whole. Simply put, people know each other; therefore, people care about each other. The college benefits as a result. The fact that EvCC plans to assume funding of the program once federal funds run out is a testament to administration’s belief in the importance of this mentorship program.

Obviously, the new adjunct mentorship program is not without its challenges. Without buy-in across campus, we hear the inevitable question, “Is it mandatory?” Dean support is clearly essential for the success of the program. Often, first quarter faculty are completely overwhelmed by the demands of teaching at a new institution. For many new adjuncts, this is their first classroom experience with teaching at all: many of our instructors come directly from the field – in psychology, IT, cosmetology, business/industry, to name just a few disciplines. Time demands on new faculty are many, particularly for those trying to combine a full-time “day job” with a part-time teaching assignment. Some may be those “I-5 flyers,” teaching a class or two at multiple institutions up and down the I-5 corridor. Many will not stay beyond a single quarter and, thus, are less motivated to finish the mentoring class in light of this knowledge.

According to one mentor, “The previous lack of understanding regarding the requirements of the academy is improving but is still an obstacle. Sometimes, new faculty treat the academy as wholly optional, which is not truly the intent. The support of deans will be crucial in improving this. There still appears to be some general (and sporadic) lack of understanding of our role, campus wide. Clearly, we are not the ones to orient new faculty to program-specific or even departmental or division-specific information. Our jurisdiction is more global and EvCC focused, with an emphasis on Canvas presence and pedagogy. There must be a clear delineation of our mentor/orientation function.”

In the words of another mentor: “Bad surprises include finding out that our new faculty don't always get what they need from their division offices. I hope this gets sorted out by the deans; it's an internal service issue. We need to model taking good care of our faculty, so they take good care of our students!”

Despite these not insignificant challenges, our program has been largely successful and does suggest new ideas for successful developmental relationships. According to Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb in their article “Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education,” there is great value in experiential learning, which our mentor program embodies (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Citing a

project at Case Western Reserve University, the authors write, “In this program, faculty members meet regularly to discuss the philosophy of experiential learning, the methods of implementation that respond to the needs of... departments, the course structure that needs to be put into place, the teaching methods that lend themselves to meeting the goals, and assessment techniques” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

In addition to meeting regularly (as mentioned in research above), we provide a concrete Canvas (LMS) class with modules containing relevant and important content for new faculty to move through. Completing modules better prepares one’s chances of being a successful educator at EvCC, as modules encompass the concepts of OL presence, the syllabus, IDEA survey faculty evaluation forms, course alignment with Course Learning Outcomes, and a reflection. Also, mentees have a “hotline” to their mentor for any questions throughout the quarter and beyond. To say that there is an open-door policy is an understatement. The typical ratio for mentor to new mentees is approximately 1:6, which means that new hires have unfettered access to an expert at the college.

Writes Ann Baker, in her article “Conversational Learning: An Experiential Approach to Knowledge Creation,” “Knowledge is created through conversation as learners actively voice their ideas and experiences in conversation and make meaning of the experiences and ideas through reflection” (Baker, 41). Our academy offers multiple opportunities for conversation and discourse over the ten-week quarter, both in person and online. The quarter closes with a reflection piece, another of Baker’s fundamental points.

Most scholarly writing on the topic of mentoring relates to business relationships or the faculty/student relationship. One notable case does reflect mentor relationships with new adjunct faculty: according to Karin Roberts et al., “Participants reported needing several types of support resulting in three subthemes for this theme (Support): institutional, work site, and staff support. The primary form of support needed was reported to be that which was provided by the academic institution either in the form of the course coordinator or *designated mentor*. Many adjunct clinical faculty reported that the course coordinator served as their mentor and was available by telephone or e-mail. Mentors who initiated contact and made visits to the clinical unit were spoken of quite favorably. Situations that involved difficult or clinically unsatisfactory students were mentioned by several adjunct clinical faculty as times when they contacted their mentor and found the support extremely helpful” (Roberts, 299). Our EvCC mentoring program provides all of the essential supports, including direct availability in person as well as via phone or e-mail. Mentors are, significantly, available for visits and offer support with difficult classroom situations, as mentioned in the study above.

The Roberts study goes on to discuss the “Connection” benefits of mentor relationships, which we have found to be absolutely true on our EvCC campus. “The feeling of being connected to the academic institution was important to most of the participants. In relation to their perception of being a part of the academic community, two subthemes emerged: lack of connection and inclusion. Many of the adjunct clinical faculty reported feeling a lack of connection to the academic institution” (Roberts, 299)

Significantly, this mentoring model will be possible to replicate, even without funding. Using existing LMS resources, it would be simple to create a sustainable course for new adjunct faculty, which might include syllabus basics, online presence, IDEA survey, use of a gradebook, campus resources, and the essentials of QM and alignment.

Finally, our mentoring team remains positive about the potential for faculty success and student retention as a result of our mentoring work. According to one mentor, “Faculty from previous quarters continue to stop by to say hello or e-mail for comments and suggestions. The overall tone from both current and former mentees is positive and optimistic. Faculty are talking to their deans about the process and how it has helped them. I’m still surprised by the appreciative comments that I get from mentees: ‘Thanks for making me feel part of EvCC!’ ‘Thank you so much for meeting with me in person. I feel better after this conversation.’”

A second mentor writes, “I am eager to meet my new mentees and will be up for the challenge each of them bring. I am looking forward to implementing some changes to the academy that supports the continuous improvement process. I am continually amazed how much I have learned about the needs of the new hires in regards to preparation for their class, student engagement, assessments, using canvas and student evaluations. Although a lot of the conversation and requests go beyond the initial intent of the associate faculty academy, I think the college can benefit from the discussion and continue to improve the hiring process and procedures and provide the support necessary to help with the new hire’s success.

Another mentor states, “Notably this quarter, mentees are frequently using mentors as a resource beyond simply asking about Canvas course content within the Associate Faculty Academy. For example, new faculty often have questions about logistics and practices with students (make-up exams, test results, procedures for scoring finals, accessing Canvas master classes – to name a few from this quarter). New faculty are also making use of mentors in one-on-one office visits. This increased communication and widened purview are notable and novel.”

We look forward to continued success with the mentoring program during the remaining two years of federal funding and beyond, when the college embraces the program’s successes and offers its own financial backing and institutionalization!

## REFERENCES

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