Transcript - ASU Remote 2022:
Strategies for Supporting Adjunct Instructors

6/9/2022

[AUDIO LOGO]

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: Hello, and welcome to Remote, The Connected Faculty Summit. I'm Norma Hollebeke manager of network programs and services with Every Learner Everywhere. And I will be moderating your session today. This 90-minute Ask the Experts block by Every Learner Everywhere, which is a nonprofit network that advocates for and supports institutions in achieving equitable outcomes in higher education through advances in digital learning.

This final segment of our Ask the Expert focuses on addressing inequities in higher education. So let's get started on session 1. To better understand the practices that impact online adjunct faculty, equity, access, and quality, WCET and the Online Learning Consortium, with support from Every Learner Everywhere conducted a survey of 119 administrators in the summer of 2021. Following the survey, in-depth follow up interviews were conducted with 12 institutions.

The survey results were published in online adjunct faculty, a survey of policies and practices, and the recommendations were published in supporting online adjunct faculty across institutional roles. The authors of the survey report and an upcoming online adjunct faculty playbook are with us today to share our institution-- how institutions can adjust their infrastructure to support online adjunct faculty.

So let me get started by introducing our speakers. Van Davis joined WCET in 2021 as chief strategy officer, where he's responsible for all aspects of WCET's strategic planning, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and he assists the team with policy and research efforts. Van also serves as the service design and strategy officer with Every Learner Everywhere, where he leads the development of the organization's service design work.

Abby McGuire serves as the online learning consortium's director for research, where she supports OLC's research efforts and advances the research and impact of the OLC's Research Center for digital learning and leadership. Abby collaborates with

scholars, practitioners, OLC team members, and external partners to design and implement initiatives and publish research that advances online, blended and digital teaching and learning. Take it away, van and Abby.

VAN DAVIS: Good morning, and welcome to strategies for supporting online adjunct instructors. My name is Dr. Van Davis, and I'm the chief strategy officer for WCET and the service design and strategy officer for Every Learner Everywhere. And I'm excited to have joining me this morning, Dr. Abby McGuire, who's director of research at OLC.

OLC and WCET worked on a study in the summer of 2021 where we surveyed participants about the 2020-2021 academic year. We had 116 participants in that study, and those 116 folks represented, about 43% of them were two-year institutions. A little over a quarter were four-year public institutions. About 28% were private nonprofit institutions, and a little over 1% were private, for profit institutions.

In addition, we had a very good coverage of the size of institutions. A little over 19% represented very small institutions and almost 17% represented small institutions. 26% represented medium sized institutions. 13%, large institutions. And a little over 24% represented very large institutions at more than 5,000 FTE. So it was a good variety of types of institutions and size of institutions.

So what did we find in this survey? Well, one of the things that we were interested in was the use of online adjuncts in that 2020-2021 academic year. And unsurprisingly, given COVID, we saw that 47% of respondents indicated that there was an increase in the use of adjuncts for online education, and a little over 43% percent indicated that the use of adjuncts for online education was about the same.

Probably what was surprising, given COVID, is that almost 10% of our respondents indicated that there was actually a decrease in the use of adjuncts for online courses during the 2020 and the 2021 academic year. We were very interested in the professional development that institutions were offering their online adjuncts, and we were especially interested in modality-specific training for online adjuncts.

What we found was that modality-specific training for online adjuncts was excellent for asynchronous online education, but it was much less robust for other modalities, especially blended and HyFlex courses. And if you look at the graph over to your right there, and particularly, if you look at the very bottom there with none.

What we see here is that online asynchronous-- that only 1.3% of respondents indicated that there was no professional development for online asynchronous courses, that 20%

indicated there was no professional development for online synchronous courses, 22% indicated that there was no professional development for hybrid courses, and a whopping 44% indicated that there was no professional development available for HyFlex courses.

So we see that professional development for online asynchronous courses is fairly robust and fairly common, but much less common by the time we take a look at HyFlex, which again, is probably no surprise given that HyFlex is a newer modality than online asynchronous professional development-- online asynchronous courses.

We also were interested in understanding professional development requirements for online adjuncts, and what we found was that the majority of respondents required at least some professional development in technical training. Academic student policy training and effective teaching methods training.

Again, if you look at the graph to the right, you'll see that online technologies training was the highest or the most common requirement at 67.5%, followed by academic and student policies at 66.3%, and effective teaching methods at 53%. Much less common were requirements around online student support and requirements around digital learning and diversity, equity and inclusion.

We were interested as well in the barriers to professional development for online adjuncts. And unsurprisingly, we found that time and money were the two most significant barriers that institutions reported for effective professional development for online adjunct faculty. Just shy of 32% of respondents said that funding was a challenge. 32% said that time was a challenge.

Almost 21% said the availability of adjuncts, the fact that they are oftentimes juggling multiple commitments and that the availability of adjuncts was a challenge. And that other challenges included the autonomy of colleges and departments and a lack of resources. Specifically, what we saw in the comments here was oftentimes, folks were indicating that there were a lack of human resources in being able to offer professional development for online adjuncts.

So we see that we have some required training in technologies and policies, but that there are still a number of barriers to supporting online adjunct faculty. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Abby, who's going to talk to us about the most effective practices by adjuncts and some recommendations for how we can best support online adjunct faculty.

ABBY MCGUIRE: Thank you, Van. So we were also very interested in looking not only at the development activities that were available, but also at effective practices. And you can see them organized here from most effective on down. So well-organized courses that were clearly designed was the top answer given by our survey respondents. Connections were also very important.

Timely feedback. Connecting content to the real world. Providing students opportunities for active learning. Communication that was timely and relevant, especially via email, was important, and then availability and approachability of instructors. Formative and summative feedback related to course goals and learning outcomes. And then providing formative feedback to students. So all the way from 65% to 30%.

And then we also looked at the most challenging practices for adjuncts. So our respondents used their perspectives on their campuses to describe the most challenging practices that their adjuncts were facing, and for many of them, so 45% reported that utilizing collaborative learning in the classroom was the most challenging practice. Creating connections between students came in a close second. We also had facilitating group discussion, providing students opportunities for active learning, and creating an inclusive classroom environment.

And then we looked at the most effective strategies for supporting adjuncts. And what follows are a group of strategies that will extend in just a couple of minutes. And we actually looked at the challenging practices. We looked at these strategies. And we came up with a list of recommendations as well. But these strategies for supporting adjunct instructors pointed to the importance of mentorship. So 44.9% of respondents told us that mentorship and training were very important for supporting adjuncts. Professional development came in second. Asynchronous support pay was another big indicator. Although, you can see that at 10%, it's much smaller than some of the other responses. Along with remote support. And some campuses reported that they did not do this well or that they did not assess the effectiveness of strategies for supporting adjuncts. So what we really saw was that it was kind of a wide variety across the board with support structures that are in place and whether those are implemented at the organizational or institutional level or whether those are implemented at the Department level or program level.

So our recommendations. So we took all of our survey responses and survey findings. And then we did some follow-up interviews to extend those survey findings, and to really

dig deeply into effective and innovative strategies that we could package into recommendations for supporting online adjunct faculty. And this is what I have for you here. So we know the importance of connection. So our survey findings and our interview participants noted the importance of creating sustained and structured connections with adjunct faculty to make sure that they feel like they are supported and that they belong on campus.

So whether it's small group or one-on-one mentoring programs, but a continuous support line for adjunct faculty is one of the most important things that institutions can do to ensure that their adjunct faculty have what they need to do the job well. And I think one of the things that came up in the interviews, that was really one of the most telling points of the study, is that really supporting online adjunct faculty, in effect, supports students. So institutions who support their faculty are setting the faculty up for success to support students. So that importance can't be under or can be estimated or can't be overestimated. How's that?

We also heard from our interview respondents the importance of offering training options that extended beyond traditional business hours. So looking at the most innovative programs offered a variety of training options, whether they were synchronous and asynchronous. Some of them had face-to-face components as well, but there was a variety that extended beyond the traditional 8:00 to 5:00 so that it would fit with adjunct faculty schedules.

Incentivizing professional development options is another key piece that institutions can implement to support online adjunct faculty, so making sure that they compensate adjunct faculty for their time and incentivizing attendance can help to make sure that professional development becomes an integral part of being an adjunct faculty member. And again, it offers the support and the knowledge that adjunct faculty need to support students.

Our next strategy has to do with tailoring training content to meet the top online adjunct faculty challenges. So we saw those top challenges which are listed for you here at the bottom of this slide as well. Collaborative learning, connection between students, facilitating group discussion, active learning, and inclusive classroom and culturally relevant teaching. But what we found from our interview responses is that colleges that are doing this well gather data from their own campuses to see what these challenges are, and then they tailor training that will help faculty to meet these challenges.

So we encourage anyone who's interested in supporting online adjunct faculty to do the same, to do the legwork on your campus and to gather data and then tailor your training accordingly. And then providing recognition. So this is a simple step that is often overlooked. And it can be done in formal ways or informal ways. But recognizing the work of exemplary online faculty who use effective practices. So whether it's through teaching awards or opportunities to be featured on the program's website or newsletter, or whether it's through more informal means a thank you email or a good job, passing them in the hall or something like that. Providing recognition is really a way to ensure that adjunct faculty feel appreciated and have feedback that they need to continue their effective teaching.

So if you are interested in learning more can contact either Van or me and our contact information is there. And then if you're also interested in learning more, we have taken the strategies in the survey results. And we put together two documents. So we have online adjunct faculty a survey of institutional policies and practices, which is the report that we wrote from the survey data. So you can download that at the link below. And then we have a newly released playbook supporting online adjunct faculty across institutional roles, and inclusive playbook for academic leaders and instructional support staff. That one is available for download on the ELE and OLC websites as well.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: So thank you very much, Van and Abby. Unfortunately, van cannot be with us for the Q&A today, but Abby is and we're going to start feeding you some questions here because we've got some really interesting questions coming up through the Q&A section. I'm seeing a few of them, and I'm going to bring them together because it seems like a few of the questions are around definitions. So when you're doing the surveys some clarity is needed.

Part of it is that you had stated something like 75% of faculty are not eligible for tenure, and 47% are part-time, which kind of leaves the implication that non-tenured equals adjunct. So I guess the questions are all kind of coming together on that. How did you define adjunct? I mean, is it only non-tenured full-time and part-time? Was it only part-time? How did you all attack that in terms of the survey?

ABBY MCGUIRE: Yeah, that's a great question. So in terms of the survey, we were really looking at being inclusive of examining the types of training and resources available to all faculty who are not on the tenure line. So we're really looking at contingent positions, whether they were full or part-time positions.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: OK, so a similar question regarding HyFlex hybrid and blended. How did you delineate between those different modalities, or are they different?

ABBY MCGUIRE: Yeah, that's a great question. They are different. Yes. And actually, we have lots of discussions about this at the OLC. And we have an ongoing study right now looking at the definitions and the ways that institutions define these differently. But we pulled together our definitions and what we are really looking at. So blended is sort of an umbrella term. So blended would encompass both hybrid and HyFlex to define those two.

So hybrid, often will have a face-to-face component and an online component. It might be synchronous. It might be asynchronous. And then HyFlex is really centered on student choice. So there's an on campus component and an online component. And students can choose which modality that they attend during each class period. So the students really have the freedom to choose.

And then online, again, can refer to synchronous activity or asynchronous or course activity as well. But the coursework is completed not on campus but through an online format. So those were the definitions that we use. But that is, as I mentioned, a robust piece of discussion that takes place in online learning circles.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: So relevant to the HyFlex. You had said something about 44% coming from a smaller pool-- I mean, is that 44% coming from a smaller group, so that response that you got, it was earlier on in the slides. Hyflex is it that it's not that common. So the responses you got relative to HyFlex modality. Was that concerning to you all in terms of the data, or you did look at it in terms of it was a small pool that offer HyFlex, so maybe there needs to be more research done in that area?

ABBY MCGUIRE: Yeah, that question was really looking at training options. So what kinds of training opportunities are institutions providing their faculty? And HyFlex was at the bottom of that list on that slide that you saw. And I think it was interesting. It definitely made us raise our eyebrows a little bit, because I think anyone if you're in the audience and you've taught HyFlex, it can be one of the more challenging modalities to master because there's a lot going on at once.

So I think it was definitely an interesting finding that there are fewer resources available, or at least according to the respondents in our sample that those institutions were providing for their faculty. So again, it just gives us a way to move forward. So if that's a

modality that institutions are using, perhaps that's something that they should look at aligning their training options.

And again, looking at what's happening on their campuses. So it ties to that recommendation about doing the legwork and going to your own faculty on your own campus and seeing what are some of the challenging teaching practices that you've encountered and how can we support you? So, yes.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: So going into the incentivization of training and professional development, was there any indication when you all were doing the interviews or any other part of the survey on what types of incentives were given to motivate the participation?

ABBY MCGUIRE: Yeah. The material about incentives really came through in the interview data. So we did some follow-up interviews and we had a handful of participants who were from centralized organizational structures at their institution. So where there was one online sort of overarching component that oversaw everything for the institution. And then we also had individuals who were from more decentralized institutions that had departmental control or program control over how their training and development was distributed for faculty.

And through the interviews. That was really where the incentive structures came through, because people were sharing their stories about what their institutions were doing. And in those stories, when we started looking at what some of those things were, we saw that at least anecdotally, the responses that they were getting was that they were getting a better turnout at some of, or they were getting a more invested turnout for their faculty when there was incentivization.

And then also it seemed to help them to show the value that their adjunct faculty had on their campus. So thinking in terms of how can we create parity? How can we create equity? Just like you open the session with, I think it's really making sure that there are adequate support structures for all faculty on campus, making sure that those training opportunities are available and that faculty don't see them as something that's requiring a lot of their time with no compensation or with no benefit. So to be able to incentivize those and compensate them for their time is really just a way to treat them as professionals and to help some of that parity come into place.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: So if there was one thing an institution should do to support this pool of instructors, what would it be?

ABBY MCGUIRE: Oh, one thing, I love it. Well, we learned a lot in this study, and I think that the one thing that I would walk away with. So if I was an institutional leader and I was reading these survey results, I think the one thing that I would think about is really that seed of equity that you planted at the very beginning. So just like what I was just talking about, how can we support our adjunct faculty so that they can support students?

So we know that faculty often have the strongest relationship that a student will have on campus. They have the closest relationship. They are in and out with students day-to-day. They are the students' point of contact. So any way that we can strengthen that and make sure that those faculty feel supported, I think is the best thing that we can do. I think breaking it down into steps again, do that legwork and do that data collection on your campus. So be in communication with those faculty.

I think if you're looking for one actionable package of packageable strategy, I would say just work to create connection because that's really what it's all about. So meet with those faculty, have conversations with those faculty, invite them in. Learn about what issues are important to them? What do they need to succeed to do their jobs? And maybe what you'll find will be something that you can implement and something that you can use to make a difference. But if you help to connect those faculty to campus and instill a sense of belonging, help support them, make them feel supported, they'll in turn do that for their students.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: I'm going to go out on a limb here. There's a really robust conversation going on in the chat regarding the title or the word adjunct. Did you all get any indication that maybe that name or title needed to be changed, and part of that shift might actually help this pool of instructors feel a little bit more appreciated, rather than the band-aid that-- the word adjunct kind of does give you that, we're just pulling you in at the last minute. You're a band-aid, you're a supplement, you're nothing.

ABBY MCGUIRE: Yes.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: And I've been full time tenured. I've been a Dean. I've also adjunct. I've also done a part time position. And there is a huge difference in the way you feel. So did you all get any ideas that maybe even starting just to shift the whole US higher education system may be starting to make that shift of not using that word adjunct anymore and finding another more appropriate term?

ABBY MCGUIRE: Yeah, I appreciate this conversation. I'm scrolling through the chat now, listening as you speak, and I think that this definitely gives us something to think about. And perhaps so this survey that we did was a revamp of a survey that was conducted in 2015 looking at the same thing. But maybe when we redo it again, we will use another term. I know contingent faculty is a term that's used a lot. Lecturers, lectureship is another thing. I see in the chat like associate faculty.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: Associate faculty was popular.

ABBY MCGUIRE: I mean, I think that that's definitely-- yeah, I think that that's definitely worth discussion. And it's really I mean, what you're really getting at is looking at the academic workforce and creating that sense of equity and not-- in respecting the scholarship and the teaching practices and the expertise of all of the faculty on your campus. And I think, what could be better than that. So I invite you to continue this discussion in the chat. And I think that the more that we do this and spaces like this, and as we go forward on our own institutions and at our own campuses, that we can enact change at that level. And that will help us to continue to grow. So I really appreciate the discussion in the chat.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: I'd like to see that discussion go on into the networking rooms and see what kind of responses they get outside of just this session. But if they take it into the virtual networking areas, I would love to see what some of the responses will be to that. So we're running out of time. So I really would like to thank Van and Abby. Thank everybody who attended this session. It was a very robust conversation there in the chat there at the end. I do encourage you all to take it into the networking, the virtual networking rooms. That would be wonderful.

Please stay with us for our session 2 block, which is titled Ending the Monolithic View of Underrepresented Students. So we're going to transition to that one. I hope everybody enjoyed this previous one. But stick around because we're going to have another great session.