



*Prioritizing the Part-Time Professor:*

*How Cultivating Community Impacts Adjunct Faculty Motivation, Participation and Performance.*

*A Quality Improvement Plan for Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business.*

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Submitted to Dr. Cynthia Nebel of Peabody College at Vanderbilt University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
<b>1. Preamble</b>	
A. Acknowledgements	5
B. About the Ed.D. Candidate	9
C. Executive Summary	10
D. Key Terms and Concepts	12
<b>2. Introduction</b>	
A. About the McDonough School of Business	13
B. Problem of Practice	13
C. Framework Evaluation	15
a. Rationale for Using Improvement Science	15
<b>3. Literature Review</b>	
A. Adjunct Faculty in the U.S.	16
B. Dissatisfied Adjunct Faculty	17
C. Satisfied Adjunct Faculty	20
D. Current Adjunct Faculty Landscape at the School	20
E. Why Improvement Science is Critical to Adjunct Faculty Success	22
a. The History of Improvement Science	23
b. Exploring the Principles of Improvement Science	25
c. Principle Six: Concentrating on Community	28
F. The Effect and Impact of Community	
a. Why Build Community Among Adjunct Faculty	30
b. Introduction to Network Improvement Communities	30
c. Exploring Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs)	31
d. Challenges in Establishing Adjunct Faculty CoPs and VCoPs	33
G. Exploring Participation	36
a. The Importance of X-Teams in Improvement Science	38
b. The Administrative/Adjunct Relationship	40

H. Exploring Motivation	42
a. The Plan-Do-Study-Act Model	44
b. Developing a Theory of Change	46
<b>4. Primary Research</b>	
A. Strategy and Rationale for the Mixed Methods Study	47
B. Research Questions	47
C. Phase I: Survey	48
a. Survey Methodology	48
b. Survey Findings	49
c. Discussion	51
D. Phase II: Focus Groups	52
a. Focus Group Methodology	52
b. Findings Part I: Compensation and Responsibility	54
c. Discussion	57
d. Findings Part II: Community Engagement: On-Boarding and Belonging	58
e. Discussion	61
f. Additional Ideas and Final Thoughts	63
E. Phase III: Administrative Interviews	64
a. Administrative Interview Methodology	64
b. Administrative Interview Findings	66
c. Discussion	68
d. Primary Research Limitations	69

<b>5. Recommendations for Quality Improvement</b>	
A. Using Improvement Science for a Better Adjunct Faculty Experience	70
a. Fishbone Diagram for Root Cause Analysis Determination	72
B. Driver Diagram for Change Ideas: Organizing Various Systemic Changes (with Theory of Change & Timeline)	73
C. Activations	74
a. Create Departmental Communities of Practice (CoPs and VCoPs)	
b. Establish Formal On-Boarding and Orientation	80
c. Add Value to the Adjunct Faculty Role:	82
d. Implement Plan-Do-Study-Act Model for Continuous Improvement	89
<b>6. Conclusion: Important Considerations for Future Implementation</b>	90
<b>7. References</b>	93
<b>8. Appendix</b>	
a. Survey Inspiration Materials	100
b. Distribution Language, Survey	102
c. Final Qualtrics Survey	105
d. Focus Group Screener	107
e. Survey Results	109
f. Solicitation Material, Focus Groups	111
g. Opening Script, Focus Groups	112
h. Moderator's Guide, Focus Groups	114
i. Focus Group Questions	116
j. Solicitation Material, Administrative Interviews	118
k. Administrative Interview Questions	119

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**Self-Dedication:** Severely wounded, but not conquered. Congratulations, Dr. Kerry O'Grady.





## About the Ed.D. Candidate

Kerry O'Grady is the faculty director for the Master's in Public Relations and Corporate Communications program at Georgetown University. She's also an Associate Professor. Prior to coming to Georgetown, she spent eight years at NYU's School of Professional Studies, leading its M.S. in Public Relations and Corporate Communication program. During her tenure, she taught a variety of PR courses, including strategic communications, theory, history, and practice, integrated marketing, practicum, and capstone. She also taught in NYU's continuing education program and high school academy. In addition, she's held teaching appointments at the Fashion Institute of Technology and a guest lecturer role at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

With professional experience in public relations, integrated marketing and advertising, past positions include Associate Director, Integrated Marketing for *Women's Health* magazine, Senior Manager, Integrated Marketing at *Parents*, *FamilyFun*, and *American Baby* magazines (Meredith Corp.), Business Development Manager, *La Voz* and *TV y Mas*, and Advertising Executive, *The Arizona Republic* (Gannett, Inc.). She also held consulting and media training roles at Saatchi & Saatchi, Viacom, and Talkspace. An award-winning practitioner, she's been honored with President's Club (Gannett, Inc.), IMC Campaign of the Year Finalist (Meredith Corp.), PRSA - NY top "35 Under 35", and NYU's "Outstanding Service" award. She's also been a Faculty Honors Recipient from NYU's president, Andrew Hamilton. She holds a B.A. (summa cum laude) in Journalism and English from The University of Massachusetts at Amherst and an M.S. Public Relations & Corporate Communication (with distinction) from New York University.

Kerry is a sought-after media expert and broadcast contributor. Domestic and international appearances include *The Washington Post*, *The New York Post*, *The Telegraph*, *Forbes*, Fox 5, and NBC News, to name a few. Highlights from her broadcast appearances include ABC News' digital podcast "Uncomfortable," "The Meredith Vieira Show", Deutsche Welle, and the China Global Television Network. Recent and past articles and accolades include pieces in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, PRSA NY, PRSA Strategies & Tactics, and J Walter Thompson. She's been a trainer and contributor on topics such as cross-cultural communication, digital crisis management, writing and reputation management for the American Marketing Association, PRSA National, PRSA Tri-State, and The National Eating Disorders Association.



## Executive Summary

This quality improvement plan explores the adjunct faculty experience at the McDonough School of Business (MSB) at Georgetown University. At present, adjunct faculty participation is low in anything outside teaching their assigned courses, including engaging in professional development opportunities, school events, and interaction with administrative staff. The lack of communication between adjunct faculty and school leadership makes it difficult to improve job satisfaction, anticipate future needs, and address any existing issues. With approximately 30% of the school's faculty designated as "part time" (adjunct), the goal was to uncover root causes of the problem and provide recommendations to implement beginning in September 2021.

### Literature Review Highlights:

- **Adjunct Faculty:** Adjunct faculty comprise of three-quarters of the total instructor workforce at U.S. colleges and universities, and that number continues to grow (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019). Adjunct faculty would like to be more involved in course creation, school activities, and other scholarly activities, but are frustrated with the lack of benefits, compensation, or value associated with participation (Bedford, 2009).
- **Improvement Science:** the implementation of improvement science can help adjunct faculty satisfaction. Improvement science forces rapid change cycles to implement quickly to fail fast and optimize accordingly. More so, improvement science fosters collaboration, knowledge sharing, transparency, inclusion, and breaking down silos. With six main principles to follow that include optimizations for community building, motivation, and participation, this plan integrates all areas of improvement science to frame the literature, as well as provide recommendations.
- **Community:** having a sense of community and belonging is critical to adjunct faculty satisfaction and success (Lingenfelter, 2016), Communities facilitate sharing among those in similar practice areas to increase knowledge and solve problems.
- **Participation:** university leadership tends to view adjunct faculty as subject-matter experts, part-time workers, classroom managers and administrators. In contrast, adjunct faculty view themselves as field experts who bring immense value to the university

based on their industry reputation and prior career success (“The Hidden Benefits of Being an Adjunct Professor”, 2018).

- **Motivation:** the literature suggests adjunct faculty are influenced by what other faculty are doing and are motivated (or unmotivated) based on positive or negative examples of performance or activity (Bates, et al., 2012),

### **Primary Research Highlights:**

To enhance the literature review and speak directly to MSB administrators and adjunct faculty, a mixed methods primary research study took place that included a survey to adjunct faculty, two focus groups with adjunct faculty, and interviews with members of the administrative team. The survey informed the focus group questions. Results were clear that compensation, job responsibility, and feeling valued were key points to be explored in the focus groups. The focus groups confirmed that faculty are feeling overworked, unsupported, undervalued, and lack a sense of belonging. Administrative interviews revealed the team designated to support faculty feel like their jobs are more facilitatory and logistical, while adjunct faculty have the perception they can also assist with teaching and classroom support.

### **Recommendations:**

Recommendations provide long-term quality improvement for adjunct faculty within MSB. All recommendations included tactics to strengthen the relationship between adjunct faculty and school leadership, as well as the administrative team. Activations include establishing communities of practices, formal on-boarding and orientation, designated support throughout the year, setting expectations with the administrative team, recognition and compensation, and methods for evaluation and continuous improvement.

Implementing this quality improvement plan at MSB will result in a more participatory and engaged adjunct faculty body. More so, leadership will earn trust with these key stakeholders and communication with administration will improve. Finally, the result will be more satisfied adjunct faculty who feel heard and valued and find deeper meaning in their roles as instructors.



## Key Terms and Concepts

This quality improvement plan includes a variety of terms and concepts that require operationalization. Thus, please note the following definitions and abbreviations, which are used frequently throughout the document.

- **School (capitalized):** Abbreviation for references to The McDonough School of Business (specific school under study for this improvement plan).
- **University (capitalized):** Abbreviation for Georgetown University.
- **Adjunct Faculty:** Part-time or contingent instructors (Kingkade, 2013).
- **Community of Practice:** “A group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. This definition reflects the fundamentally social nature of human learning” (Team BE, 2011). Community of Practice is abbreviated to CoP or VCoP (virtual community of practice, which is a community of practice in a virtual space) throughout this paper.
- **Community:** “A group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (McQueen et al., 2001).
- **Participation:** Taking part in academic activities outside of teaching a contracted course.
- **Engagement:** An arrangement to do something at the school outside of teaching a course.
- **Motivation:** “Refers to reasons that emanating from individuals’ intrinsic values to choose to teach and sustaining teaching, and the intensity of teacher motivation which is indicated by effort expended on teaching as influenced by a number of contextual factors” (Han & Yin, 2016).

## Introduction

### *About the McDonough School of Business*

Founded in 1957 under the Jesuit tradition, Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business is at the key intersection of business, government, and international relations education. Known for developing leaders to serve business and society, educational programs focus on addressing challenges and opportunities for not only issues facing the business community, but society at large. Core programming includes an undergraduate business program, Master of Business Administration programming, a Master of Science in both finance and management, and a Master of Arts in international business and policy. Executive programming includes an Executive Master of Business Administration and an Executive Master's in Leadership (C. VilaBreto, personal communication, September 2020).

At present, the School has 78 tenured and tenure-track full-time faculty, 35 teaching and other full-time faculty, and 50 adjunct faculty across all programming (C. VilaBreto, personal communication, 2020). The School is regularly featured on a variety of "Top Schools" list, including the *Financial Times*, *Poets & Quants*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Bloomberg Business Week*. With 30% of the School's faculty contracted for part-time employment, the School depends heavily on adjunct faculty to instruct its students. Currently, the school's enrollment holds at 4,806 students across all programming.

### *Problem of Practice*

During initial conversations with the Vice Dean of the School, he described many issues to explore, all of which can be conceptualized under systemic improvement. These issues were manifested as a lack of engagement with the School and University as a whole, as well as the retention of high-quality instructors.

Additionally, the Dean's cabinet (the Dean's office) and School administration are disconnected from adjunct faculty. They do not know the adjunct faculty body, nor truly understand the extent of their roles at the School. In this, there is no sense at the Dean's cabinet level if adjunct faculty are happy, how to retain them, or what they need or want out of their

positions. Additionally, the Vice Dean mentioned he does not know if there is enough support for adjunct faculty, both professionally and emotionally. Lastly, he wanted to understand if School administrative support was enough and if available teaching resources across the University were being accessed.

Thus, *the problem of practice is building community and strengthening two-way communication with adjunct faculty by focusing on the root cause, systemic issues of what affects their engagement and participation with the School.* Currently, adjunct faculty participation is low in anything outside teaching their assigned courses, including participating in departmental surveys, engaging in professional development opportunities to improve teaching, and regular communication with administrative staff. Moreover, the current lack of any communication between adjunct faculty and School leadership makes it impossible to help improve job satisfaction, anticipate future needs, and address any existing issues. Further, while the Dean's cabinet is aware of these issues, they have not done anything to date to ameliorate because of competing priorities and time constraints. Additionally, while there is awareness of the issues, there is some anxiety of how to start this exploration and improvement process and how to build a sustainable model for implementation.

Under this umbrella problem, the current environment of adjuncts will be explored. Specifically, this quality improvement plan dissects what the adjunct faculty community at the School are feeling/thinking, their relationship with administration and to each other, their perception of community, and if and how they are motivated to engage or participate at the School past teaching their courses. The following questions oriented the direction of this plan:

- *What evidence is there for a lack of motivation, engagement, and participation outside of teaching an assigned course?*
- *What prevents adjunct faculty from engaging with their department, administration, other faculty, the School, or the University?*
- *Overall, are adjunct faculty at the School satisfied in their roles?*
- *Are adjunct faculty not feeling supported or valued in their roles?*
- *Is the existence or lack of community among adjunct faculty a contributing factor in participation, motivation, and engagement?*

- *What are the root causes of adjunct faculty dissatisfaction at the School?*
- *What are some things leadership can do to improve the adjunct faculty experience at the School?*
- *How can suggested changes be implemented at scale and become sustainable?*

### *Framework Evaluation*

A plethora of frameworks were applicable to solving the problem of practice, but nonspecific to adjunct faculty. In fact, at present time, there are no frameworks dedicated to adjunct faculty community, engagement, or participation. This said, the following frameworks were evaluated for use in this project. The selected framework, improvement science, was the most applicable because it included theories that directly applied to adjunct faculty isolation and dissatisfaction, as well as lack of participation and motivation to engage with their school or university.

• <b>Framework</b>	<b>Developers</b>
• Improvement Science (used)	Deming, 1993; Carnegie Foundation, 2010
• Situated Learning Theory (participation)	Lave & Wenger, 1990
• Reflective Practice (motivation)	Freire, 1998
• Care Ethics (community)	Addams, 1972
• Motivation Unifying Themes (motivation)	Reeve, 2008

### *Rationale for Using the Improvement Science Framework*

The framework selected to examine the existing community of adjunct faculty at the McDonough School of Business was improvement science. Although improvement science is not well researched or applied in higher education-most of the research focuses on elementary education, healthcare, or manufacturing-the literature available suggests its application could make a profound difference in the space and to address the problem of practice.

All data collected during the primary research phase will be analyzed to determine the degree to which each of these aspects of improvement science are incorporated into the adjunct

faculty experience. This is to help determine what needs to be prioritized and where efforts can be directed.

## Literature Review

### *Adjunct Faculty in the U.S.*

According to a 2018 TIAA Institute study on the adjunct faculty experience, the adjunct faculty landscape is vast and diverse. Part-time, non-tenure track faculty comprise close to one-half of the total teaching population (Yakoboski, 2018). Approximately 70% of adjunct faculty in the U.S. is over 40 years old and a slight majority (52%) are female. Approximately one-half teach one or two courses at a college or university, while approximately one-fourth teach three or more classes at more than one institution. Surprisingly, approximately one-half would prefer a tenure-track position over their part-time status and preferred position type is correlated with their career satisfaction. Approximately two-thirds are satisfied with their higher education careers, but 16% are dissatisfied.

As of February 2019, contingent and part-time faculty comprised three-quarters of the total instructor workforce at U.S. colleges and universities (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019). Compensation per three-credit course ranges from \$1,500 at smaller schools to up to \$8,000 at larger universities. Even with a full-course load of teaching three or more classes per semester, most contingent and part-time faculty (“adjuncts”) live at or below the poverty line (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019). The overwhelming majority of adjuncts teach at more than one school, especially if it is their main source of income. In fact, a 2014 Congressional Report found that 89% worked at more than one school and 27% worked at two or more (“The Just in Time Professor”, 2014).

Adjunct faculty working conditions and quality of work output are the most frequently written-about issues regarding adjuncts. Specifically, the topics include pay, union contracts, professional development, and quality of instruction. With the reliance of adjunct faculty continuing to grow, more are seeking union protection for working conditions (Flaherty, 2020). Union protection includes college or university adherence to a collective bargaining agreement, which includes negotiation of wages and other working conditions such as reappointment,



benefits, grounds for disciplinary matters, and course cancellation guidelines (“Bargaining in Good Faith with Employee’s Union Representatives”, 2020).

While collective bargaining agreements are one of the most substantial advancements for adjunct faculty in recent years, work quality and output remain in question. While professional development funds are included in collective bargaining agreements, they are usually spent on activities adjuncts find enjoyable or to further their own interests, not necessarily for pedagogical or curricula advancements (Edwards & Tolly, 2018). Because of bandwidth constraints and the lack of compensation for college/university professional development opportunities, many do not take advantage, leaving learning-centered strategies undeveloped (Baldwin & Wawrzynki, 2011).

Additionally, with the overreliance on part-time faculty, adjuncts are being asked more frequently to engage with students and their schools, without any additional compensation or needed accommodations (Rhoades, 2019). Further, adjuncts are expected to hold office hours or be available for students outside of class hours, yet because they lack designated office space and have conflicting commitments, over 40% do not (Baldwin & Wawrzynki, 2011). Lastly, adjuncts are less likely to use college/university emails and websites to communicate with students overall, which partially contributes to missing departmental email communication and important notifications from the university (Baldwin, & Wawrzynki, 2011).

### *Dissatisfied Adjunct Faculty*

Across the literature, adjunct “unhappiness” stems from four specific areas: Low pay, inadequate training, and lack of time and the perception of discrimination and disrespect.

According to the American Association of University Professors, over 50% of all adjunct faculty appointments in the United States are designated “part time”, even though they teach a full-time course load (AAUP, 2021). While there are adjunct faculty members who hold full-time employment outside of teaching their courses (and teach because they enjoy it or as a second form of income), a growing number who depend on teaching to earn a salary are deemed “adjunct lifers” or “professional adjuncts” (Farwell, 2020). The “professional adjunct” or “adjunct lifer”- who only teach for a living and have no other form of income - typically teach up to six

(or more) courses per year at a variety of colleges and universities. Very few receive a salary or benefits, and are typically on reappointment, good faith, or by-semester contracts (Wilén, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2007).

This said, several factors can affect adjunct faculty from being offered classes consistently, even if they are protected by the union or qualify for reappointment. These factors include enrollment changes (which result in course cancellations), budget cuts, program redesigns, or course elimination, none of which are protected under union regulations (Edwards & Tolley, 2018). Further, overwhelmingly, adjunct faculty would like to be more involved in course creation, school activities, and other scholarly activities, but are frustrated with the lack of benefits, compensation, or value associated with participation (Bedford, 2009).

Even more problematic, feeling undercompensated bleeds into other areas that affect teaching effectiveness (which directly affects students). Specifically, the more courses adjunct faculty teach at a university, the less effective they are at teaching and managing the classroom (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Harrington & Schibik, 2001; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009, 2010; Umbach, 2007). Yet, some faculty want to teach more because their income depends on it and thus, are concerned about factors that could affect their opportunity to teach. As explained by Wilén, Springer, Ambrosino, and White (2007), adjunct faculty who lack job security, which in turn affects their salary, can be dependent upon the course evaluations from students, which could create pressure to give unearned good grades (which contributes to grade inflation), a lack of intrinsic motivation to prepare for classes, and overall morale for the institution and their perceived value within it. Additionally, there is ample stress with keeping classes full so that a course is not cancelled (and thus, contributes to a lack of income).

Another common complaint from adjunct faculty is they are not adequately prepared to teach, nor do they receive any formal on-boarding or on-going coaching. In fact, Wanjohi (2020) discussed the problem of reliance on adjunct faculty increasing around the world, yet those faculty are normally ill-prepared for the challenges they face in the classroom. Further contributing to the lack of preparedness problem is the lack of notice adjunct faculty normally receive to teach their classes and the budgetary and staffing limitations that prevent dedicated support for classroom management and pedagogy (Wilén, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2007).

Additionally, adjunct faculty feel like they are discriminated against in a variety of ways. Mainly, based on years of service and expertise, adjunct faculty believe they should have first right of refusal for additional classes, full-time positions, or additional compensation opportunities like curriculum design, event planning, and committee/task force inclusion (Anonymous, 2015). On the specific point of job openings, this is of particular importance to “professional adjuncts”, as this body strongly feels they should not need to constantly look at the university’s website and should be told about positions within their department as a courtesy (Anonymous, 2015).

The lack of interaction with full-time faculty (or being ignored by full-time faculty) is another grievance. Many adjunct faculty feel like second-class citizens compared to full-time faculty. Specifically, there is a perception that full-time faculty have access to research dollars and grants that adjuncts do not (Anonymous, 2015). Also, they are often left out of graduation or award ceremonies, even though they sometimes teach more classes than full-time faculty. And adjunct faculty are usually capped off at a certain number of classes they can teach, based on union regulations or departmental rules and regulations. This is a main reason why “professional adjuncts” work at several different universities, splitting time and energy between different institutions and their students.

Finally, overwhelmingly, adjunct faculty feel a lack of respect for their positions. While many like adjunct teaching because it provides the flexibility to give back to their profession while maintaining their professional and personal life, that does not negate the fact they feel their positions are misunderstood or undervalued. In fact, the majority of adjunct faculty, whether truly part-time or “professional”, do not think school leadership understands or recognizes the preparation time involved to teach a class, the time it takes to grade and provide meaningful feedback, or that hands-on training and mentorship is essential to their success in the classroom (Bedford, 2009). Further, most adjuncts feel like their scholarly interests and expertise are largely ignored, and do not feel included in decisions that affect their classes or experience at the school (Bedford, 2009). Finally, there is frustration about the lack of consideration around scheduling classes. For example, adjunct faculty are not being asked what class they would like to teach and there is no collaboration or consideration for the time and days of classes.

### *Satisfied Adjunct Faculty*

While much of the literature focuses on the negatives involved in being an adjunct faculty member, there are some important positives to consider. For example, Wallis (2018), details that many adjunct faculty love the flexibility of the adjunct role. The main reasons for this include only wanting to work part time, avoiding the hassle of being part of the rigid educational system, less stress, and intellectual stimulation/giving back to the community. Alternatively, many adjunct faculty continue to work full-time while teaching, which provides incremental income instead of dependency upon the income. This yields to a more enjoyable, satisfactory experience. Additionally, part-time teaching provides adjunct faculty the opportunity to make connections outside their day-to-day business relationships (Wallis, 2018).

Adjunct faculty “satisfaction” stems from a variety of factors. According to Yakoboski (2018), satisfaction is linked with adjunct faculty age and highest degree attained. Specifically, those on the younger end of the age spectrum (under 40 years old) are more apt to be dissatisfied with their adjunct role. Therefore, many get into adjunct teaching later in life, towards the end of their career or post. Younger adjunct faculty opt to have higher degree achievement (hence, large output expenditure) and are more dependent on the salary than older adjunct faculty.

The “adjunct entrepreneur” is a driving factor in satisfaction, as well (Wallis, 2018). This colloquial term means that many adjunct faculty do not simply love teaching for its altruistic value, but use adjunct teaching as a resume builder, hiring pipeline for their company, and a competitive advantage to ask for higher salaries or promotions. However, there are many areas of satisfaction currently unaddressed. Adjunct faculty need (and want) ongoing recognition, onboarding and consistent teaching support, and peer mentorship (Green, 2007; Lyons, 2005; Phillips & Campbell, 2005).

### *Current Adjunct Faculty Landscape at the School*

Across the School, there are approximately 50 adjunct faculty. 99.9% have outside corporate or consulting jobs. Approximately 90% of these faculty teach one-to-two courses per semester, and approximately 10% teach up to three courses, which is the maximum number of courses

that can be taught by an adjunct faculty member at the School (C. VilaBreto, personal communication, June 2021).

The reason for the three-course cutoff is because adjunct faculty at the School are unionized and under a union contract (formally referred to a Collective Bargaining Agreement), According to the contract, teaching anything over three courses is considered full-time. All adjunct faculty teaching at the School are required to be part of the union and abide by the job requirements, responsibilities, and restrictions in that contract.

The current Collective Bargaining Agreement is explicit in what adjunct faculty are expected to do in their role, and how the School should work with these faculty. Highlights that impact community building, pay, teaching, and professional development include:

- Adjunct faculty members who previously taught a specific course for at least two calendar years and a minimum of four times within a period of four calendar years will receive good faith consideration for a course appointment (the same course).
- Poor performance from the faculty member, evidenced by student evaluations and classroom observations, downsizing of courses, cancelling of courses, finding a faculty member with higher credentials and qualifications, specific programmatic needs, and hiring of full-time faculty, or blatant neglect of duty as an adjunct faculty member all affect whether the adjunct faculty member will be eligible for reappointment.
- Adjunct faculty have the right to ask for classroom observations and feedback from their chair or director.
- Adjunct faculty have access to teaching resources across the University (but are not mandated to use them), as well as assistance with syllabi crafting and textbook selection.
- Adjunct faculty should be allocated space to meet and speak with students.
- Adjunct faculty have the same intellectual property and academic freedom rights as any full-time faculty member across the University.
- Strict protocol on working through adjunct faculty misconduct, student grievances, and legal problems resulting from classroom behavior.

- Adjunct faculty can participate in professional development opportunities, faculty meetings, University events, advising and mentoring students, or be involved in conversations around curricular advancement (but are not required).
- Specific minimum rates adjunct faculty should earn based on years of service and number of credit hours taught, as well as mandated raises for consecutive courses taught and longevity.
- Late course cancellation fees owed to the adjunct faculty member, information on the professional development fund allocated to adjunct faculty (\$600 per fiscal year), and allocated benefits for working as an adjunct faculty at the University, such as the voluntary retirement plan, the Hoya Federal Credit Union, the GU Wellness Plan, the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program, Yates Field House, and pre-tax Smart Benefits payroll deduction (“Collective Bargaining Agreement”, 2020).

Although performance is a component of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, participation in professional development opportunities is not mandatory. This is because it is uncompensated time outside of teaching a course, which is not covered in the union contract. In conversations with the administrative team at the School, all training opportunities for adjunct faculty are available through third party instruction in different parts of the University (CNDLS, library, etc.). However, there are no opportunities specifically within the School for adjunct faculty to train in pedagogy or classroom management. Additionally, the School does not have any specific resources or training on syllabi development, rubrics, or grading.

While a complete understanding of the adjunct experience at the School would require data collection on retention, sentiment, and satisfaction, that data is not collected.

### *Why Improvement Science is Critical to Adjunct Faculty Success*

The implementation of improvement science can help increase adjunct faculty satisfaction, while minimizing the dissatisfaction. While not widely used in higher education, the literature supports this is a detriment to both growth and sustainability (Langley, et.al, 2009). This is because improvement science forces university leadership into rapid change cycles to implement quickly to fail fast and optimize accordingly. More so, improvement science fosters

collaboration, knowledge sharing, transparency, inclusion, and breaking down silos. Finally, it requires trust and open communication among all key stakeholders.

### *The History of Improvement Science*

The history of improvement science began with the work of prolific engineer, statistician, professor, author, lecturer, and management consultant W. Edwards Deming. In 1993, he developed the System of Profound Knowledge, which changed the way business was done around the world (Deming, 1994). Comprised of four overarching themes (appreciating the system, understanding variation, psychology, and epistemology), the System of Profound Knowledge is a management theory that helps leaders organize thought and transformation for their organization. By following these principles, Deming argued that an organization could reduce costs, improve workplace conditions, increase employee morale, and strengthen customer loyalty. Included in the System of Knowledge are what Deming called the “14 Points” (principles) for management effectiveness:

1. Create constancy of purpose for improving products and services.
2. Adopt the new philosophy.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality.
4. End the practice of awarding business on price alone; instead, minimize total cost of working with a single supplier.
5. Improve constantly and forever every process for planning, production, and services.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Adopt and institute leadership.
8. Drive out fear.
9. Break down barriers between staff areas.
10. Eliminate slogan, exhortations, and targets for the workplace.
11. Eliminate numerical quotas for the workforce and numerical goals for management.

12. Remove barriers that rob people of pride of workmanship and eliminate the annual ratings or merit system.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement for everyone.
14. Put everybody in the company to work accomplishing the transformation.

(Fair, 2020)

In 2010, researchers and educators at the Carnegie Foundation used Deming's improvement science framework to create a six-step process to solve systemic problems to make meaningful change ("Improvement Science Helps School Districts Succeed at New Initiatives," 2020). This process helps solve issues by engaging key communities in the change process (to create buy-in), setting goals to achieve together, establishing benchmarks and metrics to measure the change, and collaboratively working on optimization with the involved team (Lingenfelter, 2016). The six steps in the improvement process are:

1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered.
2. Variation in performance is a core problem to address.
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes.
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure.
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.
6. Accelerate improvements through networked communities.

(Carnegie Foundation, 2020)



*1. Making the work problem specific*

This first step in the improvement process encourages designated community members to specifically address the problem that needs to be solved (Carnegie Foundation, 2020).

By identifying the problem as a team-and agreeing that it is the exact problem that requires solving- co-development and assessment happens from the start of the process. Additionally, this first step engages the community early in the process, instead of retroactively fitting them into whatever solution is developed based on a siloed identification of the problem.

Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2016) provide an example of this first step within a teaching environment. In 2006, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Teacher Incentive Fund. This \$1.6 billion initiative in FY 2012 gave district superintendents and principals the opportunity to motivate their teachers under bonuses dependent on the achievement of student outcomes. This school reform was quickly implemented, but the execution of the plan created problems. These included district leaders being able to finance these financial bonuses once funding ended and best practices on how to measure. In short, a value outcome of this initiative was the learning that if leaders want teaching quality to improve, it is important to work with those who teach so they can understand their day-to-day better and get buy-in for ideas that may affect them (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016).

Another example is giving teachers feedback on performance. Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2016) detail how instructors have evaluations, but much of the time, they are never taught to teach, or given feedback on performance prior to the evaluation process. If feedback is provided, it is rarely from one person on a consistent basis. In this, teachers face confusion if given conflicting feedback based on the different people providing it. If instructors received regular feedback from the same person over their teaching tenure, improvement could not only be seen immediately, but may alleviate the need for an annual evaluation all together.

## *2. Focus on variation in performance.*

This second step of the improvement process focuses on what works, for whom and under what conditions. This is to improve efficacy and reliability at scale (Carnegie Foundation, 2020). Instead of focusing on precise measurement of the “average”, leaders focus on the variation of results across particular circumstances that are identified as “problematic” (Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016). In other words, there is no one right way to teach. There needs to be variability to adapt to different backgrounds, experience levels, and teaching styles.

## *3. See the system that produces the current outcomes.*

Seeing the system is critical to reliably achieving outcomes at scale. If the system is not seen, then there is almost always a gap between what leadership believes can occur and what is feasible because of the lack of available resources. Thus, adding more to an organization does not always mean adding value. Instead, organizations can seek to understand how every part of the system works together to carry out the work, and the effect on who they serve (Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016). In other words, before ideas or initiatives can be implemented, leadership needs to break down the parts and resources and anticipate what needs strengthening or adjustment prior to implementation. Otherwise, there is almost always a guaranteed breakdown.

When these breakdowns (in either communication or process) occur, leaders tend to blame individuals most connected to the results, instead of taking the time to analyze what parts of the system are broken. In psychology, this is called an attribution error (McLeod, 2018). Instead, the focus should be building stronger and better practices and processes for executing the work, as well as ensuring the right resources (time and people) are in place.

Out of all the improvement science principles, seeing the system is where higher education struggles the most. The complexities, layers, and bureaucracy of higher education make it difficult to make change and make that change sustainable and at scale. Additionally, not seeing the system, or the systems not seeing each other, are a main reason why ideas fail to execute successfully. To prevent, Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2016) suggest organizational

leadership learn how to see the system. The authors detail that conducting this type of analysis requires two specific steps prior to any ideation or implementation:

- **Casual System Analysis:** Participants understand what exact problem is trying to be solved.
- **Asking Why Questions:** Asking “why?” helps uncover the rationales behind what is occurring. Ideally, asking, the activity would be to ask “why” until the root cause of the issue is identified.

*4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure.*

Improvement science is interrelated with theory and measurement. However, while many in the social sciences view measurement as finite and exact, improvement scientists take a more holistic approach. Specifically, measurement is used “to inform efforts to change” (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016, p. 92). In this, the goal is understanding the purpose of measurement and what data is needed to ensure accountability. If the measurement is flexible and can be optimized based on goals, there is neither success nor failure. Instead, measurement becomes a living, breathing entity that can adapt with progress.

In a March 2019 article in Ink, Founder and CEO E&A, Gazelles Bruce Eckfeldt detailed how viewing measurement as agile can improve both business and teams. These include rates of change (changes in percentages), rolling averages (averages of a few days or weeks), or number of units per time (tracking a rate or pace of an initiative; Eckfeldt, 2019).

*5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.*

Ensuring there is as little error as possible throughout the planning and execution process is integral for quality control and optimization. To minimize errors, disciplined inquiry should be a standardized method of research throughout the application of improvement science. Disciplined inquiry is a research plan considered appropriate and acceptable by those with extensive experience in the specific field (O’Reilly, 2021). Having subject matter experts in the room from the onset of the planning process, and throughout the execution, ensures decisions are not made in a vacuum and instead, with as much information as possible.

In addition, disciplined inquiry assists in ensuring minimal interference from other factors that may hinder the improvement process. Byrk et al. (2016) specify that “In education, this means minimizing intrusions into on-going schooling activities (since we expect failures to occur, but we just don’t know exactly where), while also generating empirical guidance as to what to try next” (p. 16). In short, this means that it is more important to learn cheaply and quickly (and optimize along the way) instead of making substantial investments and then waiting until the end of the program to evaluate. Understanding what knowledge is needed from the start, the right people to be involved in the process, executing on initial small scales, and addressing issues and concerns along the way will help make change faster and more efficiently.

*6. Accelerate improvements through networked communities.*

As a key tactic in improvement science, network communities (or more commonly known as communities of practices {CoPs}), are purposefully designed communities that solve problems, assign roles and responsibilities, and create norms for membership and narratives around the affiliation and scope of work (Byrk et al., 2016). Network communities are identified by four distinct characteristics:

1. Have a specified common aim.
2. Guided by an understanding of root cause problems and shared work that will improve the system.
3. An understanding there will be disciplined methods of research to plan, test, and optimize interventions.
4. Organized to diffuse to key stakeholders and into the field. (Byrk et al., 2016)

*Principle Six: A Concentration on Community*

While all improvement principles will be examined and applied throughout this project, this last principle about building communities is critically important to higher education, especially in relation to adjunct faculty. By nature of their part-time and contracted role, adjunct faculty do not normally connect with each other. The faculty come in and out of the school at different times

(based on their teaching schedule), training is not mandatory or done as a group, and the issue of low pay yields low attendance and participation in the school overall.

Building communities and connections between adjunct faculty is a well-researched topic in higher education. Having a sense of community and belonging is critical to adjunct faculty satisfaction and success. According to Lingenfelter (2016), building community in higher education means creating a “robust partnership between practitioners, researchers, and improvement scientists at local sites” (p. 119). The communities are brought together to share learnings among those in similar practice areas to not only increase knowledge, but also solve problems and create change at scale.

Within these communities, practitioners, researchers, and improvement scientists fall into one of two categories: Knowers and doers (Lingenfelter, 2016). Knowers are those in a place of influence and leadership within an organization, but do not necessarily work on the problems that require improvement. Users, on the other hand, are those typically not involved in organizational change (because they are not in positions of leadership or influence) and just do the work (that requires improvement). Improvement science requires that these stakeholders come together to solve institutional problems because while the knowers may be more experienced or educated, the users are the critical agents in helping develop solutions to do the work.

Specifically related to adjunct faculty, Morton (2012) argues that establishing a sense of community requires an institution to not only provide training, resources, and development on teaching, but also creating a sense of belonging from the onset of their experience. This sense of belonging stems from adjunct faculty feeling like they are part of something larger than their classes, and that they are included in the everyday life of the institution (Morton, 2012). Further, building community among adjunct faculty provides them the opportunity to share the love and joy of teaching with peers, as well as brainstorm and problem solve together. Finally, establishing adjunct community encourages participation in professional development opportunities.

Without a sense of community, adjunct faculty can feel like they are working in a silo. This isolation can contribute to constant turnover because the faculty do not feel supported or valued (Pearch & Marutz, 2005). This can result in strained relationships between administration and part-time faculty, and constant resentment towards full-time faculty (as adjunct faculty often feel “less than” full-time faculty, even though the work is comparable; Pearch & Marutz, 2005). Building community among all these stakeholders is integral to ensuring common goals are achieved and shared ideas are perpetuated.

### *Network Improvement Communities*

Improvement science supports and encourages the idea of community through the implementation of Network Improvement Communities (NICs). NICs have four distinctive characteristics:

- Focused on a well-specified common aim.
- Guided by a deep understanding of the problem; the system that produces it, and a shared working theory to improve it.
- Disciplined by the methods of improvement research to develop, test, and refine interventions.
- Organized to accelerate the diffusion of these interventions out into the field and support their effective integration into varied educational contexts.

(Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016).

NICs are a key part of quality improvement plans because they bring large groups of people together who want to accomplish a goal. NICs are widely distributed communities (LeMahieu, 2015). In this, small changes are made regularly to learn fast from any mistakes and optimize quickly (Lingenfelter, 2016). The faster mistakes are learned from, the faster they can be fixed, and the goal can be accomplished at scale.

Not only do NICs provide opportunity for those normally uninvolved in institutional change to have a voice, but it is also “an example of a disciplined, accountable strategy for improvement that emphasizes internal motivation and expertise, and partnerships between practitioners and researchers, while keeping supervisory authority in the background” (Lingenfelter, 2016 p. 196). What this means is that although there is opportunity for those typically uninvolved to solve institutional problems, they are not doing so in a silo. A leader or supervisor of the NIC helps manage expectations, allocate responsibilities, and checks in on progress around solving the problem.

A recent example of a NIC in practice is from the Oklahoma Department of Education (ODE). The ODE houses Oklahoma Excel, which is an excellence initiative to engage all K-12 teachers in the state in professional development (“Oklahoma Excel”, 2021). Teachers who all teach within the same district are grouped together and concentrate on a specific improvement area. These groups engage in continuous improvement cycles with the problem being solved to test and refine strategies and tactics and eventually, have enough data and testing to decide what works (and what does not). There are added benefits to being part of this NIC, as well. As detailed by the ODE (2021):

Teachers and teacher leaders who participate receive between 45 and 70 hours of job-embedded, sustained, data-driven, classroom-focused professional development. Participants also have access to on-site instructional coaching, resources, and tools in an effort to bring about lasting improvement in their schools.

(“Oklahoma Excel”, 2021)

### *Exploring Communities of Practice*

Although NICs are more commonly referred to as CoPs, by definition, they are different. While NICs (which originated as a tactic out of improvement science) are broad and are brought together to accomplish a common goal, CoPs are subsets of NICs that are more niche. Inspired by the core improvement science principle of learning and failing fast to uncover root problems

and solve issues, CoPs bring people with common interests in a common profession together to learn from one another, create bonds, and to provide opportunity to contribute to the institution outside teaching their course (LeMahieu, 2015).

There are three main areas of community that come together to create a CoP: Domain, community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A domain is defined as a shared interest by all parties. This means that membership is voluntary and requires a commitment to collaborate with like-minded people. Thus, the people in the domain are committed to learning from each other and sharing information. The second area is practice, and this means the membership of the community depends on their status as practitioners. The sharing of resources, stories, and tools help address problems and stimulate growth in a profession. The third area is community. Simply put, the area of community reinforces the idea of togetherness, and being part of something that advances a profession.

Communities of practice are organized in a variety of ways. They can be organized by department or by courses taught by community members (Sutton & Valenti, 2020). Others are by task force or initiative, or even teaching modality (online versus in-person versus hybrid). Like NICs, they are focused on bringing like-minded people together to collaborate, problem solve, and motivate each other.

In 2020-2021, the Covid-19 pandemic brought a new normal, which includes more access and opportunity for connection in a virtual world. CoPs are no exception. Virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) recognize that not all faculty are necessarily in the same place (geographically), and thus, community building and shared learning takes place in a virtual format (Sutton & Valenti, 2020). Building and cultivating VCoPs eliminates the boundaries of solely on-ground meetings and connections and allows for both flexibility and adaptability. Higher education leadership should become well-versed on the benefits of VCoPs. Building successful virtual communities of practice can help build critical connections, support, and mentorships that adjunct faculty can use to become better teachers without the burden of needing to be in a physical space.



There are limitations, however, to communities that are solely virtual. Specifically, not having face-to-face meetings loses some engagement accountability (Lum Kai Mun, 2016). Further, the amount of time it takes to build a virtual community can be challenging, as resources, monitoring, and promotion must be considered. Even if all those factors are considered, just because the materials are available does not mean they will be used. In fact, having a library of information can be viewed as overwhelming to a community instead of helpful, especially if the direction or explicit actionable steps on those materials are lacking.

CoPs and VCoPs help encourage faculty participation at departmental, school, and university levels. This is because they give participants an opportunity to engage in problem-solving activities that are meaningful and relevant to them (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016). Additionally, by parceling out the problem into subtasks, they make it easier and more digestible to take on. This gives adjunct faculty both autonomy and authority to take on important tasks, without overburdening based on their limited time or bandwidth. The other attractive element of CoPs and VCoPs to adjunct faculty include the abilities to innovate, investigate, and connect with their likeminded peers (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016). Finally, CoPs and VCoPs provide ample opportunity to learn from one another, as well as motivate and inspire each other. The common language and aims can not only be a powerful connector, but a professional development opportunity, too.

Finally, CoPs and VCoPs can help with minimizing turnover. As previously discussed, onboarding adjunct faculty is a widespread problem in higher education. Training teachers takes time, resources, and attention; all in limited supply in educational institutions (Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, & Park, 2015). By developing communities and building a professional network among instructors, adjunct faculty feel less isolated and more supported. This is because they feel they have trusted professional relationships and peer assistance in solving student issues, progress, and successes (Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, & Park, 2015).

### *Challenges in Establishing Adjunct CoPs and VCoPs*

Even if implemented exactly as suggested above, CoPs and VCoPs have their challenges in both establishment and sustainable engagement and participation. In improvement science,

seeing the system is critical to understanding why something does not work, and CoPs and VCoPs are no exception. The following are the most readily discussed challenges in higher education today.

### *1. Lack of Leadership and Structure*

Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011) believe there are three key roles within any CoP or VCoP: The leader, the facilitator, and the members of the community. Where the stakeholders fit within these roles should be an indicator of commitment to the community. While the member role is clear, the leader and facilitator have distinct roles within the community. Communities do not cultivate themselves, and thus, resources and leadership need to be dedicated to the initiative from the onset. The leader should take the responsibility of the direction of the CoP or VCoP, as well as help ensure goals are set, as well as metrics to achieve. Additionally, the leader should take charge of leading meetings, initiatives, and be the means of support for both the facilitator and the members. Additionally, leaders help set the tone for the community, including communication norms, and ensuring content and materials are representative of diverse voices for both perspective and introspection.

The facilitator, who can be multiple individuals, helps ensure the logistics for communities are set up for success. Typically, these are internal, full-time individuals (or adjunct faculty volunteers) that help with the logistics of setting up the community and assisting with organization and engagement (Wenger, Trayner & de Laat, 2011). These facilitators can also assist with email communication, distribution of materials and gathering feedback (inclusive of assisting with group decision making and ideation buy in).

Without structure, organization, and leadership, communities of practice do not have the infrastructure to be sustainable. Thus, it is critical communities are well planned and staffed prior to inviting members to participate and engage.

## 2. *Turnover*

While CoPs can help minimize turnover once established, it does not negate the initial problem of adjunct turnover to begin with. One of the major challenges of establishing a community is the instability of it. Moreover, it is important to consider that because CoP and VCoP engagement is usually voluntary and uncompensated, adjunct faculty will naturally come in and out based on their schedules, course load, and personal circumstances. Additionally, members must see value of their participation from the onset, and that must be reinforced throughout their engagement in the community. Otherwise, the community will become a rotation of people who are unable to form relationships because of the ever-changing demographics.

## 3. *Establishing Value*

If the value of participating in a CoP or VCoP is unclear to an adjunct faculty member, they are unlikely to engage. Instead, they will simply think it is another, uncompensated, thing to do. According to Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011), there is a specific process to follow when establishing value for CoPs and VCoPs.

- Establishing peer-to-peer interactions and activities that are meaningful.
- The second step is to provide resources for delayed gratification.
- Seeing changes in teaching practices over time.
- For the adjunct faculty member to intrinsically understand the value of the CoP or VCoP.

While the above scenario is ideal, realistically, CoPs and VCoPs almost never play out this way despite extensive planning and good intentions. For a CoP or VCoP to complete all steps in Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat's cycle, higher education leadership would need to assume that all adjunct faculty have the same teaching priorities and, in turn, prioritize teaching, scholarship, and professional development equally. Further, engagement and participation within the CoP or VCoP would need to be homogeneous; all adjunct faculty starting at the same point and working through the community at the same pace. Additionally, the level of care and commitment would

need to be similar across the adjunct faculty body. This would assume all adjunct faculty would be equally committed to bettering their craft, as well as can identify shortcomings.

#### 4. *Correlations and Causations*

Setting goals and objectives for establishing CoPs and VCoPs are critical prior to implementation. This way, improvement (or a lack of) can be concretely measured (Sutton & Valenti, 2020). For example, if one of the goals of a CoP or VCoP is to improve DEI across the curriculum, then it would be important to include specific DEI components to the CoP or VCoP and then measure engagement and participation with the components against observations of class conversation around DEI concepts, as well as inclusion of diverse voices as evidence by syllabi. Another example would be course evaluations from students. If adjunct faculty who received poor evaluations begin taking part in CoPs or VCoPs and then their evaluations improve, that is an important benchmark and insight for the effectiveness of the community engagement.

While the literature on the effect of community on adjunct faculty is extensive, there is little empirical work on ways to improve faculty engagement. Instead, the rest of this literature review will focus on both principles and theories of participation and motivation. This review and discussion of effective methods in both areas can be applied to the adjunct faculty environment.

#### *Participation*

In improvement science, participation is considered a “human side of change” (Langley, et.al, 2009). In this, building formal improvement teams can encourage adjunct faculty to participate in school and university improvement efforts. More so, change does not occur unless the key stakeholders are involved, as buy-in and support are necessary for long-term, sustainable improvement. This said, outside of adjunct network communities, faculty participation is an asset to a variety of other institution-lead academic and professional initiatives. However, there is a disconnect between what university leadership involve them in, versus what they would like to get involved with and remain uninvited.

Historically, roles and titles hold weight in academia. In this, the role and responsibilities of adjunct faculty differ depending on who is asked. This is especially true with the perception university leadership have for adjunct faculty, versus how adjunct faculty view their role within the organization. For example, university leadership tends to view adjunct faculty as subject-matter experts, part-time workers, classroom managers and administrators. In contrast, adjunct faculty view themselves as field experts who bring immense value to the university based on their industry reputation and prior career success (“The Hidden Benefits of Being an Adjunct Professor”, 2018). This differentiation causes tension between viewing adjunct faculty as classroom managers instead of classroom leaders.

The difference between management and leadership is highly discussed topic across a variety of industries. The bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of higher education makes this topic even more hotly debated. According to Lee (2019), the names and titles in higher education matter less than the work behind them. With adjunct faculty having so much responsibility-including a hectic pace, mostly reactive planning, fragmented roles, and a lack of strategy associated with their training and development-adjunct faculty fall more in line with management responsibilities instead of leadership (Yukl, 2006).

Leadership and management have distinct definitions. To understand the difference between the terms yields insight as to how and why adjunct faculty tend to disengage in school and university activities. In a 2019 Harvard Business School article, Gavin (2019) described how Harvard Business School Professor, John Kotter, defines each:

‘Leadership, he wrote, is the creation of positive, non-incremental change, including the creation of a vision to guide that change—a strategy—the empowerment of people to make the vision happen despite obstacles, and the creation of a coalition of energy and momentum that can move that change forward,’ Koehn said...

‘Management is getting the confused, misguided, unmotivated, and misdirected to accomplish a common purpose on a regular, recurring basis,’ Fuller said. ‘I think the

ultimate intersection between leadership and management is an appreciation for what motivates and causes individuals to behave the way they do, and the ability to draw out the best of them with a purpose in mind' (Gavin, 2019).

As demonstrated through the literature in improvement science, a focus of any organization should be building stronger and better practices and processes for executing the work, as well as ensuring the right resources (time and people) are in place. This means including adjunct faculty in innovation, development, and the autonomy to act (Gavin, 2019). To encourage adjunct faculty to participate in school and university activities, as well as help establish leadership as a part of their role, Yuki (2006) suggests modeling participative leadership. In short, this means higher education leadership should engage with adjunct faculty in joint decision making, consultation, autocratic decision making and delegation. This way, adjunct faculty not only feel valued, but feel part of something larger than simply teaching their course.

The lack of decision-making authority is a key frustration with adjunct faculty, and it hinders their participation in the institution overall. Besides modeling participative leadership, there is a variety of literature dedicated to adjunct engagement and participative decision making (PDM). PDM is when employees are directly involved in decision making relative to their work (Felber, n.d.). Taking this a step further, adjunct faculty who are formally or informally asked for their opinion on course design, textbooks, or other related factors directly related to their role is often a catalyst for participation in faculty learning and professional development opportunities. Additionally, using a PDM model facilitates faculty buy-in for initiatives and provides an opportunity for immediate feedback on why they otherwise would not participate (if they were not initially consulted (Felber, n.d.).

Another benefit of PDM is more effective teaching. If adjunct faculty are included in course design and curricular conversations, it is a better experience than simply being handed a syllabus and a textbook from another instructor and expected to teach it. They can talk through rationales for the course with department administrators and raise concerns or questions before walking into the classroom. Additionally, giving adjunct faculty a voice in what they are teaching

helps push past the “gig” role and makes them feel valued, seen, and heard. This, in and of itself, encourages further participation with the institution (Felber, n.d.).

### *The Importance of X-Teams*

Exploring the effectiveness of X-Teams can be an asset to any quality improvement plan. Their establishment helps see the system, which is a key part of improvement science. Additionally, the creation of these teams helps achieve organizational goals, solve student issues and brainstorm on assignments that provide instant gratification and for the adjunct faculty member. The creation of X-Teams is an effective way to help build adjunct communities and provide leadership opportunities that lead to increased participation. Ancona and Bresman (2007) define X-Teams as specialized teams that focus on external activity, extreme execution, and flexible phases. External activity can include scouting new faculty, industry research, forming partnerships with organizations, and ambassadorship. Extreme execution takes away the red tape and makes it permissible to fail in trying events or other activities, if there is learning and optimization is involved.

To make progress internally via the communities of practice, adjunct faculty should work in X-Teams. Instead, “to create effective goals, plans, and designs, members must go outside the team; they must have high levels of external activity” (Ancona & Bresman, 2007, p.6). This external engagement can include networking with industry leaders, having flexible membership (and inviting turnover so new voices have the chance to participate), and autonomy to structure themselves via leadership positions and tasks.

Additionally, X-Teams can assist with membership, ambassadorship, and recruitment (Ancona & Bresman, 2007). X -Teams encourage members of a community to work externally to create more connections to industry, opportunities to connect with a repository of potential teachers, and generate awareness for the school and specific programs. Further, programming and curricula development can become stronger because of X-Teams, as they help ensure industry insight, trends, and research are included into design.

X-Teams encompass the improvement science principle of executing quickly to fail fast and optimize. Ancona and Bresman support this principle by describing how the external focus

needs to be paired with “extreme execution” internally (2007, p. 91). What this means is giving adjunct instructors permission to try ideas (and fail with support), have psychological safety to express concerns and feedback to community of practice leadership, in addition to other key stakeholders within the school when necessary, and provide time for reflection and optimization with every initiative. Further, there needs to be a strong sense of shared knowledge within the community for psychological safety and reflection to occur. While specialized skill sets are appreciated, there should be a common core of aptitudes and abilities so that no one feels like they are working in a silo. Additionally, communication is fluid and strengths, and weaknesses are transparent. Finally, this transparency is important so that when members of the community are delineating leadership for tasks, there is an acute awareness to talents and skill sets.

Finally, the flexibility in phases allows for freedom to get the work done in a way that suits the individual. This could mean distributing the leadership of a certain project to one adjunct faculty member (who expressed interest in the project) and allowing them to “distribute leadership” to other faculty members who want to get involved (Ancona & Bresman, 2007, p. 221). Thus, the team can decide how to allocate project responsibilities and how the work gets done to achieve by the due date. The process is not micromanaged, and adjunct faculty are given the autonomy to get the tasks done the way they see fit. This self-direction and opportunity to feel part of something larger than their course is a powerful way to not only get adjunct faculty involved, but also get important work done.

Tying back to the evaluation component of improvement science, this also assists in the Plan-Do-Study-Act model, especially in the first two stages. By letting key stakeholders know a change is needed, they can weigh in early and often and be part of that change. Further, they can help gather feedback from others affected by the change and be champions for the testing and operationalizing of the change. This flexibility and inclusion not only help get the change done, but also gives adjunct faculty the opportunity voice in the process (Langley, et.al, 2009).

### *The Administrative/Adjunct Relationship*

Outside of relationships with each other is the importance of the support system between adjunct faculty and their administrative team, who are usually the gateway for access to school



leadership. Unfortunately, available literature does not support a strong, supportive relationship between the administrative team and academic staff at universities and colleges. In Kuo's 2009 paper on administrative relationships, he details that although there are high levels of respect and congeniality between the two stakeholders, different functions, contributions, and job responsibilities create constant disconnect and disassociation. Specifically, academic staff feel like administrative staff is available for logistics and rule-following, and less for pedagogical and emotional support (which they would prefer) (Kuo, 2009).

In turn, overwhelmingly, administrative staff see their roles as operational, and much of the time, do not have the skill sets to assist academic staff with many of the requests they receive daily (Kuo, 2009). Further, administrative staff is sometimes frustrated by how often adjunct faculty come to them about things that fall outside of their job. Kuo (2009) created a model to demonstrate the fragility of the administrative and academic relationship, and how it is viewed from both stakeholders:

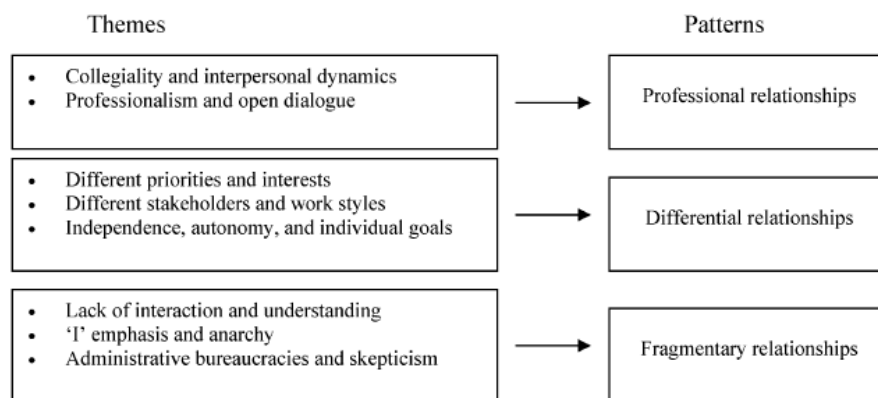


Figure 1: "Understanding Relationships Between Academic Staff and Administrators: An Organizational Cultural Perspective" by Hui-Min Kou, 2009, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. 31(1), p. 47.

As the figure details, the relationship patterns between administration and academic staff are complicated. The themes yield opportunities to either strengthen the relationship or weaken it, depending on the role of the administrator (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). For example, if an administrator and academic staff member are conversing about a scheduling issue, the conversation falls into the "professional" bucket, and there is usually open dialogue because

each understands the others' role and place in that conversation. In contrast, if academic staff contact administrative staff about needing to help with a student behavioral issue, the administrative staff is going to try and push that off. They are not trained in student behavior issues and would need to send the faculty member to someone else. This would, in turn, frustrate the academic staff member, as they do not understand why the administrator cannot help (as they are supposed to be "support"). This creates friction, misperception, and an aptitude for the faculty member to think the administrative staff is unhelpful.

Kuo (2009) suggests improvement can be made by setting expectations about roles and responsibilities of administrative staff at adjunct faculty onboarding. This can provide opportunities for both stakeholders to understand each other's roles. For example, administrative staff can take the time to explain contracting, scheduling, and why certain rules are in place. Academic staff, thus, can share with administrators that they need specific support and be more open and transparent about the classroom experience. This idea of setting expectations ties back to improvement science in relation to training. To implement a change, some form of training, or resetting expectations, is necessary (Langley, et.al, 2009).

### *Motivation*

As detailed in the literature on improvement science, behavior drives motivation (Langley, et.al, 2009). The "why" behind the motivation is what is most important to understand in any change initiative. This is so people with similar ideas can discuss them, those with opposing ideas can come to an understanding, and buy-in for initiatives can happen through conversation and influence. All of this is critical to making change for quality improvement.

According to Han and Yin (2016), categorizing motivation as energy or drive motivating individuals to do things is misleading. The complexity of motivation, the authors explain, yields there is truly no consensus to understanding motivation. Williams and Burden (1997), in contrast, detail two different motivation theories that can be used as a framework, which are especially applicable to adjunct faculty: Initiating motivation and sustaining motivation. Initiating motivation is concerned with the reasons for deciding and doing something, while sustaining motivation is the effort to persist in doing something (Williams & Burden, 1997). For teacher

motivation, specifically, Sinclair (2008) believes there are multiple factors that contribute, including “attraction to teaching, how long they remain in their initial teacher education courses, and subsequently the teaching profession, and the extent to which they engage with their courses and the teaching profession” (p. 37).

More commonly, teacher motivation is spoken about as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Extrinsic motivation stems from recognition or rewards from others, while intrinsic motivation stems directly from the performance and is an internal reward or satisfaction (Burnett, Paredes, Pons, & Williams, 2017). Intrinsic motivation is a key in overcoming any stress or unpleasant parts of a job, a natural passion for the work. While one may not be completely satisfied with all elements, multiple components of the role can still encourage engagement and motivation to do the job well. In short, even though there may be times of dissatisfaction, one is motivated to perform well because other factors of the job motivate them.

Breaking this down further, motivation for adjunct faculty tends to be more intrinsic than extrinsic. Specifically, adjuncts teach for connection with students and personal enjoyment (Wallis, 2018). Money is typically not a deciding faculty in teaching, as the majority of faculty hold other jobs besides teaching (Burnett, Paredes, Pons, & Williams, 2017). If they are teaching multiple classes, or teach at a variety of colleges and universities, they usually are not making enough money to live off comfortably (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019). While the connection with students and personal enjoyment are motivating factors, professional development opportunities and connections with other adjunct faculty are not.

In a study by Bates, Lowenthal, Stevens, Switzer, and Wray (2012), the researchers discuss the lack of intrinsic motivation for adjunct faculty to participate in professional development opportunities. They go on to detail how colleges and universities are in constant demand for accountability and improved teaching, and for this to occur, faculty need to participate in these programs. In this mixed methods study, the researchers found that, overwhelmingly, adjunct faculty do not want to attend workshops or webinars because of time constraints and perceived lack of value/specificity to their needs. Instead, they would prefer reading on their own time, attending meaningful retreats, or watching training videos. The researchers also suggest if

adjunct faculty were paid to attend training (which would be extrinsic motivation), they would be more likely to attend.

There is also a lack of intrinsic motivation when it comes to building relationships with faculty administrators. Burnett et al. (2017) found that adjunct faculty are neutral when it comes to having strong relationships with full-time faculty or administration. The rationale could stem from teaching outside normal business hours or apathy towards connection outside of teaching their course.

Additionally, motivation is influenced by peer effects. Scaffolding off the idea of network improvement communities from improvement science, faculty are influenced by what other faculty are doing, and are motivated (or unmotivated) based on positive or negative examples of performance or activity. In a 2006 controlled field experiment, Falk and Ichino demonstrated the power of peer effects. Specifically, the behavior of people working in pairs or groups is substantially different than those working alone. This lends itself to the importance of not only peer ambassadorship for X-Teams and CoP and VCoP affiliation, but also for teaching improvement. New teachers with little experience instructing, or low performing teachers, experience an increase in productivity and teaching quality by affiliating with high performers (Falk & Ichino, 2006).

Another key finding is the link between teacher motivation and student success. While past research strongly suggested relationships between teacher motivation and student learning yield to student success (or a lack thereof), more recent studies found otherwise. In fact, Roth et al. (2007) suggest even more research in this area is needed. To draw causal references, Roth et al. details there needs to be an increase in understanding how teacher motivation can support student learning as well as how the effects of teacher motivation enable student cognition.

Using all these strategies and tools together, an organization can not only see the system in its entirety but create work processes and integration that address root problems through improvement science. The next phase is demonstrating success of the initiative and continuing the cycle of motivation, which includes the Plan-Do-Study-Act Model.

### *The Plan-Do-Study-Act Model*

According to Byrk et al. (2016), improvement science within an educational setting focuses on specific tasks people do, the process and tools they use, and how policies, structures, and norms affect systemic improvement efforts. The goal in any improvement plan is to deploy a test of change to guide the development, the motivation to execute, optimize, and continue revising new tools, roles, systems, and relationships. To engage in improvement science, a community of individuals must explore the following questions:

- What is the specific problem I am trying to solve?
- What change might I introduce and why?
- How will I know whether the change is an improvement?

(Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016).

Another way education is benefitting from improvement science is to accelerate learning on how to improve a system (“Using Improvement Science to Accelerate Learning and Address Problems of Practice”, 2020). This can include testing out new curricula, instructor trainings, new policies and procedures, work roles, relationships, or community building activities, quickly assessing their success, and optimizing accordingly. This learning-by-doing methodology focuses less on formal measurement, which makes changes for systemic improvement more immediate and agile. Additionally, it includes adjunct faculty in the change from the onset, which the literature suggests motivates them to not only participate but buy-into the process.

These rapid cycles of change in improvement science is called a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model (Langley, et.al, 2009). Each part of the module is considered a cycle phase:

**Plan:** Asking the following questions to a community of individuals tied to the improvement project: What is the objective, questions, and predictions? Who, what, when, and where will this plan be carried out? What is the plan for data collection?

**Do:** Carrying out the plan, documenting observations/questions, and analyzing the data.

**Study:** Completing the data analysis and comparing the data to predictions; summarizing what was learned.

**Act:** Based on what was observed, what needs to change for next time around?

(Langley et al. 2009)

This phase of Improvement science makes a profound impact on new faculty. In Hannan, Park, Russel, and Takahashi (2015), the authors analyze a case study of new faculty under a Building a Teaching Effectiveness Network (BTEN). BTEN was a collaborative effort with The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers, the Aspen Institute, the Institute of Healthcare improvement, and three large public and urban school districts (Hannan, et al., 2015). This network improvement community was highly successful. After three years, it improved the “systems of development and support for early career teachers in partnering school districts, using the practices of improvement science” (Hannan, Park, Russel, & Takahashi, 2015, p. 495).

According to Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, and Park (2015), a collaborative effort such as a Building a Teaching Effectiveness Network (BTEN) can support new instructors through a standardized feedback method. This built-in support system provides new instructors the opportunity to learn from their peers, as well as interact with administration and develop teaching skills. On-boarding a new faculty member takes time not only for them, but for the key stakeholders involved like directors, executives, or other instructors.

### *Developing a Theory of Change*

Learning improvement science principles is just one step to making systemic change within an organization. Before putting these principles into practice, an organization needs to create a theory of change that will help lead the organization towards its goal. Langley et al. (2009) describe a theory of change as a statement that encompasses how and why a change is expected. This articulation is imperative to predicting the change that results in the improvement. Additionally, a theory of change helps ensure a desired goal is achieved. In all, a

46

theory of change is not only essential to the planning process but assists with benchmarking and evaluation.

## Primary Research

### *Strategy and Rationale for a Mixed Methods Study*

The primary research objective for this quality improvement plan was multifaceted. The first objective was to understand the significant issues affecting adjunct faculty within the School. Tied to this objective was to identify issues affecting the way adjunct faculty teach, seek professional development, or engage with the School. Another objective was to uncover factors that motivated adjunct faculty to engage with the School (outside of teaching their course) and the motivational factors involved in connecting with other adjunct faculty. Finally, on the administration side, there was an attempt to get a sense if communication and relationships with the administrative team affect faculty motivation and engagement. To understand adjunct faculty and administrative sentiment, a mixed methods study was conducted that included a survey, two focus groups, and three administrative interviews.

The scope of the primary research was limited to interactions with adjunct faculty at the School from August 2020 through December 2020. The survey was live for a two-week window from September 3 to September 17. The focus groups were completed on October 8 and 9. The administrative interviews were completed by November 30. All solicitation took place over email, with the assistance of the administrative team at the School, who sent out my requests for participation through the adjunct faculty email list, and to appropriate administrators for the interviews. Analysis took place in stages, as the survey informed the focus group questions and the focus group questions helped inform the administrative interview questions.

### *Research Questions*

The following research questions guided the three-part study:

- What are the most significant issues affecting adjunct faculty within the McDonough School of Business?



- How are identified issues affecting the way the way adjunct faculty teach, seek professional development, or engage with the School?
- What are the motivational factors involved for an adjunct faculty member to want to engage with the School or department (outside of teaching their course)?
- What are the motivational factors involved for an adjunct faculty member to want to engage with other adjunct faculty members?
- How does communication or relationships with administrators affect faculty motivation and engagement?
- How can strengthening the adjunct community address concerns or increase motivation?

## Phase 1: Survey

### *Methodology*

The initial survey to adjunct faculty at the School was inspired by an existing job satisfaction survey by P.E. Spector (1994; see Appendix A). Spector created the questionnaire to evaluate nine areas of job satisfaction related to overall job satisfaction. In Spector’s original survey, participants were asked to respond to 36 items on a scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

The purpose of this adjunct faculty survey was to get a base understanding of the adjunct faculty culture and satisfaction at the School. To meet this objective, Spector’s questions were altered to make relevant to job components of adjunct faculty. The length of the survey was adjusted from 36 items to 27 items to keep the survey completion time to under 20 minutes (see Appendix B for survey distribution language and solicitation materials and Appendix C for the final Qualtrics survey). There was no compensation for responding to the survey nor was there any known risk. At no point were participants asked for their names to keep responses as anonymous as possible.

The final questions in the survey asked if there was anything the participant would like to add and if the participant would like to be part of a focus group to discuss findings of this survey



in-depth (see Appendix D). Once written and approved, the survey was inputted into Qualtrics and distributed by Cristy Villa, a designated administrative team member at the School.

Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey. At the halfway point (one week), the survey and solicitation letter were reforwarded to the original group as a reminder to participate. At the end of the two weeks, completed surveys were analyzed for key insights and overarching themes, which inspired the questions for the focus groups. To be eligible for the focus group, faculty needed to complete a screener that asked years of teaching at the School, gender, age, and level of education to ensure a diverse group of voices would be included. In total, the survey was sent to 50 adjunct faculty members at the School, which was determined by the number of faculty included on the email list. A total of 15 adjunct faculty members completed the survey, which yielded a 30% response rate, a 90% confidence level, and an 18% margin of error.

The survey analysis began with grouping questions into specific categories and characteristics. Specifically, the categories were engagement, support, and recognition. From there, questions were divided into positive versus negative responses (agree or disagree) groupings to facilitate interpretation. While age was asked for to ensure diverse perspectives, they were less impactful than the years of service, which provided more insight into current adjunct faculty sentiment. The years of service cohorts included 1-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-19 years, and 20+ years (see Appendix E).

#### *Research Questions to Answer Through the Survey*

- *How are identified issues affecting the way adjunct faculty teach, seek professional development, or engage with the School?*
- *What are the most significant issues affecting adjunct faculty within the McDonough School of Business?*

#### *Survey Findings*

##### *Main Theme 1: Do Employees Feel Their Efforts are Recognized?*

The survey results from this question indicated two key takeaways: 1. That employees felt that their compensation and benefits reflect the quality/quantity of their work and 2. There is strong agreement among participants (67%) that believe they should have benefits at the School they are not currently getting. Breaking this down by years of service, adjunct faculty who had between 6-19 years of service agreed with this statement the most, while newer faculty (between 1-4 years) agreed the least. When it comes to the compensation, 5-9 years, and 20+ years disagreed the most that they are paid a fair amount for the work they do, but half of newer faculty (1-4 years) also agreed (50%).

For positive connotations, for any prompt that corresponded to a positive work experience, 54% of all adjunct faculty disagreed with the question. The most negative result came from the participants feeling like they are not paid enough. For negative connotations, the strongest results came from feeling unappreciated because of how much they get paid.

On a positive note, no faculty agreed their job is thankless and the overwhelming majority of adjunct faculty felt some appreciation for the work they do (33% for faculty with 1-4 years of service, 67% for 5-9 years of service, and 50% for 10-19 years of service). The only years of service category that disagreed were the 20+ category.

### *Main Theme 2: Are Employees Engaged at Work?*

The survey results from this section indicated that, overwhelmingly, adjunct faculty love the act of teaching. They also felt engaged while working (teaching) and took pride in it (100% agreed). For any prompt under this theme that corresponds with a positive work experience, 87% agreed, especially in feeling pride in doing their jobs and that teaching makes them happy. For any prompt that corresponded to a negative working experience, 31% of participants felt like their overall engagement with the institution contributed to a negative experience, but instead to a positive one. However, 32% felt isolated doing their job and only 28% felt good about their engagement with the School. There was no profound distinction between years of service under this theme.

### *Main Theme 3: Do Employees Feel Supported at Work?*

The questions under this theme were the most distinctive among years of service. 100% of adjunct faculty 1-4 years and 5-9 years felt like they have everything they need to do their job. However, only 50% of those with 10-15 years of service felt like they have everything needed. This cohort also felt the least supported by administration in doing their job and felt like they are blocked the most by administrative red tape. 83% of all adjunct faculty respondents, however, felt blocked by red tape.

While most adjunct faculty respondents felt like they have what they need to do their job, there was low agreement with taking advantage of taking advantage of professional development opportunities. Further, 32% agreed that that their supervisor/faculty director showed too little interest in what they do daily or supports them.

### *Discussion*

Triangulating back to improvement science, the survey identified a need for disciplined inquiry. Specifically, this means that it is more important to learn about a few of these topics in more depth, but to prioritize the issues prior to investing in initiatives. From the survey findings, three distinct categories appeared that would direct the focus groups:

- Community engagement
- Job Responsibilities
- Compensation

Under community engagement, the questions needed to focus on why professional development opportunities are not being taken advantage of, as well as why adjunct faculty are feeling isolated and what can be done to ameliorate. Additionally, there needed to be questions around what encourages adjunct faculty to engage with the School past teaching their classes.

Under job responsibilities and compensation, questions needed to be developed around why adjunct faculty feel underpaid, why leadership does not understand their roles, and what benefits they are not receiving (but feel they should have).

## Phase 2: Focus Groups

### *Methodology*

The survey responses informed the development of the focus group questions. Based on the results, it was clear questions needed to fall into three categories: Job responsibilities, compensation, and community engagement. Specifically, questions needed to home in on why there was such low engagement and participation with the school outside of teaching classes, why faculty are feeling isolated, and the benefits and compensation adjunct faculty felt they should be getting. Further, it would be important to understand why adjunct faculty felt like they are underpaid for their responsibilities and what their current motivations are to teach (and do it well).

From the survey, focus group participants were identified from those who completed the screener and indicated “yes” to be contacted via email. From the surveys, 12 adjunct faculty indicated “yes” to take part in the focus groups. Email addresses and timing preferences for participation were collected and then were sent solicitation emails to each identified adjunct faculty member or those who did not respond within a week’s time, one follow-up communication was sent. Post solicitation and follow up, nine adjunct faculty members who indicated they wanted to participate in the focus groups joined the conversation (see Appendix F).

Once focus groups commenced, adjunct faculty were read a script that detailed the purpose of the focus groups (see Appendix G for the opening script for the focus groups and Appendix H for the moderator’s guide), the promise of anonymity and confidentiality, and how the findings would be used. From there, all participants needed to verbally consent to the recording of the focus group by saying “yes” aloud. All did. Each focus group started and ended on time (75 minutes each) and participants were welcome to follow up with any questions or additional comments that may add to the study (see Appendix I).

Focus groups were analyzed through manual line-by-line transcript coding. The transcript for both focus groups resulted in a 72-page transcript. The first step was to code focus group participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. In this, each adjunct faculty participant had

an AJ1 through AJ9 designation. This coding was arbitrary and self-created, as “AJ” was shorthand for “adjunct”. The numbers were assigned at random, based on the order in which the adjunct faculty member confirmed their participation in the focus groups.

The next step was to try and narrow down some key themes. To do this, the transcript was analyzed line-by-line, focusing on the most common themes and ideas. Quotes, insights, and information triangulating back to the secondary research were highlighted, and most mentioned by the participants or agreed upon by the participants, were labeled as a “main idea”. If at least half of the participants mentioned or agreed with the sentiment, it was labeled as a “secondary idea”. Themes or concepts that were least mentioned or agreed upon were labeled “tertiary ideas.” Direct quotes and verbatims important to the analysis were attributed to participants via the designated coding. Only the main ideas and secondary ideas are discussed in the following analysis.

Further, one-off sentiments or highly specific experiences were put in a “parking lot” document. While some of these thoughts were interesting, they were not used in the analysis because they were specific negative experiences that would have compromised anonymity or were completely off topic. The main ideas and secondary ideas were then organized to create a compelling narrative of findings. Specific quotes that highlighted key themes are included.

#### *Research Questions to Answer Through the Focus Groups*

- *What are the motivational factors involved for an adjunct faculty member to want to engage with the School or department (outside of teaching their course)?*
- *What are the motivational factors involved for an adjunct faculty member to want to engage with other adjunct faculty members?*
- *How can strengthening the adjunct community address concerns or increase motivation?*

## *Focus Group Findings*

### *Results from the Compensation and Responsibilities-Themed Questions*

The most prominent theme coming out of a series of questions around compensation and responsibilities was the lack of understanding school leadership has about the demands of teaching. The majority of adjunct faculty in both focus groups expressed frustration around how school leadership does not understand the time or work involved in being an adjunct faculty member. Participant AJ1 got enthusiastic agreement for his sentiment that “They just don’t know very much. I don’t think they have much way of understanding how much work goes into preparing at the adjunct level.” Specifically, the focus group participants named the following as things school leadership needs to understand better:

- How the lack of appreciation affects them.
- How class size affects teaching.
- How undercompensated they are for the work they do.
- The lack of good will towards them.
- How much time it takes to correct papers, update classes, and learn how to teach online (because of the pandemic).

The lack of compensation was a point that consistently came up during the conversations, and it was not simply about monetary compensation. Adjunct faculty in both focus groups thought the low pay should be rectified by offering small gestures that would make a difference. For example, AJ5, said “Come on. At least give me free parking. I asked, they said they can’t. Well, how about putting our names on our office door? They tried to do that once, but it got taken down. It’s such a small thing! Was it because full-time faculty couldn’t ‘tolerate’ it being up? Just...you know, it’s not nice.”

Other areas of frustration around compensation included a lack of providing adjunct faculty the resources to get the work done, or even interest from school leadership about what is needed to get the job done. AJ2 said “I’ve never had the head of a department reach out. Integration can start there.” AJ5 said “At least invite me to come to research meetings.”

Participant AJ6 received much agreement with their sentiment that “They don’t even want my feedback or buy-in for ideas. We are the people who teach the courses, and there is zero input from those of us on the front lines.” Another form of compensation discussed was working with faculty from other disciplines, with more opportunities to brainstorm lesson plans, activities, and syllabi best practices.

The concept of time was another prominent theme within the conversation of compensation and responsibilities. While the adjunct faculty in both focus groups detailed how school leadership did not previously understand how much time and energy it took to prepare for classes, as well as the labor involved in giving students feedback, this was exasperated in the Covid-19 environment. As of fall 2020 (when these focus groups commenced), faculty had been teaching online since March, and not only did not feel confident in their teaching but did not feel supported. When prompted for more context, participants named generic workshops with CNDLS (the third-party vendor who designs online courses for the School) to prepare them for online teaching. None of the faculty thought this was enough, nor did they feel supported teaching their traditionally on-ground courses online based on the lack of contact from their departments.

The most common complaints were the large (50+ students) classes they manage without additional support, the unfamiliarity with online pedagogy, and how to keep students engaged. The majority of adjunct faculty expressed interest in regular professional development opportunities, outside of workday hours, and more opportunities to work with other adjuncts to brainstorm classroom activities, make syllabi adjustments, and learn about teaching innovation. While the conversation on this topic began with Covid-19 adjustments, adjunct faculty were clear they would appreciate these opportunities in more normal teaching environments, too.

When it comes to responsibility, there was much conversation around adjunct faculty versus full-time faculty (tenure and non-tenure). Specifically, the adjunct faculty in both focus groups felt like they do more work than full-time faculty, yet no one recognizes it. Participant AJ2 received many head nods when they said “I assume it's a zero-sum game. There's {only} so much money to pay faculty. So, it goes to full-time faculty. And I think the adjustment of the balance between adjunct and full time is probably what really needs to be examined.” AJ5 then

chimed in (paraphrased) that the School should be looking at what they are paying full-time faculty for the same work and make it “more fair.”

When prompted to expand upon how to make it “more fair”, answers did not come in the form of proposed solutions, but instead, frustrations about pay for the work required, lack of personalized support, and recognition. Specifically, AJ1 commented on how much they pay adjuncts versus “how much money the School must make overall” and suggested to the group that there was a clear “imbalance”. The majority of adjunct faculty from both focus groups concurred and felt like the low pay goes against the Jesuit values of caring for the whole person. In fact, AJ5 said that they are just “expected” to do the work for whatever money they are given. “Very take it or leave it”, they said.

A common complaint from both groups was that leadership does not understand what it takes to teach, and thus does not understand how undervalued they feel because of the low pay. Most adjunct faculty mentioned the time it takes to prepare for lectures, correct papers, and answer student emails/help students with assignments (six-to-eight additional hours). Some verbatims to support the need for additional support and compensation include:

*“I need help. I feel like even when I ask for help, it’s a struggle. For example, I asked for a TA for at least three months this summer. My online class had over 50 students! It’s too much. Why do I have to beg?” (AJ5).*

*“Much of the time, we’re handed down syllabi or class materials from someone else. This can be time consuming because it’s not how the next teacher would teach it. Sometimes it’s not as easy as you would think to ‘pick up’ a class. It takes a lot of time and energy no one thinks about” (AJ9).*

*“I’m wearing so many more hats now that we’re virtual: Office hours extended, planning for virtual, that I honestly don’t think anyone knows that. The reality is, students are expecting us to work all day and then be up all night. We need support” (AJ9).*

Additionally, faculty in both focus groups commented on how they do not think the School takes their schedules or additional responsibilities outside of teaching into consideration when



scheduling events or other opportunities to improve their teaching. AJ9 mentioned that most events or training (including training for online teaching) happen during the day, which is not realistic to attend based on their full-time job responsibilities. AJ8 discussed how frustrating it is that the School thinks they have time to go through every website or resource available or read every email and then when asking a question to the department, be told that an email was sent about that/to refer to the email. Overwhelmingly, adjunct faculty in both focus groups would prefer to be asked about times of the day/evening that work for them regarding trainings, events, and workshops. Additionally, they would prefer live, conversational sessions about grading, teaching best practices, and curriculum so they have a chance to ask questions and learn from other faculty (both full-time and other adjuncts).

### *Discussion*

The focus groups provided key insights for the School to consider about the current adjunct faculty mindset and morale. Highlighted in the literature on the dissatisfied adjunct faculty, these faculty do not feel like school leadership understands the amount of work and energy it takes to teach a class, and assume they have time and energy that they simply do not. This is the case for both “professional adjuncts” and those who have full-time jobs outside of teaching. Further, there is frustration around the level of support for the level of responsibility, inclusive of the availability of teaching assistants and technical support, in addition to collaboration and partnership on syllabi development and optimization throughout the semester. While monetary compensation and extrinsic awards were discussed at length by participants, those are temporary fixes to a larger systemic problem of dedicating specific resources to adjunct faculty to demonstrate care and appreciation. This is a perfect example of seeing the system that produces the current outcomes, the third principle of improvement science.

Further, it is important to note that all participants in both focus groups concurred that while there are many frustrations associated with adjunct teaching, in the end, none of those frustrations bleed over into their current teaching quality. In other words, they do not feel like they do a poor job teaching because of their perceived environment. This triangulates to the literature from Bates, Lowenthal, Stevens, Switzer, and Wray (2012), which details the lack of intrinsic motivation for professional development (in particular, improved teaching and

community building), but not teaching overall. While previous research assumed relationships between teacher motivation and student learning yield to, or deter, student success, more recent studies found otherwise. In short, higher education leadership can feel assured that despite adjunct faculty morale about the logistics of their job, they still strive to do a good job in the classroom. What is important to note, however, is that although adjunct morale may not affect teaching quality, autonomous support to students versus controlling behavior in the classroom does (Han & Yin, 2016).

The aspect of time yielded some important insights. While adjunct faculty feel they are time pressed with administrative functions of their job, they expressed wanting to be involved in more areas that interest them and show off their expertise. The focus groups suggest a strong desire to be part of curriculum design, committees, and other leadership roles. Thus, there is a need to bridge the gap between professional development to improve teaching (which adjunct faculty feel they should be compensated for) versus what they are would participate in sans additional compensation. This ties back to improvement science through the principle of anchoring practice improvement in discipline inquiry. This is because bridging the gap between professional development to improve teaching versus what adjunct faculty would participate in sans additional compensation will take learning fast, failing fast, and improving quickly. While adjunct faculty may want to engage more with aspects of the School that interest them, and show off their expertise, there is no guarantee they will engage in everything offered through recommendations. In this, it is imperative school leadership implement the PDSA model from improvement science with every engagement opportunity, and continually ask for adjunct faculty feedback.

While age was not asked of each participant while in the focus group, the years of service of each did correlate to some interesting insights. By way of introduction, each participant introduced themselves at the start of the session, which included years of service. According to Yakoboski (2018), satisfaction is linked with adjunct faculty age and highest degree attained. Specifically, those on the younger end of the age spectrum (under 40 years old) are more apt to be dissatisfied with their adjunct role. Therefore, many get into adjunct teaching later in life, towards the end of their career or post. Younger adjunct faculty opt to have higher degree

achievement (hence, large output expenditure) and are more dependent on the salary than older adjunct faculty. This yielded true in relation to years of service.

The focus groups revealed faculty newer to teaching were less satisfied with their compensation and benefits than faculty who had been teaching for more than 10 years. This is because adjunct faculty past the 10-year mark typically have more experience in the field and thus, are teaching more as a second career than an additional job dependent on compensation. This triangulates back to the survey data, where it was revealed that the fewer years of service an adjunct faculty member has, the less satisfied they are with compensation and benefits.

Finally, what attracts adjunct faculty to teaching had an impact on motivation. And the reason for this is because usually, adjunct faculty start off their teaching career highly motivated but it is lost along the way (Han & Yin, 2016). This is clear through this focus group data, as everyone started off motivated to be part of the School, and this feeling was lost some time through their tenure because of the discussed experiences. Thus, it is imperative School leadership try to reestablish (and grow) adjunct faculty motivation to engage and participate by addressing some of the listed concerns and issues.

#### *Results from the Community-Themed Questions*

Overwhelmingly, adjunct faculty do not feel a sense of community at the School. In fact, all adjunct faculty who participated in the focus groups felt disconnected, isolated, and unheard. AJ1 kicked off this part of the conversation by saying “I think this is the first time we’ve ever had a chance to talk freely about issues like this.” AJ2 picked up on this sentiment and said, “There is no faculty community. If I want to meet other faculty, I need to do it on my own.”

Throughout the conversation, it became clear the lack of community adjuncts felt directly impacts their motivation and participation in School activities. The two main pain points for the adjunct faculty in both groups were the lack of formal onboarding and continuous support, as well as feeling a lack of belonging within the School.

### *Results from On-Boarding and Feedback-Themed Questions*

In both focus groups, participants were asked to raise their hand if they received formal on-boarding to teach at the School. Operationalized, on-boarding was defined for both groups as classroom management training, practice in pedagogy and achieving learning outcomes, and creating rubrics, assignments, and assessments. No one in either group raised their hand. When prompted about available resources through the University to achieve this training (CNDLS, the library, professional development), the majority of faculty knew these resources were available, but did not engage in these offerings for the following reasons:

1. They did not know where to look.
2. They were overwhelmed with teaching. They did not have time to read websites.
3. There was no human interaction behind it, and they would rather hear from full-time faculty or learn from peers.
4. Trainings, workshops, and events were during the day (when they were busy with other responsibilities).
5. They would rather work with people from the School.

All adjunct faculty in both focus groups felt they were ill-prepared by the School to teach. In fact, AJ2 got strong agreement from the rest of the group when they said “What on-boarding? I on-boarded myself”. When asked to go into more detail about this, other adjunct faculty in focus group one joined in, detailing that teaching requires skills they do not have from their time in the corporate space. Specifically, these skills include creating rubrics, grading, lesson planning, and managing the classroom experience/teaching to different levels in the classroom.

When asked if they were given resources to look at before they started teaching, the answer was a reserved yes from all participants in both focus groups. When prompted with “what resources?”, adjunct faculty discussed the frustration of not having a single person to go to for help, and instead, were sent to websites to self-teach or third-party trainings from CNLDS (who manages the online courses via the learning management system, Canvas). Because they felt so overwhelmed with just getting the basics of teaching down (what they would teach each week

and how they would teach it), not one of the adjunct faculty members in either group took advantage of the websites or third-party training.

The following verbatims highlighted these points:

*“I was sent a bunch of websites to look at. But I never completed my onboarding, and nobody checked that I'd never completed because I never had time I was supposed to. And I always wanted to, but it was always during the working hours that I'm working somewhere else. And so, I never did it. Frankly, no one checked/cared that I completed any onboarding” (AJ9).*

*“I was literally just thrown into the fire. Thank goodness I had {an adjunct} faculty role before Georgetown where we had onboarding, and I attended all that stuff. And no point. Was there any discussion of what to do in the classroom of how to design a syllabus, you can engage with other faculty and ask questions. And I think the faculty that I encountered at Georgetown were really open about sharing their syllabus or how they went about teaching class or so, but you had to actively reach out for that and some faculty are a little bit more. Open than others with sharing, but I did not encounter any formal training on what you do in the classroom” (AJ8).*

*“I once had a student who literally bribed me. I said no, but I didn't know who to go to. I didn't want to go straight to the dean...what office was I supposed to contact to complain? I had no idea” (AJ9).*

### *Discussion*

Through these verbatims, there are clear tiebacks to the literature. First, there is ample evidence for not seeing the system, a key component of improvement science (Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2018). By not seeing the system, many assumptions are being made by leadership about adjunct faculty onboarding. An example of this is that adjunct faculty are getting a lot out of “orientation” or are taking advantage of the School’s resources and “self-training.” Further, the things that adjunct faculty need and want out of training are not being addressed, because there is no continuous feedback on on-going conversations to uncover their needs. For example, adjunct faculty want to learn together, from peers and full-time

faculty. The majority work during the day, too. These two insights are critical in developing programming that meets adjunct faculty wants and needs. As Bates et al (2012) detailed, if adjunct faculty perceive a lack of value in a training or workshop, they will not attend. The goal with future trainings or onboarding program should be to tap into intrinsic motivation so adjunct faculty want to attend, sans additional compensation. This is achieved by asking them what they want and need, delivering on those wants and needs, and adding value to their lives by being part of something bigger than just a course (Felber, n.d.).

On the topic of doing training in groups or getting adjunct faculty together with mentors or full-time faculty, this needs to be an immediate optimization at the School. Not only will this answer a need and want from adjunct faculty to build community, but it will also help with quality improvement of pedagogy and course alignment. Peer effects, as detailed by Falk and Ichino (2006), make a profound impact on teacher participation and motivation. By incentivizing each other to do better, high achievers may motivate lower-performing teachers, and in turn, high achievers will feel like they have a mentorship or leadership role.

#### *Results from Belonging-Themed Questions*

The other part of this conversation about community was establishing a sense of belonging with the School. Specifically, adjunct faculty do not understand where they “fit” into the School’s mission and vision and feel like they are treated like “gig workers” (AJ2). Additionally, AJ7 discussed how they feel like a “lone wolf”, basically left to “figure things out” as they go along their teaching journey. Another topic discussed was not understanding the School’s culture or feeling immersed in it. In this, the majority of faculty in both focus groups thought it would be helpful if they understood the demographics and psychographics of the students and faculty before heading into the classroom. This is so they would feel more comfortable getting to know their colleagues and help cater lessons better. The following verbatims support this sentiment, and several others from the group:

*“Faculty members should be immersed in the {School} culture and what the expectations {of teaching} would be a real positive benefit; something that could be addressed” (AJ8).*

*“A comfort zone steps from knowing what the culture is at that particular place and what others have seen and the types of students and the type of faculty we have. I think that’s really important” (AJ9).*

### *Discussion*

This sense of belonging extended to needing to feel like an accepted part of a group. Specifically, like “faculty” at the School. This was supported by the literature, as overwhelmingly, adjunct faculty feel like second-class citizens compared to full-time faculty. This feeling was expressed frequently throughout the focus groups. Adjunct faculty want to feel included in activities that use their expertise and directly affect their teaching, like curriculum development, committee opportunities, and the ability to build community with each other. This ties back to the literature on making the adjunct faculty role less of a managerial one, and more so about empowerment and leadership. As detailed by Gavin (2019), what is lacking from the adjunct faculty role is leadership. This means inclusion in innovation, development, and the autonomy to act. Participation will increase if the opportunities to lead and feel valued increase.

As discussed by Felber (n.d.), adjunct faculty need to be involved in decision making, feel like their concerns are heard and addressed, and believe they are seen as members of leadership to feel like they belong to an organization. Taking this a step further, Hannah, Russell, Takahashi, and Park (2015) added that establishing relationships with other faculty, having peer support and assistance, and feeling supported with student issues all help strengthen relationships between the adjunct faculty community and the School.

### *Additional Ideas & Final Thoughts*

Towards the end of both focus groups, adjunct faculty were asked if there was anything they were not asked that they would like to share (that would be helpful to the goal of this study). While this question was not directly related to any question asked during the focus groups, they did provide important considerations for future programming that encourages adjunct faculty community building, participation, and motivation to engage. They include:

- First-year student mentorship.
- Alumni engagement.
- Serve on committees.
- Mixers to get to know each other.
- Collaborations with adjunct faculty who work in my industry.
- Lunches.
- Ways to connect after the Christmas party (a master list with emails).
- Getting together to hear local speakers/experts of notoriety.
- Help understanding their evaluations.

Connecting back to the literature, what was most interesting about these engagement ideas is that they are in opposition to adjunct faculty saying they are time pressed. The insight here stems from Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011) on creating value within network communities. Adjunct faculty, in general, crave inclusion in a way in which they feel like their expertise and time is appreciated, and that they are not just “gig workers”. Thus, the more important they feel to the School (and the less disposable) and the more they feel heard and valued and thus, the more apt they will be to engage in activities that make them better instructors and committed members of the community.

While recommendations for this quality improvement plan will not address all these specific interests, they are important to consider for future initiatives and activities.

### **Phase 3: Interviews**

#### *Methodology*

To provide insight into administrative viewpoints about their relationships with adjunct faculty at the School, three 13-question interviews were conducted. The participants were selected by the candidate’s primary contact at the School via the following criteria:



- Frequent contact with adjunct faculty at the McDonough School of Business.
- From a variety of job positions that work with adjunct faculty at the McDonough School of Business.
- May have unique insight into the perspectives and relationships of adjunct faculty at the McDonough School of Business.
- Observe-and have opinions about-adjunct faculty community, motivation, and engagement.

Solicitation of the three selected individuals took place via email (see Appendix J). Each were provided details on the interview and its purpose and asked if they would like to participate. Once their participation was confirmed, each participant was given one week to complete the interview in writing and return it via email. Each interview was analyzed for repeated themes and patterns, as well as for insights that corroborate or dismantle responses about administrative support from the literature review, surveys, and focus groups. To protect the identities of each participant, as well as keep responses anonymous, names and titles are not provided in the analysis.

The administrative interview questions were heavily inspired by Kuo's (2009) study (see Appendix K). This study goes into detail about the dynamics between academic and administrative staff at a large public university in the U.S. Specifically, the interview questions borrowed from the categories and patterns found in his own interviews with administrators: Differentiation, fragmentation, individualism, and interaction (Kuo, 2009).

There were numerous responses from the three administrators that triangulated back to frustrations expressed during the focus groups, as well as the survey data. Interview participants were coded one-through-three (arbitrary), to ensure anonymity.

#### *Research Question to Answer Through the Interviews*

- *How does communication or relationships with administrators affect faculty motivation and engagement?*

## *Findings*

An overall finding is that there is a disconnect between adjunct faculty needs and how the administrative team is serving them. Specifically, the three individuals interviewed see their role as a strictly logistical and coordinator function, while adjunct faculty are seeking more emotional and pedagogical support.

All three participants were asked to assign a rank, on a scale of 1-5 (one being the lowest and five the highest), for how much the School provides support to adjunct faculty. The average was a 2.7 out of 5. One participant went so far as to say the “availability” for those who “want to seek it out” is a 5, but “in terms of engagement, more like a 2-to-3”. This suggests that although the administrative team is focused on their roles and responsibilities with logistics and coordination, they recognized that faculty need designated support to facilitate and navigate university resources. This is in addition to support to reinforce the available trainings and assist with questions.

In conjunction with the finding above, the participants were asked about opportunities to strengthen the relationships between adjunct faculty. Participant three answered this by detailing the School holds on-boarding meetings every year with new and old adjuncts. During these meetings, the participant explained, adjunct faculty are introduced to their account coordinator. This response stood out from the other two participants because it was logistical and did not address how to strengthen peer-to-peer interactions. Instead, it was commentary on how the on-boarding meetings are supposed to build community. Yet, there is no activity during the on-boarding sessions, or collaboration with one another, to promote or encourage community building.

The two other participants were enthusiastic that more needs to be done to encourage peer-to-peer interactions among adjunct faculty. One participant suggested “creating spaces for adjunct faculty to meet at least one time per semester”. Participant two agreed and commented “There is very little connection {between adjunct faculty} I see, so it seems the opportunity to be stronger here is limitless. Anything that is perceived as welcoming (that fits reasonably well with

the schedule of someone who has another job) seems to have potential.” This triangulates to the focus group data, as the majority of adjunct faculty felt like there is much more that could be done to build community among adjunct faculty. Also, there is a clear tie to the survey data, which demonstrated a lack of adjunct faculty connection or engagement with the School or each other. In fact, there was low agreement with taking advantage of taking advantage of professional development opportunities. Further, 32% agreed that that their supervisor/faculty director showed too little interest in what they do daily or supports them.

Another interesting finding was how each participant defined “adjunct faculty support”. Participant one considered support to mean “complete and interactive internet” where details are posted for any instructor to find information about teaching at the School (participant one, personal communication, November 19, 2020). This participant also mentioned the availability of teaching assistant or research assistant support if the instructor needs information about teaching and grading. Participant two took a different approach to this question and discussed administrative assistance, finding meeting spaces, help understanding school policy, and answering questions from students. An impactful finding from participant two’s response was the assumption that for adjunct faculty “there is an additional element of helping them connect with colleagues since they don’t spend time in the same physical space”, but also acknowledgement that the responsibility falls somewhere else (participant two, personal communication, December 4, 2020). Participant three believed “adjunct support” meant providing answers to faculty. For example, “to have materials like handbooks or guidelines readily available to them; to offer support in the form of graduate or teaching assistants” (participant three, personal communication, November 19, 2020).

The last key insight from the interviews stemmed from the disconnect between how the adjunct faculty view the participant’s role, versus their actual role within the school. In other words, because adjunct faculty support is limited, they assume these three individuals can help them with teaching support and curriculum questions. This is not so. In fact, participant two said “I think a lot of adjunct faculty don’t understand the scope of my role because it’s not relevant to them - they are typically not a part of determining curriculum, launching new programs, etc. But they are not wrong (disconnected) in respect to how it relates to them” (participant two, personal

communication, December 4, 2020). This verbatim is an important tieback to the focus group data, where faculty expressed frustration about not being included in determining curriculum and launching new programs.

Participant three suggested there needs to be clarification to faculty about who does what. “My name is on the contracts and communication comes from me; some adjunct faculty still reach out to my colleagues asking questions that in the end, I answer” (participant three, personal communication, November 19, 2020). In contrast, participant one thought there was no issue with the way things are. In fact, they suggested that “we have a simple and clean system. The AC staffs the course, we communicate with the adjuncts, contract them, and that’s it” (participant one, personal communication, November 19, 2020). Participant one’s opinion is consistent with other responses that assume adjunct faculty do not need any additional support than what is already available.

### *Discussion*

Through these responses, it is clear adjunct faculty support means different things to the adjunct faculty versus the administrative team that supports them. This is a prime example of principle three in improvement science, seeing the system. Through the focus groups, adjunct faculty detailed they need designated support for teaching, learning, and community building. The administrative team that supports them are more logistical in nature and do exactly what is asked of them, but nothing more. This assumes that the faculty get assistance “elsewhere” (which is not happening). This is a strong example of not seeing the system and is an opportunity for the School to improve.

There were many assumptions made between the two groups that may have never been uncovered unless explicitly asked for through this quality improvement plan. As learned through the literature on improvement science, not seeing the system, or the systems not seeing each other, are a main reason why ideas fail to execute successfully. To prevent, Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2016) suggest organizational leadership learn how to see the system.

Additionally, it should be noted that the administrative team had a different sentiment than the adjunct faculty when it came to their symbiotic relationship. While Burnett et al. (2017) found that adjunct faculty are neutral when it comes to having strong relationships with full-time faculty or administration, the focus groups disproved that. It seems adjunct faculty crave specific relationships with administration and other faculty, not just “any” relationship. While adjunct faculty may not use or respond to School emails often, nor engage in ways that are obvious to administration and leadership, that does not mean they do not crave it. In fact, if the relationships added value to their roles, and helped them feel valued, it would not only strengthen their teaching, but their morale and participation.

Finally, the administrative interviews connected back to Kuo’s research on administrative and academic staff relationships. As previously discussed, Kuo (2009) detailed that although there are high levels of respect and congeniality between the two stakeholders, different functions, contributions, and job responsibilities create constant disconnect and disassociation. Specifically, academic staff feel like administrative staff is available for logistics and rule-following, and less for pedagogical and emotional support, which they would prefer (Kuo, 2009). Synthesizing this with the primary research (focus groups and interviews), there is a clear disconnect and misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities between the parties. However, there is also ample opportunity to reset expectations and come to a common understanding about how their jobs align in ways that enhance the organization, while ensuring adjunct faculty get the support they need for pedagogy, training, and classroom management.

### *Primary Research Limitations*

The following limitations should be noted, as they impacted design, methodology, and findings:

Past faculty data, including satisfaction surveys or qualitative results of faculty course evaluations were unavailable throughout the duration of this project: Both a satisfaction survey (because it did not exist) and qualitative results of the faculty course evaluations (access could not be granted). This limited the ability to see faculty sentiments about community, participation, and engagement prior to this project, and inform questions or methodology for this study.

Additionally, improvement science expert and Vanderbilt University lecturer, David Laird was consulted early on in this project for suggestions on how to go about primary research. He mentioned having student voices was a critical part of this process, as it helps see the whole system (D. Laird, personal communication, September 16, 2020). Unfortunately, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to easily connect with students, nor was creating a focus group for this effort. The lack of student voices does pose a detriment to the primary research, as they are a key stakeholder in adjunct faculty engagement and participation.

The survey had a low response rate. Out of the 50 faculty it was sent to, only 15 completed, which yields to a 30% response rate. While the survey did produce some important data to inform the recommendations, it was a limitation to have so few. It is possible the adjunct faculty who responded to the survey were the ones who felt most passionate about the topic or craved connection and community. After consulting with leadership at the School, this type of response rate is common for any adjunct faculty survey.

Finally, it would be remiss not to mention the possible bias of all results because of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. It cannot be ruled out that survey results were more negative than they would be in any “normal” academic year. Additionally, during the focus groups, it was clear faculty were stressed, frustrated, and exhausted and were vocal about their struggles. Teaching online, managing student emotions (while managing their own), and competing priorities (coupled with more demands from School leadership) were some of the top issues mentioned. All these factors could have resulted in a social influence effect to focus on more negatives than positives during both sessions, as well as homing in on issues that were not previously bothersome.

### ***Recommendations***

#### *Using Improvement Science for a Better Adjunct Faculty Experience*

From the literature review and primary research, we see that most adjunct faculty believe they are effective teachers, but the lack of professional support, community building, and guidance on teaching practices hinder their classroom performance, as well as their ability to

engage with the School. Additionally, adjunct faculty feel disconnected with, and misunderstood by, leadership and administration, and partially resentful of their compensation and benefits. By using the principles of improvement science and integrating best practices into future planning, the following recommendations could make a difference in participation, engagement, performance, and community of adjunct faculty at the McDonough School of Business.

*Introduction: Quality Improvement Plan*

The main components of the intervention fall into three distinct categories: Community building, professional development, and added value. The rationale for these categories is based on key findings from the literature review and primary research analysis, which were then put into two main planning templates used in improvement science: A fishbone diagram and driver diagram. This was to ensure exact root causes of systemic issues were uncovered, and that the change ideas had specific drivers that would lead towards solving the problem of practice. Thus, through activating these community building activities with adjunct faculty, the following will be achieved:

- Adjunct faculty will get the support and mentorship they need feel connected to the School.
- Adjunct faculty will improve their teaching and student success and satisfaction will increase because of established on-boarding, orientation, and ongoing professional development that meets their needs.
- Adjunct faculty will begin to feel valued by School leadership and move from traditionally managerial roles to key leaders and contributors.
- Engagement and participation in the School and University will increase because of an emphasis on relationship building, transparency, accountability, and authenticity.
- The School's overall reputation will increase because of these changes, which will result in a competitive advantage from other business schools. Adjunct faculty will recruit other faculty, make industry connections on behalf of the School, and become ambassadors for programming.

Where applicable throughout the recommendations, examples of in-practice success in higher education were included.

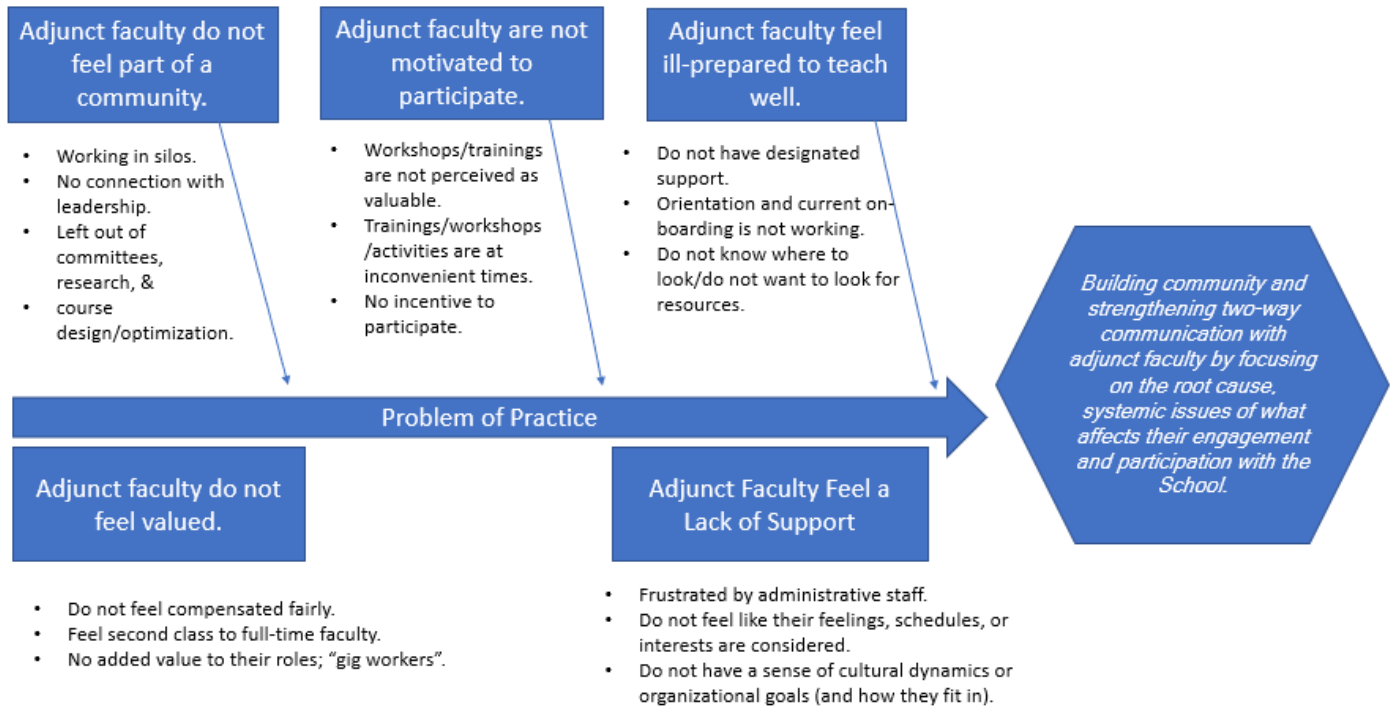
### **Fishbone Diagram for Root Cause Analysis Determination**

**Constructing a Fishbone Diagram:** A fishbone diagram helps visually represent what is the root cause problem being discussed and the layers involved in solving. As a result, this diagram (which resembles a fish) represents “a key factor thought to contribute to unsatisfactory outcomes” (Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016). Smaller “bones” underneath the major “bones” capture details that emerge from the conversations around the major “bones”.

In the fishbone diagram, below, the problem of practice is in the hexagon to the far right of the arrow. The key themes making up this problem of practice (from both the literature review and the primary research) are in the rectangles. These major “bones” are the main contributors to the current unsatisfactory outcomes. The smaller “bones” (in the body copy underneath the major “bones”) capture the details that emerged from the primary research.



# Fishbone Diagram



## Driver Diagram for Change Ideas

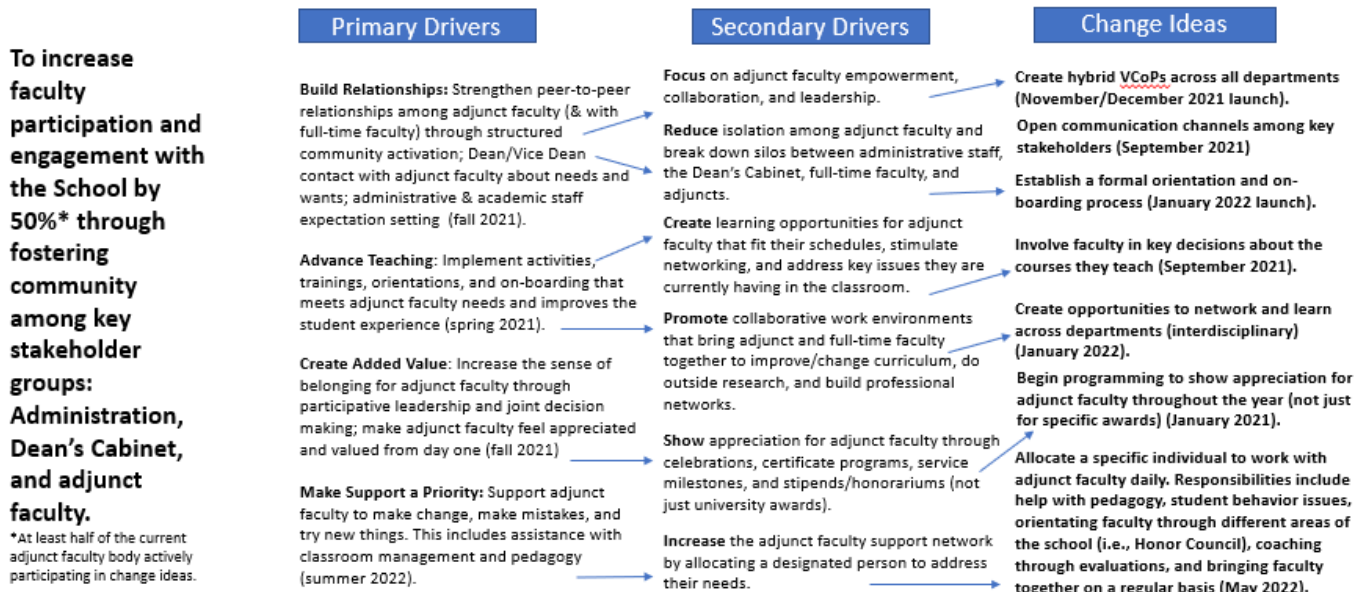
**Driver Diagram:** This diagram organizes the changes the organization will be attempting to execute. The diagram is home to a variety of change ideas that resulted from the fishbone diagram and provides context on how these ideas relate to each other.

A driver diagram is made up of a single aim, primary drivers, and secondary drivers (Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016). The aim is a measurable objective to tackle the problem of practice within a specific timeframe. Below, the aim is to increase faculty participation by 50% through fostering community among key stakeholder groups: Administration, the Dean’s cabinet, and adjunct faculty within one calendar year.

Primary drivers are “best initial bets” about what to target to make change (Byrk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2016, p. 74). The primary drivers tackle the fundamental changes that must occur to try and solve the problem of practice. Below, primary drivers include building relationships, advance teaching, create added value for adjunct faculty, and making adjunct faculty support a priority. The job of the secondary drivers is to make the primary driver more specific and actionable, so it can yield a change idea (a specific tactic) to make the change. Below, secondary drivers include a focus on adjunct faculty collaboration, creating learning opportunities for adjunct faculty, reducing teaching in isolation, showing appreciation for adjunct faculty, and increasing adjunct faculty support. From the secondary drivers evolves specific ideas for improvement.

### Organizing the Various Systemic Changes (with Theory of Change & Timeline)

## Driver Diagram: Year 1 (Sept. 2021 – Sept. 2022)



## Activations

### 1. Create Departmental Communities of Practice (CoPs and VCoPs)

*Improvement Science Principle Alignment: Accelerate Learning Through Network Communities; Make the work problem-specific and user centric.*

Establishing communities of practice (or VCoPs) is not only integral to community building among adjunct faculty, but also helps the School achieve both short-term and long-term goals. Each department at the School should have their own community, focusing on interests, domains, activities, and development for the specific areas of study. Further, the community needs to be managed by a leader, facilitators, and members to ensure an overarching mission and vision is established, and that there is regular upkeep and coordination with the community to ensure goals and objectives are achieved. Specifically, it is recommended each program's faculty director/chair take on the leadership role, while exemplar adjunct faculty are offered the facilitator roles (with compensation - either via honoraria or stipend). This way, the direction is set internally, and managed by someone in a leadership position (and intimately familiar with programming), and the designated adjunct faculty can act as facilitators to solicit buy-in, ensure tasks are assigned and completed, and gather feedback for program optimization. This can include establishing and managing mini task forces, getting cohorts of faculty together to discuss curricula, and bringing concerns to the faculty director/chair.

Additionally, there should be a designated internal administrative role(s) for site management, as well as coordination and scheduling of meetings. It is recommended the individuals be from the current administrative team per department, as they can facilitate meeting invites, distribution of administrative information on the site, and provide important reminders for contracts, grading deadlines, and important events/trainings.

While, ideally, in person connections are preferred, it may be unrealistic because of the geographic locations of adjunct faculty and lack of schedule flexibility. This said, a hybrid model for this activation is best. The hybrid model would consist of specific opportunities for adjunct faculty to meet up in person (cocktail hours, orientations, School state of the unions, etc.), but all activity and information would be available online via a VCoP. The VCoP can be built via

Canvas by the leader, facilitators, and administrative team from each department, which will take no additional instructional design resources and can be treated and managed like an on-campus course site.

The hybrid model of the CoP is supported by the literature on the benefits of VCoPs. Valenti and Sutton (2020) detail the facilitation of information and the ease of access to the community is a main factor in engagement and participation. The authors continue by describing how VCoPs need to be well organized, have opportunities for real-time conversation and hands-on learning, reference services, school updates, and opportunities for growth and inclusion in task forces of committees (Valenti & Sutton, 2020). Further, personal experiences, stories, and celebrating the “small wins” through discussion posts should be invited, accepted, and carefully monitored by leadership and facilitators. This is so issues and needs can be addressed quickly and efficiently, and optimizations can be made to improve adjunct faculty experience.

CoPs or VCoPs should focus around the following concentration areas, which are adapted from Wenger (2011) and from the focus group verbatims about creating a community:

**Goals and Objectives:** Goals and objectives for the community (as well as establishing norms of communication and engagement, as well as expectations) should be set by the designated “leader” (who should be the faculty director/chair). This ensures value is established from the onset of the community, and that everyone begins with the same foundational direction (Wenger, Trayer, & de Laat, 2011). It is important, however, that these norms and direction is discussed as a group, so adjunct faculty can add to them, ask questions, and co-create content. Getting buy-in early for any adjunct faculty initiative is imperative, as evidenced throughout the literature review. Adjunct faculty will not participate if they do not feel welcome, valued, or perceive their voice will not be heard.

**Projects and Curriculum Development:** As evidenced from the focus groups and the literature, faculty want to be included in the curriculum development process or have a say in ideation or change that directly affects how they do their job (Felber, n.d.). This said, communities of practice should include mini task forces that focus on individual course development or course updates. These mini task forces should be under the advisement of a full-time faculty member or

faculty director/chair who is intimately familiar with the course development or revision process. The faculty director/chair (who is also running point on the CoP or VCoP), should provide task forces with specific criteria, deadlines to show progress, and regular meetings to provide continuous feedback until approved. Not only will this provide adjunct faculty a meaningful way to participate, but also will facilitate buy-in for changes/new course and is a leadership opportunity for faculty to showcase their expertise in professional fields. Other project ideas for mini task forces could include:

- Program learning outcome development/learning outcome synergy per course.
- Textbook selection for all courses in a cohort.
- Faculty activities (community and relationship building).
- Consensus on needed trainings/workshops.
- Managing faculty mentorship programming.
- Gathering feedback from faculty and reporting to the chair/department lead.
- X-Team Activity: Industry research, networking, ambassadorship, recruiting faculty, and corporate training through the School (Ancona & Bresman, 2007). Teams within the community should be both externally and internally facing. Members of the X-Team should be decided among the community members, and those members need to be committed to working in an integrated capacity with internal teams.

As evidenced through the literature, adjunct faculty will be more engaged with the School if they feel like they have a say in teaching materials, programming, teaching methods, and classroom organization (Han & Yin, 2016). This point is critical to future success with faculty community, engagement, and participation with the School. In addition, the CoPs and VCoPs should include:

**Peer Support and Mentorship:** Inspired by Falk & Ichino (2006), new instructors should be paired with high-performing or other long-term faculty members from the onset of their experience at the School. This partnership will not only help set new faculty up for success but will also provide direct contact with other faculty to help problem solve student issues and

brainstorm syllabi ideas/assignments. Additionally, faculty contact information, and what they teach, should be readily available to all faculty.

**Pedagogical Training and Assistance:** As evidenced by Bates, et. al (2012), improving teaching quality requires active participation in professional development opportunities. This said, for adjunct faculty to participate, they must find value in what they are learning. Mandatory trainings should be explained in full to adjunct faculty, including the benefits and direct application to their jobs (for example, using Canvas, Honor Council reporting, rubrics, and grading). Further, trainings and workshops should be co-created and facilitated by the adjunct faculty through the communities of practice. Based on the data from the focus groups, meaningful trainings and workshops may include increasing student engagement, teaching in a virtual classroom, building effective syllabi, spotting plagiarism and cheating, interdisciplinary learning, and varied pedagogy.

**Job Openings:** Inspired by the focus groups, job openings for the department or School can be forwarded or posted to the community. Or there can be an easily found link via a designated electronic hub for the CoP or VCoP.

**Thought Leadership:** Also inspired by the focus groups, and the sentiment from adjunct faculty that their value in their specific field is unrecognized within the School, thought leadership should become a primary focus of the community. For example, faculty who are experts in specific industry areas should be brought into curriculum design conversations from the onset (and deemed “experts” or “collaborators”). Conversations around key practice areas should be cultivated through chat rooms, discussion board posts, and in-person or virtual meetings. Additionally, there should be a designated place for adjunct faculty to share job achievements, promotions, published pieces, and awards. Celebrating these wins as a group not only promotes community and good-will, but it also provides opportunity for all faculty to get to know one another better, and their specialty areas.

**Measurement and Optimization:** The leader should carefully monitor (and record) progress within the community against the key opportunities for development. An example of this is keeping track of VCoP material views compared to teaching performance. Or the number of

adjunct faculty who matriculate to the community over the initial six months, versus a year post activation. Involvement in community task forces and X-Teams would be another important metric, as well as relationship building between adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, School leadership, and the administrative staff (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & Lemahieu, 2016).

### *In Practice*

The Master's program in Public Relations and Corporate Communications at Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies developed and executed a highly successful community of practice in February 2020, and it continues to grow and thrive. Using the designated Georgetown learning management system, Canvas, the leader built a community of practice addressing key pain points of adjunct faculty: Teaching resources for creating syllabi, assignments, and rubrics, tools for teaching that encourage varied pedagogy, and a central location for administrative announcements, policies, and reminders.

All adjunct faculty were invited to participate in the VCoP through an email that detailed the benefits of joining the site (inclusive of teaching preparation, on-going support, opportunities to lead through involvement in curriculum design, and one place to receive all departmental information). By the end of the first month, 100% of adjunct faculty joined the community (accepted the course invitation to join) and engaged with at least 25% of the content. By month six 100% of faculty had engaged with the content. Seeing the success of the community, the site was also used the site as the launchpad for anti-racist education training. All faculty, prior to the start of the fall semester, needed to complete the training through the community of practice. All adjunct faculty did, and over 50% attended a summer faculty meeting discussing the module, how curricula needed to change, and how difficult conversations in the classroom needed to take place. They also started working together on teaching strategies and even asked to audit each other's classes.

The mission and vision for the site, which aligns with the overall strategic mission of the Georgetown School of Continuing Studies is posted on the Canvas site. The content is regularly updated as well. The program director is added to the site to assist with scheduling or posting administrative reminders, and adjunct faculty act as facilitators and subject matter experts to

head up conversations about curriculum, professional application, and industry needs (personal communication, May 29, 2021).

## 2. Establish Formal On-Boarding and Orientation

*Improvement Science Principle Alignment: Variation in performance is a key problem to address; See the system that produces the current outcomes.*

Adjunct faculty onboarding needs to be formal, engaging, and standardized so that all new instructors start out at the School with a common core. From the focus groups, developing syllabi, understanding learning objectives, classroom management, grading, developing relationships with each other, and teaching methods seem to be the most needed and valued. Further, on-boarding should include familiarization with the School and the people who lead it, and how they fit into their experience. With the current disconnect between School leadership and the adjunct faculty experience, it will be important to make them feel heard, understood, and valued from the onset.

Additionally, on-boarding should not take place in a silo. In this, human resources and teaching/learning centers should collaborate to ensure the administrative component of paperwork and mandatory trainings are equal to training on teaching and classroom management (Phillips & Campbell, 2005). This can include modules faculty need to complete online for the administrative parts, and then synchronous sessions for teacher training, including syllabi development, rubrics, grading, classroom management, and varied pedagogy. Networking and peer collaboration (in the form of breakouts or new faculty happy hours) can help ensure community building is a thread throughout the on-boarding process.

In reference to mentorship, new adjunct faculty should be paired with more senior adjunct faculty, as peer support for questions, concerns, or problems. Senior adjunct faculty would volunteer to pair with newer faculty for this purpose and help integrate them into the community and avoid isolation. Additionally, this is a way for more senior adjunct faculty to demonstrate their expertise and engage with activities outside of teaching their class (Danaei, 2019).



On-boarding resources should be housed in a specific online place for new faculty, so they can return to it at any point during their experience (Bates, Lowenthal, & Switzer, 2012). To enhance the community experience and integrate them into the faculty body, it is recommended on-boarding materials are integrated into each program's VCoP. This way, the on-boarding materials can have both standardization (common materials across each VCoP, as developed by human resources and teaching/learning centers), but also can include specific materials applicable to each program. These materials can include specific software trainings used in certain programs, trade publications for case studies, or specific needs of the faculty directors/chairs for their faculty bodies.

Adjunct faculty orientation needs to move past the solely administrative focus and instead, use the valuable time on community building and preparing to teach (Herdklotz & Canale, 2017). Additionally, it should be a time to engage with the School, feel welcomed by the Dean and other members of leadership, and get excited about teaching. Further, the orientation should be a time to share overarching messaging for the School, goals, missions, values, and adjunct faculty expectations. Orientations should not be simply "on ground". To accommodate schedules and varied geography, there should be both an in-person orientation and a virtual one, with each being equitable in experience to the other to ensure all faculty receive a similar "welcome" into the School.

These recommendations are not suggesting an introduction to administrative resources and support systems in and around the university are not important. It is, but in a specific way. Adjunct faculty do not need a "list" of resources; they need to be introduced to the value and benefits to using these sources and the people they should contact within the orientation. This can take the form of breakout rooms, a panel discussion, or even a cocktail hour towards the end of the orientation.

The student voice should be included in orientations, as well (Herdklotz & Canale, 2017). Orientations are a good time to share data about the student experience, in addition to any insights new faculty should keep in mind moving into the semester. This could include student satisfaction, changes in learning preferences, modalities of learning, or overarching changes in curriculum.

## *In Practice*

At the Rochester Institute of Technology, adjunct faculty on-boarding and orientations are catered to faculty both near and far, with a distance version available for those who cannot attend in person. Further, orientations are catered to address the recommendations above: Beginning with an enthusiastic welcome message, an introduction to helpful resources and people (specific deans, librarians, mental health services, etc.), and networking among peers. Also, there is time spent on teaching practices for success, including opportunities to hear from full-time faculty, overarching tips from learning centers and senior adjunct faculty, and tutorials on grading, rubrics, and learning outcomes. Finally, around a meal, faculty and staff speak freely about topics the adjunct faculty are curious about (Herdklotz & Canale, 2017).

### **3. Add Value to the Adjunct Faculty Role: Designated Support**

*Improvement Science Principle Alignment: Focus on variation in performance; Anchor practice improvements in disciplined inquiry; Make the work problem specific and user centric.*

#### *Hire or Allocate a Director of Adjunct Faculty*

As demonstrated through the interviews and focus groups, adjunct faculty need (and want) designated support. Thus, the School needs to invest, or reallocate, a resource for adjunct faculty that manages day-to-day interactions, as well as new initiatives and activities. This person should have the following credentials:

1. Over 10 years working as a faculty member with an exceptional teaching record.
2. Experience with varied pedagogy, student motivation/success, mentorship, and extensive committee/training/workshop experience.
3. Experience in administrative work in an academic environment. Specifically, schedule management, curriculum design, people management, project management skills, exemplar communication skills, and a successful track record of implementation.
4. Terminal degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D. preferred).

5. This position is full-time. Can be remote under special circumstances; will need to be in the DMV area frequently.

*Recommended Job Responsibilities:*

1. Work with faculty on course design and optimizations (Yukl, 2006).
2. Be the “leader” of the CoP or VCoP; ensuring faculty are aware of activity orientation through the goals, mission, and values of the School (Anonymous, 2015; Sutton & Valenti, 2020).
3. Responsible for classroom observations (for quality improvement and promotions).
4. Be the go-to for day-to-day adjunct faculty questions and concerns about curriculum, classroom management, teaching, or anything else non-administrative related (outside of current administrative roles (Kuo, 2009).
5. Host/facilitate workshops and trainings for adjunct faculty (Bates, et al., 2012).
6. Facilitate interdisciplinary conversations/relationships and collaborations with full-time faculty (Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, & Park, 2015).
7. Create added value programming for adjunct faculty (rewards, listening sessions, certificates, etc.).
8. Elevate systemic problems for adjunct faculty to applicable department leads/have regular touch bases with the Dean and Vice Dean to discuss major issues of importance/key successes and milestones.
9. Hiring adjunct faculty/promoting diverse hiring practices.
10. Assist adjunct faculty with Honor Council violations, IDEAA, and other student accommodations that require contact with other divisions of the University (Kuo, 2009).

This cost to School would be a worthwhile investment. Better adjunct support will lead to better teaching, which can lead to a more positive reputation. This has the potential to lead to higher enrollment. The investment has the potential to add value and pay for itself in time. As detailed through the focus groups, adjunct faculty truly need designated support to be successful in their roles. In this, they need a designated person for training, observations, questions, concerns, and student issues. And, as detailed through the literature on motivation and participation, there is a great need for adjunct faculty to constantly feel valued, heard, and

included (which directly affects their engagement in the School and morale). Further, with adjunct faculty positions increasing across the country, it is imperative the adjunct faculty community is managed through continuous improvement, and this requires a dedicated resource (Kezar, 2019).

### *In Practice*

There are many examples of adjunct faculty leads across the United States, but the most impactful for this recommendation was found at North Central Michigan College, where currently 80% of faculty are adjuncts, and they teach approximately 60% of all offered courses (“Contingent commitments: Bringing parttime faculty into focus {A special report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement}”, 2014). Thus, school leadership decided it was best to specifically serve the needs of adjunct faculty by dedicating a specific, qualified person to handle training, community building, classroom management, observations, hiring and on-boarding, and day-to-day adjunct faculty activity.

Other than specifically working with adjunct faculty, this position also helped in providing school leadership with feedback to optimize the adjunct faculty experience. The position is not only appreciated by adjunct faculty, but it is also appreciated by students. Because there is a constant pulse on quality improvement of adjunct faculty, the director addresses issues quickly and efficiently, and ensures adjunct faculty have everything they need to be successful in the classroom and valued at the school (“Contingent commitments: Bringing parttime faculty into focus {A special report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement}”, 2014).

### *Strengthen the Relationship Between Administrative and Academic Staff*

Adjunct faculty require specific support to be successful in their roles, as well as to feel valued. From an administrative perspective, adjunct faculty do not feel like they have strong and meaningful relationship with their direct support team. This is because the administrative teams usually do not have the training or skill sets to satisfy the needs and expectations of adjunct faculty (Kuo, 2009). To ameliorate, the literature suggests minimizing the disconnect between adjunct faculty and the administrative team. This is accomplished by establishing common goals

that are mutually beneficial between the stakeholders (Kuo, 2009). This can include setting expectations about the relationship at initial on-boarding and helping foster it through regular opportunities to engage.

Recommendations for strengthening relationships between administrative staff and adjunct faculty, inspired by Kuo (2009), include:

**Administrative staff as Coordinators of Departmental VCoPs or CoPs:** Explained above, helping build a common understanding of the responsibilities of their roles, in addition to having controlled real estate to release administrative information (outside of email).

**Lunch and Learns with Administrative and Academic Staff:** Coordinated by the faculty facilitators from the CoP or VCoP and key administrative staff, this lunch and learn (either virtual or in-person) can detail important reminders for the semester (grading, contracts, union dues, etc.) and answer any questions or concerns adjunct faculty have about current administrative processes. If something is not working as well as it should be from the administrative end, these meetings can help brainstorm solutions for both parties.

**Expectation Setting at Orientation:** During each adjunct faculty orientation, key administrative staff from each department should have a meet and greet with new adjunct faculty to set expectations, explain roles and responsibilities, and how, specifically, they support the team.

**Create Incentives for Mutual Cooperation:** Offer stipends or awards for systemic improvements that are mutually beneficial to both parties. For example, celebrating small wins together through newsletter mentions, or awards at the end of the semester for the best run “team” across the school (as voted on by their department leads, which will incorporate collaboration and relationship building. There are ways this incentive process could improve efficiency, as well. For example, the first team with all adjunct faculty contracts signed for a semester gets a lunch or happy hour. Finally, there could be incentives to collaborate on event initiatives or speaker sessions for students, as the administrative team would be responsible for logistics while the academic staff can take on a leadership role by proposing new opportunities for students and faculty.

**Be Transparent with Turnover & Resources:** While it was not a conversation topic in either focus group, and was not mentioned in the administrative interviews, it would be remiss to mention that building relationships with administrative staff is only as good as how long they stay in the job. Historically, turnover in entry-level or middle-manager levels at higher education institutions is high. According to Jo (2008), approximately 68 million dollars is spent because of turnover, and that does not include the intangible costs associated with low productivity, morale, and feeling like acquired skill sets are not being used. All of this contributes to attitudes and relationships with adjunct faculty and influence trust and relationship building. While data on administrative staff turnover for the School was not included in this document, it is important to consider prior to implementation. Departmental leadership should be transparent about new hires and other role transitions, so adjunct faculty know who is always working in the department, and there are no surprises.

#### 4. Add Value to the Adjunct Faculty Role: Recognition & Compensation

*Improvement Science Principle Alignment: See the system that produces the current outcomes.*

While additional compensation for adjunct faculty may not be possible at present time because of budget freezes and union contract stipulations, other forms of compensation need to be considered for adjunct faculty to feel valued and appreciated in their role. The focus groups revealed overwhelming agreement that compensation is an issue, and it was a major topic of conversation throughout both sessions. However, as was learned, the monetary compensation was only part of the issue. If they are not going to be monetarily compensated for the work via course pay, other forms of compensation would be appreciated, in the form of recognition and added value opportunities. The literature supports these sentiments, and various authors throughout the secondary research inspired the following recommendations:

**Integration into the Student Success Agenda:** According to Gavin (2019), integration into course development and program integration is important to adjunct faculty, yet they are rarely given

the opportunity. Outside of working with members of the CoP or VCoP on course redesign and improvements through task forces or X-Teams, regular inclusion in interdisciplinary meetings about student success is recommended. While the literature suggests adjunct faculty are time pressed, it does not mean they do not want to be involved in activities that directly affect their teaching or that they generate value from. Being included in these conversations on a regular basis or being part of brainstorming sessions with full-time faculty about program advancements or problem solving, is highly recommended. Specifically, getting cohorts of both full-time and adjunct faculty who teach specific subjects together to work through syllabi revisions, course calendar changes, and student feedback would be effective ways to integrate adjuncts into the student success agenda.

**Showcases for Scholarly Research Efforts/Applied Practice** Adjunct faculty interested in scholarly research efforts can write proposals for a once-per-academic-year showcase. Adjunct faculty proposals will be presented at these showcases and full-time faculty/department chairs can award a few professional development stipends for proposals that will propel the mission of the School, as well as gain valuable partnerships with outside organizations and contribute to the business field (Anonymous, 2015; Bedford, 2009).

**Support and Promote the “Adjunct Entrepreneur”:** As detailed in Wallis (2018), adjunct faculty use teaching as a resume builder, hiring pipeline, and as a competitive advantage for higher salaries and promotions. This said, higher education should lean into this by working with the career center to have a pipeline for job submissions by adjunct faculty, and even having a fair for working adjunct faculty once a year (so they can get to know the students outside of their classes and collect resumes for their company). Further, while there are limited awards for adjunct faculty, there should be more opportunity to formally praise them. One recommendation is having “small win” awards at the end of the academic year. This could include most creative teaching methods, best evaluations, most popular (based on enrollment numbers), and service awards (all facilitated by the newly established director of adjunct faculty). Recognition can be at an on-campus luncheon or cocktail hour, and formal certificates can be printed and framed.

**Select Exemplar Adjunct Faculty for University Task Forces and Committees:** While full-time faculty are typically selected for University committees and task forces, many adjunct faculty are

eligible to serve (but are usually never asked). As evidenced by Bedford (2009), as well as verbatims from the focus groups, adjunct faculty are interested in serving on task forces and committees they find of value and align with their expertise. Department leadership, as well as the Dean's Cabinet, should monitor industry expertise and classroom performance, and hand-select exceptional faculty to serve. This exposure for the adjunct faculty at the University level not only makes them feel valued, but also makes them an ambassador for the school and provides the opportunity for leadership outside of teaching their class.

**Issue Professional Development Certificates:** One of the main reasons why adjunct faculty do not participate in offered professional development opportunities from the School is because they do not understand the value of the trainings (Wilén, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2007). Additionally, they are not prioritized because of time constraints and conflicts. It is recommended the newly established director of adjunct faculty work with the faculty on training they need and want, on top of what may be mandatory, and implement a certificate program for professional development programming. Adjunct faculty would be offered a variety of trainings from across the University and told why they are beneficial, and then the School or department can hold their own trainings based on adjunct faculty interest. Like a game of “bingo”, once adjunct faculty complete a certain number of trainings, they receive a certificate of completion. Further, if they complete a certain number outside of those trainings, they can receive “mastery” certificates. Finally, adjunct faculty who go above and beyond taking advantage of trainings can be offered a facilitator role within the CoP/VCoP and help train other faculty (which would require a stipend or honorarium).

**Parking and Allocated Office Space/Supplies:** Parking was a constant pain point with adjunct faculty throughout both focus groups. While it may not be possible to pay for all adjunct faculty parking on-campus, a recommendation is to award faculty with a parking spot or a parking stipend in recognition for service milestones (for example, five years or 10 years of service). Alternatively, parking stipends could be awarded in exchange for University or School service, such as taking on a facilitator role within CoPs and VCoPs or leading a task force or X-Team.

- Designated office space and names on doors was another pain point for adjunct faculty in both focus groups.



- Removable names for doors can be recognition awards for both service milestones or performance, but that must be accompanied by prioritizing space for adjunct faculty to meet with students and each other on-campus. While individual offices are not possible because of building space constraints (especially now because of Covid-19 space requirements), it is advantageous to allocate a conference room or lab for adjunct faculty, complete with dividers for privacy and confidential student conversations, and have adjunct faculty reserve the space for designated office hours. Those awarded for service or performance milestones with removable name plates are welcome to put them on the designated door during those hours.
- Finally, adjunct faculty should be asked, via departmental leadership or the Dean's Cabinet, what supplies they need to do their jobs effectively. While not all may be accommodated, considerations should be made for anything that can be supplied in house (for example, investment in a specific software through the library budget, adding e-books to the library, or professional development/course audits through other departments/schools).

## 5. Implement Logic Models for PDSA Progress and Evaluation

*Improvement Science Principle Alignment: We cannot improve what we cannot measure; anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.*

Measurement and optimization are key components of improvement science. As seen through the literature on improvement science, continuous improvement needs to be at the forefront of any activation. Thus, the School needs to create a Plan-Do-Study-Act model for all activations to learn and fail fast, as well as optimize and improve quickly (Langley, et. al, 2009). Each recommendation needs to have its own PDSA model to monitor progress, feedback, and success. Otherwise, testing activations will not be efficient or effective, nor will there be continuous improvement.

As detailed by Langley, et al., (2009), each activation should include the four-phase PDSA cycle, and the following questions should be asked and answered:

**Plan:** Asking the following questions to a community of individuals tied to the improvement project: What is the objective, questions, and predictions? Who, what, when, and where will this plan be carried out? What is the plan for data collection?

**Do:** Carrying out the plan, documenting observations/questions, and analyzing the data.

**Study:** Completing the data analysis and comparing the data to predictions; summarizing what was learned.

**Act:** Based on what was observed, what needs to change for next time around?

(Langley, et.al, 2009).

*In Practice:*

The Indiana Department of Education uses this model for iterative problem solving (“Plan, Do, Study, Act/Adjust Template for School Improvement Initiatives”, 2018). For example, districts collaboratively identify processes to implement the model with staff. They begin with goal setting (a goal that the community buys into and is ready to engage with). The community is then split into different groups and content areas to facilitate the activation, observation, and optimization. The agile way changes are made through the model yields to active application and a continuous improvement cycle (“Plan, Do, Study, Act/Adjust Template for School Improvement Initiatives”, 2018).

**Conclusion: Important Considerations**

Throughout this quality improvement plan, it is clear community has a profound impact on adjunct faculty participation and motivation to engage with each other, the School, and the University. Suggestions in this plan can help strengthen community, build comradery, and improve adjunct faculty experience. Fixing these systemic issues will help adjunct faculty feel valued and supported for the work they do. This said, even implemented perfectly, normal

practices in academia can get in the way of success. Awareness and proactive planning can help ensure ideas in this quality improvement plan are executed using improvement science.

The first consideration is acknowledging the struggle between generating ideas and executing them in the academic world. Much of the time, resources are not designated to executing the ideas, or monitoring them for continuous improvement. Thus, many activations in higher education never get off the ground. For ideas in this plan to be successful, designated people and resources need to be allocated. Further, all ideas need the unconditional support of Dean's cabinet members. Leadership needs to buy into ideas early and often, facilitate resource allocation, and provide the autonomy to try, fail, and optimize accordingly.

The second consideration is to ensure the ideas in this quality improvement plan are not a moment, but a movement. These activations will take time and patience, and both must be invested by key stakeholders before knowing if something is successful or not. Using the PDSA model for each activation will help ensure the appropriate time and optimization is spent on all ideas, and that permission to fail and try again is built in.

Third, celebrating small wins is integral to the success of this quality improvement plan. There is no guarantee everything in this plan will be well received, nor achieve great success. However, take small wins from each activation and use those wins as the foundation for systemic improvements. Harping on the mistakes and failures will only propel the blame game and negative morale, which will not do anything but hinder innovation and advancement.

Fourth, difficult conversations need to happen, and not just when something is wrong or needs to be fixed. Having open conversations with adjunct faculty about their thoughts, feelings, and needs can be uncomfortable, but only if resentment and frustration is allowed to build. While the survey and focus groups showcased frustration and unmet needs, it was the first-time adjunct faculty were invited to have an open and honest conversation. In higher education, there is a propensity to push off difficult conversations or not have them at all. This is not an effective way to improve an organization. Dean's cabinet members need to be more in touch with the

wants and needs of key stakeholders--Adjunct faculty, administrative staff, and students--to fully understand the system and root cause problems before making systemic change.

Fifth, and finally, academic leadership must be more attentive of those who help keep the lights on. While this may sound crass, it is fact. As detailed through this quality improvement plan, the lack of participation and engagement from adjunct faculty largely stems from feeling isolated and unappreciated. This is a domino effect for not bringing issues forward that are affecting morale, turnover, and possibly the student experience through a lack of preparation and professional development. As the adjunct faculty population continues to grow across the country, it is more important than ever to ensure satisfaction and intrinsic value for this workforce. Frankly, a school or university's long-term reputation and competitive advantage depend on it.

By implementing the improvements suggested in this plan, the School will strengthen their relationship with adjunct faculty, increase their participation and engagement with the School and University overall, and see long-lasting, positive changes to both the adjunct faculty and student experience.

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Appendix A:

*Survey Inspiration Materials*

From Paul E. Spector's 1994 Job Satisfaction Survey:

**JOB SATISFACTION SURVEY**

PLEASE CIRCLE THE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH QUESTION THAT COMES CLOSEST TO REFLECTING YOUR OPINION ABOUT IT.

Disagree very much  
Disagree moderately  
Disagree slightly  
Agree slightly  
Agree moderately  
Agree very much

- |    |   |             |
|----|---|-------------|
| 1  | I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.                       | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 2  | There is too little chance for promotion on my job.                           | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 3  | I feel isolated doing my job.   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 4  | I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive.                               | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 5  | When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 6  | Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.             | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 7  | I know and connect with fellow adjunct faculty.                               | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 8  | I sometimes feel my job is thankless.   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 9  | Communications seem good within this organization.                            | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 10 | I feel motivated to do my job well.   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 11 | I regularly participate in professional development opportunities.            | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 12 | Teaching makes me happy.  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 13 | I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.                              | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 14 | My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.                   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

15	I feel supported by administration to do my job.	1 2 3 4 5 6
16	I feel like I have all the tools I need to do my job.	1 2 3 4 5 6
17	I feel engaged with my work.	1 2 3 4 5 6
18	I feel unappreciated by the organization when I think about what they pay me.	1 2 3 4 5 6
19	My supervisor shows too little interest in what I do.	1 2 3 4 5 6
20	I feel engaged with the School.	1 2 3 4 5 6
21	I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the School.	1 2 3 4 5 6
22	I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.	1 2 3 4 5 6
23	There are benefits we do not have which we should have.	1 2 3 4 5 6
24	I like my direct supervisor.	1 2 3 4 5 6
25	I have too much paperwork/admin work.	1 2 3 4 5 6

(Spector, 1994).

*Note: Insights from this survey were used to develop focus group materials.*

## **Appendix B: *Quantitative: Survey Materials***

### ***Request to distribute the survey (to the School's administrative team):***

Below you'll find the survey link and solicitation letter to send to your adjunct faculty body. I know it's the first week of classes (and insane), so I was hoping to let most of next week breath and send it out on Thursday, September 3. Would that be possible?

The survey will close two weeks later, on Thursday, September 17.

Below you'll find a sample subject line and the body copy. I assume you'll be sending this via email, so please feel free to provide some context to the adjunct faculty if you see fit before jumping into my ask. If you could send me a test copy of the email before you distribute, that would be appreciated (just to triple make sure all links are working. Type A, party of always and forever).

The survey link (raw) is: [https://peabody.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9ZWkkOOw3ghi1I9](https://peabody.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9ZWkkOOw3ghi1I9). I've hyperlinked in the solicitation letter.

If you have any questions prior to distributing, please let me know. Again, thank you so much!

Kerry

### ***Solicitation Email to Participants:***

Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in a Survey and Focus Group: Quality Improvement Plan for Adjunct Faculty

Greetings,

My name is Kerry O'Grady and I am the faculty director and associate professor of practice for the Master's in Public Relations and Corporate Communication program at Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies. I'm also a final-year doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University. For my final paper, I am examining the role of community in adjunct faculty motivation, engagement, and performance at the McDonough School of Business. Because you are considered adjunct faculty by the school, I invite you to participate in this study by [completing this survey](#), which will take approximately 12 minutes from start to finish. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. Copies of the survey will be

provided to my Vanderbilt University advisor, Cynthia Nebel and unanalyzed results will not be distributed to any person at Georgetown University. Please do not include your full name anywhere in the survey, as we would like responses to remain as anonymous as possible.

If you choose to participate in this project, please answer all questions as honestly as possible within two weeks of receiving. This survey closes at 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, September 17. Participation is strictly voluntary.

At the end of this survey, you will be asked if you would like to participate in a follow-up focus group to converse with other adjuncts about key insights resulting from this survey. If you choose to participate in the follow-up focus group, you will be contacted by the doctoral candidate only. Georgetown University will not be informed of your participation and you will remain anonymous for that activity. Please note there will be (2) focus groups, each with six participants. From there, participants will be purposefully selected for the focus groups to ensure variety of voices and experiences.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide important information to improve your adjunct faculty experience at the McDonough School of Business. Completion and return of the survey will indicate your willingness to participate in this study. If you require additional information or have questions, please contact me at the number listed below.

Again, thank you.



Sincerely,

Kerry O'Grady

[kerry.l.ograde@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:kerry.l.ograde@vanderbilt.edu)

Advisor: Cynthia Nebel

[cynthia.nebel@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:cynthia.nebel@vanderbilt.edu)





# Appendix C:

## Final Qualtrics Survey

Restart Survey Place Bookmark Mobile view on  Tools

Please click the circle that comes closest to reflecting your opinion about the statement.

	Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is too little chance for promotion at my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel isolated doing my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know and connect with fellow adjunct faculty.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sometimes feel my job is thankless.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At this School, communication is regular and effective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel motivated to do my job well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I regularly participate in professional development opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Restart Survey Place Bookmark Mobile view on  Tools

Teaching makes me happy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel supported by administration to do my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I have all the tools I need to do my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel engaged with my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel unappreciated by the School when I think about what they pay me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My Faculty Director/Direct Supervisor shows too little interest in what I do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel engaged with the School.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the School.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are benefits we do not have which we should have.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I genuinely like my Faculty Director/Direct Supervisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have too much paperwork/admin work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Restart Survey

Place Bookmark

Mobile view on

Tools ▾

Is there anything this questionnaire did not ask you that you would like to share?

How many years have you been teaching at The McDonough School of Business?

Would you like to be part of a focus group discussing key insights of this survey?

- Yes  
 No

[Click here](#) if you would like to be part of a focus group discussing key insights of this survey. The link will take you to a 2-minute screener.



Survey Powered By **Quizzes**

12:29

Is there anything this questionnaire did not ask you that you would like to share?

How many years have you been teaching at The McDonough School of Business?

Would you like to be part of a focus group discussing key insights of this survey?

Yes

## Appendix D:

### *Focus Group Screener via SurveyMonkey (featured at the end of the survey; optional)*



#### Screener for Follow-Up Focus Group

1. Are you currently an adjunct faculty member at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business?

Yes

No

2. Please indicate how long you have been teaching at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business

Less than 1 year

Less than 1 year

2-5 years

More than 5 years

3. How would you best describe yourself? (check as many as apply)

Hispanic/Latinx

Black or African American

White

Asian

Indigenous

None

Other (please specify)

---

4. Which gender do you most identify with?

5. Which age category are you in?

- 18-24
- 35-44
- 55-64
- 65+

6. What is your highest level of education achieved?

- College
- Master's
- Doctorate


---

\* 7. Are you unavailable during either of the following times?

- Thursday, October 8 at 12 p.m.
- Friday, October 9 at 4 p.m.
- Both dates and times are good for me.

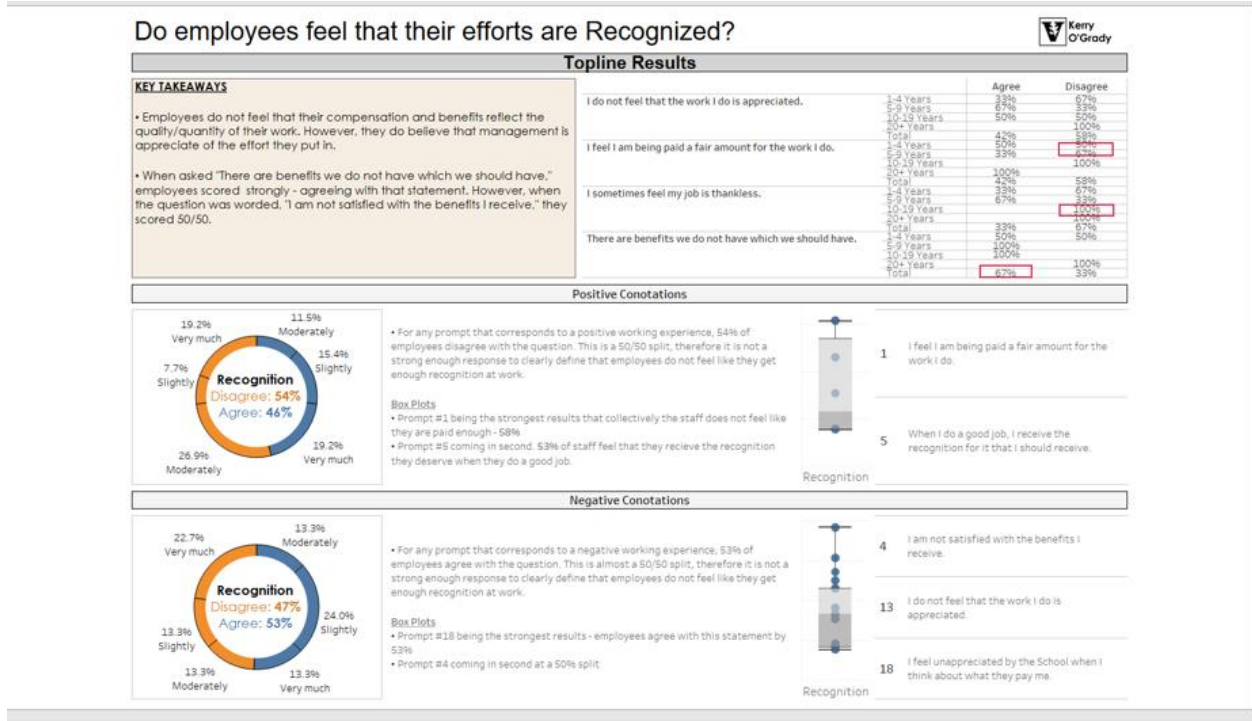
8. By providing your email address, you are agreeing to be contacted by the doctoral candidate to participate in a follow-up focus group discussing key insights of the survey.

Done


Powered by  
 SurveyMonkey  
See how easy it is to [create a survey](#).

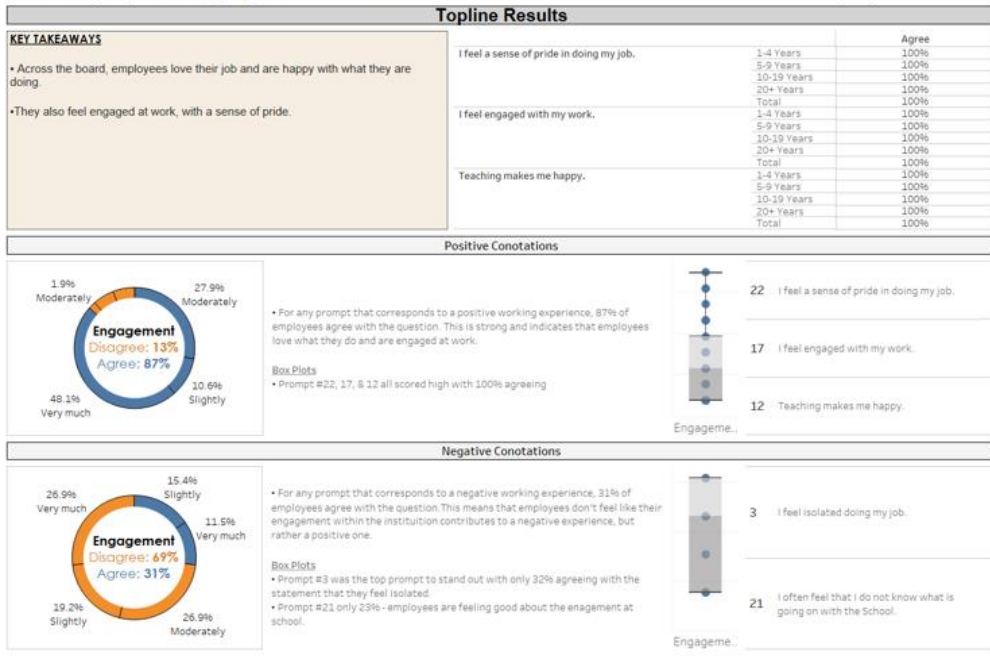
# Appendix E:

## Survey Results



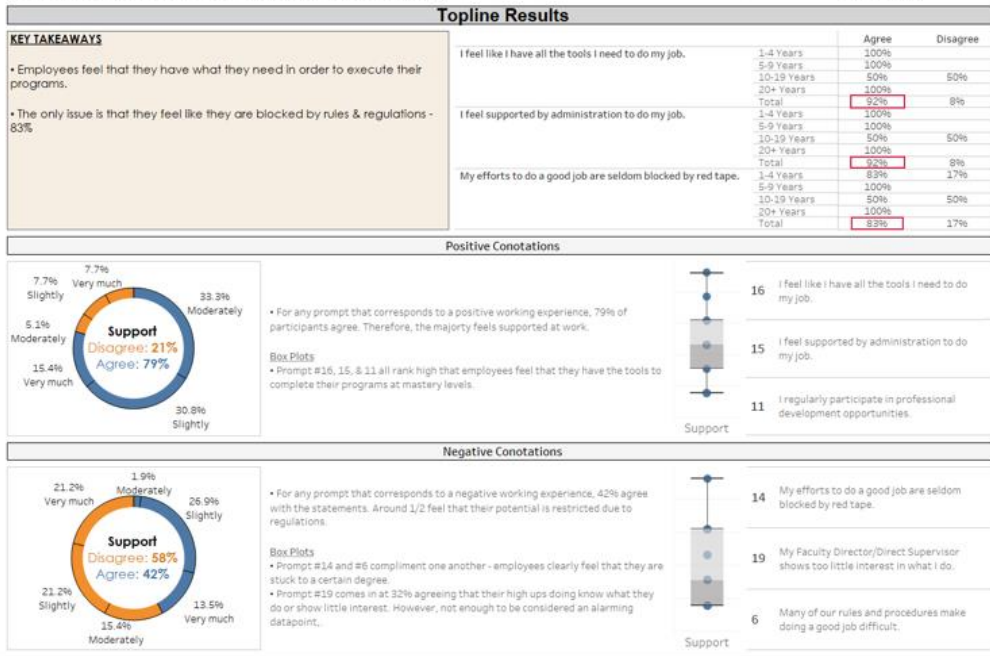
## Are employees engaged at work?

Q3 Ques... Enga... 



## Do employees feel supported at work?

Q3 Ques... Supp... 



## Appendix F:

### *Solicitation Letter Sent to Prospective Focus Group Participants*

Dear Participant:

A few weeks ago, you participated in a survey that will contribute to a doctoral paper about adjunct faculty motivation, engagement, community, and performance at the McDonough School of Business. In this survey, you indicated you would be interested in participating in a focus group to discuss these survey results in more detail. This is an official invitation to participate in one of the (two) sessions.

We invite you to meet with a group of your fellow adjunct instructors to discuss issues related to adjunct motivation, engagement, community, and performance. Approximately five others adjunct faculty will be joining your group. The discussion will last no more than one hour, will be video- and audio-taped, and facilitated by the doctoral student. Your participation and everything you say during the discussion will remain confidential. Names will not be included in the data set.

I am glad that you will be able to join us! The focus group will take place on **Thursday, October 8, at 12pm via Zoom. Log in information can be found, below.** Please log on at least 5 minutes in advance, as we will begin promptly.

Thank you in advance for your participation. Please reply "confirmed" by receipt of this email.

Kerry



## Appendix G:

### *Opening Script: Focus Groups*

This focus group is one of two for a doctoral research Capstone at Vanderbilt University, Ed.D program in Leadership and Learning in Organizations. This Capstone project is being conducted in partnership with The McDonough School of Business and is focused on adjunct faculty engagement, motivation, community, and performance. This Capstone paper, including all primary research instruments, is researched, and written under the advisement of Dr. Cynthia Nebel of Vanderbilt University. The purpose of this focus group is to discuss some key themes and insights uncovered during phase one of primary research, the survey sent out a few weeks ago.

Through this second research phase, I am looking to understand your thoughts, feelings, and opinions on specific aspects of adjunct faculty engagement, motivation, performance, and community. Specifically, I want to understand:

- What are the key issues you are facing as adjunct faculty at the McDonough School of Business?
- How are issues affecting the way you teach, seek professional development, or engage with the school?
- How does communication or relationships with administrators affect your motivation and engagement?
- What are the motivational factors involved for you to engage with other faculty members, the school, and the university?
- Does community play a factor in how you do your job?

We will use this information to improve your adjunct experience both short and long-term. With over 70% of all faculty at higher education institutions part-time, your answers will help make an impact to the adjunct faculty population overall.



I will ask questions and facilitate both focus groups. Over the next hour and 15 minutes, you will be asked some questions relating to your experience being an adjunct faculty member at the McDonough School of Business. These questions will help us to better understand the adjunct faculty experience, motivation, performance, community, and engagement. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

Your participation may benefit you, the McDonough School of Business, and the adjunct population overall by helping to the adjunct faculty experience. No risk greater than those experienced in ordinary conversation are anticipated. Everyone will be asked to respect the privacy of the other group members. All participants will be asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion, but it is important to understand that other people in the group with you may not keep all information private and confidential. Anonymous data from this study will be analyzed by me staff and may be reported to my Capstone advisor. No individual participant will be identified or linked to the results. Study records may be inspected by my advisor. The analyzed and synthesized results of this study will be presented to Vanderbilt University and Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business leadership; however, your identity will not be disclosed. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential.

By verbally saying "yes", you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this focus group.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me directly at [Kerry.l.ograde@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Kerry.l.ograde@vanderbilt.edu).



## **Appendix H:**

### ***Moderator's Guide***

Title: Exploring the Role of Community in Adjunct Faculty Motivation, Engagement, and Performance:

A Quality Improvement Plan for Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business.

Focus Groups: Complete Guide: October 8 and 9, 2020.

### **Population:**

Adjunct faculty at McDonough who indicated they would like to be part of these focus groups in the Phase I survey.

### **Approximate Number of Participants:**

From the surveys, 12 adjunct faculty indicated they wanted to take part in the focus groups.

Out of the 12, five confirmed their participation in the Thursday session; two in the Friday session (as of October 3, 2020). A reminder will go out tomorrow.

### **Welcome:**

Good afternoon and welcome to our session. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about your experience as adjunct faculty at the McDonough School of Business. My name is Kerry O'Grady and am a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, studying leadership and learning in organizations. I'm also a faculty director and associate professor at Georgetown's School of Continuing Studies here in D.C. This focus group is one of two to gather more information on some key insights from the survey on adjunct faculty community and experience you took a few weeks back. Your responses today will help develop an improvement plan for future implementation to improve your experience at McDonough.

For the purposes of today's short session, a few things to point out: There are no wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that I'm just as interested in negative comments as positive comments. I will guide the conversation by asking questions that each of

you can respond to. It is my job to make sure that everyone here gets to participate and that we stay on track.

I'm recording this session. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. This meeting will be recorded and transcribed for my purposes only, for analysis and future reference. The recording will only be used to make sure my notes are correct and will not be heard by anyone outside of this project. We will be on a first name basis this afternoon, but I won't use any names in our reports. This focus group is anonymous and confidential. Obviously, I cannot control what you do when you leave, but I ask each of you to respect each other's privacy and not tell anyone what was said by others here today. Although we hope everyone here honors this confidentiality, please remember that what you say here today could be repeated by another focus group member. So please, do not say anything that you absolutely need to keep private. Your participation in this session is completely voluntary, and you can leave at any time. That said, we are now going to take a moment for each of you to consent to participating in this focus group. Please verbally consent by saying "Yes" out loud.

I see our time is up. Thank you so much for sharing this useful information with me. I truly appreciate your time.

## Appendix I:

### *Focus Group Questions*

#### **Category: Community Engagement**

- Outside of teaching your course(s), how engaged are you with the McDonough School of Business?  
-----Prompt: This could include attending meetings, professional development opportunities, or attending events.
- What activities/events are you most apt to attend, and why?
- Which activities/events are you least apt to attend, and why?
- How connected/familiar are you with other adjunct faculty in your program?  
-----If familiar, ask about benefits of knowing/working with other adjunct faculty in the program.  
-----If not familiar, ask what their thoughts are about the school bringing adjunct faculty together more often. Are there benefits? Disadvantages? Why or why not?
- What could school leadership do to increase engagement between adjunct faculty and the school?
- What could school leadership do to increase peer-to-peer engagement among adjunct faculty?

#### **Category: Job Responsibilities and Compensation**

- Pretend you have an hour with the Dean of the school. What would you want him to know about your role as an adjunct faculty member, that he may not already know?

- What, if anything, could be improved at McDonough to ensure you were teaching to the best of your ability?
- How do you feel about your total compensation (pay and benefits) as an adjunct faculty member at McDonough?  
-----Prompt: Say more about that.
- What benefits would you like to see McDonough offer adjunct faculty, that you aren't already getting?

**Closing Question:**

- Is there anything else about your experience at McDonough that you haven't shared, that may be helpful to this study?  
-----Prompt: Say more about that.

## Appendix J:

### *Solicitation Letter for Administrative Interview Materials*

Hi {insert name} -

My name is Kerry O'Grady and I am a faculty director at the School of Continuing Studies. I am also completing my doctorate at Vanderbilt University, graduating in August 2021. In partnership with the McDonough School of Business, my final Capstone paper is dedicated to improving the adjunct faculty experience. Specifically, I am looking into faculty motivation, performance, engagement, and community. As part of my primary research, I am connecting with a few administrators, recommended by the school, to chat about their experience with adjunct faculty and the support they provide.

The interview will take no more than 30 minutes. Your names or direct titles will not be disclosed in any write up. Instead, each participant will be given a number to code responses. Your thoughts are for educational purposes only and to inform future improvement at the school. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email and I can send the questions promptly.

I look forward to connecting and learning from you,

Kerry O'Grady



## Appendix K:

### *Administrative Interview Questions*

- In what capacity do you associate or communicate with adjunct faculty in your role at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business?
- What are your main job responsibilities in relation to adjunct faculty at the school?
- How often do adjunct faculty contact/converse with you in relation to your role?
- How often do adjunct faculty contact/converse with you outside your direct role?
- How would you define "adjunct faculty support"? {What does that term mean to you?}
- Tell me about a time you supported the adjunct faculty body and they were receptive.
- Tell me about a time you tried to support the adjunct faculty body and they were not receptive.
- Do you think there is any disconnect between your role and how adjunct faculty view your role? {Why or why not?}
- Do you think there are any opportunities to strengthen the relationship between peer-to-peer adjunct faculty connections? {If so, what are they?}
- Do you think there are any opportunities to strengthen the relationship between adjunct faculty and the school? {If so, what are they?}
- Do you think there are any opportunities to strengthen your relationship with adjunct faculty? {If so, what are they?}
- What support do you think adjunct faculty need to be successful instructors and colleagues?
- On a scale of 1-5, one being the lowest and five being the highest, how would you rank the school on providing the support you detailed in the previous question?