



# Practitioner to Practitioner

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The NOSS *Practitioner to Practitioner* publishes articles of interest for developmental education professionals including administrators, faculty, learning assistance personnel, academic counselors, and tutors who are interested in the discussion of practical issues in post-secondary developmental education. *Practitioner to Practitioner* is published electronically twice each academic year. Articles in *Practitioner to Practitioner* are indexed in ERIC.

### NOSS *Practitioner to Practitioner* Submissions

Articles should relate to issues that inform and broaden our understanding and practice of teaching and learning in developmental education. The subject of the article may emphasize innovative approaches, best practices, how meaningful research affects teaching and learning, or techniques to enhance student performance. Review the “Call for Manuscripts” on page 2 for more information.

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## MISSION

NOSS seeks to improve the theory and practice of developmental education at all levels of the educational spectrum, the professional capabilities of developmental educators, and the design of programs to prepare developmental educators.

## NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

# Practitioner to Practitioner

*“Promoting Communication among Education Professionals Who Care About Student Success”*

## Call for Manuscripts

*Practitioner to Practitioner* is a publication of the National Organization for Student Success (NOSS). NOSS invites articles of interest for professionals in higher education that relate to issues which inform and broaden members understanding and practice. The subject of the article may emphasize innovative approaches, best practices, or techniques to enhance student access, performance and/or retention. Researched or non-researched articles are accepted. If researched, then the article should include references.

Please follow these guidelines when submitting your manuscript:

- There is no deadline for submission. All submissions are accepted for review at any time. *Practitioner to Practitioner* will be published depending on the number of manuscript submissions. Issues are published electronically on the NOSS website.
- *Articles* are written for faculty, counselors, support service professionals, and academic administrators.
- The article must be typewritten. *Practitioner to Practitioner* articles are generally between 1200 and 1500 words and follow AP Style.
- References, citations in the text, tables, figures or a bibliographic section are only necessary with researched articles.
- The body should be double-spaced with one-inch margins, 12-point font. Do not justify the right margins.
- The manuscript must include a cover sheet with:
  1. Title of the article
  2. The names of the author(s)
  3. Job title and employer of each author
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- The manuscript must not have been published previously nor be scheduled for publication in any other publication.
- Manuscripts must be electronically submitted in MS Word or Rich Text format as an attachment to an email addressed to [practitioner@thenoss.org](mailto:practitioner@thenoss.org)
- NOSS will acknowledge receipt of manuscripts via email within ten days.
- Articles are **not** refereed.
- All communication will be with the lead author, who is responsible for all communication with any additional author(s).

## NOSS Practitioner to Practitioner

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# The Plight of Adjuncts in Higher Education

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## Abstract

Though there is a plethora of articles written over the past years on the ordeal adjunct professors go through while teaching in universities and community colleges, very little has been done to salvage the situation. The work adjunct professors do has been oversimplified while institutions that utilize their services save a lot.

This article will discuss the impact of adjunct professors in higher education, especially those who teach developmental education courses. It will include information on problems and plight faced by these greatly needed employees, their value to educational institutions across the country, data on the number of full-time versus part-time faculty, the lack of pay and benefits offered to the thousands of adjunct and part-time teachers across the country, the savings their work provides institutions of higher education, the beginnings of collective bargaining for this population of workers, and the need to continue to work to find ways to improve working conditions for these professionals.

## Introduction

For several decades, numerous research articles as well as various educational newspaper and magazine publications have carried stories on the predicament of adjunct and part-time instructors in the community college and university systems. While much has been written over the years, little has prompted change in the way adjuncts are viewed, used, and reused in educational institutions. This is especially true of those who teach developmental education courses. More than a quarter of a century ago, Boylan, Bon-

ham, Jackson, and Saxon (1994) wrote that 72 percent of those teaching developmental courses, primarily in community colleges, were doing so on a part-time basis.

While the authors of this article note that the adjunctification of the academy is not a new issue, it is important to keep writing about the plight of those who deserve more respect, higher pay, better working conditions, and enhanced benefits.

So, why is it that change tends to have moved slowly for the predicament of adjuncts and part-time instructors in the community college and university system? While adjuncts and part-time instructors, according to the Washington Post (2015), number in hundreds of thousands they have a long way to go to achieve any equity with fulltime faculty. The structure of most institutional systems do not provide a platform for these part-time teaching professionals to have any real voice on matters concerning the classroom, their teaching practices, training, or decisions that apply to the departments in which they teach, leaving this population of teachers without much influence on matters that concern them or the institutions in which they work.

Colleges purport that there are concrete reasons regarding why it is better for the institution to staff course sections with adjunct professors than with full time faculty, mostly related to saving the institution money. So, the question might be how much money is being saved and at what point does staffing classrooms with part-time instructors, who are not paid benefits, level off. Maybe later than sooner. Studies indicate increased hiring of adjuncts and part-time instructors on many college campuses across the

nation is now equal to, and in some cases outnumber, fulltime faculty. TIAA-CREF (2015) reports that fifty percent of today's higher education academic workforce are employed part time on a non-tenure track as adjuncts. In addition, data from the Delta Cost Project at American Institutes for Research (AIR) shows that between 1990 and 2012, the increase in part-time faculty and instructors nearly tripled that of the increase of full-time faculty (AIR, 2013). To explain the heavy reliance on part-time faculty, the Delta Cost Project (2013), indicated that between 1990 and 2012, part-time faculty employment increased 121 percent. During that time, full-time faculty employments rates only increased by 41 percent. Considering private 4-year institutions, community colleges, and public 4-year institutions, adjunct positions in the public 4-year sector increased the most.

### State and System Mandates

Certainly, many states have enacted legislative and system mandates to help students to move through the developmental education course sequence and the pathway to graduation quicker than ever before. Unfortunately, while this immediately meant more course sections were available for adjuncts to fill, which in turn meant they made more money, at this same point in time the federal government legislated that the number of hours a part-time employee could work be cut. This caused many qualified adjuncts to flee higher education for K-12 classrooms and other employment. This hiatus, which involved many adjuncts, caused the number of trained, former K-12 faculty who had entered higher education over the last 20 years as adjuncts to be greatly reduced.

According to Gardener (2017), the immediate effects of the repeal of The Affordable Care Act will affect adjuncts in particular. Many of these professors could not afford healthcare prior to the signing of this act, and now will return to this perilous state. Gardener asserts that the soaring costs forced families to go without insurance for about a year before the Affordable Care Act came along. This is quite true as many adjuncts go with less than needed or no healthcare.

A further effect for the institution is savings on retirement and healthcare benefits, as many adjuncts do not receive these as part of their employment package. An unmeasured effect is what this costs the students at the institution. While all of this may be true, an ar-

ticle in Inside Higher Ed poses an interesting question. Where does the saving go? It is apparently not going on investing in more tenure-track faculty. According to the article written by Scott Jaschik, the money saved is ending up in other places including maintenance, administrative and student-services staff. Most of this spending is in recruiting, admissions, counseling, student organizations and athletics (Jaschik, 2017).

Likely, most in Higher Education recognize the value that adjunct professors provide. They are one of the most motivated groups of educators on campus, and most of these motivated adjuncts end up on community college campuses where they are an important part of the educational landscape (Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez, and Muth, 2010). These instructors enter college teaching with broad ideas about changing the ideology of men and the world at the same time. This is a broad pursuit and one that many give up on after their first year or so in higher education. And while critics contend that adjuncts may reduce the educational quality in the classroom because they usually have less teaching experience than full-time professors, Bettinger and Long (2010), state that those adjuncts, who specialize in teaching or are currently employed, could actually enhance the learning experiences for students.

### Less Pay than Other Faculty

According to the 2012-2013 annual report on the Economic Status of the Profession published by the American Association of University Professors', the average salary of professors ranges between \$60,000 and \$100,000 a year as opposed to adjunct faculty who are paid an average of \$2,700 per course (AAUP, 2013). So, when faced with paying a salary plus benefits versus a costs per course and no benefits, colleges are electing to have courses taught by adjuncts versus someone who is tenured or on a tenure track. This is not always a bad choice, as adjuncts are dedicated to the success of their students, but this should be rewarded with some form of merit pay or written assurances of future courses. Unfortunately, many adjuncts are forced to live the life of the gypsy academic, moving from campus to campus to teach whatever scraps are left on the college course schedule that higher-paid full-time faculty are not teaching. Hechinger (1982) described gypsy scholars as recent

graduates in the humanities and social sciences who wander from job to job and campus to campus with little prospect of a stable long-term career.

However, a more pressing concern is how many adjuncts and part-time faculty members live at or near the poverty level. Data from the American Community Survey, published in *The Atlantic*, states that 31 percent of part-time faculty are actually living near or below the poverty line, and that one in four families of part-time faculty are receiving benefits from at least one public assistance program such as Medicaid and food stamps (Fredrickson, 2015). This is a simple fact of the fiscal reality that today's educators must deal with, but on the whole the educating of the next generation of Americans must be our overall goal.

Full-time faculty, especially those who serve as Discipline Chairs and in other adjunct supervisory roles, must promote Professional Development opportunities that involve adjunct faculty. This serves as an opportunity to help "bridge the gap" in helping this devoted group of contingent faculty to develop classroom management skills that they may not have gained in obtaining their Masters or Ph.D.'s in their discipline. News Forums (2014) asserts that existing research suggests both intrinsic and extrinsic factors contribute to motivation to participate in professional development. 78.8% were intrinsically motivated to engage in professional development. This includes the desire for professional growth and the opportunity to improve teaching effectiveness. If we, today's professorate, do not partake in these sorts of activities, future generations will lack institutional memory regarding the hard campus choices that were made in the generations preceding them.

As far as one's thinking on higher education, this can certainly be viewed in several ways. Douglas-Gabriel (2019) contends that hundreds of thousands of adjunct instructors teach at colleges and universities, representing two-fifths of all faculty. If this group were trained properly by their institutions, rather than gaining this perspective through trial and error in the classroom, then this could clearly make for a more effective educator, both inside and outside of the classroom. The best way to achieve this is by offering campus educational programs and professional development training to support the evolution of the young educators on a given campus.

## Differences in Faculty

This is a double-edged sword of a sort. Since many younger faculty (both tenured and adjunct) have not been trained in using Promising Practices in the college classroom, they enter at a skill deficit. News Forums (2014) contends that asynchronous development opportunities that can be accessed on demand and that adjunct faculty can return to for reference are preferable. In many cases, this is even more evident in the case of the adjunct professor. While they have a set knowledge base in their academic discipline, they have not been trained in basic classroom procedures. Notably, many adjuncts are simply given a textbook and a syllabus and are then asked to teach course sections in classes they have never taught. This is of course a worst-case scenario, but one that is repeated at the beginning of every semester on college campuses around the United States.

The trend to insert adjunct instructors into teaching roles is not a new fad. Edwards (2015) asserts that in 1975, 30% of higher education faculty were non-contingent. This number rose to 51% by 2011. While adjunct professors may be some of the brightest minds on campus in some cases, many are forced to eke out an existence working at several institutions to be able to afford to live. In many cases, adjuncts are never able to retire and many live on or near the poverty line while balancing the constraints of professional and family life. 31% of adjuncts live at or near the poverty line (Kirschstein, 2015).

Kirschstein (2015) states that community colleges have the largest percentage of adjuncts teaching college courses. 65% of their faculty are part-time. Conversely, universities who are identified as research universities by The Carnegie Foundation have the smallest percentage, 32%. A major factor in this discrepancy is that research universities also use a percentage of Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants to lead some course sections.

Adjunct professors are an integral part of the community in many community colleges. Without these professional educators covering a majority of the college's courses, there would be no way for the community college to provide services to all the students that apply to open-admission institutions. Adjunct professors make it possible to fill all the college's course sections. Yakoboski (2014) asserts that a range

of individuals fill adjunct faculty positions. At one end of the spectrum are faculty who bring expertise from nonacademic sectors into the classroom. These are sometimes referred to as “professors of practice”. At the spectrum’s other end are academics employed part-time. These faculty are often used for remedial, introductory, and lower-level courses. They may be responsible for teaching a single course or multiple courses at a given time.

Smith (2016) reports that, “Student success initiatives tend to work better on campuses where faculty members are engaged.” If students have an adjunct professor, however, outcomes of success may be lower than anticipated (Ran & Xu, 2018; Schaffhauser, 2018). Low pay, lack of connectedness, and having to balance multiple positions to make ends meet are just some of the issues that can influence educational outcomes for both the organization and student (Bickerstaff & Chavarin, 2018). Additionally, precariousness of the job, intense workloads, and other inadequate support can lead to stress in non-tenured staff such as adjuncts (Reevyi & Deason, 2014). While adjuncts serve an important purpose in higher education, they are not typically set up for success (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Therefore, if a university or college is to carry out its mission effectively, attention and time must be given to provide support structures for adjuncts.

### Other Contributing Factors

Not only do adjuncts cost less per course fiscally, but they also do not receive healthcare or retirement benefits from the college or system and this translates into a savings of millions of dollars when counted across several academic years. Moreover, while colleges and universities claim to garner significant savings by employing adjuncts, the Delta Cost Project reported that hiring adjuncts, overall, had not resulted in a large amount of savings (AIR, 2013).

Another factor is that since 75.5% of instructors are off the tenure track, they will have no access to tenure. This represents a sample of 1.3 million instructors out of 1.8 total, according to the United Department of Education (2009). TIAA-CREF (2015) contends that only 19% of academics who serve as adjunct faculty are very confident they will have enough money to live comfortably in retirement. Yet, another key factor in hiring adjuncts is that it provides educational institutions more staffing flexibility because tenured

faculty are protected from being fired except for cause. Adjuncts have no protection and colleges and universities can choose not to renew the contract of an adjunct professor. Some institutions even go so far as to limit the number of course contact hours adjuncts are allowed to teach, even if this number is lower than that allowed by the State Higher Education Commission or other legislative mandates.

Another aspect to consider is that faculty of color are relegated to contingent positions. “Only 10.4 percent of all faculty positions are held by underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and of these, 7.6 percent — or 73 percent of the total minority faculty population — are contingent positions,” (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). This brings to issue the problem of students, especially first-generation college students, not having faces that look similar to theirs looking back at them from the front of college classrooms. This makes it hard for these students to find role models and mentors who come from similar backgrounds and who have similar experiences. Garrett (2018) contends that bridging the gap in becoming a college student can be one of the biggest hurdles a student of color or First-Generation college student must overcome during their first year on a four-year college campus. This is due to a lack of role models who have similar background stories as the student.

Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2010) state that one in three students who place into developmental education will never complete the developmental education course sequence. These students will also never attempt a college-level course. This is an indirect effect of the surplus of adjunct instructors teaching both developmental education and college-level courses. A lack of training of these contingent faculty is at the root of this issue. Educational institutions must provide proper training for adjunct and new faculty, as well.

### Reconceptualizing Adjunct Engagement

While adjuncts and organizations have roles to play in the way of increasing morale, several research studies discuss ways the organization can shift to result in more positive work environments for adjunct faculty. The chief theme among much of the research is increasing organizational socialization. Organizational socialization (Vance, 2018, p. 5) is discussed as an important need for higher education administrators

to evaluate and assess. By extension, Thirolf (2016) addressed the value of considering both integration and engagement in developing a more “robust and inclusive model” (p. 306) for increasing community social interaction on higher education campuses. More specifically, Vance (2018) examined the limitations and problems of orientation practices and made a case for creating formal and informal orientation activities that address inclusive communication strategies and offering resources for new faculty that will give them opportunities for professional growth. Meixner, Kruck, and Madden’s (2010) qualitative study arrived at three themes they saw surface when focusing on adjunct faculty: Receiving outreach, navigating challenges, and developing skills. Receiving outreach had to do with inconsistent communication practices and mentoring strategies. Navigating challenges entailed student engagement, quality of work, and community disconnection. Developing skills involved faculty needs and interests. The trio recommended that more advocacy be done for adjuncts and that programming, such as disseminating digital newsletters about pedagogy and other relevant items of interest to adjuncts be done to achieve more inclusive outcomes.

### **Organizational Change and Perhaps Collective Bargaining**

To take the notion of organizational inclusion strategies further, Linder (2012) noted a need for creating space for adjunct faculty via establishing and sustaining Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The researcher identified six components of deliberate CTL models: programming, physical space, community development, faculty leadership, the organization website, and resource libraries. All of these areas must be considered carefully in CTL models in order to carry out meaningful professional development initiatives that can “strengthen the university mission” (p. 51). Researchers Lapointe, Vandenberghe, and Boudrias (2014) talk about organizational socialization tactics that can assist in newcomer adjustment. They arrived at two possible routes to mediate role clarity, trust and improve relationships. One avenue is to decrease uncertainty of work and the other is to enhance relationships among faculty, coworkers, and supervisors. By extension, Kezar and Maxey (2016) expressed their support by valuing increased collabo-

ration among all faculty while keeping student success at the forefront.

Interestingly, the organizational socialization may also include collective bargaining as a way of improving the plight of adjuncts. Not possible, you say. Think again. A group of adjuncts at the University of Pittsburgh took matters into their own hands and began advocating for higher pay (Korkki, 2018). Andrew Behrendt is just one adjunct who is part of a group striving for unionization. While many adjuncts may advocate for themselves, organizations have a role to play to increase adjunct morale, as well. Adjusting budgeting models, installing mentorship programs, paying adjuncts for professional development time, and creating more predictable work schedules are some ways organizations can establish a more inclusive environment for adjunct faculty (Smith, 2016; Bickerstaff & Chavarin, 2018). Additionally, according to an article in the Washington Post by Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, adjuncts are getting help from Service Employees International Union, United Auto Workers and other unions that have helped them organize in some states, even those labeled right-to-work states.

One such example arose in Florida where seven of Florida’s state colleges filed to join the Service Employees International Union. Now, more than half of the state’s adjuncts, roughly 9,000 people, are organizing or already represented by a union in a right-to-work state (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019). Additionally, Douglas-Gabriel reported that adjuncts at St. Louis Community College recently approved their first union contract, which increased pay per course to \$1,600.

### **Promising Practices**

A provision which should be required of newly hired adjunct and full-time faculty is that they attend professional development training specifically designed to help them with the transition to classroom management. These would help adjunct instructors, especially in developmental education, to be prepared to deal with students who are not only entering college with a skills deficit, as defined by their placement, but also help these students to learn to be successful during these pivotal skill building courses. Boylan (2009) states “This means that at a time when the costs of participating in postsecondary education are

increasing, a very large number of undergraduates must stay in school longer and pay more in order to complete developmental course requirements. Time in developmental education is well spent for many of these students. They complete their developmental courses quickly, and their participation enables them to develop the skills necessary for success in later college-level courses.”

## Conclusion

A number of research articles have attested that adjuncts are not treated fairly by educational institutions across the United States of America. They lack job security, as they are only assigned courses from semester to semester, as the classes fill, they lack benefits, such as healthcare or retirement benefits, and they lack the respect of the administration on many campuses. This is evident as they are given classes at the last possible minute and they are given the least desirable hours, sometimes teaching both morning and night time course sections in order to get the full possible course load.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) supports the idea that “Adjuncts are an important piece of the professoriate and are heavily used, especially at community colleges and in professional programs. For as long as there have been adjuncts, there have been supporters of, and opponents to, their use. Today, as institutions are faced with the challenges listed above, a new call has been made to reexamine the role of adjuncts in the professoriate. With tough economic times and competition increasing from “for-profit” institutions, many fear that the role of the traditional full-time faculty member is diminishing and the role of adjuncts will increase.” This

idea is revolutionary as it is the first time that adjuncts have been appreciated for the work they do on a wide scale.

Adjunct professors teach the majority of courses on college campuses, currently, and should be treated as such, like the professional educators that they are. These individuals are a vital part of the college community and as such make a bona fide contribution to academe, as a whole and thus. They must be celebrated for this and not denigrated because they work at multiple institutions and sometimes work under the poverty level.

Hensel, Hunnicutt, and Salomon (2015) advocate for altering faculty model paradigms by sharing their vision. Their goal is “to provide a balanced faculty work life, creating space for pedagogical innovation, student/faculty scholarship, and application of expertise to solving societal problems in order to prepare students for successful professional, personal, and civic lives” (p. 60). While there are multiple ways of achieving more positive and inclusive organizational climates, the processes involved are accompanied by complexity because ultimately, higher education administrators are tasked with changing both individual and organizational behavior. With special consideration for adjunct faculty development, *New Forums* (2014) identified five key strategies that can yield positive outcomes for instructors. Identify specific and specialized professional development programs, implement monetary incentives, account for intrinsic motivation, understand that awards and recognition are not as important, and give adjuncts opportunities for participating in meaningful work are the key components to consider for inclusive cultural change.

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# “I’ll Take ‘More Than Career Training’ for \$400, Alex”: My “Jeopardy!” Audition and Its Lessons for 21st-Century Liberal Arts Education

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I’ve been obsessed with “Jeopardy!” since childhood. This is literally true, since I was eight years old when Alex Trebek began his legendary stint as the host of the gameshow where the questions are the answers and vice-versa. I’m one of those guys who annoys everyone else in the room by shouting out the answers long before many others have even had the chance to finish reading the clues. Over my 20-year career as a history instructor at the community college level, I’ve had dozens of students, colleagues, and friends urge me to try out for the show. “You know so much about so many things!”, they’d say, somehow implying that my stores of knowledge could only be put to good use on a soundstage in Culver City, CA. I finally scored an audition for “Jeopardy!” in August 2019; this fun and memorable experience also gave me a great way to show my students just how valuable their education in the liberal arts can be.

Those of us in the liberal arts often face resistance to the value of our fields when confronted with skeptical students who ask us things like “When will I ever need to know this?” or “How will this help me get a job?” The current cultural trend of emphasizing “training” over education seems to minimize the importance of wide-ranging knowledge and less quantifiable “soft” skills in favor of rigid expectations that every aspect of a student’s education will prepare him or her for a very specific task in a very specific career. I’m honest with my students. You’re right, I say, that no search committee for a nursing position is going to base their hiring decision on your knowledge of tactical strategies at the Battle of Gettysburg. But the skills sharpened by such liberal arts courses as English, History, and Psychology (communication, analysis, critical thinking, global awareness, etc.) make students more adaptable and desirable for employers in the long run. Those skills also make our students more engaged citizens in an ever-changing

and fractious society. The folks running my “Jeopardy!” audition unwittingly reinforced this fact for me.

Roughly once each year, the “Jeopardy!” website hosts an online qualifying test for any fan of the show who dreams of standing at the podium furiously trying to get the buzzer to work. The test presents 50 question over about 15 minutes. I’ve taken this test for at least seven straight years; each time realizing just how stressful it can be to sit at a computer trying to remember trivia. The test only allows 15 seconds per question to cut down on “googling”, and test takers never get to see how many questions they answered correctly (or is it “how many answers they questioned correctly”?), and for many people this is the only interaction they’ll have with the powers that be in Jeopardyland. I heard nothing more after the first six tests I took.

This changed in the summer of 2019. I was thrilled to be emailed by the show with an invitation to an audition in Chicago, the nearest audition site to my hometown in Northern Michigan. Near the end of August, 2019, I walked into a conference room at Chicago’s Omni Hotel to begin my audition experience. Glenn Kagan, a contestant coordinator for the show who has been finding potential champions since 1980s, welcomed roughly 25 of us into the room with a quick pep talk. “Look, we know you’re smart,” he said, “or you wouldn’t be here!” We’d all done well enough on the online qualifying test to merit the invitation to the audition. What he was looking for, though, were potential contestants who could stand out from the crowd and show that they were more than just storehouses of trivia and random knowledge.

We were given another 50-question test (with handwritten answers this time) just to be sure that we hadn’t given into the temptation of Google for our online tests. Then, we were called up at random

in groups of three to play a mock game of “Jeopardy!” with the same sort of buzzers used on the show. After this game, which I rocked, thank you very much, came the contestant interviews of the sort Alex Trebek does on the air. This was where Glenn was hoping to find the best potential contestants for the show. He said he wanted to see candidates with excellent speaking skills, poise, the ability to think on our feet, and a general presence of someone the audience might find personable and able to root for while they watched from home. More than once, Mr. Kagan had to ask some of the potential contestants to speak louder or more clearly. He stressed that he wanted to hear original stories and fun anecdotes that would give him a sense of our personalities to separate us from the herd. I got a chuckle out of him when I talked about covering roughly 2 miles per class while I run around the room working to get my students excited about American history!

In our classrooms, we’re working to develop the same skills in our students that Glenn Kagan and the rest of the “Jeopardy!” team seeks in potential contestants. Students aren’t simply empty vessels that we’re

supposed to fill with “knowledge” in the same way we’d pour water into a pitcher. We want them to communicate clearly in writing and in class discussions, to think critically about the world around them, and to apply concepts from our classes to the larger society regardless of whatever specific careers they hope to pursue. “Jeopardy!” contestants aren’t selected based only on their test scores; college students don’t get hired based only on their grades in specific classes. The “soft skills” of communication, analysis, and civic engagement make both “Jeopardy!” contestants and college graduates stand out from the crowd.

Everyone at my “Jeopardy!” audition was placed into the show’s contestant pool for 18 months, which means that I could get a huge phone call from California any time before the end of February, 2021. Or, I could never get the call; only about 450 of the 2500 people who audition each year ever make it on the show. But as I wait for that call, I can always take comfort in the fact that I’m auditioning brilliant communicators, astute critical thinkers, and valuable citizens every semester in my own classes.

## Promoting Student Transformation at the Community College: If Everything Happens That Can’t Be Done

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Dr. Steven Berg, current President of NOSSMI (Michigan Chapter of NOSS) just published an online book of his best practices for other classroom practitioners, *Promoting Student Transformation at the Community College: If Everything Happens That Can’t Be Done*:

To access, click on <<https://cuny.manifoldapp.org/projects/promoting-student-transformation-at-a-community-college>> In the spirit of Open Educational Resources (OERs), his publisher released Promoting Student Transformation for free! The pdf version will soon be available and Dr. Berg is in talks concerning bringing out a paperback edition.

This narrative guide to teaching features practical pedagogical advice for engaging students and addressing a variety of student needs.

This collection of 40 essays is organized into eight chapters ranging from “Overcoming Pervasive Dissatisfaction” to “Teaching with Compassion” and “Reducing Fear and Empowering Students.” Each chapter ends with a bulleted list of practical “Tips and Tricks” which can be implanted into our classrooms and our lives as professors.

The book focuses on Promoting Student Transformation.

## Introduction:

**“The title for this book is very straightforward. But why the subtitle?”**

In his introduction to *is 5*, e e cummings wrote that he is “abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement.” Although his poetry might seem randomly put together, his use of spacing, punctuation, and word choice is extremely precise. There are no accidents. Ironically, without this precision, his poetry would lack its excitement and movement.

One of my favorite poems by cummings has always been “if everything happens that can’t be done.” Incorporating references to books and a teacher, this is a beautiful love poem that concludes with the observation “we’re wonderful one times one.”

Teaching with mindfulness requires that we move as close as possible to cumming’s mathematical equation; that one professor times one student equals one transformative learning experience. I say “move as close as possible” because of the undeniable reality that the professor will always be the most powerful person in the classroom. But, as professors, we can use our power to create an approach to teaching in which our students are the primary beneficiaries.

When we apply cummings’ mathematical construct to our classrooms, we enter a world in which we discover that everything happens that can be done because we are working one times one.

For too many community college professors, a pervasive dissatisfaction has crept into too many of our lives. There are many reasons for job dissatisfaction. As one community college professor wrote to me when I asked for examples of the roots of dissatisfaction:

An assembly line feeling of teaching the same class over and over again while having little, if any, ability to getting to know these students while helping them through this part of their academic career. That is not well worded, but I teach intro to [discipline], and only this class now for six years. I don’t ever get to interact with the students who take other [discipline] classes except for those who fail my class and for some reason, sign up with me again. I have one office hour and students typically don’t come to see me. Even if they did, what can I do? I’m not in much of a position

where I am able to help them navigate the system. I have been an adjunct for 16 years. The chance that I will ever get any full-time position, forget tenure, is slim to none. I have no passion for my own work anymore between having no time and feeling stuck and let down by the very system that I’m supposed to be encouraging students to engage with. I feel like the poster child for Marx’s alienated worker; sucked dry and waiting to die.

I have redacted the author’s specific discipline because what this professor experiences is common among professors of many disciplines.

Unfortunately, most of the advice written for higher education faculty is directed at university faculty members whose priorities, working conditions, and students are very different than those of us who teach in community colleges. Advice that concerns working with “our” graduate students and teaching assistants has no value when a professor does not have graduate students or teaching assistants. Nor do most of us have to worry about balancing research with teaching. Teaching four or five classes per semester (for full-time faculty members) does not leave much time for research, which is not our priority anyway.

Part-time faculty members might “only” teach two or three classes at their institutions, but they might also be teaching two or three classes at two or three other community colleges. And if they are not teaching at other community colleges, they only earn a fraction of the salary of full-time faculty members while working other jobs to make ends meet.”

And yet we persist.

Although it begins with a recognition of pervasive dissatisfaction, *Promoting Student Transformation at the Community College* is a book that focuses on how we can persist in our individual classrooms as we work to transform students’ lives as well as our own. Although theory is discussed, this is not a book of theory. It is a book that provides specific examples that community college professors—and our university colleagues—can use to make cummings’ mathematical equation a practical reality. At the end of each chapter are practical suggestions for integrating theory into daily classroom practices.”

# “Fostering Frameworks for Success: Building Student Support Networks Through Professional Development Badging”

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## ABSTRACT

One challenge facing faculty and staff at higher education institutions, and particularly those with an access mission, is understanding and supporting their students in a holistic manner. Organizations with a high proportion of traditionally at-risk students must balance resource demands with providing the intensive teaching and advising models recommended for student success. This article explores the Student Success professional development badge as one efficient and effective model for building a holistic student support network on campuses.

As access to higher education has increased for historically underrepresented students, colleges and universities have experienced changes in the makeup of their student populations. Campuses have become more diverse across several factors. For example, between 1976 and 2014, the percentage of college students who identified as Hispanic rose from four to 17 percent, and those who identified as Black rose from 10 to 14 percent (NCES, 2016). According to a 2014 survey of first- and second-year public college students, approximately 41 percent of those enrolled in 2-year institutions and 29 percent of those at 4-year institutions reported taking at least one remedial course (Skomsvold, 2014). Additionally, in the 2011–2012 academic year, 11 percent of college students reported having a disability (NCES, 2016).

Institutions have implemented a variety of programs to support the academic success of these students, e.g., bridge programs, first-year seminars, learning communities, and peer mentoring. However, the demographic changes also require institutions to provide support to faculty and staff, as they must

now facilitate learning and development for a more heterogeneous student body with varying needs, expectations, and learning styles. Research suggests that faculty professional development activities that focus on inclusive pedagogy have had positive effects on teaching and learning (Booker, et al., 2016; Anderson, et al., 2014). As interactions with staff through support services, extra-curricular activities, and even informal engagement affects student success (Tinto & Pusser, 2006), institutions also must provide relevant staff development to create a holistic approach to the intellectual, social, and cultural development of all students.

At Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC), over 30% of first-year students enroll in learning support courses; approximately 42% of them are first-generation; and many must negotiate complex life issues such as financial limitations, caregiving responsibilities, and food, housing, and transportation insecurities. These are students with ambition and promise, as well as many gifts and strengths, but who also tend to struggle with more external and academic preparation challenges than others. As research has shown, key hallmarks of student success, particularly for first-year matriculates, are growth mindset, self-efficacy, persistence, and progression, all of which tend to lead to graduation within a 4 to 6-year period (Cambridge-Williams, et al., 2013; Han, et al., 2017; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015)

GGC’s mission centers on the promotion of student success through a coordinated care model of support. Student support takes many forms, including intensive advising, extensive tutoring opportunities, and dynamic teaching methods. It is driven by a fused Academic and Student Affairs administrative structure

that focuses on helping students meet eight Integrated Educational Experience (IEE) outcomes and the six dimensions of wellness. But how are faculty and staff prepared for this time- and energy-intensive work? How can they learn the administrative processes, relationship-building skills, and best practices to serve these first-year students at one of their most vulnerable times?

The School of Transitional Studies at GGC, in response to this need, has explored alternative ways of providing faculty/staff professional development in order to offer an even more robust support network for its students. GGC's Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) sponsors various digital badges, corresponding to sets of professional development workshops in tracks. STS has begun offering a Student Success badge towards the goal of improving faculty and staff capabilities in educating and mentoring students. Participation in the Student Success badge cohort helps create a culture that supports the persistence, progression and graduation of all students, but particularly those beginning their college experience in Student Success (learning support) courses at GGC. The participant learning outcomes for this badge include:

- Understanding the particular academic, social, and personal needs of students enrolled in Student Success (learning support) courses
- Identifying resources available to support students' persistence, progression, and graduation
- Describing the features of Student Success course placement, pathways, and assessment
- Understanding and identifying best practices in learning support instruction and programming
- Understanding and identifying best practices in working with multilingual students

These learning outcomes address the particular needs and questions that have been raised by GGC faculty and staff who have extensive contact with our students and who wish to support them more effectively and compassionately.

Members of GGC's Council to Advise Transitional Studies (CATS) originated the proposal and structure of the Student Success Badge. In addition, faculty and staff serving on that committee have helped design and lead individual workshops. The CATS team included staff from the Mentoring and Advising Center

and Academic Enhancement Center (which oversees tutoring), faculty representatives from the Math and English disciplines and Kaufman Library, and representatives from New Student Connections (orientation), Testing Services, Financial Aid, and Disability Services. This group aptly represented our faculty and staff support resources, as well as our commitment to looking at student success from multiple angles.

The final portfolio of workshops for the Student Success badge track at GGC was as follows:

- Understanding the Whole Student (student development theory, holistic approaches to support)
- Building Rapport and Relationships with Students (emotional intelligence and politeness theory)
- Placement and Pathways in Student Success (learning support course pathways and placement information)
- Best Practices in Working with Multilingual Students
- Best Practices in Learning Support and Beyond: Math Instruction
- Best Practices in Learning Support and Beyond: Reading and Writing Instruction

Participants in the series of workshops (first three usually offered fall semester, the others in spring semester) thus receive a balance of theoretical and practical knowledge of how best to work with and support their GGC students—particularly those in their first year or two. Workshops usually are a combination of lecture, discussion, and activities, maintaining an active learning environment. After each workshop session, which vary in length from 1-2 hours, participants have access to PowerPoint presentations, research bibliographies, and other resource materials via the workshop's Desire to Learn (D2L) course site. There is an embedded discussion board to encourage questions and ongoing conversation about the topics explored. To earn the microbadge for each workshop, participants must successfully pass a short quiz, also administered through D2L. Once all six workshop microbadges are earned, participants apply for the overall Level 1 Student Success professional development badge. This badge is noted electronically on their profile page in GGC's online Academic Commons, but also can be added as a CV line and noted on their annual evaluations.

In 2018, the year the badge workshops were piloted, all six workshops were offered, at least two occasions of each. A total of 16 workshop sessions were run, with 78 faculty and staff members attending. In 2019, in observation of attendance trends, seven workshop sessions were offered, with a total of 28 faculty and staff attending. Session evaluations consistently indicated workshop and facilitator quality as above average to excellent, and participants found the experience to be a worthwhile use of their time. Some participants asked if the workshops could be moved fully online to promote greater convenience and access, which is an option to be explored with the CTE. Regardless of the type of workshop however, faculty and staff commented on the valuable strategies they obtained: how to put student development theories into use, verbal and physical communication best practices to encourage student belonging, and exercises to increase student engagement and meet students where they are. The workshops succeeded in providing both theoretical and applied knowledge that will promote student success in the classroom, mentoring sessions, and other engagement opportunities. Moving forward, additional topics and platforms for offering the Student Success badge workshops will be considered.

One of the benefits of the Student Success professional development badge as a model is that it can be replicated at relatively low resource cost. We used a team of faculty and staff members to both design and create the workshops for the badge. The CTE provided physical and online space (through Desire to Learn LMS) for the workshops and administrative support to organize the advertising and registration for each session. While not all schools may have a Center for

Teaching Excellence, workshops could be offered through other campus units, such as:

- Faculty institutes or faculty/staff orientation
- Disciplinary departments
- Student Success or TRIO offices
- Advising or academic coaching staff/offices
- Human Resources

Because the Student Success badge is structured as a set of workshops that could be singled out and reappropriated for different events and audiences, it also possesses great versatility. For example, at GGC we have offered the “Understanding the Whole Student” workshop as part of the New Faculty Academy onboarding program. Versatility is further achieved via the customization of such workshops. At GGC, we have a large population of at-risk students, many of whom are in student success/learning support courses; therefore, we tailored our badge to help faculty and staff learn more about those courses, policies, and pedagogies. However, other institutions might focus their workshops on particular campus issues or target populations.

When implementing such a program, we recommend including both faculty and staff as leaders and workshop attendees. Doing so ensures the construction of a robust student support network across campus; faculty and staff work together to build relationships with students, meeting them where they are. Both anecdotally and via research, we know that it isn’t always a faculty member who ends up mentoring a student, particular those in underrepresented and first-generation groups. Fostering an inclusive partnership model of professional development recognizes staff members’ roles in developing students and builds bridges between faculty and staff across campus.

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## Ice Breakers Promote Mindfulness

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Ice breakers are more than what most instructors may think and have become a critical segment of my first-day agenda. Many may view them as a waste of time or “fluff,” but I consider them to be time well spent. They provide students with a way to establish trust and an open environment; they help alleviate first-day stress. Ice breakers allow students to get to know each other and to see the “human” side of learning. They not only engage students in active learning, but they promote mindfulness. Mindfulness is being aware of the present moment without judgment which most ice breakers invite. They invite intense focus. In order to participate, students have to listen to what is being said. The following is one of my favorite ice breakers. In addition to intent listening, students are required to create their own details.

### Toilet Paper Activity

It starts with bringing in a roll of toilet paper with perforations that present as squares of toilet paper, not a roll that is straight paper without perforations. Begin by handing the roll to the closest student, directing

him or her to “take as much as you want.” Most students will ask what they need it for. Try to deflect that question. Tell students to “just take some, as much as you need.” Wait until each student has taken some toilet paper.

Have the first student count out how many squares he or she has. For each square, the student should share something about him or herself. The next student does the same but cannot share anything the first student said. For example, if the first student said his favorite color is blue, then the second person cannot offer his or her favorite color. He or she has to offer a different detail. By the time you get to the last student, the details get very creative.

This activity encourages each student to listen carefully to the other students so as not to repeat details. It’s fun to watch student catch others who accidentally share the same thing. This activity is fun and helps students share personal details with one another, which helps the whole class get to know one another better. It becomes an even more exciting activity when the instructor goes last.